

0 Berkeley

Themes in Berkeley

- Against material substance (“materialism,” according to Berkeley)
- Against skepticism
- Against abstract ideas
- Idealism

The Dialogues

- Hylas is taken to represent Locke.
- Philonous is taken to represent Berkeley.

1 The Principles of Human Knowledge

“It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind or, lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.” (447)

Esse est percipi: “To be is to be perceived.”

- “What are [houses, mountains, etc.] but the things we perceive by senses? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?” (447)
- What is the argument?
- Note that this is really an attack on mind-independent things.

Indirect realism: Perceptions of external objects are mediated by ideas.

Direct realism: External objects are perceived immediately.

2 First Dialogue

Early on in the Dialogue, Philonous declares: “That there is no such thing as what philosophers call *material substance*, I am seriously persuaded...”

Sensible things are those that are perceived immediately by the senses.

- Whatever is perceived mediately cannot be sensible, even if they are the causes of our immediate perceptions.
- Example: perceive the letters of the book, infer the ideas they represent

Secondary qualities do not exist in material substance.

- An intense degree of heat is a very great pain.
 - Sensible pain is nothing but sensation to an intense degree. (459)
 - Why does Berkeley think this?
- But material substance cannot perceive.

- Therefore an intense degree of heat cannot exist in material substance.

Relativity arguments from Locke

- Two hands in the same water (460)
- Pain (460)

All we perceive are sensible qualities; we do not perceive some externally existing quality in material substance.

- We cannot distinguish sugar's sweetness and its sweetness as perceived by us. (460)
- Philonous: "Our discourse preceded altogether concerning sensible things, which you defined to be the things we *immediately perceive by our senses*. Therefore, whatever other qualities you speak of as distinct from these, I know nothing of them, nor do they at all belong to the point in dispute."
- At this point, Hylas concedes that sweetness is not in sugar.

Sound is not reducible to motion in the air.

- Hylas: "You must distinguish ... between sound as it is perceived by us and as it is in itself, or (which is the same thing) between the sound we immediately perceive and that which exists without us. The former indeed is a particular kind of sensation, but the latter is merely a vibrational or undulatory motion in the air." (461)
- Philonous points out that this entails that real sound can be seen and felt, but not heard.

The case of colors (461)

Finally, Hylas concedes with respect to all secondary qualities.

3 Materialism leads to skepticism

"...though we give the materialists their external bodies, they by their own confession are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced: since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner body can act upon spirit, or how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind. Hence it is evident the production of ideas or sensations in our minds, can be no reason why we should suppose matter or corporeal substances, since that is acknowledged to remain equally inexplicable with, or without this supposition." (PHK 19)

"... 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 that 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?" (PHK 86)