

Reading:

Berkeley, G. (1713), *Three Dialogues concerning Hylas and Philonous*, first dialogue.

1. Berkeley argues for the conclusion that *everything* is *mind-dependent* (including things like trees).

2. In outline, his argument goes something like this:

P₁ The things that we immediately perceive are mind-dependent.

P₂ We have no reason to think that there is anything else.

P₃ We cannot even *conceive* of there being anything that is not in some mind.

C Therefore, everything is mind-dependent.

3. He starts by arguing for P₁. He argues that *all* qualities we immediately perceive are mind-dependent. This includes so-called ‘secondary qualities’ – colours, sounds, tastes, smells, and feels; but also so-called ‘primary qualities’ – size, shape, solidity, and motion.

4. He runs two kinds of argument. Here they are in the case of heat:

First argument. Heat is not a cause of pain, it is *identical* to pain: to feel heat is to feel pain – there are not two distinct sensations. Since pain is mind-dependent, so is heat.

Second argument. Water might feel cold to one hand and hot to another. So the coldness and hotness that are felt are not in the water itself. Rather, they are mind-dependent sensations.

5. He runs these arguments for other secondary qualities:

- Colours
- Sounds
- Tastes
- Smells

6. He runs them for primary qualities as well (at least the second argument):

- Size
- Shape
- Solidity
- Motion

He notes that since size is presupposed by shape, solidity, and motion, if the former is mind-dependent then so are the latter.

7. He argues against there being a ‘material substratum’ that supports the primary and secondary qualities. To support these qualities, it must have extension; but then there must be a second substratum that supports its extension; and so on, *ad infinitum* (a vicious regress).

8. Berkeley then questions: what reason have we to think that there is anything other than what we immediately perceive? It is natural to think that there are such things, that cause

us to perceive as we do. And it is *possible* that there are such things. But is that good enough reason to think that there are such things?

He gives positive reason to think that there aren't. We posit their existence, to explain the way we perceive as we do. The qualities we perceive are supposed to resemble that which causes them. But nothing can be like a sensation or idea, but a sensation or idea. And no sensation or idea can exist without the mind. So these supposed causes are also mind-dependent.

9. He argues that we cannot even conceive of something existing without being in some mind. It seems easy to do: I can conceive of a tree existing without being thought of or perceived by any mind. But I thereby *conceive* the tree, so it is in my mind. Thus, I cannot conceive of a tree that is not in some mind. (Analogy: cannot see an unseen thing.) If we cannot conceive it, then why think it is possible?