

Berkeley's Argument Against Skepticism and Atheism

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Skepticism

- Has its roots in materialism and dualism
- Our idea of material objects is a combination of their sensible qualities, not necessarily their actual qualities
- If that is the case, we cannot know the true nature of objects or the universe

Skepticism

“...So long as men thought that real things subsisted without the mind, and that their knowledge was only so far forth *real* as it was conformable to *real things*, it follows they could not be certain they had any real knowledge at all. For how can it be known that the things which are perceived are conformable to those which are not perceived, or exist without the mind?”

(*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*,
Section 86)

Skepticism

- Hylas: “I may, indeed, upon occasion, make use of pen, ink, and paper. But what any one of them is in its own true nature, I declare positively I do not know.” (*Three Dialogues*, A&W 485a)

Atheism

- Materialism also leads to atheism
- Everything could be traced back along physical causes, i.e. matter acting on matter
- This explanation leaves no room for God
- Science is incompatible with religion

Hobbes: Matter in Motion



Berkeley's Preferred Explanation

- Instead of matter in motion, Berkeley prefers ideas initiated by God
- “Nothing can be more evident to any one that is capable of the least reflection than the existence of God, or a spirit who is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations which continually affect us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short *in whom we live, and move, and have our being.*” (Section 149)

Our Experience of God

- Why can't we perceive God?
- According to Berkeley, the same reason we can't perceive each other's minds

Our Experience of God

- “It is plain we do not see a man—if by *man* is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do—but only such a certain collection of ideas as directs us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion, like to ourselves...
- And after the same manner we see God; all the difference is that, whereas some one finite and narrow assemblage of ideas denotes a particular human mind... we do at all times perceive manifest tokens of the divinity; everything we see, hear, feel, or anywise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the power of God... (Section 148)

To Sum Up

- Materialism is the source of both skepticism and atheism
 - Skepticism: we cannot know the true nature of matter
 - Atheism: if we can explain everything by the laws of physics, there is no room for God
- Berkeley's idea of the omnipresent God