§1. The threat of solipsism

Simple metaphysical solipsism

The only mind that exists is my mind.

Simple epistemological solipsism

The only mind that I can know exists is my mind.

Idealism

Ultimately, the only things that exist are minds and their states.

Sophisticated Metaphysical Solipsism

Ultimately, the only thing that exists is my mind and its states.

Sophisticated Epistemological Solipsism

The only things that I can know exist are my mind and its states and things that are reducible to my mind and its states.

Remember the Master Argument…

P1 There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an unconceived-of body.

P2 It is possible that P only if there is no ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that P.

C It is impossible that there is a unconceived-of body.

But if P1 is true, why isn’t…

P1* There is a ‘manifest repugnancy’ involved in my conceiving that there is an unconceived-of-by-me body.

§2. Ideas and notions

Berkeley denies that we have any idea of our mind…
‘I own I have properly no idea, either of God or of any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert.’ (DHP, p.114)

Ideas are ‘perfectly inert’.

Minds are not perfectly inert.

Ideas cannot represent minds.

But he still thinks we know our mind…

‘I do nevertheless know, that I… exist as certainly, as I know my ideas exist… I know this immediately, or intuitively…’ (DHP, p.115)

And he thinks we know another mind, viz. God…

‘…though I perceive Him not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflexion and reasoning.’ (DHP, p.115)

Hylas’ objection…

‘You admit… there is spiritual substance, although you have no idea of it while you deny there can be such a thing as material substance, because you have no notion or idea of it. Is this fair dealing? To act consistently, you must either admit matter, or reject spirit.’ (DHP, p.115-116)

§3. The continuity argument

Bodies exist continuously.

Bodies are not continuously perceived by any human mind (or by human minds in concert).

A body exists at t only if it is perceived at t.

Bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert).

P3 is a consequence of idealism…

All bodies are ideas.

An idea exists at t only if it is perceived at t.

A body exists at t only if it is perceived at t.

One problem with this argument is that it doesn’t get us anything resembling God…

Another problem is that it seems to introduce a vicious circularity into Berkeley’s argument for idealism…

The consistency-with-common-sense argument…
It is not a consequence of idealism that either bodies are continuously perceived by a human mind (or by human minds in concert), or bodies do not exist continuously.

Bodies are continuously perceived by a non-human mind (or by non-human minds in concert).

§4. The independence argument

Step 1…

P1 Ideas cannot cause anything.
P2 Bodies are ideas.
C1 Bodies cannot cause anything.
C2 The only things that can cause anything are minds.

T5 ‘Whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity…’ (*PHK* §25, p.111).

T6 ‘A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, inasmuch as it is impossible for an idea to do anything.’ (*PHK* §25, p.111).

P1a Ideas can cause something only if we can perceive in them some sort of force or power or energy.
P1b We cannot perceive any sort of force or power or energy in ideas.
P1 Ideas cannot cause anything.

A Humean objection…

Step 2…

P3 Every change in our ideas has a cause.
P4 The changes in our sensations are not caused by our minds.
C4 The changes in our sensations are caused by some other mind.

T7 ‘When in broad day-light I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects present themselves to my view. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them.’ (*PHK* §29, p.113)

Step 3…
P4 The changes in our sensations are regular.
P5 If the changes in our sensations are regular, the cause of our sensations must be one mind, not a committee of minds.
P6 If one mind causes all of our sensations, this mind is all-powerful.
P7 If the changes in our sensations are regular, they help us to pursue our own happiness.
P8 If the changes in our sensations help us to pursue our own happiness, and the cause of these changes is a mind, the cause of these changes is perfectly good.
C5 The cause of the changes in our sensations is some other mind, and this mind is all-powerful and perfectly good.

§5. Other minds

T8 ‘...we cannot know the existence of other spirits, otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us... I perceive several...changes...of ideas, that inform me there are certain particular agents like my self...’ (PHK §145, p.157)

But isn’t God the cause of the changes in our sensations...?

T9 ‘...though there be some things which convince us, human agents are concerned in producing them, yet it is evident to every one, that those things which are called the works of Nature, that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on the wills of men.’ (PHK §146, p.157-158)

What is the best explanation of the changes in our sensations?

E1 One all-powerful and perfectly good mind causes all of the changes.
E2 Some of the changes are caused by an all-powerful and perfectly good mind; other changes are caused by lesser minds.
E3 All of the changes are caused by lesser minds.

A neglected possibility...

E4 The changes in our sensations are caused by a not quite all-powerful and perfectly good mind.

Isn’t this more parsimonious...?

References