

Berkeley Outline

A look at *The View from Nowhere* to transition from Descartes to Berkeley

[<https://campuspress.yale.edu/keithderose/files/2020/09/Nagel-SkeptACR-The-View-from-Nowhere-first-few-pages-of-Knowledge.pdf>]

1. Overview of Berkeley's System: 1-3, 30-31

- Stones, trees, books, etc. are "collections of ideas" (1); "Their esse is percipi" (3)
- Berkeley not out to deny the existence of bodies/physical objects like stones, etc. (nor that we can kick them! (Samuel Johnson incident)); in fact, he wants to render that existence more secure (87). Denies "matter," material objects: by which he seems to (semi-technically) mean: *mind-independent* physical stuff/objects. (Sometimes also uses "external," as in §19's "external bodies," for the bad stuff.)
- Regularities and "foresight" (30-31)
- Two solutions to the Problem of Unobserved Objects (3)

2. The Epistemological Argument: 18-20

- senses vs. reason (18); no good deductive inference (18, 20)
- no good probabilistic inference (19, 50, 25-28)
- materialist explanation, and therefore their inference, no good at all
- but don't we, at least by now, have some understanding of how our (sensory) ideas are produced?: Taking account of where we are at this point of inquiry
 - a better explanation (146-149, 28)
- Thus, Berkeley's system helps us avoid skepticism (e.g., 87)

3. The Inconceivability Argument: 8, 22-24, 86, 139-140, 142

- Simple version -- suggested in 22-24
- The more subtle interpretation: esp. 140
- sensationalism

4. Brief Reflection on God in Berkeley's System: What Happens if we take God out?

- No alternative to the materialist hypothesis. But MH still no good. Agnostic as to the cause of our sensations?
- One of the two solutions to the problem of unperceived objects no longer available; they have a merely "hypothetical" existence. Not as good, but still conceivable?

5. The Common Belief, The "Correction" made by the "Philosophers", and Berkeley's System: 56-57

- Berkeley will ask you to give up the mind-independence of physical objects, but argues that this is the best move to make to save most of what is important to common thought

6. Real Things: 29-40

- The Account: Ideas of real things will-independent (29) and strong, lively, distinct, and coherent with one another (30)
- More Important: Berkeley's General Strategy for answering the Objection
- Tension: Can we avoid skepticism in the way suggested in 87 once we have drawn an intuitively correct line between real & unreal objects?

7. Other Objections 34-84

--Berkeley's General Strategy

--A Sample Objection: Don't we see often things at a distance from us? How then can they be in our own mind?: 42-44

8. Our Knowledge of Other Finite Minds and of God: esp. 145-6

--argument from analogy for other minds; a design argument/IBE for God

A puzzled young man once said, "God
Must think it exceedingly odd
That the Juniper tree
Just ceases to be
When there's no one about in the quad."

Dear Sir: Your astonishment's odd.
I am always about in the quad
So the Juniper tree
Never ceases to be
While observed by
Yours faithfully,
God

Second limerick seems to be due to Ronald Knox (1888-1957), written while he was an undergraduate at Oxford, in reply to the first limerick, which had been penned by one of his fellow undergraduates.

From Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson:

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it thus."