Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2004
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Lecture Notes, November 1

I. Reviewing Locke's empiricism

The empiricist picture is that we have ideas, impressions on our minds, which arise from the interaction between our senses and the material world.
The material world exists independently of us, but which depends on us for sensory (secondary) properties.
The material world has its primary qualities truly.

Descartes' description of our knowledge of the physical world was implausible, since it denied that the senses had a role.
But Descartes had an account of our knowledge of mathematics and science, which relied on pure reason.
Locke rejects pure reason, and produces a more intuitive take on the physical world, relying on our senses.
But what about mathematics, then, for Locke?

Recall that Descartes parsed our ideas into three types:
A) Innate
B) Acquired
C) Produced by me

Locke rejects anything of type A).
Math can't be of type B), for the same reasons that Descartes gave.
We still don't see triangles.
Even Locke agrees.
So, our knowledge of mathematics must be of type C), produced by me.
In particular, it is produced by a process of abstraction.
We sense particulars, like doughnuts and frisbees.
Then, we generalize, forming an abstract idea, like that of a circle.

Berkeley calls this the doctrine of abstract ideas.
Read the Introduction, especially.
Locke's commitment to abstract ideas, for Berkeley, creates a problem for his commonsensical metaphysics.

II. An Empiricist's Problem

All knowledge comes from experience.
We experience sensations, not their causes.
So, we have no knowledge of what causes our sensations, i.e. objects and the material world.
That is, we seem only to know our experiences, and not the real world outside of us.

Descartes argues that we judge with our minds.
This option is not availasble to an empiricist.

Locke says that the primary qualities inhere in material objects, that our ideas resemble them.
So we have some knowledge of the external world in that way.

Berkeley, on the other hand, argues that there are no material objects!
See §4, and §9.

III. Three metaphysical positions

1) Idealism: All reality is mental
Berkeley holds this view.
This can include God, if you wish to include God in your metaphysics.
God's most often not considered a material object.
Perhaps it's better to take God as a mental object.
See §§148-9.

2) Materialism: All reality is material.
This would have to include the mental.
Thus, a materialist might say that the mind is the brain.
Hobbes was a materialist, though Locke wasn't.

3) Dualism: Some reality is mental, some is physical.
Descartes and Locke are both dualists, though we read Locke more as a materialist.

Note that these metaphysical positions are independent of one's epistemology.
Locke and Descartes agree on dualism, despite their disagreement over epistemology.
And Berkeley disagrees with Locke about metaphysics, though he mostly agrees about epistemology.

IV. Berkeley's claim that idealism avoids skepticism

Materialism (and the materialistic side of dualism) leads to skepticism and atheism.
We can't get out of our minds into those objects, so we are forced into skepticism.
See §86, and following.
We claim that our sensations depend on a world of objects.
This seems to dismiss God from our natural science, §92.

Skepticism and atheism are wrong.
Put aside the problems with atheism.
The problem of skepticism is the just the Empiricist's Problem, above.

Thus, Berkeley argues that idealism is right.

V. Berkeley's plan of attack

We posit matter to account for the ideas we can't control.
Then, with Locke and Galileo, we realize that many of these properties aren't material.
Eventually, we realize that it's all mental, even if, in some non-spatial way, external.
See §73.

Read introduction, §§1-6

Compare with this, from Locke, from the intro to the *Enquiry*:
If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; how far they reach; to what things they are in any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities... The discoveries we can make with this ought to satisfy us; and we shall then use our understandings right, when we entertain all objects in that way and proportion that they are suited to our faculties, and upon those grounds they are capable of being proposed to us; and not peremptorily or intemperately require demonstration, and demand certainty, where probability only is to be had, and which is sufficient to govern all our concernments. If we will disbelieve everything, because we cannot certainly know all things, we shall do much as wisely as he who would not use his legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no wings to fly. (§§4-5)

The beginning of the Introduction is a rejection of Descartes' work.
Berkeley says that we have prejudices, errors and paradoxes.
They are wrongly thought to arise from our natural weakness and limitations.
Materialism, and the materialist element of dualism, leads to skepticism.
But this is an unjustified skepticism.
We can avoid these problems, which arise from raising dust and complaining we can not see.

Berkeley is more concerned with the kinds of problems that Locke mentions with the Cartesian philosophy.
The rest of the Introduction contains an extended attack on Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas.
Don't accept the "largest views", false principles.
The problem is 'abstract ideas'.