Philosophy 101: Introduction to Philosophy, Queens College, Spring 2005
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Lecture Notes, March 21

I. The Primary/Secondary Distinction

How do we draw the line between veridical ideas and ones that misrepresent the world?

Locke's two principles and corollaries:
Principle 1: If an object seems (to one person, or to two) to have two incompatible properties, then it must really have neither property. Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, it can not be a real quality.

Principle 2: If an object has the same property under all conditions, it must really have that property. If every one has the same impression, then it must really have that property.
See §II.VIII.21.

The results:

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

Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis, for primary qualities only, §II.VIII.15.
Note the primacy of mathematics.
The primary qualities are mathematically describable.
Compare to Descartes' description of the physical world.

II. So, why do we see yellow lemons?

There is something in the object that makes me think it is the way it is.
The world really consists of particles (atoms) in motion.
These unite in varying ways.
Depending on how they unite, they affect us in different ways.
Their arrangement determines how we experience an object.
The arrangement of particles in the apple makes the light rays reflect from its surface in such a way that I have a red experience.
We might say that the apple has a 'dispositional property' which makes us see it as red, §II.VIII.13.
But the dispositional property is not redness, which is properly a property only of my experience.
This is the corpuscular, or atomic, theory.

Atomic theory 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, §II.VIII.17.

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.

III. Nominalism

'Nominalism' is the claim that some words are merely names and do not denote real objects or properties.
We are all nominalists about fictional objects, like the Easter Bunny.
Some people are nominalists about numbers.
Locke is a nominalist about color, and other secondary properties.

IV. Locke and mathematics

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).
Mathematics can not be of type B), for the same reasons that Descartes gave.
We still do not 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.

V. 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 available 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.