

SP03

A SHORT STATEMENT OF THE
PHILOSOPHY OF BERKELEY
& SOME OBJECTIONS.

Phil. IV

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(SP03)

A SHORT STATEMENT OF BERKELEY'S POSITION+SOME OBJECTIONS.

Things (all objects of knowledge) are Ideas. Their "being" is "to be perceived". Therefore they can subsist only in thinking substance. An idea can be like nothing but an idea, therefore it is impossible that there are copies of ideas outside the mind, for if these are perceived in any way then they are ideas. All qualities are ideas and cannot be abstracted. Material substance is a logical contradiction, it cannot be known, it cannot explain the interaction between mind and body, it is a useless abstraction and there is no real reason for believing that it exists.

But as ideas are perceived and are therefore passive and inert they do not explain causality. Much of our sense experience is inevitable is imposed in an orderly coherence. Thus ideas require some cause beyond our own will. And they require a spirit which thinks wills and perceives. This spirit is substance. None of these powers is represented in an idea. Thus we can have only a NOTION of spiritual substance. We get it by inference - we recognise our own consciousness our ability to think will and perceive. and infer that this power can belong to other spirits. Spiritual substance is made known to us through the evidence of its sign language (natural laws) as are all other spirits.

With this Berkeley thinks he has done away with several persistent problems. He has done away with unthinking corporeal substance, the problem of the divisibility of matter and the problem of the interaction of mind and body. He supposes he has done away with the basis for scepticism reality being ideas, there is no problem of the conformity of reality to the sense impression. (this problem arises in another light and will be discussed in time.) Berkeley also supposes he has done away with the doctrine of abstract Ideas His empiricism makes him deny all abstractions such as time and space but with the exception of the notion of SPIRIT.

Let us now consider some objections to Berkeleys position - those he anticipates and some others;--

1. objection- That he denies the reality of things that they are purely chimeras of the mind i.e. that he is a subjective idealist.

ans. Whatever we conceive in any way remains as secure as ever. The distinction between chimeras and realities retains its full force. that which is imposed by the mind of God is real. The reality of a combination of sense qualities is not denied.

2. obj. We see things at a distance - how can they be ideas in our mind?

ans. Space and distance is itself an idea. It is a connection a sensation of color and muscular movement.

3. obj. If a thing's reality rests in its being perceived, then things are every moment being annihilated and created anew.

ans. Bodæes can have no existence outside mind does not mean this or that particular mind but ALL minds. How can we conceive of something existing unconceived?

4. obj. That if extention and figure are existing in the mind then the mind is itself extended and figured. i.e. that his Philosophy is actually materialism.

ans. Those qualities are in the mind only as they are perceived by it i.e. not by way of mode or attribute but by way of idea.

5. Natural causes and natural Philosophy are undermined by a denial of material substance.

ans. This is untrue. Natural science is based on observation of sensible qualities, these are not denied.

6. There is universal assent on behalf of material substance

ans. So what.

7. If spiritual substance is the cause of all , why the amazing variety of apparent efficient causes.

ans. That is the way God's sign language works . It is in orderly arrangement so as to make it intelligible to the mind. Matter is itself inert and in no way could it be the cause of anything.

8. (The next is a refutation of the occasionalist hypothesis.) There is an inert senseless substance, unperceived by the mind , which is the occasion of our ideas, or at the presence whereof God is pleased to excite ideas in us.

ans. This substance is still perceived in the mind of God.

Having anticipated these objections Berkeley proceeds to discuss the consequences of his Philosophy . There ^{are} still some problems left unsolved .

There is the problem of evil. He answers this by saying that evil is given variety. Evil is also caused by the working out of the methods of nature without which there would be no universe at all. Again, as yet we know only in part."

Berkeley is still left with the problem Of the difference between reality as imposed ideas from God, and chimeras will'd in the mind . The answer is just as difficult as if he had not done away with material substance. Ideas of reality appear involuntarily, they are more vivid, they are imposed on our minde in a certain order. These three things are the test.

Finally , although he has done away with the problem of the interaction of mind and body, he has brought upon himself another problem. How does the lone spirit (God) operate on the other spirits (us)? What is the relationship between them?

The other objection has been mentioned already. Having denied abstract ideas such as justice and virtue he actually undermines his own "notion" of spiritual substance.