

Introduction to Philosophy

Philosophy 110W
Spring 2012
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Class #5 - Idealism
Berkeley



but first...

Sense Experience



- Even if I am systematically deceived, I still have my sense experience.
- But sense experience may not get us an external world.
 - The problem of solipsism
- Moreover, it is not categorical.
 - We all have different retinal images of these words.
 - Our interpretations might differ.
- Descartes presents an alternative to reliance on sense experience.
 - Pure reason
- Locke and Berkeley defend reliance on sense experience.
- Let's start with Descartes's stories of the wax and the sun.

Descartes's Wax



- First, the wax is cold, hard, yellow, honey-flavored, and flower-scented.
- We bring it near a fire.
- The wax melts, becoming hot and liquid, losing its color, taste, and odor.
- All of its sensory properties have shifted.
- We have images of the wax, in several incompatible states.
- But we do not have an image of the essence of the wax, or of wax in general.
 - ▶ “I grasp that the wax is capable of innumerable changes of this sort, even though I am incapable of running through these innumerable changes by using my imagination... The perception of the wax is neither a seeing, nor a touching, nor an imagining...even though it previously seemed so; rather it is an inspection on the part of the mind alone.”

Real and Apparent Properties

- According to the new (Galilean) science, the wax is just a body which can take various manifestations, hot or cold, sweet or tasteless, etc., but is identified with none of these particular sensory qualities.
- “Perhaps the wax was what I now think it is: namely that the wax itself never really was the sweetness of the honey, nor the fragrance of the flowers, nor the whiteness, nor the shape, nor the sound, but instead was a body that a short time ago manifested itself to me in these ways, and now does so in other ways... Let us focus our attention on this and see what remains after we have removed everything that does not belong to the wax: only that it is something extended, flexible, and mutable.”

Denigrating Sense Experience

- Descartes claims that the senses are irrelevant to knowledge
- Knowledge of physical objects comes from the intellect (or mind) alone.
- Any information we get from the senses does not rise to the level of knowledge.
- We can believe that the chair is blue, but we can never know this.
- We know that the wax can take more forms than we could possibly imagine: more shapes, more sizes.
- Our knowledge that there are other potential shapes and colors must go beyond anything that could come from the senses.
- Two different types of beliefs about the wax.
 - ▶ It has a particular shape, color, and other sense properties.
 - not knowledge
 - ▶ It can take on innumerably many different forms.
 - knowledge

Appearance and Reality

- Descartes claims that the world is not as it appears.
 - Our senses may be misleading.
 - In small ways, as when we perceive an illusion.
 - In larger, systematic ways, if we are dreaming or deceived.
- The wax example shows that physical objects are essentially none of their sense characteristics.
 - The world out there is unlike the world as it appears to us.

The Resemblance Hypothesis

RH: Our sensory ideas are like the world.

- The claim that our sensory ideas are like the world may be called the resemblance hypothesis.
- Aristotle took sensory qualities to be real properties of external objects.
 - The redness and sweetness of an apple are real properties of the apple itself.
 - Our senses are attuned to the external environment.
 - I see the apple as red because my eye itself is able to change to red.
- On Aristotle's view, our ideas resemble their causes.
- Objects really have the properties that we perceive them to have.

Descartes and the Resemblance Hypothesis

- Descartes rejects RH.
- He provides an example of the sun.
- The senses tell us that the sun is very small.
- We reason that the sun is very large.
- “Both ideas surely cannot resemble the same sun existing outside me; and reason convinces me that the idea that seems to have emanated from the sun itself from so close is the very one that least resembles the sun “(Third Meditation).
- Knowledge of objects comes from the mind alone.
- Our most secure knowledge, like that of mathematics, is innate.



Locke and the Blank Slate



- Locke denies Descartes's claims about innate ideas.
 - “Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any *ideas*. How does it come to be furnished? From where does it come by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? From where does it have all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from *experience*; our knowledge is founded in all that, and from that it ultimately derives itself” (II.I.2).
- We learn particulars, first, beginning with sense experience.
- Individual perceptions are simple.
 - Impressions of the same object under different sense modalities are independent.
 - The taste of the lemon is independent of its yellowness, and of its texture and odor.

The Molyneux Problem

- “Suppose a man born blind, and now adult, and taught by his touch to distinguish between a cube and a sphere of the same metal, and nearly of the same bigness, so as to tell, when he felt one and the other, which is the cube, which the sphere. Suppose then the cube and sphere placed on a table, and the blind man be made to see. Quaere, whether by his sight, before he touched them, he could now distinguish and tell which is the globe, which the cube” (Locke, *Essay* II.IX.8)?
- Locke denies that the blind person could tell which was the sphere and which was the cube without touching the objects.
- Our sense of touch is independent of our vision.

Sensation and Reflection

- We can hold sensory ideas in memory, and recall them.
- We can generalize, or abstract, to find universals, like those of mathematics.
- “The senses at first let in particular *ideas*, and furnish the yet empty cabinet, and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards the mind proceeding further abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names” (I.II.15, AW 321a).
- But:
 - ▶ the dream doubt
 - ▶ the wax example
 - ▶ the sun example

Locke and the Primary/ Secondary Distinction

- To avoid problems of misleading sense experience, Locke presents the primary/secondary distinction.
- Some apparent properties of physical objects are misleading; objects do not really have those properties.
- Some apparent properties of objects are veridical.
- The challenge is to distinguish the primary qualities from the secondary qualities.

Locke's Water Experiment

- The same object displays incompatible properties at the same time.
- “No one subject can have two smells or two colors at the same time. To this perhaps will be said, has not an opal, or the infusion of *lignum nephriticum*, two colors at the same time? To which I answer that these bodies, to eyes differently placed, it is different parts of the object that reflect the particles of light. And therefore it is not the same part of the object, and so not the very same subject, which at the same time appears both yellow and azure. For it is as impossible that the very same particle of any body should at the same time differently modify or reflect the rays of light, as that it should have two different figures and textures at the same time” (IV.III.15).



Locke's First Principle

- Locke tacitly presumes two principles to distinguish veridical ideas from misrepresentative ones.
- LP1: If one perceives an object as having two (or more) incompatible ideas, then those ideas do not represent real properties of the object.
 - Besides hot and cold, other sense ideas are not veridical, according to LP1.
 - Porphyry (II.VIII.19)
 - Almond (II.VIII.20)
 - Descartes's wax example
- LP1C1: Even if a change in us entails the change in the perceived quality, the ideas which change can not be veridical.
 - Orange juice
- LP1C2: Qualities that appear different to different observers are not veridical.
 - Color-blindness

Locke's Second Principle

- LP2: If an idea of an object is the same under all conditions, that idea is veridical.
 - ▶ “We may understand how it is possible that the same water may, at the same time, produce the sensations of heat in one hand and cold in the other; which yet figure never does, that, never producing the *idea* of a square by one hand, which has produced the *idea* of a globe by another” (II.VIII.21).
- LP2C: If every observer receives the same idea from an object, then that idea is veridical.

Ideas of an Apple



- Red ■ Misrepresentative
- Round ■ Real
- Cool to the touch ■ Misrepresentative
- Sweet, though a bit sour ■ Misrepresentative
- Shiny ■ Misrepresentative
- Smooth ■ Misrepresentative
- Sits still on the table ■ Real
- Crunchy ■ Misrepresentative (But consider its brittle texture)
- Weights 4 oz. ■ Misrepresentative
- Has a mass of 120 grams ■ Real
- Is one apple ■ Real
- Is being considered by you ■ Misrepresentative
- Smells like, well, an apple ■ Misrepresentative
- “These I call *original* or *primary qualities* of body, which I think we may observe to produce simple *ideas* in us, namely, solidity, extension, figure, motion or rest, and number. *Secondly*, such *qualities* which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but powers to produce various sensations in us by their *primary qualities*...these I call *secondary qualities*” (II.VIII.9-10).

Primary Qualities and Secondary Qualities

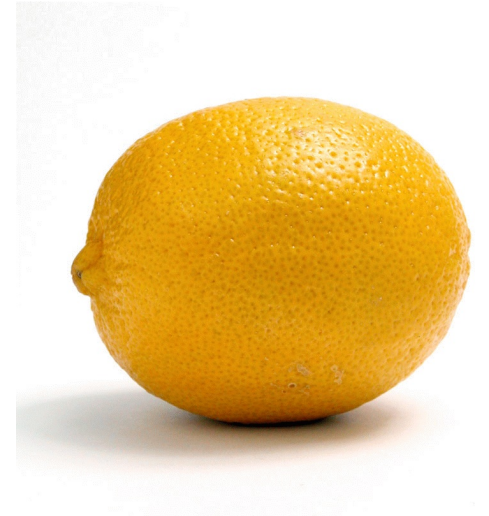
- Primary
 - ▶ Solidity
 - ▶ Extension
 - ▶ Figure
 - ▶ Motion/ Rest
 - ▶ Number
- Secondary
 - ▶ Color
 - ▶ Odor
 - ▶ Hot/ Cold
 - ▶ Sound
 - ▶ Texture
 - ▶ Taste
- We can justify our beliefs on the basis of sense experience without worrying that we will be forced to accept errors as true because we are relying on our senses, rather than pure reason.

The Primary/Secondary Distinction and the Resemblance Hypothesis

- Locke accepts the Resemblance Hypothesis, for primary qualities only.
 - The *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies *are resemblances* of them and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the *ideas produced* in us *by these secondary qualities have no resemblance* of them at all. There is nothing like our *ideas* existing in the bodies themselves (II.VIII.15).
- Our ideas of extension resemble extension in the world.
- My ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble anything in an object.
- On the basis of my ideas of primary qualities, then, I can justify significant conclusions about the world (i.e. the new science) without appealing to innate ideas.

Experience and Reality

Locke's View

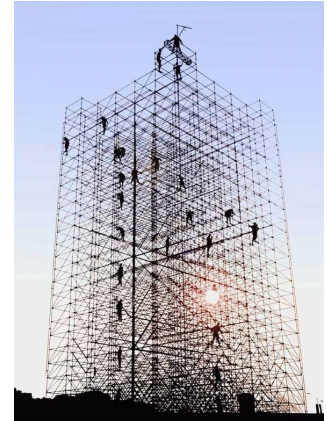


- The world is nothing but particles in motion.
- Sense qualities of objects are not really in the world.
- Lemons are not really yellow, or sour.
- They are made of particles (atoms or corpuscles) that appear yellow or sour to normal human senses.
- These minute particles unite in varying ways.
- Depending on how they unite, they affect us in different ways.
- We have ideas which arise from the interaction between our senses and the material world.

Galileo and Locke on the Primary/Secondary Distinction

- ...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 (Galileo, *Opere* IV, 336).
- Take away the sensation of them; let the eyes not see light, or colors, nor the ears hear sounds; let the palate not taste, nor the nose smell; and all colors, tastes, odors, and sounds as they are such particular *ideas* vanish and cease, and are reduced to their causes, i.e., bulk, figure, and motion of parts (Locke, II.VIII.17, AW 334b).

Descartes's View



- The only real property of physical objects is their extension.
- “The only principles which I accept, or require, in physics are those of geometry and pure mathematics; these principles explain all natural phenomena, and enable us to provide quite certain demonstrations regarding them” (Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy* II.64, AT VIII A.78)

Locke's Mysterianism

- The question remains why lemons appear to be yellow and bitter.
- Why do such and such motions in the air cause me to hear a symphony?
- Why do certain wavelengths of light cause me to see blue?
- That the size, figure, and motion of one body should cause a change in the size, figure, and motion of another body is not beyond our conception. The separation of the parts of one body upon the intrusion of another and the change from rest to motion upon impulse, these and the like seem to have some *connection* one with another. And if we knew these primary qualities of bodies, we might have reason to hope we might be able to know a great deal more of these operations of them one upon another. But our minds not being able to discover any *connection* between these primary qualities of bodies and the sensations that are produced in us by them, we can never be able to establish certain and undoubted rules of the consequence or *coexistence* of any secondary qualities, though we could discover the size, figure, or motion of those invisible parts which immediately produce them. We are so far from knowing what figure, size, or motion of parts produce a yellow color, a sweet taste, or a sharp sound that we can by no means conceive how any *size, figure, or motion* of any particles can possibly produce in us the *idea* of any *color, taste, or sound* whatsoever; there is no conceivable *connection* between the one and the other (IV.III.13).

and now for Berkeley...

An Empiricist's Problem

- The empiricist claims that all knowledge comes from experience.
- But we experience our 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.
- “So long as men thought that real things subsisted without the mind, and that their knowledge was only so far forth real as it was conformable to real things, it follows they could not be certain they had any real knowledge at all. For how can it be known that the things which are perceived are conformable to those which are not perceived, or exist without the mind?” (*Principles*, §86).

Idealism

- Locke: our ideas of primary qualities of objects resemble real qualities of those objects.
 - ▶ To assert a resemblance, we have to be able to perceive both objects.
 - ▶ We seem to be stuck with only our sensations.
- Berkeley: there are no material objects.
 - ▶ “It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing among men that houses, mountains, rivers, and, in a word, sensible objects have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding... What are the aforementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations?” (*Principles*, §4)
 - ▶ “By matter...we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion do actually subsist. But it is evident from what we have already shown that extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. Hence it is plain that the very notion of what is called matter, or corporeal substance, involves a contradiction in it” (*Principles*, §9).

Three Arguments for Idealism

1. From the sensibility of objects
2. From the relativity of perceptions
 - the major argument
3. A reductive argument

Berkeley on Sensible Objects

The table I write on, I say, exists; that is, I see it and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed - meaning by that that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odor; that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a color or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible that they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them (*Principles* §3).

The Argument from the Sensibility of Objects

D1. Objects are sensible things.

D2. Sensible things are things with none other than sensible qualities.

D3. The sensible qualities are the secondary qualities.

D4. Those secondary qualities are strictly mental properties.

DC. So, objects are strictly mental, i.e. there is no physical world.

Berkeley's Arguments from the Relativity of Perceptions

- Locke's principles showed that the secondary qualities were not real.
- Berkeley extends the use of these principles against the primary qualities.
- Why may we not as well argue that figure and extension are not patterns or resemblances of qualities existing in matter, because to the same eye at different stations, or eyes of a different texture at the same station, they appear various and cannot, therefore, be the images of anything settled and determinate without the mind? (*Principles* §14).

Number



- For the argument for the relativity of number, consider what number we might give to a deck of cards.
- It is 52 cards, 4 suits, 13 ranks, 1 deck.
- “The same thing bears a different denomination of number as the mind views it with different respects. Thus, the same extension is one, or three, or thirty-six, according as the mind considers it with reference to a yard, a foot, or an inch. Number is so visibly relative and dependent on men’s understanding that it is strange to think how anyone should give it an absolute existence without the mind” (*Principles* §12, AW 449b).
- 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.



Extension



- To show that extension is relative to the perceiver, consider the mite (a tiny insect) and a giant.
- What appears large to the mite can appear tiny to us, and minuscule to the giant.
- The size of an object is relative to perceiver, just as the color or taste is.
- I appear large to the mite, but to a giant, I appear small.
- Thus extension is a secondary property, too.
- This example is of utmost importance, since extension is the most plausible primary quality.

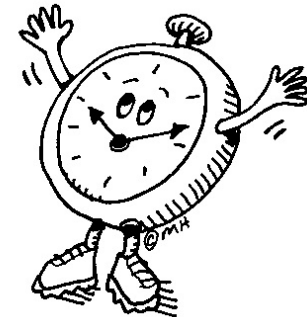
Shape



- To show that shape is relative to a perceiver, consider what we see under a microscope.
- Edges that appear straight to the naked eye will appear jagged when magnified.
- Consider our perception of a rectangular object, like a table.
 - ▶ The shape is never really seen as a rectangle, although we all infer that it is that shape.
 - ▶ What we really get from the senses about the shape is relative to the perceiver.

Motion

- The argument for the relativity of our perceptions of motion relies on an argument for the relativity of our perceptions of time, since motion is change in place over time.
- Our perception of time varies with the succession of our ideas.
- If our ideas proceed more quickly, a motion will appear more slow.
- Just as we can not rely on an external measurement of extension, since we have to agree on a standard unit measure, we can not rely on an external measurement of time.



Solidity

- Berkeley's argument for the relativity of solidity to the perceiver takes solidity to be 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.

Summary of Berkeley's Arguments From the Relativity of Perceptions

- Berkeley has considered 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.
- All qualities are secondary qualities.
- We have no veridical primary qualities, representing a material world.

Berkeley's Reductive Argument Against the Primary Qualities

If it is certain that those original [primary] qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind. But I desire anyone to reflect and try whether he can, by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved, but I must in addition give it some color or other sensible quality which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where, therefore, the other sensible qualities are, these must be also, namely, in the mind and nowhere else (*Principles* §10).

Berkeley's Reductive Argument, Regimented

R1. You can not have an idea of a primary quality without secondary qualities.

R2. So, wherever the secondary qualities are, the primary are.

R3. Secondary qualities are only in the mind.

RC. So, the primary qualities are mental, too.

Causes and Intermediate Instruments

- For Berkeley, only God can be taken as the true cause of my ideas.
- An all-powerful God could have no use for an intermediate instrument.
- “Though we do the utmost we can to secure the belief of *matter*, though, when reason forsakes us, we endeavor to support our opinion on the bare possibility of the thing, and though we indulge ourselves in the full scope of an imagination not regulated by reason to make out that poor *possibility*, yet the upshot of all is that there are certain *unknown ideas* in the mind of God; for this, if anything, is all that I conceive to be meant by *occasion* with regard to God. And this at the bottom is no longer contending for the *thing*, but for the *name*. Whether therefore there are such ideas in the mind of God, and whether they may be called by the name *matter*, I shall not dispute. But, if you stick to the notion of an unthinking substance or support of extension, motion, and other sensible qualities, then to me it is most evidently impossible there should be any such thing, since it is a plain repugnancy that those qualities should exist in or be supported by an unperceiving substance” (*Principles*, §§75-6).

Locke's Error

The *ideas of primary qualities* of bodies are *resemblances* of them and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves, but the *ideas produced* in us *by these secondary qualities have no resemblance* of them at all. There is nothing like our *ideas* existing in the bodies themselves. They are, in the bodies we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us. And what is sweet, blue, or warm in *idea* is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the *insensible parts in the bodies themselves* which we call so (Locke's *Essay* II.VIII.15, emphasis in last line added).

Berkeley on the Resemblance Hypothesis

- RH1. My ideas resemble material objects.
- RH2. My ideas resemble their causes.
 - Berkeley rejects RH1, but accepts RH2.
 - Ideas can only resemble other ideas.
- “But, you say, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them of which they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking substance. I answer, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a color or figure can be like nothing but another color or figure” (*Principles*, §8, AW 448b).
- My ideas resemble, we presume, the ideas in the minds of other persons.
- And, they resemble their causes, which are ideas in the mind of God.

Berkeley on God

“When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or not, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses-the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is, therefore, some other will or spirit that produces them” (*Principles* §29, AW 453a).

Not a presumption, but an inference.

Idealism and Abstraction

- We have seen three arguments for idealism: from sensibility, from relativity of perceptions, and the reductive argument.
- If Berkeley's denial of the existence of a material world were based solely on our inability to know about such a world, his idealism would be ill motivated.
- But, Berkeley's idealism is more forcefully motivated by his objections to a particular kind of inference used by Locke to generate his materialism: the ability to abstract.
- Berkeley attacks Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas as the source of a skeptical, atheistic materialism.

Locke on Abstract Ideas

- According to Locke, our ideas of primary qualities, like extension, correspond to real properties of real, material objects.
 - Those ideas do not correspond to particular sensations.
 - We experience an extended chair, but not the extension itself.
- In order to form the idea of extension in general, or even the extension of a particular chair, we have to strip away the other qualities in our minds to form a new and abstract idea.
 - We create general terms to stand for the abstract ideas in our minds.
 - 'Body' stands for an abstract idea of body, which corresponds, somehow, to actual material bodies.
- Since we can not form an abstract idea of body, Berkeley argues, there is no reason to claim that there are any bodies.
 - The term 'bodies' stands for no idea at all.

Berkeley on Abstract Ideas

If we thoroughly examine this tenet [materialism] it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*. For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? Light and colors, heat and cold, extension and figures - in a word, the things we see and feel - what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas, or impressions on the sense? And is it possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception? For my part, I might as easily divide a thing from itself... In truth, the object and the sensation are the same thing and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other (*Principles* §5).

Look Ma, No Problem of Sense Error

- On the materialist view, there is no yellow, no sweetness in external objects.
 - As applied to objects, terms for secondary qualities are mere names.
- Berkeley interprets terms for secondary qualities as referring to our mental states.
 - The lemon is yellow, since I really have a yellow sensory experience.
- Berkeley's account solves the problem of error for our beliefs based on the senses.
 - All ideas are independent.
 - We need not ascribe contradictory properties to an external object.
 - The problems of error that motivated Descartes and Locke are obviated.
- Berkeley has a new set of problems.



Intersubjectivity and Persistence

- How do we account for different people having similar experiences?
- How do we account for the fact that objects do not seem to go in and out of existence, that they persist?
- Berkeley posits God.
- “For, though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them though we do not. Wherever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatsoever. It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perception of them” (*Principles*, §48).

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."

Berkeley's World

- There are colors, sounds, and smells.
- The apple is just how I experience it.
- The mental world, while not a material world, is not a world of imagination.
- “The ideas imprinted on the senses by the author of nature are called *real things*; and those excited in the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things* which they copy and represent” (*Principles* §33).
- But Berkeley's world is purely psychological.



Coming Up

- This Thursday:
 - Bobby on Moore
 - Wittgenstein
- First Papers are due next Thursday (February 9).