

BERKELEY: THE ARGUMENT FOR GOD'S EXISTENCE

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Berkeley's argument for God's existence in the *Principles* stretches over sections 25, 26, 29, and 30.

In section 25, Berkeley argues that what are commonly thought to be primary qualities (i.e., extension, figure, and motion) cannot be the cause of our ideas. This claim is based on three premises:

- (1) Ideas are inactive. [Observation and understanding]
 - (2) Extension, figure, and motion are ideas. [From section 1]
 - (3) What is inactive cannot be the cause of anything. [Self-evident]
- So, (4) Extension, figure, and motion cannot be the causes of our ideas.

Berkeley claims to know (1) on the basis of introspection: our experience of ideas indicates that they are purely passive. He also bases his knowledge of (1) on his understanding of what it is for an idea to exist (namely, that its existence consists in its being perceived, which suggests that passivity is part of its nature).

Berkeley then uses 25.1 and 25.3 in his argument for the existence of God in sections 26, 29, and 30.

The Argument of Section 26

- (1) My ideas occur and change. [Observation]
 - (2) There can be no occurrence or change without a cause thereof. [Self-evident]
- So, (3) Something causes the ideas in my mind and causes them to change. [1, 2]
- (4) Ideas can't be the causes of anything. [25.1, 25.3 – see above]
 - (5) There are only two kinds of things: substances and ideas. [*Principles* 1-2]
- So, (6) Some substance causes the ideas in my mind and causes them to change. [3, 4, 5]
- (7) Minds are the only sorts of substances. [*Principles* 7]
- So, (8) Some mind causes the ideas in my mind and causes them to change. [6, 7]

The Argument of Section 29

This argument picks up from where the Argument of Section 26 leaves off.

- (9) My ideas of sense have no dependence on my will. [Observation]
- (10) I am not the cause of what has no dependence on my will. [Self-evident]
- So, (11) I am not the cause of my ideas of sense. [9, 10]
- So, (12) Some mind other than mine is the cause of my ideas of sense. [11, 26.8]

The Argument of Section 30

This argument picks up from where the Argument of Section 29 leaves off.

- (13) My ideas of sense are particularly strong, lively, distinct, steady, orderly, and coherent. [Observation]
- (14) Whatever causes items that possess such strength, liveliness, distinctness, steadiness, orderliness and coherence must be extremely powerful, wise, and good. [Self-evident]
- So, (15) Whatever mind produces my ideas of sense must be extremely powerful, wise, and good. [13, 14]
- (16) The only thing that could possibly possess such power, wisdom, and goodness is God. [Self-evident]
- So, (17) God exists. [15, 16]

Note: Berkeley provides an argument for the existence of God in the *Second Dialogue* (pp. 97-100). Commentators disagree about whether this argument is identical to the Argument of the *Principles*.