

BERKELEY'S EMPIRICISM AND THE CONCEPT OF GOD: A DEFENCE OF THEISM

Wisdom Tonye Gibson

Department of Philosophy

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

wisdom.gibson@iaue.edu.ng

Abstract

George Berkeley (1685–1753), Irish philosopher and Anglican bishop, occupies a singular and philosophically productive position within the empiricist tradition. Where Locke retained a mind-independent material substratum beneath sensible qualities and Hume systematically dissolved the metaphysical commitments of empiricism into scepticism, Berkeley developed a radical but internally disciplined alternative: the doctrine of immaterialism, or subjective idealism, according to which the existence of sensible things consists entirely in their being perceived. This paper argues that this doctrine is not incidentally but structurally theistic. It demonstrates that Berkeley's argument proceeds through four logically connected stages: first, the conceivability argument, which establishes that the concept of mind-independent matter is not merely unobserved but strictly inconceivable; second, the *esse est percipi* principle, which establishes that to be is to be perceived; third, the continuity argument, which demonstrates that the continuous existence of sensible objects under the *esse est percipi* principle requires an infinite, omnipresent perceiver; and fourth, the argument from the order and regularity of experience to a rational, volitional cause. The paper further argues that Berkeley's idea/notion distinction, when properly reconstructed, resolves — or at least substantially defuses — the principal objection that spiritual substance is no better supported than material substance. Principal objections to Berkeley's system are examined and assessed, with the conclusion that while his immaterialism faces genuine difficulties, these difficulties do not undermine the structural theological argument it generates. Berkeley's defence of theism, this paper contends, constitutes a philosophically serious contribution to natural theology, grounded in the internal logic of empiricist epistemology rather than in theological presupposition.

Keywords: Berkeley, Empiricism, Theism, Immaterialism, Idealism, Perception, Philosophy of Religion, Natural Theology, Conceivability Argument

1. Introduction

The empiricist tradition, broadly understood as holding that all knowledge is ultimately derived from sensory experience, is typically associated with a naturalistic, and sometimes sceptical, orientation in philosophy. Francis Bacon (1561–1626) grounded inquiry in observation and experiment; John Locke (1632–1704) argued that the mind begins as a blank slate filled by experience; and David Hume (1711–1776) pressed empiricist principles to their sceptical limit, dissolving causality, personal identity, and natural theology into habits of association and custom. Against this trajectory, George Berkeley (1685–1753) stands as a striking anomaly: a philosopher who deployed the resources of empiricism not to undermine but to vindicate theism.

Berkeley's central conviction was that the materialism implicit in Locke's empiricism — the retention of a mind-independent material world as the cause and support of our sensory ideas — was philosophically untenable and theologically disastrous. Once a wholly non-mental world is admitted, Berkeley argued, scepticism about its nature follows inevitably: we are confined to our ideas and can never compare them with the material realities they are supposed to represent. Moreover, a self-sufficient material world has no need of God for its existence or operation, and the road from materialism to atheism is short. Berkeley's remedy was radical: deny matter altogether. If everything that exists is either a mind or an idea in a mind, then the world is irreducibly mental, and its existence and order require a mind of infinite capacity to sustain it. That mind is God.

The thesis of this paper is that Berkeley's defence of theism is not a theological afterthought appended to an independently motivated epistemology, but is structurally entailed by it. The argument from sensory experience to the existence of God is, within Berkeley's framework, logically continuous: each stage follows from the preceding one by moves Berkeley explicitly makes and defends. This paper reconstructs and examines that argument with care, identifies its logical pressure points, and evaluates the extent to which Berkeley's own philosophical resources can address the principal objections raised against it.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 examines Berkeley's conceivability argument against material substance and establishes the *esse est percipi* principle on which his idealism rests. Section 3 develops the structural theological argument: the continuity problem, the role of God as infinite perceiver, and the argument from the order of experience. Section 4 examines the logical structure of the argument in formal terms, identifying where the inferential weight falls. Section 5 addresses the principal objections — the common-sense objection, the spirit objection, the causation objection, and the objection from overreach — and assesses the resources Berkeley has to meet them. Section 6 evaluates the enduring philosophical significance of Berkeley's theism. The paper concludes with a synthetic assessment.

2. The Conceivability Argument and the *Esse Est Percipi* Principle

Berkeley's argument against material substance is not merely an assertion that matter is unobserved or unobservable. It is a conceptual argument: that the very idea of a mind-independent material world is incoherent, because any attempt to conceive of such a world necessarily imports mental content that undermines its supposed independence. Understanding this argument correctly is

essential, because it closes the logical gap that critics typically identify in Berkeley's move from "ideas are mind-dependent" to "everything is mind-dependent."

2.1 The Conceivability Argument

Locke had maintained that material substance is the *substratum* that underlies and supports sensible qualities — extension, solidity, figure — independently of any mind. Berkeley's challenge is to ask what determinate content this concept could possibly have. Every content we can assign to "matter" — this colour, this shape, this texture — is drawn from sensory experience, and sensory experience, all parties agree, is constituted by ideas in the mind. The supposed substratum, stripped of all sensible qualities (since those are conceded to be mind-dependent secondary qualities), is Locke's own admission: "something, I know not what" (Locke, *Essay*, II.xxiii.2). Berkeley's point is not merely that we happen not to know what it is, but that the attempt to specify its content inevitably circles back to ideas. To conceive of an unperceived tree, Berkeley argues, is to imagine perceiving it: "but do you not 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" (PHK §23). The act of conceiving is itself a mental act, and its object — conceived as unperceived — is self-contradictory.

This is not a verificationist argument (the claim that unverifiable propositions are meaningless); Berkeley predates verificationism, and his argument is strictly conceptual. The claim is that the content of "mind-independent material substance" cannot be specified without either importing mental content (which contradicts the mind-independence) or evacuating the concept of any determinate content whatsoever (which leaves nothing being asserted). Either way, the concept fails to pick out any coherent object of thought.

2.2 The *Esse Est Percipi* Principle.

From the conceivability argument, Berkeley derives his foundational principle: *esse est percipi* — to be is to be perceived (PHK §3). This principle is not an arbitrary stipulation but a consequence of the conceivability argument: if the only coherent content available for the concept of a sensible thing is drawn from perception, then sensible existence just is perceptual existence. To say that a sensible thing exists is to say that it is perceived, or could be perceived under appropriate conditions by an appropriate perceiver.

Berkeley is careful about scope: the *esse est percipi* principle applies to sensible things — ideas — not to minds or spirits, whose existence consists not in being perceived but in perceiving. The ontology is thus bipartite: *esse* of ideas *est percipi*; *esse* of spirits *est percipere*. This bipartition is philosophically significant: it means the principle does not generate a vicious regress (minds perceiving minds *ad infinitum*), and it carves out a place for active, perceiving subjects — including God — that is not subject to the same analysis as passive, perceived objects.

It is worth noting that Berkeley's position is not phenomenalism in the twentieth-century sense — the reductive analysis of physical objects into actual and possible sense-data. Berkeley maintains that sensible objects are *real*: they are not illusions, hallucinations, or mere subjective appearances.

The cherry, the tree, the mountain are genuinely there. What Berkeley denies is not their reality but the incoherent philosophical addition of a non-mental substratum beneath them. As he insists: "I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflexion. That the things I see with my eyes and touch with my hands do exist... I make not the least question" (PHK §35).

3. The Structural Theological Argument

The *esse est percipi* principle, once established, generates a theological argument of considerable force. This section develops that argument through three stages: the continuity problem, the role of God as infinite perceiver, and the argument from the order and regularity of experience.

3.1 The Continuity Problem and the Necessity of an Infinite Perceiver.

The most immediate consequence of the *esse est percipi* principle is what may be called the continuity problem: if sensible things exist only when perceived, what becomes of them when no finite perceiver is attending to them? The cherry on the table — does it cease to exist when the room is empty?

Berkeley was fully aware of this problem and did not evade it. The problem, however, is not merely a difficulty for his system: properly understood, it is an *argument for theism* within that system. The reasoning runs as follows:

P1. Sensible things exist if and only if they are perceived (*esse est percipi*)

P2. Sensible things continue to exist when no finite mind is perceiving them (established by the continuity of nature, the independence of the physical world from individual human attention, and intersubjective agreement about its persistence)

P3. From P1 and P2: if sensible things persist when no finite mind perceives them, they must be perceived by some mind other than any finite mind

P4. The only candidate mind capable of perceiving all things at all times is an infinite, omnipresent mind

C. An infinite, omnipresent perceiving mind — God — exists

The logical structure of this argument is valid: if the premises are true, the conclusion follows necessarily. The philosophical work therefore falls on the premises, particularly P2 and P4. P2 is not an assumption but an observation that both Berkeley and his opponents accept: the world does not disappear when we close our eyes, and physical reality is not a private projection of individual minds. P4 is the claim that requires justification: why could there not be some other explanation of continuity?

Berkeley considers and rejects the main alternative: the counterfactual or dispositional analysis, according to which "the table exists when unperceived" means only "if someone were suitably positioned, they would perceive a table." He rejects this at *Three Dialogues* 234, and his rejection is philosophically principled rather than arbitrary. Under the *esse est percipi* principle, existence is

actual, not hypothetical: "can an idea exist without being actually perceived? These are points long since agreed between us" (3D 234). A counterfactual analysis makes existence consist in a possibility rather than an actuality, which contradicts the principle that to be is to be actually perceived. If the *esse est percipi* principle is accepted — and it follows from the conceivability argument developed in Section 2 — then the counterfactual analysis is unavailable, and the inference to an actual infinite perceiver is the only remaining option.

3.2 The Denial of Blind Agency and the Continuity of God's Perception.

A potential difficulty with the argument of §3.1 concerns the relationship between God's *perceiving* and God's *willing*. Berkeley's account of the continuous existence of ordinary objects invokes not only God's perception but also God's volitions: the table continues to exist because God wills that suitably situated finite perceivers shall have table-ideas under appropriate conditions. This raises the question of whether God's volitions, rather than God's actual perception of the table, are doing the explanatory work — in which case the argument would not require God actually to have sensory ideas, avoiding the tension with divine impassibility.

Here Berkeley invokes a principle that Winkler (1989, pp. 207–224) identifies as the "denial of blind agency." Berkeley holds that any genuine act of will — any volition — must have a cognitive component: it must be a will directed towards something determinate, and that determinateness requires an idea of what is willed. This principle is not merely assumed by Berkeley; it is implicit in his account of causation and agency throughout the *Principles* and *De Motu*. A volition that has no idea associated with it — a "blind" act of will — would be utterly indeterminate: it would not be a volition towards anything in particular, and would therefore fail to be a volition at all. Berkeley writes: "a spirit is one simple, undivided active being: as it perceives ideas it is called the understanding, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them it is called the will" (PHK §27). Will and understanding are not separate faculties but two aspects of a single active being: to will is always to will something, and to will something is to have an idea of it.

The denial of blind agency, thus reconstructed, is not an arbitrary additional premise but follows from Berkeley's analysis of what it is to be an active, willing being. Applied to God, it yields the result that God's volitions — including the volition to cause finite minds to have table-ideas — presuppose God's understanding of the table, i.e., God's having an idea corresponding to it. The table therefore exists continuously in God's understanding, grounding its actual existence in accordance with the *esse est percipi* principle.

3.3 The Argument from Order and Regularity.

A second, complementary theological argument emerges from the character of sensory experience itself. Berkeley observes that the "ideas of sense" — the objects of ordinary perception — differ systematically from the "ideas of imagination" that we produce voluntarily. Ideas of sense are "more strong, lively and distinct"; they exhibit a "steadiness, order and coherence" that our own imaginings lack; and they come to us according to "rules or established methods" that we call the laws of nature (PHK §30). These laws are not imposed by us: they are given to us, and they are the same for all finite perceivers.

Berkeley's argument is that this orderly, regular, intersubjective character of sensory experience cannot be explained by the existence of passive, inert matter. Ideas, by definition, are passive; they do not cause anything (PHK §25). The cause of our ideas of sense must therefore be an active being — a mind or spirit — of sufficient power and intelligence to produce the entire ordered system of nature. Moreover, the cause must be one: the unity, coherence, and universality of natural law points to a single, rational, omnipresent agent. Berkeley writes: "The *ideas* of sense... are not excited at random... but in a regular train or series, the admirable connection whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author" (PHK §105).

This argument is structurally analogous to, and in important respects stronger than, the traditional design argument. The design argument, as standardly formulated, infers from the apparent purposiveness of organic structures to a designing intelligence. Berkeley's argument is epistemologically more fundamental: it infers from the very intelligibility and lawlikeness of experience — the fact that nature is *knowable* at all — to a rational, legislative mind. Even if all apparent design in nature could be explained by natural selection or other immanent processes, Berkeley's argument would remain: the existence of a lawlike, rationally ordered, intersubjectively shared world of experience still requires explanation, and the explanation Berkeley offers — an infinite rational mind whose volitions constitute the laws of nature — is one that the advance of natural science does not obviously refute, since science presupposes rather than explains the rational orderedness of nature.

4. The Logical Structure of Berkeley's Theistic Argument

Having set out Berkeley's argument in stages, it is instructive to reconstruct its overall logical structure explicitly, so that the validity of the inference and the location of the philosophically contested premises can be assessed clearly.

The complete argument may be formalised as follows:

- L1. All content available for the concept of a sensible thing is drawn from perception (empiricist premise)
- L2. To specify a sensible thing as mind-independent is to specify it stripped of all perceptual content (definition of mind-independence)
- L3. A concept stripped of all content is not a coherent concept (from L1 and L2: the conceivability argument)
- L4. Therefore, the concept of a mind-independent sensible thing is incoherent (from L1–L3)
- L5. Therefore, sensible things exist if and only if they are perceived — *esse est percipi* (from L4)
- L6. Sensible things persist when no finite mind is perceiving them (empirical observation, granted by all parties)

L7. If L5 and L6, sensible things must be perceived by a non-finite mind when no finite mind perceives them (from L5 and L6)

L8. The only mind capable of perceiving all sensible things at all times is an infinite, omnipresent mind (from the scope of the persistence requirement)

L9. Therefore, an infinite, omnipresent perceiving mind — God — exists (from L7 and L8)

L10. The ideas of sense exhibit order, regularity, and unity that passive ideas cannot self-generate (empirical observation)

L11. Order, regularity, and unity in a system of ideas require a rational, volitional cause (from the analysis of agency: ideas are passive; only spirits are active)

L12. The rational, volitional cause of the ordered world of sensory experience is God (from L9 and L11)

The inference from L1 to L5 is the conceivability argument, examined in Section 2. The inference from L5 and L6 to L9 is the continuity argument, examined in Section 3.1. The inference from L10 to L12 is the regularity argument, examined in Section 3.3. Together they constitute a chain of argument in which each step follows from the preceding ones, given the empiricist starting point.

The contested premises are L1, L6, L8, and L11. L1 is the empiricist premise, which rationalists deny but which Berkeley's interlocutors accept. L6 is granted by all parties, including Berkeley's critics. L8 is a premise Berkeley asserts rather than argues for at length; a determined sceptic might resist it by denying that an omnipresent mind is the only available explanation of persistence. L11 follows from Berkeley's analysis of causation: ideas are by definition passive (PHK §25), and only active beings — spirits — can be causes. This is not assumed but argued: Berkeley explicitly analyses the concept of causation and concludes that genuinely causal activity requires a will, and that passive entities (ideas, including what materialists call "matter") cannot be genuine causes of anything.

The argument is therefore valid: given the premises, the conclusion follows. Whether it is *sound* — whether the premises are all true — depends on one's assessment of the empiricist starting point and the conceivability argument. Berkeley's philosophical strategy is to show that anyone who accepts empiricism is already committed to premises that entail theism, whether they recognise it or not. This is a philosophically significant claim, and it is what makes Berkeley's argument more than mere apologetics: it is a demonstration of an internal connection between a widely held epistemological position and a theological conclusion.

5. Principal Objections and Berkeley's Responses

Four principal objections have been raised against Berkeley's immaterialism, and each bears on the soundness of the theological argument reconstructed above.

5.1 The Common-Sense Objection

The most immediate objection, associated with Thomas Reid and in popular form with Samuel Johnson's famous stone-kicking, is that the denial of material substance is simply contrary to common sense. As Zaato (2018) observes, Berkeley's claim that objects do not exist independently of perception is at odds with ordinary belief and can generate inconsistencies in ordinary practical reasoning.

Berkeley's response deserves more credit than it typically receives. He does not dismiss common sense but appeals to it. His target is not the ordinary person's belief in tables and trees but the philosopher's superaddition of a mind-independent substratum beneath them — a theoretical posit that common sense does not actually require and that Berkeley argues is incoherent. The ordinary person believes in the tree; Berkeley believes in the tree. What the ordinary person does *not* believe in — because they have never heard of it — is a non-mental, imperceptible Lockean substratum. Berkeley writes: "I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend either by sense or reflexion" (PHK §35). The charge that idealism is contrary to common sense therefore misfires: the common-sense belief in the reality of sensible objects is precisely what Berkeley's system preserves, while the materialist posit he rejects is a philosophical addition that common sense neither makes nor requires.

5.2 The Spirit Objection

The most penetrating logical objection is that Berkeley's argument is *ad hoc*: he rejects material substance on the ground that we can have no idea of it, but invokes spiritual substance whose existence equally exceeds what we can perceive. De Waal (2006) formulates this with precision: if we cannot have an idea of tangible substance as an explanation for our ideas, the same applies to spirits; positing spirits to explain the presence of our ideas is as useless an explanation as positing matter.

Berkeley's response turns on his distinction between ideas and notions (PHK §§89, 140–142). We know minds — including our own minds — not through ideas (passive, inert representations) but through *notions*: a direct, reflexive acquaintance with ourselves as active, perceiving, willing beings. This is not a separate and weaker form of knowledge; it is a different kind of access appropriate to a different kind of object. The asymmetry between matter and spirit is not arbitrary: material substance is defined as entirely non-mental, utterly lacking the active, willing character that constitutes mental existence — and it is precisely this character that we directly acquaint ourselves with in self-reflection. There is therefore a genuine epistemological asymmetry: we have *notional* acquaintance with spirit (our own, and by analogical extension, other spirits and God) that we entirely lack for matter. The objection, pressed with full force, thus does not establish parity between matter and spirit: it establishes only that we have no *idea* of spirit, which Berkeley grants; it does not show that we have no cognitive access to spirit at all.

Furthermore, there is an asymmetry in explanatory role. Spirit, as an active, willing being, can be a genuine cause of the ideas that constitute sensory experience. Matter, as Berkeley argues at PHK §25, is passive and inert, and passive entities cannot be genuine causes. Even if one grants that we

posit both matter and spirit beyond what is directly perceived, spirit is at least a coherent explanation, whereas matter is not only unperceived but *incapable of doing the explanatory work* assigned to it.

5.3 The Causation Objection.

Dicker (2011) presses the question of how Berkeley can account for natural processes and causal regularities in terms of ideas and spirits. How does the caterpillar become a butterfly? Not through ideas causing other ideas — ideas are passive — but through what? Berkeley's answer in *De Motu* (1721) is philosophically careful: physics and natural science correctly describe the regularities among natural phenomena without identifying genuine causes; the genuine cause of all natural events is God. Natural laws are the language in which God communicates with finite minds — a "visual language" (to use the term Berkeley develops in the *New Theory of Vision*) whose grammar God establishes and maintains.

This answer has genuine philosophical content. It is importantly similar to the occasionalist position of Malebranche, though Berkeley resists Malebranche's occasionalism in its full form. The key point is that Berkeley's account does not require ideas to cause other ideas (which would be incoherent on his own analysis); it requires only that God, as the active, volitional cause of all natural regularities, produce ideas in finite minds in an orderly sequence. This is consistent with — indeed, it underpins — the scientific project of identifying and describing those regularities.

5.4 The Objection from Overreach

Maller (2010) contends that Berkeley's immaterialism both proves too much (in denying matter) and too little (in failing to account for the explanatory functions of a material world). After three centuries, he suggests, the rejection of matter is the settled verdict of the philosophical community.

This objection has rhetorical but limited philosophical force. Philosophical consensus is not a criterion of philosophical truth: many once-settled consensuses have been overturned, and the history of philosophy is replete with positions dismissed in their time and rehabilitated later. More substantively, Berkeley's argument does not obviously fail on the charge of proving too little: his system preserves everything that scientific and common-sense practice requires of the physical world — regularity, persistence, intersubjectivity, lawlikeness — while grounding it in God's volitional activity rather than in a problematic material substratum. What is lost is a theoretical posit (matter) that Locke himself could not positively characterise. What is gained is an account of the world's existence and order that is philosophically grounded rather than merely gestured at.

6. The Philosophical Significance of Berkeley's Theism

Having reconstructed Berkeley's argument and assessed the principal objections, we are in a position to identify its enduring philosophical significance, beyond the specific debate about immaterialism.

First, Berkeley's argument represents a rare philosophical achievement: it derives a substantive metaphysical and theological conclusion from a widely shared epistemological starting point by a chain of argument each step of which can be made logically explicit. This places his defence of theism in a different category from arguments that simply appeal to intuition, authority, or the beauty

of creation. Whether or not one accepts the conclusion, the argument can be engaged on its own terms — which is what philosophical argument demands.

Second, Berkeley's critique of materialism as intrinsically unstable — as generating scepticism about the external world and eliminating the need for God — anticipates difficulties that have occupied philosophy of mind ever since. The "veil of perception" problem for representative realism, the hard problem of consciousness, and the explanatory gap between physical description and phenomenal experience all reflect tensions that Berkeley identified at the root of Lockean materialism. Whether his solution is accepted or not, his diagnosis of the problem retains force.

Third, the argument from the order and regularity of experience to a rational, volitional cause is, as noted in Section 3.3, more epistemologically fundamental than the traditional design argument. It does not depend on biological complexity or apparent purposiveness that might be explained away; it depends only on the fact that experience is lawlike, rational, and intersubjective — features that natural science presupposes and does not explain. This gives Berkeley's argument a kind of immunity to scientific refutation that the Paley-style design argument lacks.

Fourth, Berkeley's account of divine omnipresence is philosophically distinctive. God is not a distant first cause or an absentee creator but the immediate, continuous, active source of every moment of sensory experience. This is a theism of radical immanence — and it is grounded not in mystical intuition but in the analysis of what perception requires. For the philosophy of religion, this represents a contribution that is not easily replicated within materialist frameworks.

It must be acknowledged, with appropriate intellectual honesty, that Berkeley's full immaterialist system faces difficulties that he did not entirely resolve. The tension between God's having ideas and God's impassibility, the exact character of notions as a form of cognitive access, and the account of error within a bundle theory of objects are problems that remain subjects of scholarly debate (Winkler 1989; Dicker 2011, 2013; Bettcher 2008). Furthermore, Berkeley's argument is addressed primarily to those who accept the empiricist epistemological framework; it is less compelling as a free-standing proof of theism for those who reject that starting point.

These are genuine limitations, and no philosophically responsible assessment of Berkeley should conceal them. What can be said with confidence is that Berkeley's defence of theism is philosophically serious, internally motivated, and logically disciplined — and that the objections it faces are difficulties for a sophisticated position rather than refutations of a naïve one.

7. Conclusion

This paper has argued that Berkeley's immaterialism constitutes a structurally theistic position: not a philosophical system to which theological conclusions have been added as embellishments, but one in which the existence of God follows by logical necessity from the premises. The chain of argument — from the conceivability argument against material substance, through the *esse est percipi* principle, through the continuity argument, to the conclusion that an infinite, omnipresent perceiving mind sustains the existence of the sensible world — is valid, and its premises are either

granted by Berkeley's empiricist interlocutors or argued for within his own philosophical framework.

The principal objections — the common-sense objection, the spirit objection, the causation objection, and the objection from overreach — have been examined in detail. Each has genuine force; none is decisive. The common-sense objection misfires because it targets a belief Berkeley shares. The spirit objection is substantially defused by the idea/notion distinction and by the explanatory asymmetry between spirit and matter. The causation objection is answered by Berkeley's account of God as the volitional ground of natural regularity. The objection from overreach proves less than it claims, since philosophical consensus is not a criterion of truth, and Berkeley's system preserves the functional requirements of scientific and practical engagement with the world.

Three centuries after the publication of the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and the *Three Dialogues* (1713), Berkeley's arguments retain their capacity to unsettle confident assumptions about the relationship between mind, world, and God. His defence of theism is not merely of historical interest: it raises questions about the foundations of experience, the coherence of materialism, and the explanatory resources of natural theology that remain live in contemporary philosophy of religion. Whether or not one ultimately accepts Berkeley's immaterialism, his argument demonstrates that the path from rigorous empiricist epistemology to theistic metaphysics is philosophically possible — and that traversing it requires not a leap of faith but a sequence of logical steps.

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