

ON HOBBS AND BERKELEY

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HOBBS AND BERKELEY

We have suggested throughout this chapter that people's metaphysical views influence their views of human nature. Two seventeenth-century philosophers—Thomas Hobbes and George Berkeley— illustrate the profound impact a metaphysical view can have on one's view of human nature.

Hobbes, as was briefly mentioned earlier, proposed the metaphysical view that everything in the universe is material. The view led him to propose a materialistic view of human nature. Hobbes believed that humans are, in effect, complicated machines. Berkeley, on the other hand, advanced the metaphysical claim that everything in the universe is spiritual or nonmaterial. This claim then led him to hold a thoroughly spiritualistic view of human nature: To be human is to be a kind spirit.

Examining the views of Hobbes and Berkeley in some detail will help us see how metaphysics is related to the positions we take on other philosophical issues, in particular on the issue of human nature. It will become clear, also, how metaphysics can influence our views of God and society.

HOBBS

Thomas Hobbes was a thoroughgoing materialist: He held that only material objects exist. In this respect he differed considerably from his contemporary, René Descartes (whom we showcase in the next chapter). Descartes carried over from medieval philosophers like Aquinas the view that reality consists of both material and immaterial (or "spiritual") entities. Hobbes rejected this dualistic view. The recent astronomical discoveries of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo had all been based on the observation of moving bodies. Influenced by their approach to reality, Hobbes reasoned that perhaps all reality could be explained in terms of the motions of bodies in space.

Born prematurely in 1588 when his mother, overcome with fear at the approach of the invading Spanish navy, went into early labor, Hobbes throughout his youth had a melancholy personality that earned him the nickname of the Crow. The son of a clergyman, Hobbes was sent at the age of fourteen to study at Oxford, where, he tells us, he learned to hate philosophy. However, he apparently learned enough so that when he graduated in 1608 he was hired by the wealthy and aristocratic Cavendish family as a tutor for their sons. He later remarked that the job left him more than enough time to read and study while his young charges were "making visits" in town. Traveling with the Cavendish family gave Hobbes the opportunity to see much of Europe and to become acquainted with the great thinkers of the period, especially the Italian astronomer Galileo, who at this time was busily tracing the motions of the heavenly bodies with the aid of geometry. At about the age of forty, probably under Galileo's influence, Hobbes came to the conclusion that everything in the universe could be explained in terms of the motions of material bodies and that geometry could provide the basic laws of their motions. He attempted to work out the details of this philosophy in a remarkable series of writings that included his masterpiece *Leviathan* and a trilogy bearing the titles *De Corpore* (On Material Bodies), *De Homine* (On Man), and *De Cive* (On the Citizen). Hobbes's final years were relatively happy. He died in 1679, famous for his materialistic philosophy and the political theories that grew out of it. Hobbes was unequivocal in claiming that matter is all there is in the universe:

The Universe, that is the whole mass of things that are, is corporeal, that is to say body; and has the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length, breadth, and depth. Also every part of body is likewise body, and has the like dimensions. And, consequently, every part of the Universe is body, and that which is not body is no part of the Universe. And because the Universe is all, that which is no part of it is nothing, and, consequently, nowhere.¹

(Hobbes's archaic spelling has been modernized in this and following quotations.) In Hobbes's view, the characteristics and activities of all objects, including human beings, can be explained in purely mechanical terms:

For seeing life is but a motion of limbs, the beginning whereof is in some principal part within; why may we not say, that all automata (engines that move themselves by springs and wheels as does a watch) have an artificial life? For what is the heart, but a spring; and the nerves, but so many strings; and the joints, but so many wheels, giving motion to the whole body, such as was intended by the artificer?²

Hobbes attempted to apply this mechanism to explain the mental activities of human beings. Many philosophers, Descartes in particular, believed that the mental activities of perceiving, thinking, and willing were evidence that human minds are spiritual or nonmaterial. Mental activities (thinking) and mental contents (thoughts) seem to have no physical characteristics (that is, they have no color, size, or position and seem to be nonbodily). Hobbes was particularly concerned with showing that even mental activities could be entirely explained in terms of the motions of material bodies. He begins this task by first arguing that all of our thoughts originate in our sensations (or, as he writes, in "sense"). And sensations, he claims, are nothing more than motions in us that are caused by external objects. These motions in us travel through our nerves to our brains:

Concerning the thoughts of man, I will consider them first singly, and afterwards in train or dependence upon one another. . . .

The origin of them all, is that which we call SENSE [sensation], for there is no conception in a man's mind, which has not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten upon the organs of sense. . . .

The cause of sense is the external body, or object, which presses the organ proper to each sense . . . , which pressure, by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings and membranes of the body, continues inwards to the brain and heart, causes there a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavor [movement] of the heart . . . , which endeavor [movement], because [it is] outward, seems [to us] to be some matter without. And this seeming or fancy, is that which men call sense. [Sense] consists, as to the eye in light, or color . . . ; to the ear, in a sound; to the nostril, in an odor; to the tongue . . . , in a savor; and to the rest of the body, in heat, cold, hardness, softness, and such other qualities as we discern by feeling.

All [these] qualities . . . are, in the object that causes them, but so many . . . motions of the matter, by which it presses our organs. Neither in us, that are pressed, are they anything else, but . . . motions; for motion produces nothing but motion. . . . [Just] as pressing, rubbing, or striking the eye makes us fancy a light, and pressing the ear produces a din, so do the bodies we see, or hear, produce the same [sensations] by their . . . action.³

Once the motion created in our senses has traveled to the brain, the brain retains this motion, much like water continues moving after the wind stops. This "decaying" motion in our brain is the residual image that we retain in our memory. Thus, our memory of an object is nothing more than the residual motion the object leaves impressed on our brain:

When a body is once in motion, it moves, unless something else hinders it, eternally; and what- ever hinders it, cannot in an instance, but [only] in time, and by degrees, quite extinguish it. And as we see in the water, though the wind cease,

¹ Thomas Hobbes, *Hobbes's Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1909; original work published 1651), 524.

² *Ibid.*, 8.

³ *Ibid.*, 12.

the waves [continue] . . . rolling for a long time after, so also it happens in that motion which is made in the internal parts of man. . . .

This decaying sense, when we would express the thing itself, . . . we call imagination. . . . But when we would express the decay, and signify that the sense is fading, old, and past, it is called memory. So that imagination and memory are but one thing.⁴

But what does all of this have to do with thinking? Hobbes held that when we are thinking, we are merely linking together the decaying images (or motions) that we have retained in our memory. Our thinking activities are thus nothing more than a sequence of motions linked together, usually as they are linked together when we first experienced them as sensations. Sometimes our thinking is “un-guided,” as when we daydream, and sometimes it is “regulated,” as when we are trying to solve some problems:

By consequence or TRAIN of thoughts, I understand that succession of one thought to another, which is called, to distinguish it from discourse in words, mental discourse.

When a man thinks on anything whatsoever, his next thought after is not altogether . . . casual. . . . The reason . . . is this. All fancies [images] are motions within us, relics of those made in the sense. And those motions that immediately succeeded one another in the sense, continue also together after sense. . . .

This train of thoughts, or mental discourse, is of two sorts. The first is unguided, without design, and inconstant, wherein there is not passionate thought, to govern and direct those that follow to itself, [such] as the end and scope of some desire, or other passion, in which case the thoughts are said to wander and seem impertinent one to another, as in a dream. . . .

The second is more constant, as being regulated by some desire and design. . . . From desire arises the thought of some means we have seen produce the like of that which we aim at; and from the thought of that, the thought of means to that mean; and so continually, till we come to some beginning within our own power. . . . The train of regulated thoughts is of two kinds: one, when an effect imagined we seek the causes, or means that produce it. . . . The other is, when imagining anything whatsoever, we seek all the possible effects that can by it be produced.⁵

But “trains of thoughts” are not the only things produced by the motions that begin in our senses and end in the imaginations of our brains. The motions of our imaginations also produce motions in our organs of appetite (which Hobbes thought were located mainly in the heart); these are called desires. The motions called desires, in turn, are what lead us to engage in “voluntary actions”:

There be in animals, two sorts of motions peculiar to them. One [is] called vital . . . such as the course of the blood, the pulse, the breathing, the concoction, nutrition, excretion, etc. . . . The other is . . . voluntary motion, as to go, to speak, to move any of our limbs, in such manner as is first fancied in our minds. . . . And because going, speaking, and the like voluntary motions, depend always upon a precedent thought . . . it is evident that the imagination is the first internal beginning of all voluntary motion. . . . These small beginnings of motion, within the body of man, before they appear in walking, speaking, striking, and other visible actions, are commonly called ENDEAVOR.

This endeavor, when it is toward something which causes it, is called APPETITE, or DESIRE. . . . And when the endeavor is from something, it is generally called AVERSION. . . . That which men desire, they are also said to LOVE, and to HATE those things for which they have aversion. . . . But whatsoever is the object of any man’s appetite or desire, that . . . he . . . calls good, and the object of his hate and aversion, evil. . . .

As, in sense, that which is really within us is, as I have said before, only motion, caused by the action of external objects. . . . So, when the action of the same object is continued from the eyes, ears, and other organs to the heart, the real effect there is nothing but motion or endeavor, which consists in appetite or aversion, to or from the object moving [us].

When in the mind of man, appetites, and aversions, hopes, and fears, concerning one and the same thing, arise alternately; and divers good and evil consequences of the doing, or omitting the thing propounded come successively

⁴ Ibid., 13–14.

⁵ Ibid., 18–20.

into our thoughts; so that sometimes we have an appetite to it; sometimes an aversion from it; sometimes hope to be able to do it; sometimes despair, or fear to attempt it; the whole sum of desires, aversions, hopes and fears continued till the thing be either done, or thought impossible, is that we call DELIBERATION. . . .

In deliberation, the last appetite, or aversion, immediately adhering to the action, or to the omission thereof, is what we call the WILL. . . . Will, therefore, is the last appetite in deliberating.⁶

Thus, Hobbes concluded, not only can a materialist philosophy fully account for all our obviously physical characteristics, but it can also account for all of those inner, mental activities that other philosophers take as evidence of a spiritual or nonmaterial mind: sensing, remembering, thinking, desiring, loving, hating, and willing. These mental activities do not require us to say that some kind of nonmaterial reality exists in addition to the material objects in the world. There is no such thing as a nonmaterial reality: Everything consists of matter and its motions.

Hobbes felt that his materialistic philosophy also provided the foundations for a social philosophy. By examining the basic material characteristics of human individuals, he felt he could explain why our societies are structured as they are. Hobbes began by maintaining that the central desires that affect the relations between individuals inevitably lead them to quarrel with one another:

So that in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory. The first makes men invade for gain; the second, for safety; and the third, for reputation. The first use violence, to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle; the second, to defend them; the third, for trifles, as a word, a smile, a different opinion, and any other sign of undervalue, either direct in their persons, or by reflection in their kindred, their friends, their nation, their profession, or their name.⁷

Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, and such a war as is of every man against every man. . . . In such condition, there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain: and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; no instruments of moving, and removing, such things as require much force; no knowledge of the face of the earth; no account of time; no arts; no letters; no society; and which is worst of all, continual fear, and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.⁸

To escape the brutal state of nature into which their passions continually push them, people at last decide to form a government (or, as Hobbes calls it, a Leviathan). This government is meant to set up a "common power" possessing enough force to establish law and order and thereby put an end to fighting. We set up a government by entering into a "social contract" with one another. That is, we make an agreement (or "covenant") with one another to hand over all power to a person or a group. That person or group then becomes the "sovereign" ruler and has the authority to use the power or force of the citizens themselves to enforce the law (which the sovereign makes) and to establish peace and order. We thus emerge from the dreadful state of nature by becoming "subjects" and taking on the constraints of life in a civil society:

The final cause, end, or design of men, who naturally love liberty and dominion over others, in the introduction of that restraint upon themselves, in which we see them live in commonwealths, is the foresight of their own preservation, and of a more contented life thereby; that is to say, of getting themselves out from that miserable condition of war, which is necessarily consequent, as has been shown, to the natural passions of men, when there is no visible power to keep them in awe, and tie them by fear of punishment to the performance of their covenants. . . .

⁶ Ibid., 39, 41, 46, 47.

⁷ Ibid., 234–96.

⁸ Ibid.

The only way to erect such a common power, as may be able to defend them from the invasion of foreigners, and the injuries of one another, and thereby to secure them in such sort, as that by their own industry, and by the fruits of the earth, they may nourish themselves and live contentedly; is, to confer all their power and strength upon one man, or upon one assembly of men, that may reduce all their wills, by plurality of voices, unto one will: which is as much to say, to appoint one man, or assembly of men, to bear their person; and every one to own, and acknowledge himself to be the author of whatsoever he that so bears their person, shall act, or cause to be acted, in those things which concern the common peace and safety; and therein to submit their wills, every one to his will, and their judgments, to his judgment. This is more than consent or concord; it is real unity of them all, in one and the same person, made by covenant of every man with every man, in such manner, as if every man should say to every man, I authorize and give up my right of governing myself, to this man, or to this assembly of men, on this condition, that you give up your right to him, and authorize all his actions in like manner. . . . [T]his is the generation of the great LEVIATHAN. . . . And he that carries this person, is called SOVEREIGN, and said to have sovereign power; and everyone besides, his SUBJECT.⁹

Thus, the materialist philosophy that Hobbes created also gave him the basic concepts he needed to explain the formation of governments. Governments are simply the outcome of the motions we call “desires.” Desires lead people to fight with one another (for their material possessions), and this results in a continual “war of all against all.” A further desire or motion, the desire for peace, then leads people to form governments.

BERKELEY

George Berkeley is perhaps the most famous of all those idealist philosophers who hold that reality is primarily spiritual and not material. To some extent, Berkeley was reacting to the philosophy of materialists such as Hobbes, whose views were becoming popular in the wake of the growing influence of the new sciences. Such materialist philosophies, Berkeley felt, left no room for God and thus were inimical to religion. What better way to combat atheism than to prove that materialism was false and that all reality is spiritual!

Berkeley was born in 1685 in Kilkenny, Ireland. As a teenager, he was sent to Trinity College in Dublin, where he graduated with a master’s degree in 1707. Berkeley stayed on at Trinity College as a teacher for six years. There, at the age of twenty-four, he finished writing what was to become the classic exposition of an idealist philosophy, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. In 1713, Berkeley left Trinity College. He was by now an ordained Protestant minister, and in 1729 he and his recent bride traveled as missionaries to Newport, Rhode Island, where he planned to organize a college that would eventually be established in Bermuda. But funding for the college never materialized, and in 1731 he returned to England. In 1734, Berkeley became a bishop in the Church of England and was assigned to the diocese of Cloyne in Ireland. Sixteen years later, at the age of sixty-five, he retired to Oxford with his wife and family. There he died in 1753.

Berkeley held the view that all we know or perceive of the world around us are the sensations we have: the colors, sights, sounds, and tastes we experience. We commonly attribute these sensations to material objects outside us. When our eyes see a small round patch of red, for example, we might infer that outside us there exists a material object that we call an apple and that light coming from this material object causes our eyes to have the sensation of red color. However, Berkeley questioned this inference. He pointed out that we really have no reason to say that in addition to the sensations we experience within our minds, there also exists outside us (or, in his words, “without us”) some kind of material objects. We do not even have any idea what these so-called material objects would be like, for all we perceive are our sensations, and these sensations are clearly not material objects because our sensations exist entirely in our minds (or, in Berkeley’s words,

⁹ Ibid., 128, 131–132.

“our spirits”). All that exists besides our minds, or “spirits,” Berkeley concluded, are the sensations we perceive in our minds and the mental images we voluntarily form in them. Berkeley used the term ideas to refer to the contents of our minds, including both the sensations we have and the mental images we form. Thus, for Berkeley, the world consists entirely of minds (“spirits”) and ideas.

Berkeley summarized his view in the Latin slogan *esse est percipi*, which means “to exist is to be perceived”: The only things that exist, besides minds, are the ideas perceived within minds. As he flamboyantly asserted, “All the Choir of Heaven and the furniture of earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have no substance without a mind.”¹⁰ Thus, Berkeley was a complete idealist: He held the view that reality consists of nothing more than the ideas in our minds.

Berkeley’s views are most clearly expounded in the short work he titled *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. He opens the treatise with a remark expressing what many newcomers to philosophy feel: that philosophy seems to create more “doubts and difficulties” than it resolves:

Philosophy being nothing else but the study of wisdom and truth, it may with reason be expected that those who have spent most time and pains in it should enjoy a greater calm and serenity of mind, a greater clearness and evidence of knowledge, and be less disturbed with doubts and difficulties than other men. Yet so it is, we see the illiterate bulk of mankind that walk the high road of plain common sense, and are governed by the dictates of nature, for the most part easy and undisturbed. To them nothing that is familiar appears unaccountable or difficult to comprehend. They complain not of any want of evidence in their sense, and are out of all danger of becoming skeptics. But no sooner do we depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a superior principle, to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things, but a thousand scruples spring up in our minds concerning those things which before we seemed fully to comprehend. Prejudices and errors of sense do from all parts discover themselves to our view; and, endeavoring to correct these by reason, we are insensibly drawn into uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow upon us as we advance in speculation, till at length, having wandered through many intricate mazes, we find ourselves just where we were, or, which is worse, sit down in a forlorn skepticism.¹¹

To resolve the “uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies” that give philosophy a bad name, Berkeley undertakes to examine “the first principles of human knowledge”—that is, the primary sources from which we draw all our knowledge.

He begins by pointing out that if we look into our minds, we will see that everything we know consists either of sensations (“ideas imprinted on the senses or perceived by attending to the passions”) or mental images (“ideas formed by help of memory and imagination”). Consequently, each object we know in the world around us (such as an “apple, a stone, a tree, a book and the like”) is really nothing more than a collection of ideas (sensations of color, touch, smell, taste, or hearing). In addition to ideas, he notes, there are also “active beings” or “minds.” In fact, ideas can exist only in minds. Because all objects consist of ideas and because ideas can exist only in the mind, it follows that the objects in the world exist only in the mind! Berkeley argues for this startling conclusion in the following passages:

It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly,

¹⁰ George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *The Works of George Berkeley*, vol. 1, ed. George Sampson (London: George Bell & Sons, 1897), 181–182.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

ideas formed by help of memory and imagination— either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways. By sight I have the ideas of light and colors, with their several degrees and variations. By touch I perceive, for example, hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and of all these more and less either as to quantity or degree. Smelling furnishes me with odors, the palate with tastes, and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition. As several of these are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one thing. Thus, for example, a certain color, taste, smell, figure, and consistency having been observed to go together are accounted one distinct thing signified by the name “apple”; other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things—which as they are pleasing or disagreeable excite the passions of love, hatred, joy, grief, and so forth.

But, besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering, about them. This perceiving, active being is what I call “mind,” “spirit,” “soul,” or “myself.” By which words I do not denote any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them, wherein they exist or, which is the same thing, whereby they are perceived—for the existence of an idea consists in being perceived.

That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination exist without the mind is what everybody will allow. And it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them.—I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by anyone that shall attend to what is meant by the term “exist” when applied to sensible things. The table I write on I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed—meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odor, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a color or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse is percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence out of the minds or thinking things, which perceive them.

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men that houses, mountains, rivers, and, in a word, all sensible objects have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But with how great an assurance and acquiescence so ever this principle may be entertained in the world, yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the fore mentioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived? . . .

But, say you, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them, whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking [material] substance. I answer, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a color or figure can be like nothing but another color or figure. If we look ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. Again, I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or not? If they are, then they are ideas and we have gained our point; but if you say they are not, I appeal to anyone whether it be sense to assert a color is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest. . . .

But, [suppose] it were possible that solid, figured, movable substances may exist without the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, yet how is it possible for us to know this? Either we must know it by sense or by reason. As for our senses, by them we have the knowledge only of our sensations, ideas, or those things that are immediately perceived by sense, call them what you will; but they do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived, like to those, which are perceived. This the materialists themselves acknowledge. It remains, therefore, that if we have any knowledge at all of external things, it must be by reason, inferring their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense. But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without the mind, from what we perceive, since the very patrons of matter themselves do not pretend there is any necessary connection betwixt them and our ideas? I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, frenzies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without resembling them. Hence it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing of our ideas; since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always in the same order we see them in at present, without their concurrence. . . .

But, say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer you may so, there is no difficulty in it; but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them? But do you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose; it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it does not show that

you can conceive it possible the objects of your thought may exist without the mind. To make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind, taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind, though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in itself. A little attention will discover to anyone the truth and evidence of what is here said, and make it unnecessary to insist on any other proofs against the existence of material substance.¹²

Berkeley's views were naturally accused of leading to skepticism, the view that we cannot know anything about reality. For Berkeley's views are but a short step away from the view that because the ideas in our minds might be false and because all we know are the ideas in our minds, we can never know anything for sure about the real world. However, Berkeley did not intend his idealist philosophy to encourage skepticism. On the contrary, he felt that "the grounds of Skepticism, Atheism and Irreligion" lay in materialism. Those who hold that only matter exists, he felt, were inevitably led to the view that God does not exist because God is a nonmaterial spirit. The best way to combat atheism, then, is to prove that matter does not exist and that, on the contrary, only spirits and their ideas exist. If spirits and ideas are the only reality, in knowing these we know all the reality there is. Thus, skepticism, like atheism, is false.

Berkeley, in fact, took great pains in his attempt to show that God exists. God is a crucial part of his universe and plays an essential role as the source of the world we see displayed before our senses. If we examine the ideas in our minds, he argues, we will see that some of them require the existence of another "spirit" to produce them, and this is God. God produces in us the sensations that we perceive as reality and ensures that we perceive an orderly reality in which we can plan our lives and look easily toward the future. Berkeley concludes that the "surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection" of the orderly display that God creates in our minds and that we call the world should fill us with admiration:

I find I can excite [some] ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straight- way this or that idea arises in my fancy [imagination]; and by the same power it is obliterated and makes way for another. . . .

But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses; the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them.

The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connection whereof sufficiently testifies to the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. Now the set rules or established methods wherein the mind we depend on excites in us the ideas of sense are called "the laws of nature"; and these we learn by experience which teaches us that such and such ideas are attended with such and such other ideas in the ordinary course of things.

This gives us a sort of foresight which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. And without this we should be eternally at a loss; we could not know how to act on anything that might procure us the least pleasure or remove the least pain of sense. That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that to sow in the seedtime is the way to reap in the harvest; and in general to obtain such or such ends, such or such means are conducive— all this we know, not by discovering any necessary connection between our ideas, but only by the observation of the settled laws of nature, without which we should all be in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man no more knows how to manage himself in the affairs of life than an infant just born. . . .

But if we attentively consider the constant regularity, order, and concatenation of natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but above all the never-enough-admired laws of

¹² Ibid., 179, 180–182, 186–187, 189

pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals; I say if we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and import of the attributes: one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect, we shall clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid spirit, "who works all in all," and "by whom all things consist." . . .

It is therefore plain that nothing can be more evident to anyone that is capable of the least reflection than the existence of God, or a spirit who is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations which continually affect us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." That the discovery of this great truth, which lies so near and obvious to the mind, should be attained to by the reason of so very few, is a sad instance of the stupidity and inattention of men who, though they are surrounded with such clear manifestations of the Deity, are yet so little affected by them that they seem, as it were, blinded with excess of light.¹³

Berkeley's idealist philosophy, then, provided him with what he thought was an irrefutable proof of the existence of spiritual reality, including God, and of the nonexistence of the material world on which Hobbes and other materialists insisted.

¹³ Ibid., 191–192, 247–248.