

BERKELEY'S ARGUMENTS FROM VARIATION AND CHANGE

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The Argument from Variation

1. If an object O occasions a perception of property F at T, then F is in O at T.
 2. The same object is perceived to be hot and perceived to be cold at the same time.
- So,
3. Heat and cold are in the same object at the same time. [1, 2]
 4. Heat and cold are opposite properties.
 5. No opposite properties can be in the same object at the same time.
- So,
6. Heat and cold are not in the same object at the same time. [4, 5]

Contradiction at (3) and (6). This means that (1), (2), (4), or (5) is false. Berkeley points the finger at (1). In the *Dialogues*, he concludes from the falsity of (1) that hot and cold are in the mind (i.e., that hot and cold are ideas). But this inference is mistaken. The most that follows from the falsity of (1) is that: from the fact that an object O occasions our perception of F, it does not follow that O is F. Thus, we can't conclude from the fact that O appears to us to be F that O is in fact F. The falsity of (1) leaves open the possibility that O is F. This is something Berkeley himself recognizes at *Principles* 15: "Though it must be confessed this method of arguing doth not so much prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, as that we do not know by sense which is the true extension or colour of the object."

The Argument from Change

1. If F is a real (i.e., intrinsic) property of an object O that occasions our perception of F, then O cannot be F at T1 and not F at T2 without undergoing real change (i.e., without undergoing a shift in its intrinsic properties).
2. If an object O occasions a perception of property F at T, then F is in O at T (i.e., O is F at T).
3. It is possible for an object to occasion a perception of red at T1 and to occasion a perception of not-red at T2 without undergoing a shift in its intrinsic properties (e.g., by changing the viewing circumstances).

So, 4. It is possible for an object to be red at T1 and not-red at T2 without undergoing a shift in its intrinsic properties. [2, 3]

So, 5. Redness is not a real (i.e., intrinsic) property of objects that occasion our perception of redness. [1, 4]

The problem here is that the truth of (2), given the truth of (1) and (3), leads to (5). So Hylas, who accepts (2), must (it seems) also accept (5). In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley assumes that the truth of (5) entails that colors are in the mind. This inference is mistaken. It is certainly compatible with the fact that colors are not *intrinsic* properties of objects that colors are *relational* properties of objects (rather than ideas in minds). For example, (5) is compatible with Locke's claim that redness is a power in external objects to cause the idea of red in our minds. [In Locke's ontology, powers are relations.]

Note: F is a *relational* property of X if X's being F entails X's being related to something else. For example, being a father is a *relational* property of Bush because Bush's being a father entails Bush's being related to something else (namely, his daughters). A property that is *not relational* is *intrinsic*. For example, being human is an *intrinsic* property of Bush because Bush's being human does not entail his being related to anything else.