



Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

Bishop Berkeley, Empiricist & Idealist

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Iona College Department of Philosophy
agoldstein@iona.edu
<http://www.iona.edu/faculty/agoldstein>

PHL110: Introduction to Philosophy
Created 30 March 2009
Updated to v. 2.0 16 August 2010
Compiled August 17, 2011



[slide #1]

Outline of Topics

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

- Introduction to basic ideas about empiricism and idealism
- Some of Berkeley's arguments for Idealism
- Berkeley's views on the causes of ideas



[slide #2]

Overview of Berkeley's Epistemology

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

- Berkeley is an empiricist. That is, he believes that:
 - Knowledge is obtained by way of the faculty of sensation, i.e., by sight, sound, hearing, smell, and taste.
- Empiricism may also be understood as a view about justification: claims to knowledge are justified by way evidence obtained by way of the senses, rather than by reason.
- Berkeley's empiricism is a kind of foundationalism: whatever is known may be traced back to some activity of the senses; or, whatever is known may be justified by reference to some activity of the senses.



[slide #3]

Overview and Initial Clarification of Berkeley's Metaphysics

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

- Berkeley is an idealist, that is, he believes that:
- There only exist ideas, and the minds that have them.
- Recall that the contrasting metaphysical view is *Realism*, i.e., the view that there exist some objects that need not be perceived or thought of to exist.
- Clarification of Berkeley's position: Berkeley is *not* claiming that everything is *made up or imagined*.
- Rather, his view is about what it means to claim something is real: to do so is to assert only that it can be experienced by one of the five modes of sense, and that it exists in no other sense.
- Examples: chocolate, pink elephants, hunger.



[slide #4]

Where Are We, and What's Next?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Berkeley's Defense and Elaboration of Idealism
 - Defining Some Basic Terms
 - Two Arguments for Idealism
- 3 What Causes Ideas?



[slide #5]

Berkeley's Definition of "Object"

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- According to Berkeley, an object is any set of sense-perceptions that are regularly associated with one another in space and time.
- Example: an apple is a patch of redness, hardness, roundness, and sweetness.
- So, for Berkeley, there is an apple at a given time and place, if and only if there is a grouping of these sensed properties at that time and place.
- See *Treatise*, section 1.



[slide #6]

What Exists?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- According to Berkeley, there are only two kinds of things that exist: ideas (perceptions), and minds.
- Berkeley accepts Descartes's views up to the point at which Descartes affirms his own existence as a meditator.
- In contrast, Berkeley does not accept Descartes' realism; for instance, he does not accept the wax argument.
- See *Treatise*, section 2.



[slide #7]

Where Are We, and What's Next?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Berkeley's Defense and Elaboration of Idealism
 - Defining Some Basic Terms
 - Two Arguments for Idealism
- 3 What Causes Ideas?



[slide #8]

The First Argument: The “Esse is *percipi*” Argument

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- The bulk of the first 30 or so sections of Berkeley's *Treatise* are directed at various arguments against Realism.
- The first argument he offers is the “*esse is percipi*” argument, in *Treatise*, section 3.
- This argument is linguistic, i.e., it takes as its premise a claim about the meaning of the terms “exist,” “object” and the like.



[slide #9]

The Argument

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

- 1 An object is something that is necessarily, essentially perceived—its *esse is percipi*— which is reflected in how we understand people when they say something like “such-and-such exists.”
- 2 It is necessarily false to say, “There is something that exists, but that thing is not perceived.” (Follows from previous premise.)
- 3 Therefore, all objects are dependent on someone perceiving them for their existence.



[slide #10]

The Second Argument: About Objects

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Defining Some Basic Terms

Two Arguments

Causes of Ideas

This argument takes the concept of an object as its starting point; it appears in *Treatise*, section 4.

- 1 An object is a collection of regularly-appearing sensed properties. (Nature of the concept of an object.)
- 2 For an object to exist in a manner not dependent on a mind, it would have to consist of something other than sensed properties. (Sensed properties require a mind, i.e., someone to sense them.)
- 3 Therefore, it is impossible that an object exist, and someone not be perceiving that object.



[slide #11]

Where Are We, and What's Next?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

Facts About Ideas

Conclusions About Ideas

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Berkeley's Defense and Elaboration of Idealism
- 3 What Causes Ideas?
 - Facts About Ideas
 - Conclusions About Ideas



[slide #12]

Observations About Ideas

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

Facts About Ideas
Conclusions About Ideas

- Ideas are *passive*: they have no causal power to produce new ideas.
- Ideas are experienced by a mind, termed by Berkeley “will,” “understanding,” “spirit,” or “soul.”
- The will can manipulate some of its ideas—someone can control what thoughts or experiences he or she has, within certain limits.
- Some ideas cannot be controlled by us, but appear or disappear without our wishing it, or against our wishes.
- Those that we can't control are known by experience to benefit us.



[slide #13]

Where Are We, and What's Next?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

Facts About Ideas
Conclusions About Ideas

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Berkeley's Defense and Elaboration of Idealism
- 3 What Causes Ideas?
 - Facts About Ideas
 - Conclusions About Ideas



[slide #14]

What are the Causes of Our Ideas?

Berkeley's Empiricism

Dr. Adam M. Goldstein

Introduction

Arguing For Idealism

Causes of Ideas

Facts About Ideas
Conclusions About Ideas

- I cause the ideas that I can control myself.
- God causes all the others.
- This is why we can flourish by learning from experience: God, out of benevolence, causes ideas to occur in a regular manner, according to *laws of nature*.