

The aim of the dissertation is to provide a sympathetic interpretation of Berkeley's immaterialism that does not proceed on the assumption that there is something fundamentally wrong with the system itself. Careful close reading uncovers new semantic relationships between important philosophical concepts in immaterialism.

Although traditionally viewed as anti common-sense, Berkeley devotes one whole book to explaining his position on common sense. He claims that his system is closer to it than materialism because it does not distort the meanings of such key words as "know", "certain" and "real". Furthermore, he empties words "external object", "absolute existence" etc. of their meaning, thus precluding the very semantic framework within which the traditional debate about realism, idealism, phenomenalism and solipsism takes place.

Berkeley's own definition of the object of perception is to be found primarily in his scientific theory of vision, from which it is generalized into a metaphysics. And since his optical programme provides a psychology of vision, also the immaterialist metaphysical underpinning limits itself to connecting ideas as psychological entities private to each perceiver and construing objects of perception out of them.

But if things are just collections of ideas and ideas are mind-dependent entities, what happens to things when the ideas are not in the mind, when they are not perceived? The orthodox interpretation has Berkeley bring in God, the never-sleeping cosmic observer who sees everything, thus keeping everything in existence. But this interpretation has little support in the texts and in some places goes against them, so it has to be rejected. Berkeley in fact takes the hard line and claims that unperceived things do not exist at all. ...