

# [George berkeley and empiricism analysis philosophy essay](https://assignbuster.com/george-berkeley-and-empiricism-analysis-philosophy-essay/)

Empiricism is the doctrine that knowledge derives from experience. One very important philosopher to empiricism is George Berkeley. Berkeley denies the existence of material substances and says that existence of substances is depended on perception. In his famous Three Dialogues, he introduces characters Philonous and Hylas whose names ironically mean “ love of intellect” and “ matter.” As the First Dialogue starts, Hylas calls Philonous a skeptic by his definition “ one who doubts of everything or who denies the realty and truth of things (pg. 219, The Empiricist) he soon gets Hylas to admit that he too is a skeptic. Philonous breaks everything down into two groups either having: primary qualities (qualities that can be measured) and secondary qualities (sensible qualities).

In the following pages Berkeley goes on to prove that there is no inherit qualities within a material substance that makes it a material substance, and everything is viewed through perception. For example, a cherry is a cherry because it is red, sweet, round etc. But all those things are not innate things that are a cherry. They are sensible qualities because we see, taste, and feel that the cherry is red, sweet and round. Even though we all agree that before us is a cherry, we all will find that we have different perception about whether on not the cherry is sweet or bitter. Anything that is arbitrary is perception. His point was that if it is without being perceived, then it cannot be proven. In order to know a thing exists, we must perceive them.

Berkeley also set out to prove that primary qualities only exist in our minds. His proof of this is that an object perceived by two different people could be larger or smaller, depending on how big that person actually is. For example a foot to me may seem moderately long, but a foot to a 6 foot person may seem really short. Hence, extension is not inherent in the object. He also gives the example of motion and how speed is measured by an internal clock

In the Second Dialogue, Berkeley introduces Monism (everything is reduced to one), Dualism: 1) thinking (substance pilot) 2) physical material (substance machine), and Idealism (only perceiving minds and perceptions exist). This is where Philonous brings God into the equation because he needs a cause for our sensible ideas. His argument of causation is as follows: 1) sensible ideas must be caused by some spirit 2) I am not the cause of my sensible ideas 3) There must be some other spirit that causes my sensible ideas. Therefore, there is a God. His argument of Perception then is: 1) sensible things cannot exist without being perceived 2) sensible things exist independently of my perceptions 3) there must be some other perceiver. Therefore God is the perceiver. He goes on to say that since were purely passive in our perceptions and God is purely active, it is God that excites ideas in our minds.

In the Third Dialogue, Hylas asks how idealism can distinguish a dream from reality (since they are both depending on the mind). Philonous answers him by saying that dreams and products of the imagination are faint and dependent on the will; sense impressions are livelier and do not depend on the will. Hylas also brings up the fact that if God is the author of all things, he would also be the author of evil; Philonous says that evil doesn’t exist outward, only inward and that we are in control of our own wills.

At first I found Berkley very convincing in his arguments about perception, but as with other philosophers, when he gets to the existence of God, their argument falls apart. The thought of God exciting all our ideas through our souls is a bit strange. Yes all perceptions have to be first perceived by God, and that God had to have an idea of us doing something for it to actually happen is crazy. I don’t agree with Berkeley’s use of God, but I don’t necessarily agree that God just created the world and people in it and steps away from it (Descartes, Meditations); there has to be some type of middle ground. If you fuse the philosophies of Descartes and Berkeley, I believe that one could come up with something more believable, its just too hard to believe that God does everything because in a sense your saying that God who is all powerful and omnipresent uses us to act here on Earth, which is absurd since we are finite and he is infinite.

I didn’t quite get Berkeley’s concept that God is all active and first perceives us doing things before we do them because is flawed. If that were true, you would have to infer that God is also the author of evil. If God perceives everything we do before we do it and everything we do our first His ideas, then he would be able to stop evil doings. What Berkeley says about us being in control of our own wills would have to be false because if that were true, we would be in control of our own perceptions in my opinion. It just seems that if that were true, then everything we did would be in a sense godly, and that obviously isn’t true.

It makes perfect sense to me that are senses play a big role in how we view the world around us, but although he was convincing in that concept I, couldn’t help but thinking that Hylas had a lot of good points also. There must be something innate in objects that make them the objects they are, or else we why would we need to name the objects to discern one from another? I thought that Berkely had a good theory, but it wasn’t realistic, although convincing.

If I can’t agree with Berkeley’s use of God, then his whole theory starts to starts to fall apart because he’s using God as a sort of cushion for his concept, but I don’t think he uses God in the right way. Because Berkely is a bishop, he can’t be really objective when it comes to God. He already has preconceived thoughts, and for philosophy to work one needs to dispel all previous conceptions on all subject matter, but obviously he can’t because of his vocation. This is where his argument on God is flawed.

I believe that the reason why philosopher arguments’ get confusing or nonsensical when it comes to God is because I believe that back then religion was uniform. Taboo to go against it, whereas now we have many. Many religions open up many different ways of viewing God. I believe this is important when it comes to philosophy because philosophy is most broadly defined as love and pursuit of wisdom by intellectual means and moral self-discipline. You can’t truly have self exploration without being willing to accept new things or at least the possibility of new things.

In conclusion, I could not agree with Berkeley’s idealisms, but they did make me think about they way I view the world. At the end of the day, I feel that personal biases will always get in the way of the way we perceive.