

Reading Assignment 4: Criticisms of Abstract Ideas

Required Readings:

- Introduction to Berkeley [1998].
- Section 1.1.7 of Hume [2003].
- Reread pages 67-68 of Shapiro [2000].

Questions:

- Suppose you present an argument that you believe constitutes a proof of the proposition, “The sum of the interior angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles.” An isosceles triangle is pictured in the diagram accompanying your proof. Would Berkeley think your proof is valid for all triangles, including non-isosceles ones? Why or why not?
- Explain in your own words what Berkeley might mean when he says that a single word may stand for multiple ideas.
- Explain in your own words what Hume might mean when he claims, “tis contest, that no object can appear to the senses; or in other words, that no impression can become present to the mind, without being determined in its degrees both of quantity and quality.”
- Explain Frege’s criticism that abstract units cannot be counted.

References

George Berkeley. *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*. Oxford University Press, New York, 1998.

David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Courier Dover Publications, 2003.

Stewart Shapiro. *Thinking about mathematics: The philosophy of mathematics*. Oxford University Press, 2000.