

Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Fall 2004

Russell Marcus, Instructor

email: philosophy@thatmarcusfamily.org

website: <http://philosophy.thatmarcusfamily.org>

Office phone: (718) 997-5287

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I. How do we draw the line between veridical sense properties (those that accurately resemble the world) and ones that misrepresent the nature of the world?

Locke tacitly presumes the following principle:

If an object seems (to one person, or to two) to have two incompatible properties, then it must really have neither property.

Compare with Descartes' discussion of the wax.

Locke doesn't discard all sense properties, though.

II. Sense properties that Locke claims do not represent the world

Hot and cold, §21

Color, because porphyry loses color in dark, §19

Taste and odor, because an almond changes taste and odor when mashed, §20

III. A corollary to the first principle

Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, it can't be a real quality.

Then we're like two people: one before and one after.

And so it appears to have incompatible properties to two different stages of us.

IV. A second principle

If an object has the same property under all conditions, it must really have that property.

This one tells us which properties are veridical.

See §9: "Qualities such as are utterly inseparable from the body..."

A corollary:

If every one has the same impression, then it must really have that property.

See §21 and the discussion of figure (shape).

V. Can we generalize these conclusions?

Consider any physical object.

Which qualities are about us, and so can vary?

Which are about the objects, and so can not vary?

See §23:

Primary Qualities	Secondary Qualities
Solidity extension Figure (§21) Motion/ Rest Number	Color Odor Hot/ Cold Sound Texture Taste

Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis, for primary qualities only, §15.

VI. So, why do we see yellow lemons?

There's something in the object that makes me think it is the way it is.

This is the corpuscular, or atomic, theory.

The world consists of particles (atoms) in motion.

These unite in varying ways, and have dispositional properties, §13.

Their arrangement determines how we experience an object.

Note the primacy of mathematics.

The primary qualities are mathematically describable.

This is like Descartes, but with a wider set of properties, and resemblances.

This picture is not original with Locke, writing in 1689.

Democritus had posited the existence of atoms in the fifth century BC.

Boyle, the founder of modern chemistry, had written similarly in the 1660.

Check out this quote from Galileo (1564-1642):

...that external bodies, to excite in us these tastes, these odours, and these sounds, demand other than size, figure, number, and slow or rapid motion, I do not believe and I judge that, if the ears, the tongue, and the nostrils were taken away, the figure, the numbers, and the motions would indeed remain, but not the odours, nor the tastes, nor the sounds, which, without the living animal, I do not believe are anything else than names.

Compare with Locke, §17.

VII. Nominalism

'Nominalism' is the claim that some words don't denote real objects or properties, but are merely names.

We are all nominalists about fictional objects, like Pegasus.

Some people are nominalists about numbers, for example.

Locke is a nominalist about color, and other secondary properties.

VIII. Summary

The empiricist picture is that we have ideas, impressions on our minds, arising from the senses and their interaction with the material world. This material world exists independently of us, but depends on us for its sensory

properties.