

Philosophy 1320: Theories of the Mind, Stern College - Yeshiva University, Spring 2007
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Lecture Notes, February 28

I. Berkeley's objects

We have seen that Berkeley denies that general terms refer to anything, since we come to them as the result of an illegitimate process of abstraction.

Everything that exists, for Berkeley, is particular.

Even our ideas of ordinary objects are actually collections, or bundles, of particular sensations.

Berkeley considers an apple, §1.

We use the term 'apple' to refer to a collection of particular sensory ideas.

All we can know is this passing show, our experiences of the particulars (e.g. the feel of the apple, its taste, and odor).

'Apple' does not correspond to any abstract idea of apple, or of red, or of sweet, etc.

The names 'apple' and 'chair' and 'red' are just convenient labels, and should not indicate any existence of the apple or chair or color beyond my current experience of it.

The ideas of sensation are all separate and independent.

We can give a name to commonalities among particular sensations, but this is just a name.

We have no positive idea of man, or triangle, or matter, as all are abstractions.

Berkeley thus extends Locke's nominalism about secondary properties to all properties of objects, to everything except particular experiences.

II. Materialism and skepticism

We have been examining Berkeley's argument against abstract ideas, because he thinks that materialism depends on those alleged ideas.

Berkeley also provides more direct arguments for idealism and against materialism.

One quick argument for idealism is that its competitor, materialism, leads to skepticism.

As I said, Berkeley and Locke and Hobbes agree on the first premise:

1. All knowledge comes from experience.
 2. But we experience sensations, not the causes of our sensations.
- So, we have no knowledge of what causes our sensations, i.e. objects in the supposedly material world.

That is, we seem only to know our experiences, and not the external world.

Locke says that the secondary qualities arise from the impulse of insensible parts of matter on our senses, §II.VIII.15.

But, says Berkeley, we can have no experience, no sensation, of insensible parts.

How could one sense the insensible?

III. Idealism and the primary/secondary distinction

Berkeley agrees with Locke and Descartes that secondary properties, like color, exist only in the mind, but he extends the point.

Berkeley wants to show that the so-called primary qualities are only perceptions, too, that they are essentially mental.

Berkeley provides three arguments to show that primary qualities are in the mind:

1. From the sensibility of objects
2. The extended Lockean arguments
3. A reductive argument

IV. The argument from the sensibility of objects

Berkeley's argument for idealism from the sensibility of objects begins with a definition of what it means to be a sensible object.

1. Objects are sensible things.
 2. Sensible things are things with sensible qualities.
 3. The sensible qualities are the secondary qualities.
 4. Those secondary qualities are strictly mental properties.
- So, objects are strictly mental. That is, there is no physical world.

On premises 1 and 2, read §3.

This argument is not valid, as it stands.

You might take some time to find the problems with it.

I think it fairly represents Berkeley's intentions though.

Remember that Berkeley and Locke agree that all we know must originally come in through the senses.

V. Berkeley's Lockean arguments

The Lockean arguments demonstrate that each supposedly primary quality is really a secondary quality.

I call these arguments Lockean because Berkeley uses Locke's principles against him.

The use of the following principles characterize a Lockean argument:

LP₁: If some quality of an object appears different to two or more people (or to one person in two or more different states) then that quality is merely mental.

Remember the hot and cold water experiment.

LP₂: If the quality appears the same to every one, then it is a real property of the object.

Locke uses the example of the sphere.

Berkeley's Lockean argument against the primary qualities is that the condition in LP₂ is never fulfilled.

There are no properties that do not vary with the perceiver.

He proceeds by example, for all the primary properties: number, extension, shape, motion, solidity.

The Lockean arguments appear at §12 - §14, but some of them are more explicit in [another excerpted handout, this one from Berkeley's *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*](#).

Berkeley's Lockean argument against number, §12.

Consider what number we might give to a deck of cards.

It is 52 cards, 4 suits, 13 ranks, 1 deck.

The number correctly applied to the object varies as we think of the object in different ways.

It may be a property of a concept, rather than of an object.

Berkeley's Lockean argument against extension.

Consider the mite, a tiny insect, as Berkeley does in *Three Dialogues*, column 2.

What appears large to one perceiver can appear tiny to another.

The size of an object is thus relative to perceiver, just as the color or taste is.

Thus extension is a secondary property.

The relativity of extension is of utmost importance, since extension is what Descartes called the essential characteristic of material objects.

One response to Berkeley's argument about extension is that there is something on which the mite and I can agree: I am six feet tall.

A giant, to whom I appear tiny, can also agree that I am six feet tall.

That is, the correspondence between a scale of measurement and an object is not relative to the perceiver.

The problem with this response is that the scale of measurement itself is relative to a perceiver.

A yard was originally defined as the distance between the end of the king's finger and the tip of his nose.

We have more objective measures now, but even these do not solve the problem.

There used to be an actual standard meter bar, against which all other meters could be measured.

Now, we use the distance light travels in a specific period of time as a universal standard, since the speed of light is thought to be a constant.

But consider, what if we awoke tomorrow and found that everything had doubled in size.

We would have no way of discovering this fact.

Dilations and restrictions could happen all of the time, without us knowing!

We settle our scales relative to useful sizes and distances.

Extension does seem to be a secondary quality, according to the Lockean principles.

Berkeley's Lockean argument against shape, §14.

For shape, consider that the rectangular table is never really perceived as a rectangle.

The shape is inferred, not perceived.

Also, consider that under a microscope straight edges will appear as jagged; *Three Dialogues*, column 3.

Berkeley's Lockean argument against motion is also in §14, and in *Three Dialogues*, column 3.

Consider how motion varies with the succession of our ideas.

Take motion as the reciprocal of time, the change in an object's position over time.

If our ideas proceed more quickly, the motion will appear more slow.

Berkeley's Lockean argument against solidity is clearest in *Three Dialogues*, column 4.

Berkeley considers solidity as resistance to touch.

A strong person will find something soft that a weaker person will find hard.

This is even more plausible if we consider giants and mites again.

Berkeley considers all of Locke's primary qualities as we experience them.

He has shown that these perceptions vary in the same way that perceptions of the secondary qualities do.

VI. Berkeley's reductive argument against the primary qualities

Berkeley provides a last, direct, argument that the primary qualities reduce to secondary properties, §10.

1. You can not have an idea of a primary quality without secondary qualities.
 2. So, wherever the secondary qualities are, the primary are.
 3. Secondary qualities are only in the mind.
- So, the primary qualities are mental, too.

Locke thinks that our ideas of primary qualities resemble properties of material objects. But this, for Berkeley, is an illegitimate inference. There is no primary/secondary distinction, since all qualities are secondary.

At §22, Berkeley says he will put the whole argument on the following: can you think of any idea as existing somewhere other than a mind?

VII. Berkeley and Descartes

[We went very quickly through this section, in class. I urged you to look it over, carefully.]

Berkeley argues for idealism mostly by arguing against Locke.

Descartes argued, distinctly, that we judge that there is an external world, and what it is like, with our minds and not through the senses.

Berkeley rejects Descartes' inference to a material world, since it is possible to have the same ideas even without material objects; §18.

Remember that Descartes claimed that if the world were Berkeleyan, God would be a deceiver.

Berkeley's response to Descartes, at §19 et seq., relies on an assertion we can call the Principle of No Good Reason.

The Principle of No Good Reason says that God will not do anything if there is no good reason to do it. A corollary follows: If God does something, there must be a good reason to do it.

(These principles are better known as the Principle of Sufficient Reason, often credited to Leibniz.)

1. If God exists, then he can either create physical objects or not create them.
 2. We do not need physical objects in order to have all of our experiences, since God can implant them in our minds directly.
 3. So, there is no good reason to create physical objects, in addition to minds.
 4. God exists.
 5. God will not do anything if there is no good reason to do it. (The Principle of No Good Reason.)
- So, God will not create physical objects.

God just creates our ideas directly, instead of taking the detour through physical objects.

Berkeley asks us, in §20, to imagine a person who has all of our experiences placed directly in his mind. Such a person would have exactly the same reasons to believe that there is a material world that we do.

But, we can see that he has no good reason to believe that there is a material world.

So, neither do we.

VIII. Berkeley's world

Locke and Descartes posit matter as the cause of our ideas.
This matter really has only the primary qualities as properties.
Descartes and Locke denigrate sensory properties as merely mental.
Similarly, Hobbes just insists that they are physical properties.
Berkeley gets to retain colors, sounds, and smells.
For Berkeley, there is a real world, but it is not a material world.

Locke and Descartes agree that terms which seem to refer to secondary properties of objects actually refer to our mental states.
But, Berkeley does not thus denigrate their referents, since Berkeley thinks that the world of ideas is the real world.
The lemon is really yellow, since I really have a yellow sensory experience.

Berkeley's account avoids the worries of conflicting sense experience that led to the primary/secondary distinction.
There is no contradiction in the lukewarm water being both hot and cold, since there is no material object to be both hot and cold.
There are just some hot sensations and some cold sensations.
The drawback with Berkeley's account is that we are left with only our mental states.
Berkeley's world is purely psychological.

IX. Perceivers

Berkeley's idealism is often summarized, as he writes in §3, that for objects, their esse is percipi.
'Esse is percipi' means 'being is perception'.
In fact, for Berkeley, there are perceptions, and perceivers.

There is no universally accepted solution to the perennially troubling problem of other minds.
Thus, we have the question of how we know that other people are not craftily constructed robots.
Philosophers like to say that every one's problem is no one's problem.
But the problem seems even worse for Berkeley.
We do not perceive our minds (our selves).
It would seem that even our own existence is an illegitimate inference!
Berkeley agrees that we have no idea of ourselves, §27.

X. Persistence and intersubjectivity

There are other problems for Berkeley's idealism.
One of Berkeley's new problems is the problem of intersubjectivity.
How do we account for different people having similar experiences?

Similarly, he has a problem explaining persistence.
How do we account for the fact that objects do not seem to go in and out of existence?

To ensure both intersubjectivity and persistence Berkeley appeals to God.
What are the causes of my sensations, if they are not material objects?
Recall that Berkeley says that ideas can only resemble other ideas, §8.
Ultimately, God is the cause of all of our ideas.
That God provides similar ideas to different perceivers explains intersubjectivity.
On a metaphoric level, our experiences are like peering into the mind of God.

What happens to ideas when we are not perceiving them?
Read §6.
They may subsist in the mind of other spirits.
But what if no person is perceiving them?
Sensible things have to be perceived.
But it does not follow that they are frequently created and annihilated.

Consider the limerick:
There was a young man who said God
Must think it exceedingly odd
When he finds that this tree
Continues to be
When there's no one about in the quad

Dear sir, your confusion is odd
I am always about in the quad
and that's why this tree
will continue to be
Since observed by, yours faithfully, God.