

# The Radical Strategy Concerning Treating Our Encountered World View

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## Abstract

“Total nonuniversality” means the nonuniversal nature of sensible content and the institute of conceptuality, taken together. It can bravely be stated that this is the message most difficult for humans. The message of total nonuniversality is opposed to our basic attitude. There is a need for a “place”, to which the main elements of our encountered world view can be attached. I call this place the original environment. The original environment may be described as “large space, short time”. One of my main goals is to establish that notion.

## Keywords

Berkeley, Hume, Hegel, Original Environment

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## 1. Introduction

It is well known that the idealism/materialism debate is the primary conflict in the history of philosophy. Since my aim is to reframe the idealist standpoint and to highlight the important sentences in certain classical works on the subject, it is also necessary for me to make a few remarks concerning materialism.

Naive materialism may be considered to be a natural worldview for human beings. Its main characteristic is spontaneous assessment: both sensible knowledge (in what follows: sensible content) and the institute of conceptuality qualify themselves as universal. I call this assessment *total universality*.

The message of idealist philosophy, as presented by me, is *total nonuniversality*. The idealist standpoint should be conceived as a counterpole to naive materialism. The key to consistency should be the *same* assessment of these two elements (the sensible and the conceptual). Both naive materialism and idealism are therefore consistent philosophies.

Naive materialism is given to us. What can be done with it at the level of phi-

losophy? Two courses of action can be seen:

1) One course rectifies the various elements to which the natural sciences object. Small steps are taken to reach the so-called scientific worldview. (As an example, consider the “revolutionary” move by materialists in 19<sup>th</sup> century: they substituted the claim “everything changes, nothing is eternal” for the original claim of “things are eternal”.)

2) The other course declares this worldview to be entirely “bad” (that is, non-universal). This approach appreciates the cohesion of its elements and the dignity of the whole. One should not intervene: if one does so in a consistent system, new problems emerge. According to this approach, there is no scientific worldview.

## 2. The Original Environment

If the “sensible + conceptual” are not universal, then they are local. A place to which both components can be attached must be sought and found. This singularly important place can be described as “large space, short time”. This notion of “large space, short time” is called *the original environment*.

“Large space, short time” results from grasping the act of perception with the aid of space and time—exploiting the fact that one always perceives in the present and never in the past or the future. (The “large space” element indicates that the perception takes place not in the microworld but in the world of human-scale objects.)

The following question is important: what should we mean when we refer to the moment of now? In principle, two answers to this question are possible: extension and extensionlessness. There is, however, a requirement that must be met by the definition of now: it must take into account the flow of time. Our concept of time is possible only if the numerous moments of now, which succeed each other, could form the past.

This requirement is not fulfilled in the case of “present = extensionlessness”. The statement by Hume and Hegel that nothing can be built out of absence precludes the answer of “present = extensionlessness”. In the case of Hume, one can understand from the phrase “infinite number of coexistent moments” that he is aware of the impossibility of building out of absence. I cite the following very important sentence by him:

...if in time we could never arrive at an end of division, and if each moment, as it succeeds another, were not perfectly single and indivisible, there would be an infinite number of coexistent moments, or parts of time, which I believe will be allowed to be an arrant contradiction (Hume, 2016: p. 17).

Hume says that if we could not terminate the drive to divide, then we would find ourselves in the zero position, and we would reach an impasse in that position. I present the phrase “infinite number of coexistent moments” as an equation:

zero multiplied by infinity equals zero.

From this equation, I reach the conclusion that Hume dismisses the conventional answer to the question of the present, which is extensionlessness.

A sentence to the effect that “out of absence, one cannot build anything” written by Hegel reads as follows: “That the line does not consist of points, nor the plane of lines follows from their concepts” (Hegel, 2007: p. 31).

“The line does not consist of points” says Hegel, and the concept of the point is nothing but a declaration of absence of extension...

### 3. Berkeley: Save the Extension from Running Out

Thus far, it has been shown that both Hume and Hegel dismiss the standpoint of “present = extensionlessness”. Hence, both of them confirm the standpoint of “present = extension” indirectly.

The direct confirmation of this latter standpoint is the claim that finite extension is not infinitely divisible. I cite Berkeley on this point:

The infinite divisibility of finite extension, tho’ it is not expressly laid down, either as an axiom or theorem in the elements of that science, yet, is throughout the same everywhere suppos’d, and...that mathematicians never admit it into doubt, or make the least question of it (Berkeley, 1998: paragraph 123).

Berkeley claims that finite space and finite time are not infinitely divisible. This claim opposes the general opinion. Can Berkeley be right in arguing against the conviction of a vast number of people?

In answer, I announce the following: the competition between Berkeley and general opinion may be a draw. Finite extension can be divided infinitely, but this infinite division is not permitted! These two opposing claims are quite compatible if neither infinite divisibility nor noninfinite divisibility are viewed as a property!

If infinite divisibility is not a property, then what is it? The infinite divisibility of finite space and finite time is nothing but the negation of the absolute nature of those concepts. How should we interpret noninfinite divisibility? The point is that this notion is a defensive move: we defend the conceptual substance (which is extension) from running out, from falling to the level of zero.

I must therefore rectify Berkeley’s claim: finite time can be divided infinitely, but that act is not permitted to be performed. This duality serves as a basis for the distinction between absolute present and present, in which context by absolute present I mean extensionlessness and by present I mean extension. This distinction is central to idealist philosophy, and it may truly be emphasized if absolute present and present are located in different structures. This idea, however, cannot be elaborated here due to a lack of space (see Sztankó, 2020).

With the aid of Berkeley, Hume and Hegel, I have arrived at the conclusion “present = extension”. The following question arises: what size extension should be allotted to the present? Since no standard extension appears in nature, I must take recourse in convention: when we refer to the moment of now, we should

mean a *small* extension! This move (resorting to convention) is a heavy blow to the materialist idea that time should be viewed as an entity that is independent of humans.

#### 4. Projection of the Sensible Content into Small Space and Long Time

My main thesis that will be elaborated here: “to be is to be perceived” can only be explained on the basis of the nonuniversal nature of sensible content.

Let us return to the notion of “large space, short time”, which is called the original environment. Since idealist philosophy is nothing but the art of binding to a place, this notion is indispensable for us. (Binding to a place, that is binding of essential elements of naïve materialism, but first and foremost the sensible content to the original environment.) Using the notion of original environment, I would like to show that there is a connection between two claims by Berkeley:

- finite extension is not infinitely divisible,
- to be is to be perceived.

The two claims are connected by the answer to the question: what should we mean by the moment of now?

The claim of noninfinite divisibility of finite time determines what should we mean by now: an extension atom. On the other hand, perceiving is an act of humans happening always in the present, which is in the above extension atom. Since perceiving is always happening in the present, “short time” can be allotted to an act of perception. Completing this—as we have already seen—we can add: perception is happening at the same time in “large” space, meaning the world of human-scale objects.

“To be is to be perceived” is expressed in new wording: the circumstance “large space, short time” is a substantial one. If to the act of perception one should attribute such a strength and importance that could create the existence of sensible objects, then the twin “large space, short time” describing that act of perception, has special importance as well. This is the argument, why the “large space, short time” is important by the logic of Berkeley’s philosophy.

Apart from Berkeley, we can bring up argument as well emphasizing the importance of the original environment. We can make use of the fact that our understanding—driven by the belief that sensible content is universal—make projections into small space and long time. So the sensible content expands, and I describe this expansion as empire-building.

The empire of our understanding consists of two claims:

- Democritean atoms exist (this statement is nothing but projection of the sensible content into a small space).
- Things are everlasting (this statement is a projection of the sensible content into a long time).

If the two claims listed above are true (that is the empire stands securely), then the notion of “large space, short time” cannot be viewed as a substantial circum-

tance; therefore, our attempt to express the thesis that “to be is to be perceived” in new words has failed.

The necessary downfall of all empires, however, is suffered by the empire of our understanding as well. As usual, the troubles start far away from the centre. Here, the “far away” means small space and long time.

There is general agreement that the claim that “things are everlasting” is incorrect. With respect to the other claim (that absolute finitude exists), one cannot give an unequivocal answer. In any case, however, the truthfulness of idealist philosophy on the one hand and the existence of Democritean atoms on the other preclude each other. The openness of the matter in question provides an opportunity for the opponents of idealist philosophy to refute it. This possibility can put that philosophy to test on the basis of simple and clear criteria. I think that this willingness to be put to test secures a moral advantage for idealism over materialism.

I can, however, posit that there are no Democritean atoms. Hence, I am able to declare that the circumstance “large space, short time” is substantial. Berkeley’s merit is that he has contributed to the claim “present = short time”, which is essential for the new wording of his own thesis. Let us engrave in our mind: the claim that finite extension is not infinitely divisible and the claim that to be is to be perceived are two claims of which coexistence is not accidental in Berkeley’s philosophy.

We have seen: the thesis “to be is to be perceived” highlights the importance of “large space, short time”. Contrary to this, the two claims: “there exist Democritean atoms” and “things are everlasting” deny the importance of “large space, short time”. That line of thinking does not question the universality-attitude of our mind. Since this is a deep feeling of humans, Berkeley’s philosophy is foreign to us.

## 5. Conclusion

Idealist philosophy is nothing but a bold resort to a radical strategy aimed at answering the question: what should be done with naive materialism? According to that strategy, all substantial elements of our initially encountered worldview are declared to be nonuniversal. The message of total nonuniversality may have no convincing power since it stands in opposition to the basic attitude of human beings. It stands in opposition to the deep belief of our understanding in its own universal nature.

What is the job of idealist philosopher, who is forced to wage such an uphill struggle? His or her job is to point out that the materialist standpoint must be defeated because of a small mistake.

There is a rupture of fundamental importance on the time continuum. This rupture is exposed by the following question: what should we mean when we refer to the moment of now? Hume and Hegel pounce on that mistake, which is the claim that “present = extensionlessness”. Out of absence one cannot build anything—this applies even to extension.

To grasp the distinction between materialism and idealism better, I must paint two grand pictures, where the key words are: *marching* on the one hand and *turning over* on the other. Materialists are marching from their starting point, naïve materialism toward an imagined “scientific worldview”. The further they get from their starting point, all the more they speak of naïve materialism in terms of contempt.

Contrary to this, idealists appreciate our natural world view highly. This is a consistent system—they say. The fault is only a tiny circumstance, which is the definition of the moment of now as extensionlessness. This qualifies itself a sufficient reason why the one consistent system should be turned over into another consistent system. The latter is called idealism with the message: total nonuniversality.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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