

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2004  
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Lecture Notes, November 15

Let's return to Berkeley's account of the sensible world.

### I. Berkeley on the resemblance hypothesis

Berkeley accepts the resemblance hypothesis, in a way.

Locke used the resemblance hypothesis as support for his materialism, for his view that material objects are the causes of our ideas.

Obviously, Berkeley doesn't follow Locke in this way.

Consider two different refinements of the resemblance hypothesis.

(RH1): My ideas resemble material objects.

(RH2): My ideas resemble their causes.

Berkeley rejects RH1, but accepts RH2.

So, what are these causes, if they are not material objects.

Recall, that Berkeley says that ideas can only resemble other ideas, §8.

### II. What happens to these 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, §48.

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.

### III. What is Berkeley's world like?

Locke and Descartes posit matter as the cause of our ideas.

This matter really has only the primary qualities as properties.

But on this picture, there's no yellow, no sweetness: all secondary properties are just names.

Berkeley tries making the terms refer to my sensory states.

So when we say the lemon is yellow, we're right, since I really have a yellow sensory experience.

Berkeley's account solves the problem of error for our beliefs based on the senses.

(This is the problem that led both Descartes and Locke to reject the resemblance hypothesis, insofar as they do.)

But Berkeley has a new set of problems.

One of his new problems is the problem of intersubjectivity.

How do we account for different people having similar experiences?

Similarly, how do we account for the fact that objects don't seem to go in and out of existence, that they seem to persist?

Berkeley posits God, to ensure both intersubjectivity and persistence.

On a metaphoric level, our experiences are like peering into the mind of God.

Berkeley urges that his position is more commonsensical than materialism, which leads to atheism and skepticism.

Materialism makes the world independent of God, and this is atheism.

It also entails that we don't experience the objects in themselves, and this is skepticism.

See Descartes, AT55: I do not understand why I err.

Compare with Locke's contentedness with ignorance.

Berkeley gets to retain colors, sounds, and smells.

Recall §1 and the apple.

The apple is just how I experience it.

Remember, he thinks there is a real world.

It is just not a material world, §38.

The drawback is that we're left with only our mental states.

Berkeley's world is purely psychological.

#### IV. Descartes v Berkeley

Descartes, recall, considered the possibility of a Berkeleyan world, pp 78-79.

But he says that this would make God a deceiver, it would reveal a fault in God.

Berkeley, of course, would deny this.

Here's an argument that would support Berkeley:

It is an argument for Berkeley's idealism from a Principle of No Good Reason

1. If God exists, then he can either create physical objects or not create them.
  2. We don't need physical objects in order to have all of our experiences, since God can implant them in our minds directly. (He has to create *and* preserve, anyway!)
  3. So, there's no good reason for him to create physical objects, in addition to minds.
  4. God exists.
  5. God only does something if there's a good reason to do it.
- So, God won't create physical objects.  
That is, God just creates our ideas directly, instead of taking the detour through physical objects.

Two points about this argument:

1. It does rely on the existence of God, but this is no problem here, since Descartes and Berkeley agree on it.
2. If Descartes could have a clear and distinct understanding of this argument, he would have to give up his beliefs in the physical world, I think.