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PHIL 130-035

18 November 2016

Reflection 6

Many people thought that George Berkeley was insane after the publication of his work "The Principles of Human Knowledge" for several reasons. Many of the ideas presented in Berkeley's work appeared to contradict common sense, even though "He saw himself as a defender of common sense" (452). For example, Berkeley claims that it is impossible to think about an object without observing it through one's senses: "As it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, so is it impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it" (456). Many of Berkeley's readers disagreed with his views which, to them, appeared to argue against common sense. Berkeley continues and denies the existence of objects and their qualities and characteristics when not being thought about: "The arguments foregoing planily show it to be impossible that any colour or extension at all, or other sensible quality whatsoever, should exist in an unthinking subject without the mind, or in truth, that there should be ny such thing as an outward object" (457).

Berkeley argues that there is no difference betweenn primary and secondary qualities: "Some there are who make a distinction betwixt primary and secondary qualities. … But it is evident, from what we have already shown, that extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be nothing but another idea … Hence, the very notion of what is called matter or corporal substance, involves a contradiction in it" (457). In addition,

he asserts that matter is "an unthinking substance" (457) and cannot exist, as objects can only exist in the mind. These claims were perceived by many to be nonsensical and, although he was not burned at the stake because he did not reject the idea of God, he was cast off by society as an irrational thinker with views way beyond what society would accept.