

Berkeley 2
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1. Variability arguments

A representative case: Suppose x , an ordinary healthy person, and y , a person who has “jaundice”, are both looking at a blank sheet of paper. The paper seems white to x and yellow to y .

Claim 1: x and y are immediately perceiving different things.

Argument for this claim: x is immediately perceiving something white, and is not immediately perceiving anything yellow. y is immediately perceiving something yellow and is not immediately perceiving anything white. Therefore, there is nothing that both x and y are immediately perceiving.

How to justify the second premise of this argument? Perhaps we could appeal here to Berkeley’s definition of immediate perception as perception that is independent of reason and past experience (p. 90). Perhaps we could cash this out as follows: Things we perceive immediately are things whose sensible properties we can come to know without having to make any inferences based on past experience. But plainly y does need past experience to know that anything in the situation is white!

Q: is there any good reason to think that y is immediately perceiving *anything* in this sense?

Claim 2: At least one of the things immediately seen by x and y is a sensation, an “idea” “in the mind”

There aren’t both white and yellow material objects to be seen; and the only other candidates are sensations.

Q: isn’t it bizarre to think that a *sensation* could be *seen* [perceived], or that a sensation could be *yellow*? We would normally say that sensations are *had*, not perceived; and while we might speak of a sensation *of yellow*, that’s not the same as a sensation that is itself yellow.

Claim 3: All the things immediately seen by x and y are sensations “in the mind”.

It would be arbitrary to suppose that some lucky perceivers get to immediately perceive things other than sensations.

Claim 4: If there is a material object that causes the sensations of x and y , that object is neither white nor yellow.

Argument 1: it would be arbitrary to suppose that some lucky perceivers get to immediately perceive sensations that are the same color as the material objects that cause them.

Argument 2: 'can any thing be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?' (p. 92) Berkeley says: No. (This argument would also work for Claim 3.)

2. Sensible things versus (alleged) material objects

Sensible things (=sensations)	Material objects
Must be perceived to exist	Can exist unperceived
Known immediately through senses	Need some sort of argument
Are coloured, noisy, extended, moving	Don't have any such properties
Are collections of sensible qualities	Hard to say what relation they might bear to sensible qualities: "substratum"? cause? occasion?
Can easily be imagined	Are completely inconceivable

3. God

One argument for the existence of God suggested by Berkeley (p. 97):

Sensible things can exist even when no finite mind perceives them.
But sensible things cannot exist when no mind perceives them.
Therefore, there is an infinite mind.

Another argument:

Something must explain why I have all these sensations
Material objects can't do the job (p. 100), so the sensations must be caused directly by some mind.
A mind that caused and co-ordinated all these sensations would have to be amazingly powerful, wise, etc.

Berkeley seems to be neutral between two accounts of the relation between God's ideas and ours:

- (i) God's ideas are *archetypes* of which ours are *copies*.
- (ii) God's ideas are *numerically identical* to ours.

Q: What is the world of God's ideas like? Does he have equally vivid ideas of all *possible* sensible things, including golden mountains, unicorns, etc., as well as tables and chairs?

4. Common sense

Although he denies that there are material objects, Berkeley does not want to deny that there are any trees, houses, cherries, oars...

So which of the things that Berkeley believes in could be a cherry, say?

Berkeley's answer: a cherry is a "congeries" or collection of many ideas.
(p. 130, 127)

The ideas that jointly make up a cherry seen by many people presumably include ideas that are perceived by each of these people, as well as many other ideas that are perceived only by God. These ideas will be quite dissimilar to one another if the perceivers see the cherry from different angles, using different senses, with different sorts of apparatus, at different times...

What do we mean when we say that a certain cherry is red, or that a certain oar is crooked? Not the same thing that we mean when we say that a single idea perceived by just one person is red or crooked!

Rather, when we judge that an oar is crooked, we mean that it has some "hypothetical" property: *if we were to take the oar out of the water, or if we were to touch it, we would still "perceive it as crooked"* (i.e. have crooked sensations that are members of it). Better: *if we were to have a succession of sensations as of reaching out for the oar, seeing our arms approaching it, feeling our hands going into the water, feeling the hardness of the oar, and feeling our hands moving along the oar, we would have tactile sensations of crookedness.*

Q: Is it inconsistent of Berkeley to insist on the univocality of words like 'red' and 'crooked' when he's arguing against the existence of matter, and then to claim that these words are ambiguous in the way I just described?