

Idealism: Berkeley

What is it?

- All that exists are minds and their ideas.
- Physical objects therefore do not exist independently of being perceived. They are no more than collections of ideas or sense data appearing in minds.
- Berkeley argues that the universe is sustained in existence through being perceived by the infinite mind of God.
- God directly causes our ideas or sense data.

Criticism of Berkeley's primary and secondary qualities distinction

Yes, both primary and secondary qualities can vary depending on the position and so forth of the perceiver. But, it does not follow that the qualities themselves cannot be mind-independent.

P1: Apparent size, shape or motion of an object varies.

P2: A material object's objective properties cannot vary.

C: Therefore, apparent size, shape and motion cannot be objective properties of material objects. But material objects can still have some specific size, shape and motion independent of the mind.

Berkeley's attack on the primary and secondary qualities distinction

- Both P and S qualities do not resemble anything beyond the mind.
- We can conceive of an object without secondary qualities and therefore these too must be essential to our idea of an object.
- Try to imagine an object with only the primary qualities. When we try to do this, we imagine it with colour, therefore we cannot distinguish between primary and secondary qualities, both are equally mind-dependent.

P1: It is impossible to imagine an object with just P qualities.

C1: so our ideas of secondary qualities of an object cannot be separated from those of its primary qualities.

C2: So they must exist together.

P2: Indirect realists accept that our ideas of secondary qualities are mind-dependent.

C3: So our ideas of primary qualities are also mind-dependent.

Perceptual variation for Berkeley shows that P and s qualities are not distinguishable. As shape, size and movement are subject to perceptual changes and so cannot be considered as real properties of external objects.

P1: What looks small to us will look big to a fly.

P2: Material objects cannot be small and big at the same time.

C: Therefore, size cannot be a property of material objects.

P1: The perceived shape of an object changes depending on the angle of observation.

P2: But an object cannot have different shapes at the same time.

C: Therefore, shape cannot be a property of material objects

And so on, Berkeley's conclusion is that primary qualities are mind-dependent, just like secondary qualities

