

# Three dialogues between hylas and philonous

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The dialogues between Hylas and Philonous were written by George Berkeley, who was ordained as a Bishop in Cloyne. He was also a famous idealist and philosopher of the early modern period. His works reflect metaphysical ideas and concepts of idealism. Berkeley had written several books in his lifetime. All of his works reflected his views about life and spirituality as he makes arguments about the existence of things around us. He is very resilient in defending his claim by providing valid supporting evidences to support the argument.

He is formulating arguments through proper use of words and concepts. He also made several critiques about the works of other philosophers who doubt in the existence of God. It was evident that Berkeley believes that there is a God, a Supreme Being who is responsible for the things we see. He is responsible for the sensorial qualities of the things around us. He explained the omnipotence of God from an idealist perspective. He made very strong arguments by questioning the nature of our sensory abilities and providing possible hypothesis for this.

After making a series of hypotheses, he discarded each one by providing a counter-argument until he comes up with the last hypothesis that there is one capable being that is responsible for everything on Earth including the sensorial faculties of man. During Berkeley's time, a lot of philosophers like the famous rationalist John Descartes, believed that material things existed even if it is not perceived by the human mind. They argued that the qualities of the object were inherent to the latter with or without human perception.

They also believed that the objects around us help us to generate ideas about it as well as attributes. They also argued that human perception could be deceiving because not all concepts that were perceived by the senses were viable. Sometimes what we see in an object is not its real quality. A good example of this perhaps would be a pencil in a glass of water wherein a part of a pencil is submerged while the other is not. It can be observed that the submerged part appears to be bigger than the other half. Berkeley did not believe that material things existed. Rather, he believed in immaterialism and idealism.

He argued with the apologists of materialism about this. He pointed out that materialism can be explained by the existence things around us through our own ideas but it cannot explain the nature of our ideas through the things around us. Maybe one advantage that Berkeley had at that time that made his argument firm was the fact that nobody could placidly explain to him what a material thing really is. Their description and exposition could not suffice the counter-arguments and inquisition of Berkeley. He believed that material things did not really exist. These were mere products of our senses.

He expounded that material things are dependent on our mind and sensory abilities. Without our sensory-neural facilities, there will be no concept of things. Thus a material thing would not exist. In his work, "The Three Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous, in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists" Berkeley made a direct attack on the supporters of materialism by juxtaposing the claims of the materialist and his counter arguments. He used fictitious characters in this work in the likeness of Hylas and Philonous to

explain his views about the perception of things and how these could be attributed to skepticism and atheism.

He expressed his ideas on the words of Philonius, a character in his work, as he was conversing with Hylas, the character that represents the advocate of materialism. In the preface of his work, Berkeley explained that if the inferences he made would be validated, the concept of atheism and skepticism will no longer be applicable. He believes that if his ideas were applied, there will be a re-evaluation in the principles of science. The pointless part should be omitted keeping those that are plain. The complex rationale for the things around us will be simplified.

Also, he explained that instead of using paradox and ambiguous statement, man could simply apply plain common sense to explain the things around him. In the three dialogues of Philonous and Hylas, Berkeley used simple examples using the qualities that we perceive through our senses such as colors, sweetness of sugar, hot and cold and a lot more to support his inference that the qualities of material things does not exist per se. It is perceived through our senses and we associate the qualities. He even commented on the use of a microscope to see the qualities of things not visible in the unaided eye.

I would like to share a particular scenario to illustrate my understanding of Berkeley's views and how he inferred that materialism could lead to atheism and skepticism. As I was reading the lengthy debate of Hylas and Philonous, a particular instance came to my mind. What if three people were left in an isolated region with no initial knowledge of the common qualities of things? To intricate further, one of them could be considered color blind but can

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hear, the other can hear as well but could not see anything, and the third cannot hear sound but has normal vision. How do they describe a yellow chirping bird for example?

Maybe in the perspective of the first person, it is a gray bird chirping. The second person perhaps might not have any ideas that there is a yellow bird but he could describe that he could hear a chirping sound, not exactly from a bird. The last one, however, could see a yellow bird with its beak moving, but there is no sound. Considering their three accounts, how would they know the real qualities attributed to the bird? Is the bird really yellow or is it gray? Does it really chirp or does it simply move its beak, or is there really a bird or is it just a chirping sound?

In that example, who describes the most accurate qualities of the bird? How would the third person infer that he sees the correct color because he is normal if there are only three of them with different descriptions? Is it suffice hitherto to conclude that qualities of the materials are inherent to the subject with or without our perception if these qualities differ from one person to another? What if half of the world's population had congenital color blindness and claims that the leaves of the trees are brown while the other half claims it is green.

How can the latter defend that the leaves are green if the former does not have any concept of what the color green is? What then is the real color of the leaves? Is it brown or is it green? What then is the inherent color of the leaves with or without man's perception and how can we prove it? How can we say that everything that we perceive is the inherent quality of that object? I believe that the scenario was as the same as what Berkeley wanted

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to point out. In this dialogue, Philonous enlightened Hylas about his perception on material things.

Hylas believed that we cannot dissociate a characteristic of material to a material. We cannot say that a sugar will no longer be sweet just because we do not perceive it as sweet. However, if we are going to look for the history of sweetness as one of the characteristics of sugar, it will be easier to infer that this observation was based on the consensus of the people who tasted sugar. It was perceived by our taste buds. A lot of people sharing the same opinion established the authenticity in the statement that sugar is sweet. What if we could not taste sugar, does that mean that it is no longer sweet?

If our taste buds failed to savor the sweetness in the chocolate bar that we are eating, does that mean that the chocolate bar is no longer sweet? However, one interesting argument that Berkeley laid through Philonous was that if it is true that qualities are innate to the object per se, why does food taste bitter to others while sweet to some? If our perceptual rationale is arbitrary, how can we establish the fact that the characteristics of an object around us akin to the object? What will that characteristics be? How can we prove that objects would exist with or without us?

I would admit that the challenging enigma that Berkeley posed in this dialogue is quite tedious to refute. I agree with Berkeley as he opposed the idea that the qualities of an object are inherent to the object with or without our perception of it because we have different perspectives. Our concepts of things are provisory on our capacity to view things. We cannot think of the unthinkable, of something that goes beyond our capacity to think. Also, on the Third Dialogue, Hylas asks Philonous about the story of creation wherein <https://assignbuster.com/three-dialogues-between-hylas-and-philonous/>

Moses described the creation of corporeal things, the sun, the moon, the plants and animals.

These were not mere ideas existing only in the mind. These are tangible things. Hylas challenged Philonous on how he could make his claims consistent to the account stated in the story of Creation. Philonous defense was to define what he meant by ideas. Ideas are not fictitious. According to Philonous, ideas are based on the things perceived by the senses. Any object that could not be perceived by the senses could not be considered ideas or beyond human thought that it will be impossible to draw even a visual representation are not ideas. Thus, his claim is cohesive with the theories of creation because we can perceive these things.

What Philonous disapproves is the fact that material things exist by itself with its characteristics distinct. In the last part of the third dialogue, Hylas was convinced with the explanation of Philonous. They made inferences and juxtaposed their claims and the notions of the materialist philosopher and their rationale for the claim. They inferred that matter are things that are perceived by the mind and its qualities are not akin to itself but on our perception of it. It is a common knowledge but through the philosophies introduced by other scholars seemed makes it more intricate.

His main goal is to unite the “ concept that the things we are the real things and these are ideas which exists only in the boundaries of our minds. ” Berkeley believes that the principle of materialism could lead to skepticism and atheism because something beyond the capacity of our mind, we tend to conceptualize a material world without the sovereign of God. In my opinion, what the author wanted to say was that the moment we believe that a thing

would exist by itself independent of our perception would imply that a material world could be expected to run without God.

It would lead us to believe that material things exist the way they are and there are no spiritual being causing those things to happen. On the last part of the dialogue, Philonous connoted that some philosophers had the tendency to become skeptics and atheist with formulation of scientific and mathematical principles and of things with no empirical content. It should not be the case; the principles of science should not be a paradox to the existence of God. By believing that things exist beyond our perception is an outright denial that God does not exist.

It is embracing the notion that things are just the way they are and there is nobody that controls it. In the last part, he used the fountain as an example. Water was able to rise and fall because of gravity. This principle made others skeptics when in fact this could simply be explained in a lighter sense. Our perception makes us aware of the gifts God has endowed in our world, its existence is under the providence of God. Thus, thinking what our minds cannot conceive and our senses cannot perceive could lead us to doubt that God is the cause of all these things. This skepticism in the long run could lead to denial of God