

Hylas's retreat, cont.'d

~~Naïve realism~~ ✘



Primary quality realism

By the midway point of *Dialogues I*, Hylas has been forced to deny the “reality” (i.e., the mind-independence or objectivity) of one after another of the sensible qualities

until none are left

He has retreated to a position that could be called primary quality realism

This is the view that while mind-independent external objects have none of the sensible qualities, they at least have the primary qualities of extension, solidity, cohesion, and their modes

and we immediately perceive at least those qualities as they are in mind-independent, external objects

Problems with Primary Quality Realism

Gravitation is motion of one body towards another

Cohesion is two bodies not allowing a third body to move in between them

Solidity is when a body does not allow another body to move into its extension

So it seems like all of the primary qualities involve some reference to extension and motion

This poses two problems:

- Foucher's problem
- a new problem discovered by Berkeley

Let's take up these problems in turn

Between discussing the first and second, Hylas attempts an evasion

we'll bring that up between as well

Problems with Primary Quality Realism, cont.'d

Foucher's Problem

1. The same perceptual relativity arguments that have been employed to cast doubt on the objective reality of the secondary qualities work to cast doubt on the objective reality of extension and motion

The same object looks to be bigger or smaller depending on distance

or extended into one shape or a different one depending on viewing angle

or of different sizes when viewed with telescopes or microscopes or by different animals with microscopic eyes

So the sizes and shapes that we perceive must be just ideas in us

Problems with Primary Quality Realism Foucher's Problem, , cont.'d

1. The same perceptual relativity arguments that have been employed to cast doubt on the objective reality of the secondary qualities work to cast doubt on the objective reality of extension and motion

Motion is change of place over time

But the length of time is determined by the number of ideas that succeed in our minds

So one and the same motion can appear to occur more quickly to one person, preoccupied with a particular idea

Or more slowly to another person, whose thoughts are racing

So the speeds that we perceive must be just ideas in us

But if the extension and motion we perceive are just ideas in us, so are all the primary qualities we perceive

Hylas's evasion

Even if we grant that the specific sizes, shapes, and motions we perceive are merely ideas in us and not real things in objects

mind independent substances could still have some sort of general extension and general motion

Philonous's reply

Something has to make one object different from another

that would have to be some specific shape and size of their extension and some specific speed of their motion or rest

were extension and motion stripped of everything that makes them specific they would be merely universal notions

but it is commonly accepted that everything that exists is a determinate, particular thing and not a universal (like a Platonic form)

But never mind any of these scholastic quibbles

just ask yourself if you can conceive extension that is not of some specific size and shape, or motion that is not in some specific direction at some specific speed

if you can't, then these things are not immediately perceived by us

and you still want to maintain that we immediately perceive real things

Problems with Primary Quality Realism, cont.'t Berkeley's new problem

2. Just as gravitation, cohesion, and solidity presuppose motion, so motion presupposes extension

(there has to be some space for bodies to move in)

but it is impossible to conceive of space without conceiving of a space of some particular shape and size

and it is impossible to conceive of a sized shape without edges

but an edge is a boundary between contrasting qualities

so where there are no contrasting qualities there can be no edges, and so no sized shapes, and so no motion, and so none of the primary qualities

but the only quality contrasts that serve to define edges are those between visible and tangible qualities like colour and temperature

Problems with Primary Quality Realism, cont.'t
Berkeley's new problem, cont.'t

2. So, the primary qualities cannot exist where there are no secondary qualities

But the secondary qualities exist only in the mind and only when perceived

So the primary qualities can exist only in the mind and nowhere else and at no other time than when perceived

Hylas's retreat, cont.'d

~~Direct realism~~ ✘

(either of the Naïve or the “primary quality” sort)



Representationalism

By this point Hylas has been forced to accept that nothing we perceive is “real” in his sense of being a quality of a mind-independent, external substance

But he attempts to maintain that what we perceive might nonetheless correspond to or represent or signify some mind-independent quality of external objects

Hylas's first proposal

The Act/Object distinction

When we perceive we perform an act, and that act exists in us

but there is also an object we perceive through performing this act

and whatever we perceive that is not part of the act of perceiving belongs to the object

so the painful act of perceiving heat is in us, but there is also some quality of heat in the fire

and the way we perceive the colour of an object (as a "coloured" colour) is in us, but there is also some underlying colour in the object

Philonous's Replies

1. The earlier discussion has established that we do not perceive the "object" or "material substance" that heat is "in" or that colours are "in" or "on"

we only perceive the heat and the colours and the other sensible and primary qualities

whatever we perceive is only perceived to be related to other things we perceive

e.g. the colours we perceive are perceived to be spread over the shapes we perceive

they are not perceived to belong to something we do not perceive

Philonous's Replies, cont.'d

2. The mind is purely passive in perception

Since the mind does not act at all in perceiving, *everything* that we experience in perception is something that belongs to the “object”

nothing belongs to the “act”

If it is insisted that the object is an external object that exists independently of the mind

and if everything in perception that does not belong to the act of perceiving belongs to the object

then perception as a whole must belong to the object

so things like rocks and trees must contain perceptions

and fire must feel burning pain

which is of course absurd

Hylas's second proposal

Relative ideas of substance and substratum

It is intuitively obvious that qualities like white and sweet cannot just exist on their own

this entitles us to infer that there must be some material substratum or substance that they inhere in

even if we can form no clear and distinct idea of that substance or substratum

we get a relative idea of it as the thing that is needed to support qualities

Philonous's Reply

A relative idea must be based on some relation between the known (here =sensible and primary qualities)

and the unknown

So what is the relation?

is it being spread out underneath the quality to hold it up, like bread holds up peanut butter?

(the Latin *substratum* means "spread out underneath")

is it standing under the quality?

(the Latin *substance* means "standing under")

These relations only make sense if you presuppose that there is extension

but extension is one of the qualities that needs to be spread under and stood under

so is there another extension in which this happens?

If “substance” and “substratum” are not supposed to be related to qualities in this “gross literal” sense, then it needs to be specified how, exactly, they are related to one another

The fact is that that the only thing that seems at all necessary for colour or extension to exist is that they be perceived

not that they be “supported” in some substratum

Hylas's third proposal

Maybe qualities could support one another in existing outside the mind and independently of being perceived

Philonous's Replies

1. The earlier arguments have not just established that when heat or colour or figure are separated from all other qualities they cannot exist outside of the mind

they have established that there is no way they can exist outside of the mind

indeed, the fact that shape cannot exist apart from other qualities was a an important reason for saying that it cannot exist outside of the mind

2. The "Master" argument

(so called because Philonous declared himself willing to rest his entire case on this one argument)

"If you can conceive any quality, or any combination of qualities existing unconceived, I will convert to your opinion"

An Objection to the Master Argument

Don't we at least see objects existing outside of us, that is, at some distance away from us?

Philonous's Replies drawing on Berkeley's theory of vision

1. We have the same experience in dreams, though there are no external objects in that case
2. What we see at a distance is nothing like what we see when we move closer up

This implies that what we see when at a distance is something that exists only in us when we are at that distance, not in the object

As we learn how to see, we associate experiences had from a distance with those had from close up and so confuse what we see at a distance with a view of the distant object rather than with something in us at that distance

The accepted answer to Molyneux's question proves this

3. The eye is not directly sensitive to differences in distance

This is proven by the fact that distant objects stimulate the eye in a point, regardless of how far away they are

Since distance makes no difference to how the eye is affected by light, information about distance must instead be inferred from other qualities of visual experience

This is again proven by the accepted answer to Molyneux's question

When we draw this inference we are actually simply associating visual with tangible sensations

qualities of colour with anticipated muscle sensations involved in bringing ourselves into contact with what we see

the outward distance is never really there

Hylas's fourth proposal

At least, ideas are signs that represent things existing outside of us and so lead us to think of or “mediately perceive” something that exists outside of us

Philonous's Reply

The only way something can work as a sign or representation of something else is if both the sign and the thing signified have been immediately perceived in the past

so smoke signifies fire only because in the past we have found fire wherever there is smoke

and visual appearances signify physical effort involved in walking or reaching, or signify tactile sensations only in virtue of past experience of those kinaesthetic and tactile sensations

but a picture of Caesar can't represent or signify Caesar to someone who has never seen Caesar

that person just immediately perceives the picture and does not mediate perceive anything else

And we have only ever immediately perceived our ideas,
not anything else that those ideas might represent or
signify

so we can only mediately perceive one set of ideas
by immediately perceiving another set of ideas

e.g., mediately perceive kinaesthetic and tactile
ideas by immediately perceiving visual ones

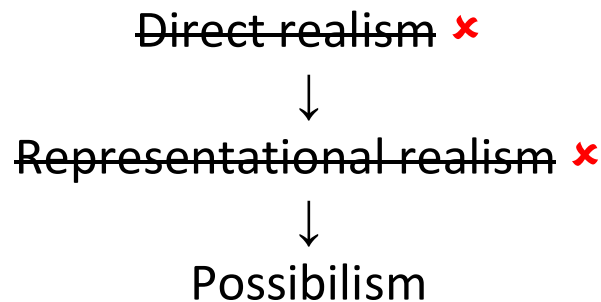
but we cannot mediately perceive material
substance

Hylas's fifth proposal

But surely it is at least possible that our ideas might be like material substances in some ways, even if we can't know this for sure

(This proposal represents the final stage of Hylas's retreat)

Hylas's retreat



Philonous's response The "Likeness Principle"

Philonous's response invokes a principle that has since been called the "likeness principle"

Nothing can be like an idea but another idea

One reason for this:

Ideas are temporary and change with every slight motion or shift of the perceiver and every slight alteration in the surrounding circumstances, and they exist only when perceived

but external objects are supposed to be stable and to be as they are independently of us and independently of their surroundings

so at best some of our ideas could be "like" objects

Worse, all ideas are sensible, whereas external objects are insensible

and what is insensible cannot be at all like what is sensible

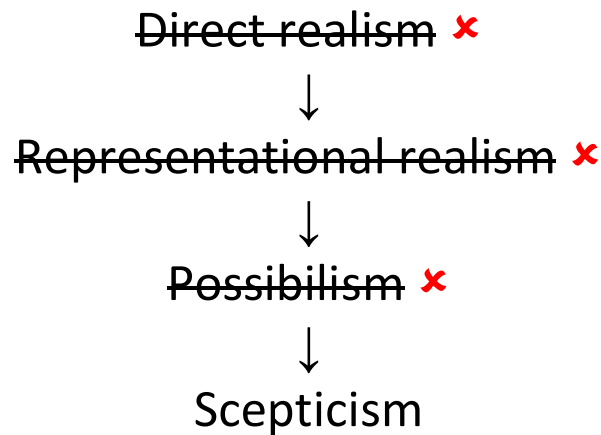
any more than what is invisible can be like what is invisible

what is tasteless like what is sweet

what is painful like what is no form of pain or pleasure

what has shape and size determined by edges between different colours or tangible qualities like what has no extension

Hylas's retreat, completed



Hylas started off maintaining that we immediately perceive mind-independent external objects

over the course of the dialogue, he has been forced to concede

that one after another of the things we perceive is only an idea in us, and cannot exist apart from being perceived

that we are in no position to infer the existence of mind-independent external objects from the existence of our ideas

that we cannot even take our ideas to be anything like mind-independent external objects

As a consequence of these concessions he is driven to maintain that we have no knowledge of “true and real” things

but this scepticism only follows because he is convinced that if we do not perceive mind-independent external objects

either immediately or mediately
either actually or at least possibly

then we can't consider ourselves to have any perception of true and real things

But surely we exist, and are true and real things

and our ideas exist in us when they are perceived, and are true and real things

and while we might cause some of our ideas, we do not cause all of them, and they must have some true and real cause

Philonous accepts all of these things

the next question is what he makes of them