

## 1 The brain hypothesis

At the start of the second dialogue, Hylas proposes a mechanistic explanation of our receiving of ideas: "...and [the nerves] being filled with spirits, propagate them to the brain or seat of the soul, which, according to the various impressions or traces thereby made in the brain, is variously affected with ideas." (475)

- Philonous: "Besides spirits, all that we know or conceive are our own ideas. When, therefore, you say all ideas are occasioned by impressions in the brain, do you conceive this brain or not? If you do, then you talk of ideas imprinted in an idea causing that idea, which is absurd. If you do not conceive it, you talk unintelligibly instead of forming a reasonable hypothesis."
- Furthermore, there is no necessary connection between the motion in nerves and sensations.

## 2 Idealism at a glance

Berkeley does not take himself to be a skeptic. In fact, he rejects materialism because he thinks it leads to skepticism.

An argument for God: "To me it is evident, for the reasons you allow of, that sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind or spirit. From this I conclude, not that they have no real existence, but that, seeing they do not depend on my thought, and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me, *there must be some other mind in which they exist*. As sure, therefore, as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite, omnipresent Spirit who contains and supports it."

The account:

- The only things that exist are ideas and minds (spirits).
  - We immediately perceive the former.
  - We have "notions" of the latter.
- Sensible objects like chairs and doors are collections of ideas.
  - They exist independently of our minds, but dependently on God's mind.

Berkeley distinguishes his view from Malebranche's view. According to Malebranche:

- There is a material world.
- But because an immaterial thing cannot perceive a material thing, the mind immediately perceives God, who contains our ideas, since God is "spiritual." (477)
  - The difference between Berkeley's view and this is that this view takes ideas to constitute *part* of God, or his *essence*; that is, that they are God's ideas and not ours.
  - Furthermore, God's ideas represent externally existing objects - they are their archetypes.
  - Berkeley maintains only that our ideas are produced in us by God.
- Occasionalism

Philonous: "I do not understand how our ideas, which are things altogether passive and inert, can be the essence or any part (or like part) of the essence or substance of God, who is an impassive, indivisible, purely active being." (477-8)

- Furthermore, the postulation of a material world is inelegant and unnecessary.

3 Matter, again

Hylas: Matter is just the cause of my ideas. I am not the cause, nor can they subsist by themselves.

- But matter is usually described as "an extended, solid, movable, unthinking, inactive substance." (479)
- So it cannot be the cause, since that requires activity.

Alternate accounts of matter:

- Matter is the cause, of a "limited and inferior nature," of my ideas, via motion. God (of course) is the ultimate cause of everything. (479)
- Matter is not the cause, but it is an instrument of God's production of our ideas.
  - Reply: We know nothing of it, and God cannot *need* it to produce our ideas.
  - "...the use of an instrument shows the agent to be limited by rules of another's prescription and that he cannot obtain his end, but in such a way and by such conditions." (480)
- Matter is an occasion: "an inactive, unthinking being, at the presence of which God excites ideas in our minds." (481)
  - The evidence is the order and regularity in our perceptions.
  - Reply: This is accounted for by the wisdom and power of God.
- Matter is "something in general," that is not substance, accident, cause, instrument, nor occasion.

Argument against matter: (481-2)

1. Whether or not matter really existed, we would have the same reasons to believe in it.
2. Therefore we have no reason to believe in it.

Last effort: Matter is nonetheless possible, even if "highly improbable." (483)

- Philonous: "But granting matter to be possible, yet, upon that account merely, it can have no more claim to existence than a golden mountain or a centaur."