

Chapter 9, Perception: Idealism and Phenomenalism

Berkeley

Subjective idealism – all that we can know to exist = ideas (in the largest sense) and other minds

1. All that we can ever know of a thing = its **sensible properties** (qualities)
– like Locke – we have no idea what ‘substance’ is and whether it exists
2. Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary properties inherent in objects
v.
B – we can only know them to be **properties that the objects cause in us**
3. **Objects:**
 - a) Locke – our experiences = caused by physical objects
B – this is unjustified, because **we have no experience of the objects**, only of their effects on us i.e. the ideas they cause in us
Therefore, a consistent empiricist must give up:
 - (i) the causal theory of perception
 - (ii) the notion of physical objects
 - b) B accepts the Cartesian assumption that we are **acquainted only with our ‘ideas’**
 - c) Denies that we can make ‘inferences’ to material things, which we can in no way perceive. NB. the **doctrine of abstract ideas**
 - d) Rejects the causal or representative theory in favour of the view that **ideas = ultimate constituents of the sensible world**
 - e) **Phenomenalism** = denies that physical objects must be supposed to have any existence distinct from sensible appearances, ideas or phenomena
B – physical things exist only in that they are perceived – all that we ordinarily call **physical objects = actually collections of ideas in a mind** e.g. a table = a set of perceptions I have when I touch, look, etc.
 - f) This is not to say that things are really different from what they appear to be – but **all that we can know about the objects = the ideas we have of them**
4. **Mind and God:**

Problems: (i) **‘perpetual annihilation and creation’** – things don’t just disappear when we’re not looking at them
(ii) what accounts for the **series of ideas** that occur and the **regularity of the patterns?**

 - a) B asks the reader: ‘whether he means anything by the actual existence of an idea, distinct from its being perceived?’ (*Principles*, XLV)
 - b) **Ideas = only the passive effects of something** – ‘they are imprinted on the senses by the author of nature’ Note the distinction between
 - (i) ideas of sensation
 - (ii) ideas of reflection
 - c) **The order of our ideas must be due to some mind other than our own** – who constantly

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perceives all the ideas and at various times makes us perceive a particular group of them which is our experience

= universal mind i.e. God

d) **Mind = active** (an agent of God) v. **ideas = passive** effects of mental activity

e) **Cosmos = spirits or minds** – finite and infinite = all active agents – the only sort of power that can produce anything exists solely in the mind:

(i) **Finite spirits – ourselves**

(ii) **Infinite mind of God**

– the entire world of nature – its scientific harmony = nothing but the expression of the ideas in the divine mind

– passive effects = ideas = permanent, because they are constantly perceived by God i.e. B doesn't say that the desk disappears if no one happens to be looking at it; because the all-perceiving mind of God ensures the continuity of existence for all such ideas

5. Summary – B's theory:

a) Only realities = spirits/minds and the ideas minds have

b) 'Objects' = merely collections of ideas

c) Supreme mind of God ensures:

(i) Continuity of these objects by having the ideas that constitute them when no one else is having them

(ii) Order and coherence of the ideas of sensation which human minds experience

Hume

I. Hume extends Berkeley's ideas and subjective idealism:

Destroys the concept of the mind as effectively as B had destroyed the concept of matter – the mind = just a bundle of different perceptions

Like B, Hume based his inquiry on facts of experience:

B – distinguished between ideas of sensation and ideas of reflection

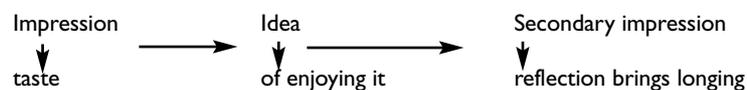
H – distinguished between impressions and ideas

a) **Impressions:**

= sensations, feelings, emotions – 2 types:

(i) **primary impressions of sense**

(ii) **secondary impressions of reflection** – arise as a result of our ideas e.g. chocolate



b) **Ideas:**

= thoughts – familiar copies of impressions – 2 types:

(i) **Simple** – copies of primary impressions

(ii) **Complex** – combinations of simple ideas derived from impressions

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c) Principles and habits of association:

Combine ideas according to certain patterns/principles of association
= psychological habits:

- (i) contiguity
- (ii) cause/effect

e.g. Constant conjunction – causal and predictive explanations

d) Aim = to discover relations between impressions and ideas:

- (i) Relations of ideas
- (ii) Matters of fact relations

2. Rejects metaphysics

a) Only meaningful terms or ideas = impressions or mathematical concepts:

- (i) sense impressions ('matters of fact') = meaningful, because they can be tested by experience and observation
- (ii) mathematical concepts ('relations of ideas') = meaningful, because they express relationships between ideas, that we can intuitively see to be true and certain

No other concepts can be meaningful, because there is no way of testing their validity

b) Key notions of metaphysics (e.g. substance, reality, mind, matter) = meaningless, because we're unable to define them in terms of anything we know about – If our knowledge about the world is restricted to experience and the inferences we draw from it, we cannot possibly tell if there is any permanent structure to reality over and above what we are aware of

c) Metaphysical notion of 'substance' = unintelligible:

- (i) if the qualities of immediate experience (e.g. colour, taste, sound, smell) = excluded from being features of the material world, the world of substance, which supposedly exists independently from us, then we could not possibly conceive of what matter is like
- (ii) all the qualities metaphysicians attribute to matter (e.g. extension, motion, solidity) = just as subjective as the others – as Berkeley had proved

3. Physical objects:

= the external world of material bodies – separate from our impressions – thought to cause our impressions

a) Material bodies = illusion/fiction

– nothing in our experience suggests our impressions belong to some object outside our experiences

b) Although the existence of material objects can't be proved (it is an illusion) – their existence might be convenient to assume

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- c) Considers the **psychological question**, why in fact we do believe in the continued and independent existence of material bodies

Kant

1. Two worlds:

- a) **Phenomenal** – the world as seen through sense impressions, through phenomena
- b) **Noumenal** – the world in-itself, independent of the mind and unknown to us
 - Any attempt to speculate about the nature of the noumenal world and build bridges between the two results in paralogisms (errors in our reasoning) or in antinomies (something that can be proven and disproven)

2. Knowledge:

- a) begins with experience, but doesn't arise from it
- b) the senses supply content – the mind supplies form

3. Mind:

Processes sense impressions creating necessary connections that yield understanding

Two stages:

- a) **Perception** – the senses
 - applies *forms of intuition* –
 - (i) temporal features
 - (ii) geometric features
 - processing sense data into organised sensations
- b) **Conception** – understanding
 - organises perceptions around categories = *forms of understanding*
 - creates knowledge of relationships, sequences and laws

Logical positivism

1. Propositions = true factually or formally:

- a) empirical truths – correspond one-by-one to sensory experiences
- b) logical truths – no more than an explication of their meaning

2. Ideas = direct or indirect copies of sense experience:

- a) **indirect** – propositions about *internal relations between ideas* = logically true
 - no content
 - e.g. logical and mathematical propositions
 - b) **direct**:
 - (i) true by virtue of their *content* – in the form of sense impressions
 - (ii) structure of immediate sensory observations reflected in language reducible to elementary propositions corresponding one-by-one to items of sense experience
- NB. The *Verification Principle*