

## Mind-Dependence

### Lecture 1: Primary and Secondary Qualities

#### 1. Course Outline

In this course we will consider how philosophers have defended the mind-dependence of some or all objects of experience. This will lead us first past the distinction between Primary and Secondary qualities, and then more to full fledged Idealism, as a thesis about reality as we know it.

#### 2. The 17th Century Distinction

Popular view: colours are ‘in the brain’. This is deeply puzzling. Aren’t apples red and the sky blue? The modern origin for this puzzling view of sensible qualities can be found in Galileo’s work:

whenever I conceive of any material or corporeal substance, I am necessarily constrained to conceive of that substance as bounded and as possessing this or that shape, as large or small in relationship to some other body, as in this or that place during this or that time, as in motion or at rest, as in contact or not in contact with some other body, as being one, many, or few—and by no stretch of imagination can I conceive of any corporeal body apart from these conditions. But I do not at all feel myself compelled to conceive of bodies as necessarily conjoined with such further conditions as being red or white, bitter or sweet, having sound or being mute, or possessing a pleasant or unpleasant fragrance. . . . I think, therefore, that these tastes, odours, colours, etc., so far as their objective existence is concerned, are nothing but mere names for something that resides exclusively in our sensitive body, so that if the perceiving creature were removed, all of these qualities would be annihilated and abolished from existence. (*The Assayer*)

We can find similar distinctions in Descartes and Boyle.

The main thesis that emerges with the development of Modern philosophy is that *sensible qualities* we perceive are to be placed in the mind, while the *geometrical qualities* we perceive can be rightly attributed to mind-independent substances. We owe the labels ‘Primary’ and ‘Secondary’ to Locke, who in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1692) gives the now canonical presentation of the distinction.

### 3. The main arguments

Here are three influential arguments for the distinction:

1. **Argument from Scientific Explanation:** We seem to be able to explain the workings of nature quite independently of any colours, smells, or sounds. More strongly, sensible qualities, such as colours, are *caually inert*, and so they *could not* contribute to an explanation to the workings of nature.
2. **Argument from Microscopes:** Locke: “Blood to the naked eye appears all red; but by a good microscope, wherein its lesser parts appear, shows only some few globules of red, swimming in a pellucid liquor.” (Locke, *Essay*, bk 2, ch 23, sec 11) Locke himself seems to assume the microscope reveals the primary qualities of things, and make the secondary ones disappear.
3. **Paradox of Conflicting Appearances:** The same water can feel cold to one hand and hot to another. If the heat or cold were in the water and not the the mind, the water would have to be hot and cold at the same time. But one and the same body cannot simultaneously be both be hot and not hot (i.e. cold).

### 4. In what way are Secondary Qualities mind-dependent?

If these arguments succeed, then (a) there is a real distinction between Primary and Secondary Qualities and (b) Secondary Qualities are mind-dependent. In what way are Secondary Qualities mind-dependent? Here’s a way of organising the positions:

1. They are wholly in the mind
  - as sensation
  - as ‘mere appearance’
2. They not wholly in the mind
  - as a relational property (e.g. being-red-for-s)
  - as as a non-relational property of objects (that still is somehow mind-dependent)