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Human corporeality in the Philosophy of George Berkeley
Lidská tělesnost ve filosofii George Berkeleyho

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Vedoucí práce: doc. James Hill, Ph.D.

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V Praze dne: *Podpis:*

Abstract

George Berkeley is an immaterialist. He conceives the material substance as an unnecessary and internally contradictory concept. Therefore, he posits monism of the spiritual substance. Nevertheless, he does not deny that the physical world, and the human body with it, is in some sense real and existing. It is not a mere illusion.

This thesis attempts to show two things. First, that Berkeley believes the human body is real and that it is an idea or, more precisely, a collection of ideas which is, with its existence, dependent on the activity of spiritual substances. Secondly, that Berkeley differentiates this body from other ideas and objects in the physical world by connecting it more intimately to the human nature, which is primarily constituted by the finite spiritual substantiality.

This thesis, however, also reveals that the topic of the human corporeality, especially in regard to his spiritual monism, is insufficiently thought through by Berkeley.

Keywords: George Berkeley, immaterialism, human corporeality, human body, limited spiritual substances

Abstrakt

George Berkeley je immaterialista. Materiální substanci považuje za zbytečný a vnitřně rozporný koncept, a postuluje proto monismus duchovní substance. Přitom ale nepopírá, že fyzický svět a také lidské tělo jsou, alespoň v nějakém slova smyslu, reálné a existující. Nejsou pouhými přeludy.

Tato práce se snaží ukázat dvě věci. Za prvé, že Berkeley považuje lidské tělo za něco, co je reálné, totiž za ideu či spíše konglomerát idejí, jehož existence je zcela závislá na aktivitě duchovních substancí. Za druhé, že toto tělo odlišuje od ostatních idejí a předmětů ve fyzickém světě tím, že jej těsněji váže na lidskou přirozenost, která je konstituována konečnou duchovní substancialitou.

Práce se však také snaží ukázat, v jakém ohledu není téma lidské tělesnosti v kontextu Berkeleyho duchovního monismu dostatečně domyšleno.

Klíčová slova: George Berkeley, imaterialismus, lidská tělesnost, lidské tělo, konečné duchovní substance

Contents

List of abbreviations

Berkeley's works

ALC *Alciphron or the Minute Philosophers* (1732), in *Works* III (references are to Dialogue and section number).

DHP *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), in *Works* II (references are to page number).

DM *De Motu* (1721), in Berkeley, George. *De Motu; and The Analyst*, with introductions and commentary by Douglas M. Josseph, Dordrecht – Boston – London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992 (references are to section number).

PC *Philosophical Commentaries* (1707–1708), in *Works* I (references are to entry number).

NTV *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), in *Works* I (references are to section number).

PHK *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), in *Works* II (References are to section number. Passages from the Introduction are denoted with an additional "Intro" mark).

SI *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries concerning the Virtues of Tar-Water and divers other Subjects connected together and arising One from Another* (1744), in *Works* V (references are to section number).

TVV *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733), in *Works* I (references are to section number).

Works *The Works of George Berkeley*, vol. I–IV, edited by Luce, A.A. and T.E. Jessop, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1948–51.

Other

Essay John Locke: *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), abridged with an Introduction and Notes by Pauline Phemister, New York: Oxford University Press, 2008 (references are to a book number, chapter and paragraph).

"Mem: Carefully to omit Defining of Person, or making much mention of it."[1]

Entry from *Philosophical Commentaries* by George Berkeley.

[1] PC 713.

1. Introduction

To this day, Berkeley's philosophy remains the subject of heated discussions. Numerous commentators still debate about the idiosyncratic thoughts of this Irish thinker. Most of them admit tough time assenting to the doctrine for which Berkeley is remembered the most: immaterialism. As David Berman notices, thinkers still describe themselves as adherents to the teachings of certain modern philosophers and therefore call themselves Kantians, Hegelians or Lockeans.[2] However, rarely do we encounter somebody who calls himself a Berkeleian. Attesting for the intriguing nature of Berkeley's philosophy is also the well-known anecdote where Samuel Johnson responds to immaterialism by exclaiming *„I refute it thus!"* and as a demonstration of his refutation, he kicks a tree.

Berkeley's philosophy is riddled with puzzlements which lead commentators and philosophers to such desperate acts. This thesis will hopefully bring us closer to understanding Berkeley's thoughts in a more sympathetic way by exploring a topic which is mostly ignored by him and consequently also left unexplored by his commentators: human corporeality. At first, such project seems to be quite foolish. After all, the essence of Berkeley's immaterialism is the denial of the material substance, an entity which many philosophers deem as crucial for supporting the existence of all what is material and physical, including the human body. Berkeley, however, thinks of the concept of material substance as unnecessary and internally incoherent. Everything that materialists comprehended as existing on the grounds of material substance and inhering in it becomes dependent solely on the spiritual substance. Hence, this thesis will have two primary goals:

i) show that the non-existence of the material substance did not stop Berkeley from asserting that the physical world – and with it the human body – is, at least in some sense, real;
ii) uncover the specific nature of the human body in immaterialism and its relation to the spiritual substance.

[2] Berman (2009), p. 69.

a. Limitations of this thesis

In his works, Berkeley does not frequently use the term 'human body', nor does he systematically discuss its meaning. Thus, we encounter three problems when we try to give an account of the human corporeality in his philosophy.

First on the list is the scarcity of references regarding our topic in Berkeley's work. Even when Berkeley discusses human corporeality, he usually does so in the context of an altogether different subject. It is necessary to confront ourselves with the question: why? Was it a topic that was not relevant to him or did he ignore the problem just because he did not know how to solve it? There is probably a little bit of truth in both, but there seems to be one even more important reason: Berkeley, coming from his denial of material substance, was afraid that employing terms traditionally used in relation to this substance, such as the human body, would confuse his readers and that it would not help them in understanding his immaterialism. Indeed, in the course of this thesis, such view will gain some merit, especially when seen in the context of Berkeley's treatment of the physical world.

Secondly, since his rare mentions regarding human corporeality are scattered and applied in various contexts, we cannot precisely pinpoint the manner in which Berkeley would have approached this topic. Did he think that our bodies differ from other living beings? Was the question 'Why do I consider something as my body?' relevant to him?

Thirdly and lastly, due to the two problems stated above, we will be in danger of pursuing venturous speculations. The danger of abstracting his thoughts from the whole of his philosophy is real and it can lead us astray. Given this fact, we must stay vigilant and not fall into hypothesising which would take us away from the heart of Berkeley's philosophy.

b. Primary sources and how to approach them

David Berman divides Berkeley's work into five different periods of his life.[3] Three of these periods (and works written in them which are stated in parentheses) will be relevant for this thesis: 1709–1713 (*An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision, Principles of Human Knowledge, Three Dialogues*), 1732–1735 (*Alciphron or the Minute Philosopher, The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*) and 1735–1753 (*Siris*).

[3] Berman (1994).

An additional source to these works will be the so-called *Philosophical Commentaries.* These are private notes which Berkeley wrote before publishing his official writings (in the years 1707–08) and which have been published long after he had passed away. Commentators still discuss whether these notes present Berkeley's mature views or are only preliminary accounts of not yet fully-developed topics. Hence, the use of these entries from *Philosophical Commentaries* should always come with some caution, even if in recent years Berkeley's interpreters use them more frequently and freely.

A similar question concerns the more scientifically oriented works: *New Essay on Theory of Vision* or *De Motu* (written in 1721, not listed above). Because of their nature, these works, at first, seem rather unimportant to the whole of Berkeley's metaphysics. However, throughout this thesis, it will become evident that they are highly relevant to the metaphysical layers of Berkeley's philosophical system.

The last note on Berkeley's writings has to do with the often neglected and ridiculed *Siris*, which was primarily conceived as a medical publication demonstrating that tar-water is a panacea. As Fraser notes, given the nature and subject of this book, thoughts here are *"presented in aphorisms, unsystematic and often mystical, or (...) buried under references to antiquated physics and metaphysics. The gold has to be separated from the dross."*[4] The tendency of neglecting *Siris* stems not only from its enigmatic character and odd subject matter but from how it does not seem to fit the rest of Berkeley's thought. It is mainly because of *Siris* that some commentators, for example, A. A. Luce and G. A. Johnston, consider Berkeley's work as less coherent in its overall nature. They take the previous writings of Berkeley to be, at least in some respects, irreconcilable with *Siris* and other later writings. Johnson claims that in Berkeley's writing *"(...) value and significance of sense-perception has declined, and in Siris it is regularly disparaged."*[5] Fraser similarly notes that since the period of middle years Berkeley *"was exchanging the Lockian for the Platonic point of view"* and that in *Siris* he reaches an *"all-comprehensive Idealism"*, ditching the importance of the sense-perception, favouring the tools of reason.[6]

On the other hand, there are some commentators who try to show that even if the focal point of Berkeley's philosophy has changed, the earlier and later works are at their

[4] Fraser (1909), p. 198.
[5] Johnston (1923), p. 253.
[6] Fraser (1909), pp. 155, 175.

core philosophically compatible.[7] These commentators believe that Berkeley merely shifted his attention to more reason-grounded ways of attaining knowledge and that it is the specific goals of *Siris* which cause its distinct character. It stands in such contrast to earlier works of Berkeley because these works mainly concentrate on the perceptual reality but they do not necessarily contradict what is stated in *Siris.* I find myself often sympathising with those who interpret Berkeley in this way and I think that in considering the concept of human corporeality in immaterialism we will see that the compatibility of *Siris* and earlier works does seem, at least in some ways, very plausible. Nevertheless, the problem of *Siris* and how it relates to other Berkeley's writings should not be trivialised. So when quoting passages from *Siris,* we should be aware that these are not considered, at least by some, as belonging to the core of Berkeley's earlier immaterialism.

c. Structure of thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters, including the introduction. In the second chapter we will consider some general remarks about Berkeley's philosophy. We will go through his motivation, method, and introduce one possible interpretation of his ontology.

In chapter three it will be shown that Berkeley regarded human body as an existing physical thing and also that he saw it as essential to perception.

The fourth chapter will consider how the fundamental constituent of Berkeley's world, spiritual substance, relates to the human body.

In the fifth and final chapter, we will try to bring all the pieces together and try to assess not only what the human body was for Berkeley, but if and what role it played in the overall framework of his spiritual monism.

[7] Cf. Roberts (2007), Daniels (2011).

2. Motivation, method and ontology of immaterialism

In this chapter, I will attempt to answer three questions: what *motivated* Berkeley to adopt the doctrine of immaterialism, what was the *method* of his philosophy and lastly what were the *constituents* of his ontology.

Simultaneously, I will elaborate on three terms Berkeley considered pivotal to immaterialism. Reality, existence and thing:

> *„Nothing seems of more importance, towards erecting a firm system of sound and real knowledge, which may be proof against the assaults of scepticism, than to lay the beginning in a distinct explication of what is meant by thing, reality, existence (...)"*[8]

These two triads of questions and terms do not necessarily correspond but they all unfold in three aspects of Berkeley's philosophy which I posit as fundamental.

First, it is his quest for reinstating trust in the intuitively perceived and known reality, motivated by what he saw as sceptical tendencies of some philosophers.

Second, his employment of the term 'existence', which was, according to him, previously used as a foundation for erroneous philosophical methods.

Finally, he posits two things constituting reality: ideas or perceptions; spirits or perceiving spiritual substances. In the following paragraphs, I will present these three aspects one after the other.

a. Motivation of immaterialism

Berkeley was concerned with atheism and scepticism. The tendency to explain the universe through mechanistically oriented science and the declining authority of the church led numerous thinkers to denounce the concept of the universe based entirely on the omnipotent spirit. Being deeply religious, Berkeley was troubled by this. Even more concerning to him were the views of some philosophers who tried to defend the Christian concept of the universe, yet ended up not far from the claims of sceptics, saying that we do not perceive what is truly real. As he noted: *"Upon the common principles of philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived. And we are taught to distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our*

[8] PHK §89.

senses."[9] These 'philosophical sceptics' troubled Berkeley the most, precisely because they made us think of senses as imperfect and unreliable, not delivering the *"utmost accuracy"* and *"perfection"* of knowledge.[10] Berkeley was dissatisfied with such views:

> *"Hence it is, that we see philosophers distrust their senses, and doubt of the existence of heaven and earth, of everything they see or feel, even of their own bodies. And after all their labour and struggle of thought, they are forced to own, we cannot attain to any self-evident or demonstrative knowledge of the existence of sensible things. But all this doubtfulness, which so bewilders and confounds the mind, and makes philosophy ridiculous in the eyes of the world, vanishes, if we annex a meaning to our words, and do not amuse us our selves with the terms absolute, eternal, exist, and such like, signifying we know not what."*[11]

In short, Berkeley held that the chimaera of the absolute human knowledge about sensible things led philosophers into the grave mistake of distinguishing between the perceptions of things and their real nature.

i. The problems of material substance

According to Berkeley, the most damaging offspring of this chimaera is the concept of the material substance, especially that of Locke. Presumably the prime target of Berkeley's criticism,[12] Locke honoured the empiricist dogma *nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuerit in sensu* and thought that everything that is perceived is particular at its core.[13] Besides acknowledging spiritual substance, he posited material substance as a support of the whole perceivable world. Due to its substantial being, such material substance can be neither particular nor sensible. However, if we perceive only sensible particulars, how are we to acquire any knowledge of such a thing? Locke tried to solve this by ascribing a representative function to what we immediately perceive, ideas,

[9] DHP 167. Cf. PHK §101.
[10] PC 838a.
[11] PHK §88.
[12] Prevailing tendency is to see Locke as the only target of Berkeley's criticism. As David Berman shows (Berman, 1972), Berkeley clearly criticises also other philosophers as well: Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz et al. Cf. Jolley (2013), p. 237.
[13] Essay, II, I, §2–3.

presenting them as a vehicle filled with information about such substance. Berkeley has many problems with this solution. We will summarise his issues with it in two points.

First, Berkeley agrees with Locke on the fact that we perceive only what we immediately perceive – ideas: "*When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while contemplating our own ideas."*[14] However, he dismisses that this immediate perception is only a shadow veiling the real nature of things. For if Locke claims this, his conclusion must be that we know the material substance only indirectly. As Berkeley asserts: *"as we attribute a real existence to unthinking things, distinct from their being perceived, it is not only impossible for us to know with evidence the nature of any real unthinking being, but even that it exists."*[15] Locke, as Berkeley understood him, put a veil of perception between us and the real things: we do not know the material substance and "*see only the appearances"*.[16] Berkeley holds that such sceptical stance towards the senses eventually leads to atheism: *"We should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach."*[17]

The second problem concerns the relation between the material and spiritual substance. They need to be distinct in their essences, so how should we explain the fact, asks Berkeley, that an idea is both perceived by the spiritual substance while existing in a material substance which is neither perceived nor perceiving?[18] Moreover, the problem of the relation between the material and the spiritual substance concerns the paradigms of both substances: nature and God. They are supposed to be both substantial, thus characterised by the usual substantial specifications – unity, independence, simplicity – hence they should be co-eternal. However, Berkeley being deeply convinced of God's omnipotence, cannot accept such reasoning. Therefore, he names the material substance *"great friend (...) to atheists in all ages"*.[19]

ii. Berkeley's response to 'philosophical sceptics'

The postulation of material substance coerced philosophers into abstracting from the sensible and led them into atheistic conclusions. Berkeley sees this as a mistake and

[14] PHK §23.
[15] PHK §88. Cf. PHK §40.
[16] PHK §87.
[17] PHK Intro §3.
[18] PHK §7.
[19] PHK §92.

calls for a return to knowledge about the world as if it contained only one type of substance: spirit. Mechanistic philosophers who conceive nature as an end-in-itself, disturbed Berkeley. He is convinced, that the world's grandeur and harmony *„cannot be accounted for by mechanical principles, by atoms, attractions, or effluvia"* and that it stands as a proof of *"one wise, good, and provident Spirit, which directs and rules and governs the world."*[20]

In light of this, Berkeley is clearly a philosopher who tries to reinstate certainty in the perceived reality. As he himself notes *"(...) it is evident that every vegetable, star, mineral, and in general each part of the mundane system, is as much a real being by our principles as by any other."*[21] Even if his task of convincing people about the plausibility of his monism eventually fails, we need to remember that he never doubts the reality of what we perceive and he wants to prove that the perceptions are not mere appearances or representations of some unknown nature of the world. He believes that the best way to pursue such a goal is denouncing the existence of the material substance and postulating immaterialism.

b. Method of immaterialism

In his writings, Berkeley repeatedly induces us to consider his own thoughts and to recognise that what he tries to prove should be intuitively clear to anyone.[22] I presume that this intuitiveness lies at the core of Berkeley's method. It urges us to base all knowledge about what exists on our direct access to the world which we have as rational and perceiving beings, i.e. as spiritual substances.

i. Reason and perception

As it is clear from his commandment *"we should speak with the vulgar and think with the learned"*,[23] Berkeley thinks that his philosophy can somehow unify these two different approaches to knowledge. At first, however, they seem irreconcilable. The vulgar calls for some form of naïve realism and places importance on immediate perception, while the learned stresses the importance of abstraction and forming universal knowledge. Initially, it might seem that Berkeley belongs to the first group, accusing

[20] ALC, IV, §14.
[21] PHK §36. Cf. PC 305, 427.
[22] Cf. PHK Intro §10, PHK §8, §27, DHP 168.
[23] PHK §51. Cf. PC 207.

philosophers of complicating our way to knowledge, or as he puts it, raising a dust and the complaining that we cannot see.[24] Moreover, the presumption that we should *"depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a superior principle, to reason, meditate"* appals Berkeley.[25] At the same time, he does not deny the importance of the universal. On the contrary, he says that: *"(...) all knowledge and demonstration are about universal notions, to which I fully agree (...)"*.[26] What was important for him was the fact that universality should not be seen *"in the absolute, positive nature or conception of anything, but in the relation it bears to the particulars signified or represented by it (...)"*.[27] All the universal knowledge – even science – remains important in immaterialism, but it must be grounded in particular knowledge and beware of the unnecessary postulation of the material substance.

Hence, Berkeley's method clearly tries to encompass both the particular – the perception – and the universal – the reason. We need to remember that Berkeley denounced the chimaera of absolute human knowledge about perceptions and with it its product, the term object 'as it is in itself', the "*real nature*" distinguished "*from that which falls under our senses"*.[28] The reconcilement of reason and perception is possible precisely because Berkeley does not aim for some hidden reality behind the perceived. He aims for knowledge which links the reason and the perception with what we, as spiritual substances, intuitively know. I believe this is what Berkeley tries to explicate when he says that *"I know with an intuitive knowledge the existence* ***of other things*** *as well as* ***my own soul****.* [my emphasis]*"*.[29] As it is clear from the conclusion of his so-called master argument, he despised the method which overshadows the intuitive approach to the world:

> *"It is very obvious, upon the least inquiry into our own thoughts, to know whether it be possible for us to understand what is meant, by the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves, or without the mind. To me it is evident those words mark out either a direct contradiction, or else nothing at all."*[30]

[24] PHK Intro §3.
[25] PHK Intro §1.
[26] PHK Intro §16.
[27] PHK Intro §15.
[28] DHP 167. Cf. PC 832.
[29] PC 563. Cf. PHK §40, PC 547.
[30] PHK §24.

In summary: absolute knowledge applied in the context of perception, not towards God and spiritual substance, is a mere illusion which wrongly presupposes that we can achieve knowledge of the world by other means than immediate perception and direct knowledge which are sources that are intuitively accessible to us as spiritual substances.

ii. Conventionalist account of truth

For Berkeley, attempting to step outside of our intuitive knowledge is problematic because in reaching for something as the absolute knowledge, we are, as the materialistic philosophers thought, supposed to abstract and think outside of our thinking. We are supposed to think without thinking and to have a birds-eye view of our mind without our mind.

As Margaret Atherton points out, Berkeley tries to deny that *"at least some of our ideas, some of the ways in which we are aware, can be abstracted from the context of awareness in which they occur, so that they can be used to describe this extramental reality which is said to have been responsible for the ideas we have."*[31] The point of Berkeley is thus not the fact that it is logically impossible to prove the existence of something without our mind.[32] What he tries to say is that even if it were possible we could not know anything about it because we cannot step outside of our particular thoughts and perceptions: *"Hence 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."*[33] We just cannot abstract the perceiving from the sensed and the thinking from the thing which is thought.

Of course, the philosophers who postulate material substance are those who try to ground knowledge in what is abstracted from perception and by this, according to Berkeley, they are making *"you dream of those unknown natures in everything"* and *"distinguishing between the reality and sensible appearances of things"*.[34] Berkeley believes that we are defined by our particular and limited existence and that we do not have the tools for non-direct and non-particular knowledge. Consequently, we cannot truly distinguish between something which we know by perception, the supposed

[31] Atherton (1993), p. 300. Cf. Eaton (1987), p. 443 and Peacocke (1985), p. 21, Brunton (1970), p. 277.

[32] The precise meaning of the impossibility stated here by Berkeley is debatable. Presumably, Berkeley does not mean logical impossibility (see PHK §15). Cf. Pappas (1980) and Lennon (1988).

[33] PHK §5.

[34] DHP 229–230.

'appearance of things', and that which is merely presupposed to be existing, the 'real nature' of things. Berkeley instructs us to turn back from such abstract thoughts to what we immediately or directly perceive and know.

Interestingly, he does not appear to be troubled by the fact that such method of knowledge enables only relative or conventional concept of the truth about perception. He acknowledges *"the scantiness of my comprehension"*,[35] and thus appears to be satisfied that the truth we can reach is always conventional or indeterminate.[36]

As we shall see, the knowledge about spiritual substances will have somehow different status. Still, it will be also intuitively known, although not from perception. Thus, it remains vital for us to see Berkeley as emphasising the role of how we exist in the world and employing the method of intuitiveness in regard to what we know, be it from perception or reason. According to him, it is pure nonsense to abstract entirely from the particularity in which we are necessarily entangled. Spiritual substance is the only substance needed and on the grounds of it we can understand the whole world.

*

Let us set the scene for Berkeley's ontology by putting these remarks in a broader context. Berkeley's central claim was the fact that the perceptions *"(...) have no existence distinct from being perceived, and cannot therefore exist in any other substance, than those unextended, indivisible substances, or spirits, which act, and think, and perceive them (...)"*.[37] I believe that this is the core of Berkeley's essential principle: '*esse est percipi*'.[38] All that exists must be related to what is perceived and as we shall see, to what perceives. Consequently, philosophy should be concerned only with *what* we perceive, and, of course, with *how* we perceive it and *who* we are as perceivers. The answers to these questions, as will be shown, are known intuitively to us, either from perception through senses or "*inward feeling or reflexion*"[39] of reason.

So even if it might seem that Berkeley circumscribes the term 'existence' – because he dismisses the existence of the material substance – it is also important to see that he simultaneously broadens it: his realism considers as existing even that what philosophers denote as mere appearances of things.[40] Hence, it should not surprise us that

[35] PHK §81.

[36] Such concept of truth does not necessarily discredit science and other human universal knowledge, cf. Eaton (1987), p. 444.

[37] PHK §91.

[38] PHK §3.

[39] PHK §89.

[40] DHP 234.

Berkeley claims that *"(...) the existence of an idea consists in being perceived"*[41] and denies the following *"To exist is one thing, and to be perceived is another."*[42] What is known – either through reason or senses – is always in some sense existing. As Berkeley says: *"idea of existence"* is *"brought into the mind by all the ways of sensation & reflection"*.[43] Hence, everything that exists must be traceable to particular spiritual substances and their perceptions: *"The question between the materialists and me is not, whether things have a real existence out of the mind of this or that person, but whether they have an absolute existence, distinct from being perceived by God, and exterior to all minds."*[44]

Therefore, we should not search for demonstrative proof of Berkeley's principles. We would be judging Berkeley through the lens of the methods he refused. We would omit the fundamental and intuitively known truths about the world of which plausibility Berkeley was deeply convinced.

We should conclude these remarks by quoting a paragraph from the outset of *Principles* which serves as a summary of this intuitive approach:

> "*Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that (...) all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind,* ***that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit:*** [my emphasis] *it being perfectly unintelligible and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. To be convinced of which, the reader need only to reflect and try to separate in his own thoughts the being of a sensible thing from its being perceived."*[45]

[41] PHK §2.
[42] DHP 175. Cf. PC 491.
[43] PC 670.
[44] DHP 235. The term 'person' is of great importance to the conclusion of this thesis. We should only note that here and other places it clearly alludes to something as a human nature.
[45] PHK §6.

c. Ontology of immaterialism

Consequently, our task will be to show how Berkeley builds his ontology on such methodology and on the intuitive knowledge of the spiritual substance and its perceptions. It is there, Berkeley claims, where we come to meet two *"entirely distinct"* entities.[46] These two entities are ideas, which we perceive, and spirits, which are the thing *"wherein they* [ideas] *exist, or, which is the same thing, whereby they are perceived; for the existence of an idea consists in being perceived."*[47] As we saw, both must be known intuitively.[48] From this follows, as some commentators notice, that Berkeley's principle must be broadened into *esse est percipi et esse est percipere*.[49] What exists is either perceived – ideas, or perceives – spirits.

The relation between these two entities remains a subject of heated discussions which revolve around three interpretative possibilities. Some take Berkeley as working with the traditional concept of substance, pursued by Descartes and Locke, taking it as a substratum that supports ideas that inhere in it. Other pursue the Humean view on which the spirit exists as a mere bundle of perceptions, barely retaining its status as a substance in the traditional meaning of the word. The third group interprets Berkeley along the lines of Neo-Platonism and Leibniz, where substantiality consists in its activity. In the following paragraphs, I pursue the third interpretative approach, also because it corresponds with my interpretation of Berkeley's motivation and method as it was laid out above.

i. Passivity and activity distinction

So how precisely should we distinguish between ideas and spirits? Let us start with noting that Berkeley's metaphysics conceives the activities of spiritual substance – thinking, knowing, perceiving and willing – as essentially identical. Their common denominator is the pure fact that the substance is active through them. It is therefore important to see Berkeley's principle of existence as encompassing not only perception but all the activities of spirits. It does not surprise us then that he also states his principle in the following form: *"existence is percipi or percipere or velle i.e. agere"*.[50] So when

[46] PHK §3.
[47] PHK §3.
[48] PC 563. Cf. PHK §40.
[49] Ayers (1993), p. 101. Cf. Roberts (2007).
[50] PC 429. Cf. PC 829, 578, PHK §98.

Berkeley dismisses that idea cannot exist apart from its perception, we should understand that this means activity in general. It is in this sense that Berkeley says the following: *"All things that exist, exist only in the mind, that is, they are purely notional."*[51]

Upon such realisation, the distinction between ideas and spirits can be formulated on the grounds of the former being the object and the latter being the act. Berkeley seems to point towards this by differentiating them through the terms of activity and passivity: *"The former* [spirits] *are active, indivisible substances: the latter* [ideas] *are inert, fleeting, dependent beings, which subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in minds or spiritual substances."*[52]

The prime example of this distinction is causation: ideas, being passive, are the effect, whereas spirits, being active, are the cause. Indeed, in *Principles* Berkeley says that *"the cause of ideas is incorporeal active substance or spirit"*.[53] He views causality as consisting in a will – cause is *"a being which wills when the effect follows the volition"*[54] – and he sees the activity of spiritual substances, be it perceiving or thinking, as volitional: *"volition is an act"*.[55] Thus, it is not surprising that he thinks of spirit as the only possible cause of things: *"there are no causes (properly speaking) but Spiritual, nothing active but Spirit"*.[56] Spirit, taken to be a will at its core, is the only efficient causal agent in the universe. There is *"no active power but the will",* meaning spirit.[57] So at the root of the causal relation of idea and spirit is the fact that one is the act, which wills, and the other is the content of that act; it is willed. As Berkeley notes, one cannot be without the other: *„when we talk of unthinking agents, or of exciting ideas exclusive of volition, we only amuse ourselves with words."*[58] Berkeley's methodology is in full effect here, proving that we cannot abstract from our particular existence: we cannot think without thinking something or think something without thinking.

Hence, when Berkeley says that sensible qualities exist in the spirit by the way of idea[59] or that *"ideas are in the mind only in the sense that they are perceived by the mind"*,[60] he hints at the fact that the relation between idea and spirit, here in the specific

[51] PHK §34.
[52] PHK §89. Cf. PHK §25, §27.
[53] PHK §26.
[54] PC 499.
[55] PC 621.
[56] PC 850.
[57] PC 131.
[58] PHK §28.
[59] PHK §49.
[60] PHK §91.

case of perception, should be understood as a relation between the active act and passive object – content.

The objection of solipsism arises, for ideas seem to be just the contents of our mind. Berkeley, however, holds that in one particular kind of spiritual activity, perception, the spirit remains largely passive which indicates that he is not the sole cause of the contents present in such activity. Therefore, there exists some other spirit which causes them: *"For if I am conscious that I do not cause them* (ideas)*, and know that they are not the cause of themselves, both which points seem very clear, it plainly follows that there must be some other third cause distinct from me and them."*[61] Clearly, the ability to distinguish between what we cause and what we do not is a crucial component of Berkeley's epistemology. By pointing out this knowledge of ourselves, he avoids the dangers of solipsism and manages to prove the existence of other spirits, which cause the passively perceived ideas. These then constitute the public "objective" reality. Two questions arise:

i) How do things exist when they are not perceived by us?
ii) How do we remain active spirits even when we passively perceive?

We will answer both questions in the third chapter, but first, we must deal with another essential theme of immaterialism, the elucidation of which seems to be long overdue: self-knowledge. Clearly, it is indispensable to immaterialism.

ii. Notions and knowledge about spirits

Knowledge about ourselves and spirits cannot rely on ideas or perceptions, for we know that passive ideas are entirely distinct from active spirits: *"I have properly no idea, either of God or any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert, as our ideas are."*[62] Perceptual knowledge of minds is impossible and is compared to having sensible knowledge about round square.[63] Berkeley also seems to be pointing out the empirical realisation that we cannot perceive the activity of other spirits. We rely on circumstances surrounding their doings. Imagine we do not know that there is something as a hands-free device. We see a person with something in his ear loudly

[61] TVV §21.
[62] DHP 231. Cf. PHK §27.
[63] PHK §136.

exclaiming phrases and from that we infer that such person is probably crazy. We do not understand the circumstances of his activity correctly, so we err in the pursued activity. Simply said: we cannot access the mind of that gadget-wearing person directly and know that in fact he is talking to someone real. We cannot perceive his actions as such.

Berkeley is convinced that having no idea about spirits *per se* does not keep us from knowing them since there is one spirit which existence and activity finite spirits can know: their own. Berkeley claims that we do not perceive ourselves but that we have something which he calls the notion of ourselves, acquired by some *"inward feeling or reflexion"*.[64] The concept of notion is highly problematic and we cannot treat it here thoroughly. However, we can interpret it as a direct intuitive knowledge about something. In the specific case of our mind, Berkeley holds the following: *"I have some knowledge or notion of my mind, and its acts about ideas, inasmuch as I know or understand what is meant by those words. What I know, that I have some notion of."*[65] Under notion, Berkeley understands direct knowledge about our activity precisely through this activity itself. Simply put: notion makes us directly aware of something non-explicable present in our nature, e.g. some form of activity or act.

Such concept of self-knowledge is evidently a critique of Descartes's way of treating it, which is pursued along the lines of perception and which would be problematic for Berkeley, because we should know ourselves as the perceiving and the perceived at the same time.[66] If Berkeley posited the two-termed concept of knowing ourselves, he would have to distinguish between the act and its content. Eventually, it would mean that we always see only the effect – the passive inert ideas – not the cause, the active substance.[67]

This direct knowledge of the spiritual substance is fundamental for all knowledge because it not only explicates what substantiality means, but it secures the knowledge of other critical notions: cause, activity and even the ethical concepts.[68] It is also one of the fundamental truths and intuitive realisations which Berkeley is sure of:

> *"How often must I repeat, that I know or am conscious of my own being; and that I my self am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas. I know that I, one and*

[64] PHK §89.
[65] PHK §142.
[66] Cf. Hill (2016), p. 116–119.
[67] PHK §136.
[68] S §335.

the same self, perceive both colours and sounds: that a colour cannot perceive a sound, nor a sound a colour: that I am therefore one individual principle, distinct from colour and sound: and for the same reason, from all other sensible things and inert ideas."[69]

Hence, perception is crucial to knowledge about ideas while notional reflexion is the key to the knowledge about active substance.

iii. Linguistic background of Berkeley's ontology

One last problem arises. If we know other spirits only through their effects, how can we presuppose that there is some spirit behind them? Berkeley explicitly says that we acquire such knowledge through reason.[70] He has one last trump up his sleeve which we have heretofore omitted and which shows his theory of perceiving and knowing in a different light.

It is no accident that Berkeley begins his *Principles* with the denial of abstract general ideas *and* a postulation of his conception of language. Besides the intuitive method of his philosophy, he also holds that we can know things mediately: through the methods of linguistics. Indeed, he thinks of the whole universe as one divinely constituted language signifying and mediating something entirely different from the signs contained in it, namely rules of these signs, i.e. the syntax of this language caused by the spiritual substances.[71]

The relation of the sign and the signified, constituted on mere convention originating in the concurrence of two things, imitates the relation of cause and effect: *"Ideas which are observed to be connected together are vulgarly considered under the relation of cause and effect, whereas in strict and philosophic truth, they are only related as the sign to the thing signified."*[72] Indeed, this is the danger of language, for it is *"entirely the result of custom and experience",*[73] but we think of the relation between words and the things they signify as necessary. This danger is balanced by its flexible usability: *"Nothing is easier than to define in terms or words that which is incomprehensible in idea; forasmuch as any words can be either separated or joined as*

[69] DHP 233–34.
[70] PHK §89.
[71] NTV §147.
[72] TVV §13.
[73] NTV §104.

you please, but ideas always cannot."[74] Be it the language of humans or God, it is always pregnant with endless possibilities of denoting things. Important is, that it should always reflect the meaning mediated by the signs and should not take them as brokering the necessary causal relation: *"I will be still for retaining the words. I only desire that men would think before they speak & settle the meaning of their words."*[75]

The flexibility of language also ensures that it has a variety of applications. Berkeley thinks that words, or signs in general, can be used to signify things which are not intuitively known by sense or reason, e.g. the activity of spiritual substances. So thanks to the knowledge about ourselves, words which *"denote active principle, soul, or spirit*" are not insignificant *"(...) since I understand what is signified by the term I, or myself, or know what it means, although it be no idea, or like an idea, but that which thinks, and wills, and apprehends ideas, and operates about them."*[76] So even if we do not know the other spirits as we know ourselves, their activity and existence can be signified to us: *"The ideas that are in every man's mind ly hidden & cannot of themselves be brought into the view of another. It was therefore necessary for discourse & communication, that men should institute sounds to be signs of their ideas (...)".*[77]

Let us return to the case of the man with the hands-free device which showed us that we infer his activity from the perceived ideas which are circumstantial to his activity. Berkeley thinks that the fact that we know that there is an active spirit behind these ideas is based on what such ideas signify.[78] We do not see the activity itself. It is only mediated – signified – to us. So if we perceive an idea passively, we conclude that there must be some other spirit causing it.[79] However, this idea remains only a mediator, effect or sign, of the spiritual cause: *"Hence the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge of my ideas; but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs."*[80] The instance is analogical in the case of knowing nature – and ultimately God.[81] We passively acquire some perceptions, thus we infer that they are constituents of divine language. Eventually, we infer from them some rules, e.g. natural laws, and in the ideal case also the existence

[74] *Works*, III, p. 330, §48.
[75] PC 553.
[76] ALC, VII, §8.
[77] *Works*, II, 128, §12.
[78] PHK, §148.
[79] DHP, 212.
[80] PHK §145.
[81] PHK §147.

of God himself.[82] The fact remains that these perceptions do not signify any necessary relations: *"I see the effects or appearances: and I know that effects must have a cause: but I neither see nor know that their connexion with that cause is necessary."*[83] Thus the knowledge of nature consists of uncovering its laws, its syntax which signifies us the activity of the substance behind nature, i.e. God.[84] Consequently, the whole world is termed a *"natural language"* by Berkeley, instituted by the *"Author"* of this nature.[85]

The key to understanding why Berkeley thought he is in a better position with his "linguistics" than Locke with his representational conception of an idea lies precisely in Berkeley's concept of a sign which ultimately signifies constituents that we directly and intuitively know: ideas and spirits. Consequently, ideas are expressions and effects of some activity but they should not be taken as some imperfect images or deficient representations of what is ultimately true. We know what is behind them, at least categorically, because we know how causality works due to the self-knowledge about ourselves.

In contrast, Berkeley claims to have no such knowledge about the material substance: *"I have no immediate intuition thereof* [matter] *(...) whereas the being of myself, that is, my own soul, mind or thinking principle, I evidently know from reflexion."*[86] Berkeley simply believes that it is the intuitive knowledge about ourselves on which we should build our knowledge. The linguistic structures of the universe ultimately refer to such knowledge because they also stand on the shoulders of a spiritual substance – God – which is categorically same as we are. We are a spirit, but the spirit is also *"that active principle, that supreme and wise spirit, in whom we live, move, and have our being."*[87]

In conclusion, Berkeley holds that thinkers hitherto treated essential terms of philosophy poorly because they ignored the fundamental nature of our immediate knowledge – perceptive and notional – and they misused the mediated knowledge – words and signs.[88]

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[82] The activity of inferring God is somehow more complicated since it consists of perfecting our notion of spirit (DHP 231–232).

[83] TVV §30.

[84] S §251.

[85] TVV §40.

[86] DHP 233.

[87] PHK §66.

[88] Interestingly enough, Berkeley eventually dismisses the existence of material substance because it is perceived neither immediately nor mediately (DHP 221).

In the end, Berkeley's project of unifying the branches of knowledge and turning our attention to what we intuitively know is two-fold:

i) showing that we know ourselves and things which we immediately perceive;
ii) removing the "mist", "veil" or "curtain" of misused words.[89]

d. The question of the human body in immaterialism

It became clear that Berkeley thinks that his denial of material substance does not deny the existence of a physical world and hence he can claim: *"the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny, is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance."*[90] Even the eyes and hands Berkeley speaks of will remain real in some sense, although they are not substantially defined: *"sensible body rightly considered, is nothing but a complexion of such qualities or ideas"*.[91] His broadened principle of existence ensures this.

A question comes to mind: is our body somehow different from other sensible bodies which we perceive? At first, it seems, that all that is sensible is just ideas, nothing more. I will try to show that the picture is far more complicated than that. In the next chapter, it will be shown that the human body plays a crucial role in our perception. In the fourth chapter, we will explore the question of the causal power we have over our body, and if our body relates to us in the same way as other passively received ideas; in short if its causal dependency differs from other perceived ideas. We will return to the central question in the last chapter and show that there are two main aspects in which our body differs from other ideas of the perceived world, e.g. from a perceived cherry or tree.

[89] PC, 642. Cf. PHK Intro §24, PHK §144.
[90] PHK §35.
[91] DHP 241.

3. The human body and perception

At the end of the last chapter, we said that the human body is an idea. An idea, as we saw, is that which is perceived. Thus, we should explore how we perceive this idea of our body. Before we proceed, however, we must deal with the two questions we postponed in the second chapter:

i) How do things exist when they are not perceived by us?

ii) How do we remain active spirits even when passively perceiving?

a. The spiritual and the physical world

By now, it should be clear that the answer to the first question cannot be formulated on the grounds of grasping something unperceived or unknown by spirits. Berkeley, however, is well aware that humans regularly think of perceived objects as existing even if they do not perceive them, and offers a solution in placing the ultimate existence of objects in the mind of God: *"(...) there is an omnipresent eternal Mind, which knows and comprehends all things, and exhibits them to our view in such a manner, and according to such rules as he himself hath ordained, and are by us termed the Laws of nature."*[92] Further, he backs his claim with the example of a tree which is not perceived by any finite spirit and concludes that this tree exists only due to God's activity and that it exists in *"the infinite mind of God."*[93] Does this mean that God perceives passive ideas? If not, what is then this "real tree"?

i. Active God and the inert world

Needless to say, the idea of a tree cannot be known by God as we perceive it. First and foremost, owing to the inertness of ideas *"Nature (...) cannot produce any thing at all"*.[94] The perceived reality consisting of ideas is entirely passive. Even though we commonly speak of ideas as possessing causal efficiency, e.g. 'fire heats' and 'arm moves something', there is no causality in them. God, however, is entirely active, sometimes denoted as pure activity by Berkeley,[95] so how is it possible that the physical realm which

[92] DHP 231.
[93] DHP 235.
[94] PHK §150. Cf. PHK §22.
[95] *"Purus actus"* (PC 701).

consists of passive ideas is somehow inhering in him? How can God know or think something passive if he is wholly active?

Berkeley solves this by distinguishing between our and God's knowledge about the reality. We, as finite beings, perceive only minor fragments of it. God, on the other hand, knows everything:

> *"All objects are eternally known by God, or which is the same thing, have an eternal existence in his mind: but when things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them; then are they said to begin a relative existence, with respect to created minds."*[96]

Since Berkeley thinks of perceiving as passive, God cannot be, strictly speaking, perceiving.[97] However, even if he does not know *"nothing by sense",* he knows all things.[98] Hence, he does not perceive ideas and our perception of them, rather he is somehow aware of them: *"God may comprehend all Ideas even the Ideas which are painfull & unpleasant without being in any degree pained thereby."*[99] Unfortunately, throughout his work, Berkeley fails to coherently formulate what this comprehension specifically means. Nevertheless, he rejects the representationalist account, firmly claiming that God's knowledge about 'true nature' of objects should not lead us into conceiving our reality as consisted of mere appearances:

> *"I have no objection against calling the ideas in the mind of God archetypes of ours, but I object against those archetypes by philosophers supposed to be real things, and to have an absolute rational existence distinct from their being perceived by any mind whatsoever (...)"*[100]

The content of God's knowledge cannot be the inert ideas. He is unreservedly active so they cannot be known by him as ideas or determinate objects. It follows, that God knows ideas by knowing the causal structure behind them.[101] In short – and in a

[96] DHP, 252. They are also termed as *"infinitely known"* by God (DHP 235), or *"subsisting in the mind of the eternal spirit"* (PHK §6).

[97] It must be noted that Berkeley is not entirely coherent in his terminology and that he often speaks of God as perceiving. Nevertheless, there are also passages where he explicitly distinguishes the ways ideas exist in our and in God's mind (PHK §6).

[98] SI §289. Cf. DHP 241.

[99] PC 675. Cf. PC 812.

[100] *Works*, II, 292.

[101] Some interesting views are to be found in Daniel (2008), p. 211, Winkler (1985), pp. 92, 96, McCracken (1979), p. 289, Foster (1985), p. 100.

greatly simplified manner – our world of perceptions resides in its original form, as some causal structure, in God's mind. Such structure serves as a "blueprint" for our passively perceived reality which we comprehend only in scantiness of the signs. Paradoxically then, the actual perceived reality is only *"relative existence, with respect to created minds"*, while the absolute reality is the *"eternal existence"* which is known by God.[102]

For a better understanding of the relation between our perception and God's knowledge of the world, we must show how our perception works. Expanding on this, we will answer the second question posed at the outset of this chapter: how can our perception be passively determined by ideas, yet active in the sense that it is the spirit which exercises it?

ii. Perception as synthesising activity

The spiritual substance must be always active.[103] However, if it only passively receives in perception, in what sense does it remain active? Its activity, in such cases, appears to consist of the fact that it organises that which it passively perceives. In Berkeley's own words: *"(...) certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple."*[104] As an object, an apple consists of assembled ideas originating from different senses. These ideas are immediately sensed by their corresponding sense organs or immediately suggested by such sensations. Together, they can form one object, one perception. Therefore, the perceived object is not, strictly said, one idea – it is a collection of ideas. As Berkeley summarises: *"(...) a cherry, I say, is nothing but a congeries of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by various senses: which ideas are united into one thing (or have one name given them) by the mind (...)"*[105]

What unifies these individual ideas into objects? God is their ultimate cause in the sense that he maintains their eternal existence in their causal form, but as was shown above he does not perceive them as unified objects, collections of ideas. Thus he cannot be the cause of their unity. It is in the mind of finite spirits where this actual and relative existence of ideas lies.[106] Finite spirits actively subsume the particular ideas under specific objects. Berkeley builds this almost Kantian manner of forming the experience

[102] DHP 252. Cf. PC 293a.
[103] PHK §98.
[104] PHK §1.
[105] DHP 249.
[106] DHP 252.

on his concepts of unity and number. He asserts that these concepts are not intrinsic to what is sensible, for we impose them on it.[107] We form the distinctiveness and identity of perceptions precisely because the number is *"entirely the creature of the mind, considering either an idea by it self, or any combination of ideas to which it gives one name, and so makes it pass for an unit. According as the mind variously combines its ideas the unit varies (...)"*[108] It is in this respect that we need to understand the statement of Philonous in *Three Dialogues* that we cannot decide whether two ideas are entirely identical. For acts of individual spirits, which shape the perceptions, are theirs and theirs only.[109] In short, perceptions are

i) **composed of** immediately perceived or suggested ideas, which are expressions of God's causal structure; owing to these, the world is made perceptible to us;
ii) **constituted by** the perceptive act of a finite spiritual substance which synthesises these perceptions in particular collections of ideas, i.e. objects.

Admittedly, Berkeley explicates this distinction in his own terms: *"To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. (...) Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding."*[110] We can conclude that when presented with particular perceptions, we remain passive; we do not choose what we sense. By synthesising these perceptions, we exercise our activity as spirits.[111] While sensing, we are passively receiving, and while perceiving, we exercise our activity in shaping the experience.[112] So it remains true that we are always active.

Such solution, as Foster shows, is not unproblematic, *"for there seems to be only a fine dividing line between saying that there is a physical world, but one which is wholly created by the organization of human experience, and saying that there is no physical*

[107] NTV §109.
[108] NTV §109. Cf. PC 110, PHK §12.
[109] DHP 247.
[110] TVV §42.
[111] For more elaborate discussion about this topic see Hill (2016). Interesting is also the question if this implies some kind of blind agency of spirits, see Winkler (1985).
[112] Berkeley does not sufficiently distinguish between what is traditionally termed as 'sensations' and 'perceptions'. Sometimes he invokes the distinction between "perceptions of sense", that is the passive sensations, and "inferences of reason", that is the act of inferring (TVV §16). He also does not sufficiently specify the precise scope of human influence on the synthesis of objects. Nevertheless, he recognises that God still plays major role in it because he supplies the ideas coherently and habitually connected to other. This he holds evident from the fact that there is general coherence in how men objectify world (TNV §144, §152). He also notes that the ideas *"have some connexion in Nature, either with respect to co-existence or succession"* (DHP 245).

world, but our experiences are organized as if there were."[113] The trouble results in one of the most urgent questions regarding Berkeley's immaterialism: if what is ultimately real is only signified by ideas, are such ideas properly existing at all? Berkeley broadens the term 'existence', and it would be interesting to ask whether he broadens it too much or not. This question is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis and we must shift our focus to the central question of this chapter: how do we perceive the idea of human body?

b. Perception of human corporeality through touch

As was already established, the human body is a collection of ideas. Moreover, this specific collection of ideas does not seem to be like the others, for Berkeley claims that as finite spirits we *"are chained to a body"*[114] Such statement indicates that Berkeley reflects that we are, in some way, embodied. Out of all Berkeley's works, only *Essay* (and partially *De Motu*) seems to treat this topic of the embodiment. Although the *Essay* is a treatise on the sense of vision, it is laden with mentions of another sensory faculty: touch. In the next paragraphs, we will expand on Berkeley's thoughts about this sense and its role in the perception of our body.

i. The heterogeneity of the visible and the tangible ideas

Berkeley's primary goal in *Essay* is to refute a theory of vision which claims that the eye perceives distance, magnitude and position and that it does so with the help of geometry. Berkeley was perplexed by this, saying that it is *"humour making one see by geometry"*[115] and asserted that the eye does not play any role in the perception of distance. Vision, consisting of a *"(...) line directed end-wise to the eye, it projects only on point in the fund of the eye, which point remains invariably the same, whether the distance be longer or shorter."*[116] The mere fact that the point on the retina cannot reflect any three-dimensional information – for it is composed only of unorganised lights and colours – persuaded Berkeley into asserting that vision does not immediately perceive distance. The ideas of vision only suggest – mediate, signify – the immediate ideas that carry the information about three-dimensional space and come from a different sense: touch.[117] In

[113] Foster (1985), p. 104.
[114] DHP 241.
[115] NTV §53.
[116] NTV §2.
[117] NTV §25.

other words, that *"what is seen is one thing, and that which is felt is another"*.[118] The distinction between mediate and immediate ideas[119] – between the signified and the signs themselves – is crucial for grasping the gist of Berkeley's argument. Let us expand on it.

Remember the hands-free man? We initially thought that we see his activity as such when we did not distinguish between the sign and the signified. Berkeley noticed that we do the same thing not only with spoken language, for we act *"as if we heard the very thoughts themselves"*,[120] but more importantly, with ideas: we often act as perceiving the signified, i.e. the activity of spirits, even though we perceive, strictly speaking, only the sign. Berkeley illustrates this by comparing words and signs to counters used in a game. Even though the players at the table do not need to have a specific value in mind when betting such and such counters, they use it as if they did.[121] The overall point of this example is to illustrate how easily the lines between the signs and the signified get blurred. Another example of this blurry relation is Berkeley's notorious example of an arriving coach. We claim "I hear a coach" and we mean it precisely as we tell it. Berkeley disagrees. We do not really hear the coach itself. We merely immediately perceive the sound which goes 'clap-cla-clap' and we infer from it that there is a coach approaching: *"It is nevertheless evident, that in truth and strictness, nothing can be heard but sound*: *and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested from experience."*[122]

So what if we eventually learned that the sound was made by somebody who was thumping coconut shells against each other in the specific rhythm of a horse going at a trot? Berkeley holds that this error can emerge because we mixed up the sign and the signified, the immediate and the mediate. If we take into account exclusively what is perceived immediately, we cannot err in our statement about the sound, precisely because the immediately perceived is preordained by God and directly perceived by particular sense-organs. As Berkeley says: *"our ideas are adequate"*. In contrast, *"our knowledge of the Laws of nature is not perfect & adequate."*[123] We suppose that such and such sound necessarily suggests a coach but having only limited knowledge of the state of affairs and causal workings of the universe, we suppose wrongly. We err in thinking that our inferring, i.e. our perceptual activity, is inherent to the immediately perceived.

[118] NTV §49.
[119] Cf. TVV §9–10.
[120] NTV §51.
[121] ALC, VII, §8.
[122] DHP 204.
[123] PC 221. Cf. NTV §74.

Similarly to the example with the coach, when we perceive distance, we think that we perceive it by vision alone. However, we only infer from the ideas of colour and light to the three-dimensional ideas of magnitude, position and distance: *"Having of long time experienced certain ideas, perceivable by touch (...) to have been connected with certain ideas of sight, I do upon perceiving these ideas of sight forthwith conclude what tangible ideas are, by the wonted ordinary course of Nature like to follow."*[124] In short: signs can stand for each other even if they are heterogeneous. Especially the visible ideas function quite well as a tool of foretelling what will be perceived by touch. Thanks to them, we swiftly transition from what we see to what we are about to feel.[125] Such ability to predict eventually causes us to forget that what we see is composed only of light and colours and that vision does not immediately perceive the three-dimensional objects. We forget that the two entirely heterogeneous sets of ideas, the visible and the tangible, are merely associated due to their frequent coexistence.

Summarised, the immediate is what we sense through particular sense organs and it is made perceptible to us by God: *"In short, those things alone are actually and strictly perceived by any sense, which would have been perceived, in case that same sense had then been first conferred on us."* [126] The mediate, on the other hand, arises when the mind deducts; *"(...) when from a frequently perceived connexion, the immediate perception of ideas by one sense suggests to the mind others perhaps belonging to other sense, which are wont to be connected with them."*[127]

Interestingly enough, these deductions, which go beyond the immediately perceived, bring us closer to the knowledge of the causal structure underlying the world, to the knowledge of the syntax defining the divine language. At the same time, they lead us into a territory of mediated knowledge where we ordinarily and gradually forget the origins of our ideas. Berkeley thought that this precisely happened with the case of vision: people forgot that the three-dimensional information comes initially from touch.

[124] NTV §45.
[125] NTV §145.
[126] DHP 204.
[127] DHP 204. Of course, such distinction remains problematic. Further thoughts on this are to be found in Dicker (1985) and Schwartz (1994).

ii. The body as the sense-organ of touch

If Berkeley places such emphasis on touch, it is somewhat odd that he does not sufficiently expand on what are the specific objects of it. We shall present some passages from *Essay* which at least indicate what were the contents of the touch.

Berkeley says that the visible magnitude constantly changes: a building is becomes smaller and smaller as we move away from it. Eventually, it can be as small as the size of our thumb. Contrariwise, the tangible magnitude remains constant: *"(...) man placed at ten foot distance is thought as great as if he were placed at a distance only of five foot: which is true not with relation to the visible, but tangible greatness of the object: The visible magnitude being far greater at one station that it is at the other."*[128] The tangible size becomes the measure of objects serving as a constant and less varied size of the thing. Furthermore, touch provides us with information about distance and position of things. These are crucial to our preservation. Endowed with the visible ideas, we can foretell what our immediate ideas of touch would be if we adopted such and such position in the world:

> *"(...) the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It is by their information that we are principally guided in all the transactions and concerns of life."*[129]

Geneviéve Brykman notices that this makes the tangible extremely significant for our practical life. She even interprets Berkeley as making the distinction between *affects-ideas* and *things-ideas*, citing passages where Berkeley talks about pain and pleasure as being the essential referents of our self-preservation. Brykman thinks that touch being in affective contact with the world – providing feelings of pain and pleasure – is of primary importance for us since other senses *"are not directly involved in the preservation of the finite sensible creature."*[130] Indeed, Berkeley himself expresses such thoughts:

[128] NTV §60. Cf. NTV §61.
[129] NTV §147.
[130] Brykman (1985), p 132.

"We regard the objects that environ us in proportion as they are adapted to benefit or injure our own bodies, and thereby produce in our minds the sensations of pleasure or pain. Now bodies operating on our organs, by an immediate application, and the hurt or advantage arising there –from, depending altogether on the tangible and not at all on the visible, qualities of any object: ***This is a plain reason why those should be regarded by us much more than these*** [my emphasis] *(...)"*

He further backs this up by saying that visible ideas do not affect bodies. Therefore:

"when we look at an object, the tangible figure and extension thereof are principally attended to; whilst there is small heed taken of the visible figure and magnitude, which though more immediately perceived, do less concern us, and are not fitted to produce any alteration in our bodies."[131]

Thanks to vision – and presumably other senses – we can stretch behind the immediate tangible experience and foretell what will or will not affect us. In the end, however, the sense of touch serves as the ultimate referent of this affective contact with the world. In comparison with the mere *"light and colours"*, the tangible is more vivid,[132] and it provides us with the *"hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance"*.[133] Touch, also named as *"feeling"*,[134] seems to be far more important for our perception of the world than other senses. Brykman goes even further in claiming that Berkeley thought that *"all our sensible ideas are means for the preservation of one set of tangible ideas"*, our body.[135] Of course, the bold move Brykman makes is her proposition of distinguishing between what she calls 'affect-ideas' and 'things-ideas'. Such move presents Berkeley as having some hierarchy of senses, where touch assumes the superior position over the other senses precisely because through it we perceive ourselves as corporeal beings.

Whatever we make of Brykman's argument, it is undeniable that in the *Essay* Berkeley tried to enact some hierarchy of senses. Only the immediate affective ideas of

[131] NTV §59.
[132] PC 243.
[133] PHK §1.
[134] PC 136.
[135] Brykman (1985), p. 134.

touch enable us to feel the world directly, and through them we understand some ideas as our body, while the ideas of other senses serve only as languages for the tangible.[136] Touch, and the ideas it perceives, not only helps us to tell apart our body from the rest of the ideas perceived, but it helps us ¨to feel the body and to orientate ourselves in the world.

c. Touch: indispensable to extension and object-perception

The boundaries of our body are outlined to us also through another set of tangible ideas: the proprioceptive sensations. These are not mere additional cues in our distance perception – the motion of our eyes and head, again termed as *"perceived by feeling"*,[137] or *"sense of feeling"*,[138] and also the straining of our eyes signalling greater or lesser distance[139] – for it is due to proprioception that we acquire immediate ideas about the motion of our body. These ideas are essential to the information about the distance of things:

> *"I say, neither distance nor things placed at a distance are themselves, or their ideas, truly perceived by sight. This I am persuaded of, as to what concerns my self: and I believe whoever will look narrowly into his own thoughts and examine what he means by saying he sees this or that thing at a distance, will agree with me that what he sees only suggests to his understanding* ***that after having passed a certain distance, to be measured by the motion of his body, which is perceivable by touch*** [my emphasis]*, he shall come to perceive such and such tangible ideas which have been usually connected with such and such visible ideas."*[140]

Ignoring Berkeley's neglect of the distinction between the various roles of touch – proprioception of our body, touching outward objects and affective feeling of pain and pleasure – it is evident that touch assumes another crucial role: it is essential to how we perceive spatiality.

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[136] Berkeley does not explicitly consider the relation of other senses to the sense of touch. It seems to be the case that they are even less important for him than touch or vision. It is clear, however, that they do not provide three-dimensional informations (NTV §46).

[137] PHK §145.

[138] TVV §66.

[139] NTV §27.

[140] NTV §45.

i. Motion and extension

Berkeley rejects Newton's absolute space or motion,[141] conceiving these concepts as relative to the perception of finite spiritual substances.[142] Interestingly, he holds that this relativity is contingent on the perception of our body:

> *"When therefore supposing all the world to be annihilated besides my own body, I say there still remains pure space: thereby nothing else is meant, but only that I conceive it possible, for the limbs of my body to be moved on all sides without the least resistance: but if that too were annihilated, then there could be no motion, and consequently no space."*[143]

Hence the perception of space depends on the perception of motion which is exercised by some body: *"no motion can be understood without some determination or direction, which itself cannot be understood unless besides the moving body, our own body or some other is also understood to exist."*[144]

Berkeley believes that if we are to conceive something as extended, it must bear some relation to our bodies, which we immediately sense through proprioception of motion. Without such sensing, space would be non-existent:

> *"We may sometimes be deceived by the fact that when in imagination we suppose all other bodies to be removed, we still suppose our own body to remain. (...) Nevertheless if we consider the matter more attentively, it will be clear that we conceive first a relative space marked out by the parts of our body, secondly, the fully free power of moving our limbs impeded by no obstacle, and nothing beyond this."*[145]

Clearly, Berkeley tries to draw attention to the fact that the passed distance of body *"measured by the motion of his body, which is perceivable by touch"* is constitutive of our relative space.[146] Once again, tangible ideas assume an essential role in how we organise our experience and in how the collection of ideas conceived as the human body

[141] DM §53.
[142] PC 270, 622, NTV §137.
[143] NTV §16.
[144] DM §58. Cf. NTV §117, DM Qu. §12.
[145] DM §55. *"Space not imaginable by any idea receiv'd from sight, not imaginable, without body moving (...)"* (PC 135). Cf. PC 96, 876.
[146] NTV §45.

defines the distinction between us and the outer world. Other senses may supply us with useful information,[147] but it is the proprioceptive touch that eventually makes the extensionally defined reality possible because it provides us with immediate ideas needed for the constitution of it. A question looms: is the role of touch in such organisation indispensable?

ii. The case of being without touch

We can close our eyes and not see, but can we perceive without touch? We surely cannot close 'the eyes of the touch'. Does this mean that a creature lacking touch is impossible? There is one passage where Berkeley entertains the idea of a pure intelligence, or creature without the sense of touch. After some deliberation he concludes that this creature would not *"(...) judge as we do, nor have any idea of distance, outness or profundity, nor consequently of space or body, either immediately or by suggestion."*[148] Furthermore, it would have *"no idea of a solid, or quantity of three dimensions, which followeth from its not having any idea of distance."*[149] While the case of the blind man, repeatedly discussed by Berkeley, unveils the importance of vision – the blind person would not be able to have mediated ideas of touch, only in a limited fashion with the help of the white stick[150] – it also reveals that such a man would still understand the objectually-defined experience. In contrast, the creature without touch – the pure intelligence – would have no perception of space, for his ideas of touch, through which we perceive and thus constitute the body itself, would not be perceived at all. Finally, Berkeley dubs such creature *"pure spirit"*,[151] pointing out that it would have to be without perception.

This thought experiment has two problems. First, Berkeley himself admits that having a meaningful debate about such a being borders on impossibility because a complete disentanglement of the *"objects of sight from those of touch which are connected to them"*[152] is unrealizable. The second problem is that it serves Berkeley only as a proof of how geometry depends on the tangible ideas. He does not state that it is an experiment proving universal indispensability of touch to perception. The case can be

[147] PC 262.
[148] NTV §154.
[149] NTV §154.
[150] Important is to realise that the white stick does not become a part of his body, for he still feels the affective states only in his hand, not in the white stick *per se.*
[151] NTV §159.
[152] NTV §159.

made that he deliberately avoids such bold statements related to the topic of our embodiment for fear of inciting the thoughts of materialist philosophers in the minds of his readers.

Nevertheless, this does not mean we should give up the primacy of touch over other senses. We can introduce additional evidence for this. The organ of vision, the eye, claims Berkeley, is *"only in the mind"*[153] – it does not introduce us to any externality or extension.[154] Berkeley makes this explicit: *"For all visible things are equally in the mind, and take up no part of the external space: And consequently are equidistant from any tangible thing which exists without the mind."*[155] Touch constitutes the externality of our perceptions, thus also all the sensible bodies. This is also evidently what Berkeley means when he says that when we look at another eye, we do not see the visible eye, but the tangible eye. For it seems to be the fact that every time we perceive, even when we see, we perceive some extensionally defined object, having an ultimate referent in the immediate ideas of touch.

Admittedly, there is a paragraph in *Principles* where Berkeley explicitly says that these thoughts made in *Essay* should not lead us into *"vulgar error"*, thinking that we directly perceive something outside of our mind. By touch, we do not perceive ideas outside of our intuitive and immediate scope of perception: *"So that in strict truth the ideas of sight (...) do not suggest or mark out us things actually existing at a distance, but only admonish us what ideas of touch will be imprinted in our minds at such and such distances of time, and in consequence of such and such actions."*[156] Such statement, I believe, does not rebut my interpretation, for I have only asserted that the proprioceptive and affective ideas supply us with the immediate ideas of touch, which draw the line between our body and the external space. Further inferring about space and distance unfolds on the grounds of these perceptions but it already oversteps our immediate ideas. Indeed, when Berkeley says that we perceive the motion of our body, he says that it only suggests distance perceptions to us, it does not provide them immediately.[157] We do not immediately perceive the distance of objects that are not in direct contact with us, we merely infer it on the grounds of the tangible immediate perception. Thus the *"(...) man born blind being made to see, would at first have no idea of distance by sight (...) all*

[153] NTV §119.
[154] NTV §36.
[155] NTV §111.
[156] PHK §44.
[157] NTV §45.

would seem to be in his eye, or rather in his mind."[158] At first, such man could not use the ideas of vision as language signifying distance, because he would primarily have to connect them to the ideas of touch. Berkeley's view is that the external world distanced from us is only suggested to us, only corporeality we perceive immediately is through the affective and proprioceptive ideas of our body.

Thus, it should not surprise us that in *Principles* Berkeley explicitly states that visible ideas are only *"marks and prognostics"* of the tangible ideas.[159] He does not mention other senses, but it seems plausible to presume that the other senses also remain subordinated to the immediate tangible ideas. They still serve as languages, signifying information crucial for our self-preservation and organisation of experience. Furthermore, as it is clear from *De Motu,* even later in his works Berkeley remains convinced that touch is indispensable for the concept of the object itself: *"Let extension, solidity, and figure be taken away from the idea of body (...) nothing will remain."*[160] Moreover, the proprioceptive is here clearly posited as critical knowledge for the determinants of our reality and corporeality: *"Motion never meets the senses without corporeal mass, space, and time."*[161] It is the proprioceptive ideas of touch which endow us with the essential and categorical ingredients of the perceived reality: corporeal mass, space and time. Only the touch presents the perceived reality as extended and object-defined.[162]

d. The human body and the finite spirit

Deprived of touch, the consequences for our perception would be grave. It is possible that we would not perceive anything at all, because we would lose our perceptual object-defined reality. Presumably, such loss would also have other grave consequences: *"Certainly if there were no sensible ideas there could be no soul, no perception, remembrance, love, fear, etc. (...)"*.[163] So if we assent to the conclusion that ideas are not formed without touch, our existence itself appears to be endangered.

The ideas of touch are still mere ideas, but it is primarily through touch that we exist in the world as perceiving and embodied beings. Again, this only illustrates how much the existence of finite spiritual substances depends on how and what they perceive.

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[158] NTV §41.
[159] PHK §44.
[160] DM §29.
[161] DM §43.
[162] For similar interpretation, see Warnock (1969), p. 49.
[163] PC 478. Further investigations into the term 'sensible ideas' and if it relates exclusively to the ideas of touch, connected with pain and pleasure, would be highly interesting.

We would usually presuppose that, because we have a body, we can touch something. Berkeley turns this view on its head, claiming that we cannot posit something as our body if we do not perceive it. His motivation for this is traceable to his methods laid out in the previous chapter: corporeality can be meaningful and acceptable for him only when we do not conceive it as an independent substance existing outside the spirit, but only as constituted through perception.

Consequently, the whole perceived reality of the world is heavily downplayed by Berkeley:

> *(…) when I speak of objects as existing in the mind or imprinted on the senses; I would not be understood in the gross literal sense, as when bodies are said to exist in a place, or a seal to make an impression upon wax. My meaning is only that the mind comprehends or perceives them (…)".*[164]

All that we perceive are only our ideas, which, strictly speaking, are in our mind, which itself is not extensionally defined,[165] for extension is also a mere idea: *"Every particular finite extension, which may possibly be the object of our thought, is an idea existing only in the mind, and consequently each part thereof must be perceived."*[166] Hence, Berkeley clearly denies the dualism of mind and body.[167]

Ergo, we are not affected by some self-sufficient external world. It is always the divine language which speaks to us. We then organise the ideas perceived through it into a collection which we call the human body:

> *"We are chained to a body, that is to say, our perceptions are connected with corporeal motions. By the Law of our Nature we are affected upon every alteration in the nervous parts of our sensible body: which sensible body rightly considered, is nothing but a complexion of such qualities or ideas, as have no existence distinct from being perceived by a mind: so that this connexion of sensations with corporeal motions, means no more than a correspondence in the order of Nature between two sets of ideas, or things perceived immediately."*[168]

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[164] DHP 250.
[165] DHP 249.
[166] PHK §124.
[167] DHP 208–209.
[168] DHP 241. Such statement certainly begs the question: if Berkeley means here two sets of ideas – sensations and corporeal motions – does it imply that touch is eventually two senses? One affective and

We perceive corporeal motions and sensations – proprioceptive and affective ideas – and connect them based on their coexistence. This results in the constitution of the collection of ideas which we call our own body. As Berkeley claims elsewhere, we *"are chained to a body that is to say, our perceptions are connected with corporeal motions."*[169] As it is clear from Berkeley's treatment of perceiving the existence of other embodied finite spirits, this body then becomes our own tool of expression and language incorporated in the divinely organised language: *"we do not see a man, if by a man is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do: but only such a certain collection of ideas, as directs us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion like to our selves, accompanying and represented by it."*[170]

In sum: thanks to touch, we immediately perceive some ideas as our body. These ideas are more important for us than others, mainly because we use them for our preservation and organise the rest of the perceptual experience around them.[171]

The interpretation presented here is a tentative one. It mostly depends on the emphasis I put on the above-introduced passages from *Essay* and *De Motu.* However, the overall point I tried to press – the primacy of touch over other senses in Berkeley's philosophy – should not be disputed. Nevertheless, the question of how big a role touch plays in the categorical specification of our perceptive reality remains up to discussion.

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The fact that human corporeality must be known and constituted on the grounds of perception, not reason, is irrefutable. Thus, the concept of being corporeal being does not seem essential to our substantiality. Our body is still only a collection of ideas, so, categorically speaking, Berkeley can claim that mind can exist without it: *"Extension tho it exist only in the Mind, yet is no Property of the Mind, The Mind can exist without it tho it cannot without the Mind."* To this Berkeley adds that he will treat this topic, the relation of body and mind, in future writings: *"But in Book 2 I shall at large shew the difference there is betwixt the Soul & Body or Extended being:"*[172]

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one proprioceptive? Such interpretation seems to be quite audacious and has no – as far as I am aware – support in Berkeley's writings.

[169] DHP 241.

[170] PHK §148.

[171] The question is what such preservation means. As shall be more clear towards the end of this thesis, it should be understood only as a preservation of the collection of ideas conceived as our body, not preservation of some ‚self', entire substantiality of a person.

[172] PC 878.

Since Berkeley never got around to writing the second part of *Principles*, which he alludes to here and which was supposed to clarify the relation between mind and body, I will try to undertake this task in the next chapter and also in the conclusion.

4. The activity of finite spirits in regard to their bodies

In the preceding chapter we concluded that the human body exists as an idea or a collection of ideas. Therefore, it does not seem to be a part of our substantiality. Even though it is "ours" more than other ideas, it is still a mere idea which is, at its core, perceived passively. This begs the question whether we are also active towards our body and if we cause anything in it. Hence the central question of this chapter is: does the finite spirit partake in the causation of the body's existence and movement?

a. The problem of moving our own body

Berkeley claims that we *"move our Legs our selves"*.[173] When he ponders on an episode where we interact with a specific object of perception, a tulip, he asserts: *"in plucking this flower, I am active, because I do it by the motion of my hand, which was consequent upon my volition."*[174] In *Siris,* he says that the cause of motion is the spirit,[175] which corresponds to his claim that we possess the power of moving our bodies *"since our minds may at will excite and stop the motion of our limbs, whatever the ultimate explanation of this may be."*[176]

Nevertheless, he simultaneously asserts that we are not the ultimate cause of these corporeal movements. Right after saying that we move our limbs, he adds that our will is only a particular and subordinate principle of this movement, *"which itself depends on the first and universal principle."*[177] On top of that, sinful acts are caused only volitionally according to Berkeley. They do not need to correspond to any actions in the perceived world:

> *„I farther observe, that sin or moral turpitude doth not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion. (...) Since therefore sin doth not consists in the physical action, the making God an immediate cause of all such actions, is not making him the author of sin."*[178]

[173] PC 548.
[174] DHP 196.
[175] SI §291.
[176] DM §25. Cf. PHK §147.
[177] DM §25.
[178] DHP 237.

Right when we think that this pinpoints Berkeley's definitive opinion about the causation in our bodily movements, he backtracks saying that we are the cause of them, even if only in a limited fashion:

> *"Lastly, I have no where said that God is the only agent who produces all the motions in bodies. It is true, I have denied there are any other agents besides spirits: but this is very consistent with allowing to thinking rational beings, in the production of motions, the use of limited powers, ultimately indeed derived from God, but immediately under the direction of their own wills, which is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their actions."*[179]

Such statements introduce us to a fundamental problem we will face in this chapter and which Berkeley himself had trouble explaining. Ideas – even our body – are passively perceived. If we claim that we move our hands, it is a contradictory statement: we actively cause what we immediately perceive as passive. On top of that, these ideas are causally dependent on God. So supposing that we bring about change in God's causal structure of the universe appears to be blasphemous. However, if we are not active in doing something, we cease to be the *"constantly willing"*[180] spirits, we cease to be substances. Once again, Berkeley appears to have trouble reconciling our and God's activity, this time concerning spiritual causation.[181]

b. Diverse interpretations of the finite spiritual activity

There are three main interpretative trends when it comes to resolving this problem. First, we can take finite spirits as only occasionally causal in the perceived world, as some kind of secondary causes. Secondly, we can conceive them as deprived of any causation. Thirdly and lastly, we can conceive them as genuinely active but only in producing their volitions. Examined under scrutiny, all of these solutions present us with further challenges, suggesting that Berkeley's treatment of causality is either incoherent or difficult to grasp.

[179] DHP 237.
[180] PC 791.
[181] Interestingly, he sometimes also posits the problem in terms of freedom, making clear that he tries to preserve both the freedom of finite spirits and God (TVV §6).

i. The occasionalist view

Berkeley himself discredits the option that we are only occasionally causal: *"We move our Legs our selves. 'tis we that will their movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch."*[182] Those who interpret Berkeley as an occasionalist take this entry from *Philosophical Commentaries* as representing a position which Berkeley later abandons, or which he simply cannot hold, since all the causal efficiency must be ultimately the doing of the omnipotent substance: God.[183] George Pitcher, an adherent of this view, argues that finite spirits only send a volitional "signal" to God that they want to move. Consequently, God can decide if such movement occurs or not. Pitcher asserts that Berkeley's acts of volition are nothing more than occasions for God's acting, *"God, being omniscient, and thus knowing that I will my arm to move in a certain way, produces in any suitable observers (including myself) ideas of sense that answer to the intended arm-movement."*[184]

However, such take on human causality seems to be incompatible with the epistemological framework of Berkeley's philosophy. It discredits the fundamental notion of ourselves as active that is key to understanding the concepts of activity and substantiality. Such knowledge is accessible to us because we are made in the image of God:

> *"And though I perceive Him* [God] *not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflexion and reasoning. (...) Farther, from my own being, and from the dependency I find in my self and my ideas, I do by an act of reason, necessarily infer the existence of a God, and of all created things in the mind of God."*[185]

Consequently, if we were only occasionally causal, it would result in the loss of knowledge about the world and its substantial constituents.

Further, on the occasionalist account of causation, Berkeley would have trouble explaining sinful behaviour. Finite spirits would be sinful only on the grounds of wishing, and the distinction between what is in their imagination and what manifests itself in the world would collapse. It would be rather absurd to claim that in God's eyes the mere wish

[182] PC 548.
[183] Admittedly, Berkeley toys with occasional thoughts (PC 699).
[184] Pitcher (1981), p. 222.
[185] DHP 232. Cf. DHP 231.

of murdering someone is equal to an actual murder. It seems even more absurd to hold that the true causal agent of a murder is God, deciding arbitrarily if the murder takes place or not.

Lastly, such interpretation of causation causes confusion in Berkeley's metaphysics. If we are only occasionally active we cannot be the genuine cause of organisation of ideas into objects. Hence, the inert objects of perception, ideas, would have to be somehow ascribed to God. On such view, Berkeley's philosophy becomes riddled with opinions he rejected, first and foremost with the thought that objects of perception exist in God's mind as some archetypal objects, being represented by their deficient appearances in our world.

ii. The inactive view

The second possibility is to assert that we do not act at all. Such is the position of C.C.W. Taylor who concludes that *"It is absurd to suggest that an omnipotent and benevolent God needs to be stimulated into action by any act whatever on our part, even the act of wishing that He should act."*[186] He holds that Berkeley's effort to equip the finite spiritual substance with genuine activity always ends in paradox, being incompatible with the notion of an omnipotent God.

This view, similarly to the occasionalist one, is also incompatible with Berkeley's epistemology. Without knowing ourselves as active substances, our ability to distinguish between what we passively sense and actively perceive would vanish altogether. Moreover, if we were to say that all we take as evidence of our activity, even our dreams, must be caused by the omnipotent spirit, the Christian God would become a caricature of himself. Not only does he plant dreams and illusions in our minds, he even makes us think that we cause them, even though we do not and cannot.

To sum up, such view of spiritual (non-)causality goes against the most basic foundation of Berkeley's philosophy. Indeed, this is a point Taylor wishes to make: to show that the problem of our activity as finite spirits is unresolvable in the framework of immaterialism which posits omnipotent God.

[186] Taylor (1985), p. 223.

c. Berkeley's distinction of causes

The key to understanding how we can remain genuinely active even with respect to the omnipotent God lies in recognising that Berkeley does not believe that we are true causes, in his terms *"proper efficient causes"*, of anything but our volitional states.[187]

Let us introduce an excerpt from a letter which Berkeley wrote to his frequent correspondent Samuel Johnson:

> *"Cause is taken in different senses. A proper active efficient cause I can conceive none but Spirit; nor any action, strictly speaking, but where there is Will. But this does not hinder the allowing occasional causes (which are in truth but signs); and more is not requisite in the best physics, i.e. the mechanical philosophy. Neither doth it hinder the admitting other causes besides God; such as spirits of different orders, which may be termed active causes, as acting indeed, though by limited and derivative powers."*[188]

Recognising that only a spirit is a true cause,[189] Berkeley terms the signs of the physical world – presumably the entire content of the divine language – as mere *"occasional causes"*. As a counterpart he posits *"proper efficient causes"* that are only *"where there is Will."* With such distinction, we are better equipped to resolve the above-introduced problem, for on its grounds we can postulate two crucial claims:

a) strictly speaking, we do not cause anything in the realm of divine language – physical world – save for what might be denoted as occasional causation;
b) nevertheless, we are active spiritual substances, for we cause our volitional states, we are active in exercising our will – in this sense, we are proper efficient causes.

We will explain both of these claims separately.

[187] As it is often the case with Berkeley, he remains incoherent in his terminology. In general, however, it can be claimed that he does not distinguishe between particular volitions and the will *„The Will not distinct from Particular volition."* (PC 615).

[188] *Works*, II, 280.

[189] PC 850, 499a.

i. The occasional causation

The first claim dismisses that we are properly and efficiently causal in the perceived world. Simply put, all the motions and changes in the corporeal are caused by God, thus they are not ultimately dependent on our will: *"(...) the will of man hath no other object, than barely the motion of the limbs of his body; but that such a motion should be attended by, or excite any idea in the mind of another, depends wholly on the will of the Creator."*[190] As we already saw Berkeley claim elsewhere, finite spirits have only limited powers in causing motions, powers which are ultimately derived from God.[191]

This is in accordance with Berkeley's assertion that the perceived motion of bodies is completely passive.[192] As he notes:

> *„The physicist contemplates the series or succession of sensible things, observing by which laws they are connected, and in what order, what precedes as a cause, and what follows as an effect. And in this way we say that a moving body is the cause of motion in another, or that it impresses motion on it, pulls it or impells it. In this sense second corporeal causes should be understood, no account being taken of the actual seat of forces, or active powers, or of the real cause in which they are."*[193]

Perceived motion is a mere sensible quality according to Berkeley, and sensible qualities are nothing but passive and inert ideas.[194] Again, these cannot be caused by us as they are not creations of our will.[195] So, the perception of motion is only an idea and since Berkeley thinks that causes, i.e. spirits, cannot be perceived, this leads him into conclusion that when we perceive motion we see only effects, not causes.[196]

Hence, when Berkeley says that the motion of our hand is only *"consequent upon my volition"*, breathing is the *"effect of my volition"* and smelling is *"consequent to all this"*,[197] he wants to alert us, that even though some motions are more intimately connected to our volitions, they are still only perceived as passive ideas, which are only

[190] PHK §147. Cf. SI §258.
[191] DHP 237.
[192] DM §49.
[193] DM §71.
[194] DHP 217.
[195] PHK §29. Cf. PHK §146.
[196] TVV §12.
[197] DHP 196.

effects, not causes.[198] There is no true activity in the immediately perceived ideas, even if they are part of a collection of ideas we call the human body. We only associate these perceptual motions and activities with the true activity, but understood correctly, these motions are not the *"real causes",* they are only *"second corporeal causes"*.

If we wanted to be sympathetic to Berkeley, we could introduce an empirical proof of this. Not only do we not precisely comprehend what is going on when a motion of a hand occurs – e.g. we do not understand the precise functioning of the nerves and muscles – but we also know that sometimes when we will our hand to move, it does not happen no matter how much we will it. It follows that we are not the proper efficient cause of our bodily motions. Furthermore, even when the motion we will occurs, it is never understood in its entirety by us for it is not ultimately dependent on us, rather it rests on the causal structure of the world as created by God. In this light, we should understand Berkeley's claim that God *"alone it is who* [is] *upholding all things by the Word of his Power (...)".*[199]

Of course, Berkeley realises that we can cause something in our body more easily than in other idea, for our body is some kind of instrument of our activity:

> *"Is it not common to all instruments, that they are applied to the doing those things only, which cannot be performed by the mere act of our will? Thus, for instance, I never use an instrument to move my finger, because it is done by a volition. But I should use one, if I were to remove part of a rock, or tear up a tree by the roots."*[200]

Still, such causality, presumably also some kind of *"second corporeal cause"* is learned only from experience. It is only a subordinate principle of motion:

> *"And that in these [thinking things] there is a power of moving bodies we have learned from our own experience, since our minds may at will excite and stop the motion of our limbs, whatever the ultimate explanation of this may be. This much is certainly agreed, that bodies are moved at the will of the mind, and it can thus quite appropriately be called a principle of motion;*

[198] PHK §32. Cf. PHK §25.
[199] PHK §147.
[200] DHP 218.

a particular and subordinate one indeed, and one which itself depends on the first and universal principle."[201]

Consequently, all perceived corporeal motions are part of the perceivable world caused ultimately by God, who must decide if we can or cannot occasionally, as secondary causes, be principles to some motion. In short: we are only occasionally active in the perceived world.[202]

ii. The proper efficient causation

So in what sense are we genuinely active? Are we proper efficient causes of something? It seems that in *Three Dialogues*, Hylas makes an attempt to answer this question: "*And indeed it is very plain; that when I stir my finger, it remains passive; but my will which produced the motion, is active.*"[203] Interestingly enough, Philonous seems to be quite satisfied with this claim, presumably because Hylas manages to characterise our true causation quite well, at least in saying that it is the will that is truly active. Indeed, this seems to be what Berkeley tries to express in his above-mentioned letter to Johnson: *"A proper active efficient cause I can conceive none but Spirit;* ***nor any action, strictly speaking, but where there is Will.*** [my emphasis]*"* Here and elsewhere – *"Volition is an act"*[204] – Berkeley clearly puts the will of spirits on the pedestal of true causality. Again, this is in accordance with his causally built monism, where only spirit as an active being is the genuine cause.[205]

What precisely does this mean for finite spirits? They must also have some volitions, some instantiations of their proper efficient causality. Being only occasionally active in the perceived sphere of our existence, it leaves us with only one possibility: we are active in our inner sphere, in the volitions and thoughts we produce.

Even if this appears to be a severely limited conception of human causality, we must realise how aptly it fits Berkeley's philosophy in general. Only the spiritual substance, distinct from ideas, is the true causal principle. So if we claim that true causality is manifested only through the will of such substance, we are saying, quite correctly it seems, that the spiritual substance is genuinely causal in exercising its nature.

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[201] DM §25.

[202] The precise form of occasionalism differs with interpretations. I propose more modest version, Robert McKim makes our intimate connection with bodily ideas more explicit, see McKim (1984), p. 192.

[203] DHP 217.

[204] PC 621. Cf. PC 131.

[205] PC 850.

Furthermore, we need to recall that we are made in the image of God, who is, at its core, nothing but pure activity, pure willing. His true essence dwells in his causation of the causal – or volitional – structure of the world, which is manifest to us in the form of the divine language. In Berkeley's words, the world is the *"Word of his Power"*.[206] Hence, in the framework of immaterialism, the claim that finite spirits, created in the image of God, are genuinely causal in willing and thinking does not ring as hollow as it might have appeared at first. They are, in comparison to God, limited beings, so it is not shocking to claim that they do not directly interfere with God's doing. Berkeley subtly hints at these boundaries drawn between the will of God and finite spirits: *"But whatever power I may have over my thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will."*[207]

Hence, our genuine causation seems to manifest itself in two different aspects: we can produce volitions that can become occasional causes of corporeal motions and we have power over our thoughts.

The former case of proper efficient causation is grounded in the spirit's willing to cause something, e.g. moving a hand. Producing such volition is what we truly cause. It is not the movement itself, it is only the volition which is sometimes reflected by God in his divine language. In regard to the corporeal movement, we remain only secondary, occasional causes, but what we will is dependent on us.

The latter case seems to consider the way in which we are active in perception. Berkeley says: *"The mind therefore is to be accounted active in its perceptions, so far forth as volition is included in them."* [208] Moreover, he asserts that: *"I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. (...) This making and unmaking of ideas doth very properly denominate the mind active."*[209] We actively cause the content of our thoughts as far as they are subject to our ability to imagine: we *"create in some wise whenever we imagine"*.[210] Possibly, Berkeley thought of imagination as of a tool used not only for creating phantasms but also for synthesising activity of perception itself. Hence, imagination is defined by ideas content-wise, but in its essence, it creates and maintains these ideas because it is a non-abstractable act of will, whose essence is the fact that it is willed and that we will it. It is simple because it does

[206] PHK §147.
[207] PHK §28.
[208] DHP 196.
[209] PHK §28. Cf. PHK §30.
[210] PC 830.

not depend on the subject-object relation, it is not a two-termed ability. As John Russell Roberts formulates it: *"We do not first will an image and then passively receive one. The imagining is exhausted in the willing of it. When the willing ceases, the imagining ceases, because, as Berkeley say, 'it is no more than willing.'"*[211] In this aspect, the activity of imagining certainly resembles the fleetingness of perception which is dependent on us in its organisation and unity.

Nevertheless, it is clear that Berkeley thought of our causal activity as being manifested not only in producing our own thoughts but also in willing something to happen in the world outside of our minds. Further considerations of what the true and proper efficient causation precisely means for Berkeley should be left, given the subject matter of this thesis, unattended. We can be satisfied with the conclusion that in producing corporeal motions we are only secondary, occasional causes that need God's act to cause these motions.

d. Activity is willing

In sum: spirits are genuinely active when they will something. Apart from occasional causal influence over their bodily movements, they do not cause anything in the perceived world. The problem which we aimed at resolving disappears: all spirits remain genuinely active but only in their corresponding field of activity – their minds, their wills – complying with their limited or eternal essence.

On such grounds, we can answer the question posited at the very beginning of this chapter – does the finite spirit partake in the causation that causes the body to exist and to move – with a 'no' and 'yes, in some sense'. First, we are not the cause of our bodies' existence. At most, we can be the cause of organising the passively perceived ideas of our body. As Berkeley says: *„The soul of man actuates but a small body, an insignificant particle, in respect of the great masses of nature, the elements, and heavenly bodies, and system of the world."*[212] Secondly, we are only occasional causes of moving our body. It is only in a limited manner that we participate in the order of ideas as occasional, derivative causes.[213] We produce volitions that sometimes, in accordance with the rules of the divine language, pierce, as occasional causes, into the world ordained by God.

[211] Roberts (2007), p. 117.

[212] ALC, IV, §5. By actuality Berkeley could be alluding to the fact that the actual existence of the idea-defined world depends on the relativity of perception exercised by finite spirits. Cf. DHP 252.

[213] PHK §30.

i. Advantages of such interpretation

Such interpretation has its benefits, mainly because it manages to preserve the nature of finite spirits as active beings which are substantially kindred with God. Saying that humans are created in the image of God not because they act upon ideas, but because they will something, seems to be, considering that the divine language is at its core only a volitional structure, coherent with Berkeley's philosophy. Moreover, this leaves Berkeley's epistemological cornerstone, the notion of ourselves as active substances, intact.

Further, placing our activity in the ability of imagination and forming the experience helps us to tell apart our and God's activity in perception. We form the object-defined reality. Consequently, God does not have to possess archetypal entities of objects in his mind. On top of this, the distinction between what is entirely "private" – perceptual knowledge created by our imagination, and what is in some sense "public" – causal structure ordained and made perceivable to us by God – holds.

Lastly, this allows us to say that God does not determinate and cause all. For finite spirits have power over their thoughts and volitions. Sometimes they are allowed to enter the realm of the divine language, sometimes not. However, they are still caused by our own will.

ii. Ambiguities of such interpretation

Such interpretation is not without flaws and shows how Berkeley's account of causation remains problematic, especially when it comes to the exact form of our causality being in accordance with that of God. These problems cannot be solved on these pages, they are only peripheral to the topic of this thesis. Let us only outline them in a concise manner.

First of all, it remains unclear in what relation our will stands to God's will. After all, he is the creator of the whole world and our causal freedom, even if manifested only

in our will and thoughts, cannot be entirely unrestrained by him. There must be some rules of thoughts, e.g. the impossibility of thinking a round square.[214]

Secondly, such interpretation shows that Berkeley is, at least in some sense, an occasionalist after all. For it seems that it is only the emphasis which he puts on the production of volitions as genuine causality that differentiates him from occasionalists. As Douglas M. Jesseph notes in his commentary to a passage from *De Motu* quoted above:

> „*So-called second causes are the finite bodies in the world which depend upon God (the first cause) for their existence. Second causes were traditionally interpreted as the means through which God acts in the world, since all events in the world are ultimately the result of God's will. The occasionalist doctrine held that second causes are actually not causes at all, but merely the „occasion" for God's action. Berkeley's doctrine here is thus very similar to the occasionalist thesis."*[215]

Thirdly, some accuse this concept of causality of counter-intuitiveness. Fleming, for example, notes that it is quite an audacious move from Berkeley to wholly remove the causal efficiency of humans from the physical world.[216] Fleming's puzzlement is understandable. However, with respect to the omnipotence of God, it is entirely plausible to assert that our power to cause something in the world which he creates is limited. Moreover, the intuitively known fact that we do not entirely comprehend the workings of our own body when it moves can be supported by the fact that our role as causal agents in such movements is constrained, e.g. by the natural laws. The difference with Berkeley is the fact that such laws and specifics of the ideas depend on a rational principle, God:

> *"A man with his hand can make no machine so admirable as the hand itself; nor can any of those motions by which we trace out human reason approach*

[214] Interestingly, if we would interpret the passage from the letter to Johnson differently, it could be argued that Berkeley distinguishes there between the only efficient and proper causation, God, and all the other causes which are, both in their corporeal and volitional willing, always limited. Indeed, his use of capital letters when concerning the only proper efficient cause – it is caused by *"Spirit"* or *"Will"* – seems to point to this. In some sense, this would complicate my interpretation. It would have to be discussed if there is some difference between volitional thoughts of finite spirits and occasional causes in the corporeal. Admittedly and with respect to the present subject matter, I leave this question open.

[215] DM §71. Contrary to this, there are some commentators who claim Berkeley cannot be an occasionalist, see Jolley (2013), p. 250.

[216] Fleming (2006), p. 415.

the skill and contrivance of those wonderful motions of the heart, and brain, and other vital parts, which do not depend on the will of man."[217]

Moreover, Berkeley's account of causation is quite intuitive in other aspect, for, as Sukjae Lee notes, the freedom which we have in our thinking seems incomparably lesser to bodily movements:

"Appearances to the contrary, I believe that when we will bodily movements, we do not enjoy the kind of freedom we have over our ideas of imagination. (...) For it is not the case that I can will any bodily movement and it will come about. At minimum, for the bodily movement to come about upon my willing it, it cannot violate what we identify as laws of nature."[218]

In the end, the accusations of counter-intuitive thoughts made by Berkeley ring hollow, because they more or less reflect the simple fact that we conventionally talk about causing bodily movements, even though we do not fully understand them.

Generally, however, it is clear that Berkeley's account of activity remains plausible only if he gives a reasonable and coherent explanation of what it means to be a limited spiritual substance and how precisely such substance interacts, even in its thoughts, with God.

e. The importance of spiritual reality and the activity manifested in it

We should conclude the present chapter by noting that the importance of the spiritual reality and God to Berkeley's immaterialism cannot be overstated and remains key to understanding it. The absolute and immediate dependence of finite spirits on God is evident even in the earlier more anthropologically-centred *Principles:*

"We ought therefore earnestly to mediate and dwell on those important points; that so we may attain conviction without all scruple, that the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good; that he is with us and keepeth us in all places whither we go, and giveth us bread to eat, and

[217] ALC, IV, §5. See also Berkeley's example of musician to understand our dependence on the rules more precisely (S §257).

[218] Lee (2012), p. 559.

raiment to put on; that he is present and conscious to our innermost thoughts; and that we have a most absolute and immediate dependence on him."[219]

Berkeley places the causal efficiency in the perceived world outside of our powers: in the will of God. He is a philosopher who is utterly committed to the concept of omnipotent God as the ultimate explanation of reality. God is not in the physical – or perceivable – world, neither is such world in God. In a sense, God is this world.

Of course, this should not lead us into thinking that the perceivable reality we exist in as embodied finite spirits is unimportant. Contrariwise, it appears to be significant to the expression of our limited nature. We should only avoid saying that the perceptions of the corporeal world, including our body, are what the world is in its eternal form. Spirits and their activity remain at their core distinct from entirely passive ideas, which are only expressions of their activity.[220] We must realise that it is only a limited form of knowledge about the world which causes this reality to be idea-defined. The reality as such is not substantially corporeal, physical or material. Approaching the last chapter where we should summarise our findings over the notion of the human body and offer some tentative solutions to the mind-body relation in immaterialism, we should keep this in mind.

[219] PHK §155.
[220] DHP 231, PC 706.

5. Conclusion: the corporeal and the spiritual

As was shown in the second chapter, Berkeley considerably broadens what the term ‘existence’ encompasses. Consequently, he denotes two things as ‘real’, one passive – ideas, and one active – spirits. Throughout this thesis, it became evident that this distinction establishes a dualism of a sort, one that can be applied in numerous ways. Considering the present subject matter, the most relevant instantiation of this dualism is the contrast between the perceived – corporeal, physical – world, defined by ideas as expressions of substances, and the reality of the active spiritual substances which underlies it. The human body, being a mere collection of ideas, was shown to belong in the former category.

At the outset of this thesis, we began with the aim of finding out if there is a feasible interpretation of Berkeley’s immaterialism in which the human body is real. I hold that the possibility of such an interpretation was demonstrated quite successfully: Berkeley postulates the human body as existing, even if it is defined only as a collection of perceived ideas unified by spirits. Clearly, he also differentiates this collection of ideas from other perceived collections of ideas, i.e. other sensible bodies. In the conclusion of this thesis, we will summarise exactly how these collections differ and point out that these remarks implicitly give rise to even greater questions about Berkeley’s immaterialism.

a. The human body as a collection of ideas

The human body is an idea, more precisely, a collection of ideas. We unveiled two reasons why we, as finite spirits, understand some ideas as belonging to this specific collection while some others not:

i) We perceive them as proprioceptive and affective ideas. For example, we feel pain in them, but we do not immediately feel pain in a distanced tree.

ii) We influence them more directly than other ideas. For instance, we will that our hand moves and it, at least usually, moves and it does so without the need for another instrument. We do not, however, possess “telekinetic powers”, we cannot move the ideas we perceive as a tree in the same way as we can move our body. First and foremost, we need an instrument by which we move the tree – our body.

Conclusively, the collection of ideas conceived by us as our own body is more intimately, perceptually and causally connected to us. Yet it is not, strictly speaking, integral to our substantiality. We do not consider it as our own body because we know it through reason and notionally as we know that we are spirits. Even if we perceive it immediately, it still consists of inert ideas. In other words, as Berkeley claims, these ideas are connected to us through the *"order of Nature"*.[221] So it must be God who causes that we perceive them more intimately than others and subsequently understand them as belonging to our body.

Of course, we would like to know what leads God to create us in such a way. Even if Berkeley does not explicitly formulate an answer to this question, we can try to approximate it.

b. Why are we created as embodied beings?

Given the fact that God and finite spirits are categorically the same, Berkeley often applies the analogical method: the specifics of our existence can be understood in analogy to the omnipotent spirit – and the other way around. At first, this method seems to be a promising tool in the present case: similarly to how God expresses himself in the divine language, finite spirits express themselves through their bodies. Berkeley himself seems to implement such analogical approach:

> *"(...) it seems to me that, though I cannot with eyes of flesh behold the invisible God, yet I do in the strictest sense behold and perceive by all my senses such signs and tokens, such effects and operations, as suggest, indicate, and demonstrate an invisible God – as certainly, and with the same evidence, at least, as any other signs, perceived by sense, do suggest to me the existence of your* [i.e. Alciphron] *soul, spirit, or thinking principle;* ***which I am convinced of only by a few signs or effects, and the motions of one small organized body*** [my emphasis] *(...)"*[222]

Based on this passage it appears that our body is our primary expressive tool, similarly to how God expresses himself through the perceivable world. This analogical

[221] DHP 241.
[222] ALC, IV, §5. Cf. PHK §145.

method, however, has its limitation. First of all, it answers the question why we have some ideas more intimately than the others only partially.

For God exists in an altogether different mode than we do as he is absolute and eternal. In comparison to him, we are limited and finite. It is therefore problematic to take the divine language as analogical to our body, especially when we realise that the divine language is manifested to us in a different – substantially limited – form than how it is known by God. This shows us that in answering the cause of why the ideas of the human body are more intimately perceived by us than other ideas, we should primarily attend to two questions:

i) What precisely does it mean that we are finite and limited spiritual substances; does the human body play a part in this?
ii) If it does not play a part, how should we then understand our embodiment in relation to our spiritual nature?

The basic outline of these questions will show that Berkeley's philosophy contains some discrepancies when it comes to the question of human nature – 'person' as it is termed by Berkeley.[223] For the being of humans must be defined by their substantiality – being active spiritual beings – yet at first, Berkeley's philosophy might make us think that it is the corporeal, i.e. the passive, that makes the humans finite and limited.

i. The privative existence of finite spirits

Berkeley explores the limitedness of finite spirits predominantly in *Siris.* Here he shows that their limitation consists of their privative nature which is finite and should not be defined on positive grounds, rather, it consists of restrictions. This approach seems promising, especially in respect to the fundamental ontological distinction made by Berkeley, i.e. the distinction between activity and passivity. For the passivity is generally used by him not as positive determination, but as an absence of activity, or rather, inertness.

Consider these passages from *Siris* that indicate that the passively defined perception is in some sense more an inability than ability: „*Sense implies an impression*

[223] The question is, if this is what Berkeley means by the term '. I hold that he means the core of our being, i.e. the substantial self, the spirit. Individual finite spirits are then 'that' or 'this' 'person'.

from some other being, and denotes a dependence in the soul which hath it. Sense is a passion; and passions imply imperfection."[224] Eventually, Berkeley utters an almost platonic statement: *„And if by some extraordinary effort the mind should surmount this dusky region, and snatch a glimpse of pure light, she is soon drawn backward and depressed by the heaviness of the animal nature to which she is chained."*[225] Thus, in *Siris,* finite spirits are limited in the sense that they are not – in contrast to the *purus actus*, God – entirely active. In other words: due to the fact that they are acted upon by other spirits, the activity of finite spirits is limited.

Berkeley has an example of this: the corporeal motion, caused ultimately by the spirit, occurs only *"(...) without resistance (...) but if I find a resistance, than I say there is body: and in proportion as the resistance to motion is lesser or greater, I say the space is more or less pure."*[226] The crucial fact is that such resistance experienced by us seems to be the action of some other spirits which we passively sense: *"For in truth this resistence which we sense is a pasivity (passio) in us, nor does it prove that the body acts, but that we suffer: it is certainly agreed that we would have suffered the same, whether the body moves itself or is impelled by another principle."*[227]

Thus, our limited nature and the fact that we can be acted upon is expressed through our embodiment:

> *"We have a notion of body from resistance. So far forth as there is real power, there is spirit. So far* ***for the as there*** *is resistance, there is inability or want of power; that is, there is a negation of spirit. (...) We are embodied, that is, we are clogged by weight, and hindered by resistance."*[228]

As Radek Chlup notes, this shows that the whole corporeal – perceptual – reality is merely an expression of the limitedness of finite spirits: *"Ideas acquire their bodily character only when they are sensed by finite minds who cannot carry out their volition as they please since they constantly hitting the boundaries of their capabilities."*[229]

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[224] SI §289. Cf. SI §301.
[225] SI §340.
[226] PHK §116.
[227] DM §27.
[228] SI §290. Cf. SI §294.
[229] My translation. Original: *„Ideje získávají tělesný ráz tehdy, když jsou zakoušeny konečnou myslí, která nedokáže svou vůli uskutečňovat dle libosti, nýbrž neustále naráží na hranice svých možností."* – Chlup (2009), p. 303.

ii. The relation of corporeality to the nature of finite spirits

Still, we should keep in mind that our embodiment arises only because we are limited – not the other way around. We are not categorically different from the omnipotent spirit. We are still spiritual substances in the first place, not conglomerates of spirit and corporeality. The difference between our and God's existence must be encoded only in the way we differ in our substantiality.

Throughout this thesis it became clear that spirit, as a substance, cannot be an idea.[230] Furthermore, we have already encountered Berkeley's assertion that

> *"(...) we do not see a man, if by a man is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do: but only such a certain collection of ideas, as directs us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion like to our selves, accompanying and represented by it."*[231]

Clearly, persons, i.e. the finite spirits, are strictly speaking not perceived. As Tipton vividly illustrates: *"at a funeral we are burying John, though clearly we are not burying a conscious being. (...) Strictly the person is the mind or spirit (...)".*[232]

However, the case is not so simple. Berkeley frequently mentions the indispensability of ideas to the acts of perceiving and activity: *"(...) if there were no sensible ideas there could be no soul, no perception (...)*".[233] He even asserts that "*we must have Ideas or else we cannot think."*[234] At the same time, he wants to retain his *esse est percipi* principle. As he himself summarises: *„when we talk of unthinking agents, or of exciting ideas exclusive of volition, we only amuse ourselves with words."*[235] Eventually, he seems to resign on placing the spirits over ideas or the other way around: *"It seems to me that Will & understanding Volitions & Ideas cannot be severed, that either cannot be possibly without the other."*[236]

At its core, the problem is pretty simple. Berkeley conceives the perceived reality as ultimately derived from the spiritual. Yet, as some commentators note, he wants to eat the cake and have it too, for the ideas do not appear to be simply reducible to the spiritual.

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[230] ALC, VII, 8. Cf. PHK §27, §2.
[231] PHK §148.
[232] Tipton (1994), p. 292. Cf. Roberts (2007), p. 81 or Sosa (1985), p.78.
[233] PC 478. Cf. PC 24, 25, 580, 539, 547, 652, 577.
[234] PC 547.
[235] PHK §28.
[236] PC 841, 842. Cf. PHK §98 and SI §346.

As Stephen H. Daniel notes: *"A perceived thing is intelligible or meaningful as an object of mind, and mind is intelligible as the activity by which objects are identified as objects. But there is no proper way to speak about minds apart from their perception of the divinely ordained sequences of ideas that distinguish them from one another."*[237] Daniel draws our attention to the fact that finite spirits are not only ultimately defined by their ideas for their individuation appears to be dependent on them too.

Daniel's account is proxblematic in many aspects,[238] but it shows us one crucial fact about the ideas as objects of our thinking and perceiving. The perceptions and thoughts are decisive for our individuation and nature only because they are a specific way of our activity. In other words: the perceptions are important for us only in the sense that it is we who make them. On this view, it is understandable that Berkeley did not hold that the separation of finite spirits from their ideas – and *vice versa* – is possible. The finite substance is defined by its perceptions in the sense that its nature is determined by its specific place in the divine language, by the precise way it is limited by this language – how it perceives it and how it relates to it.

So, the immediately perceived ideas as objects of perception are not what individuates and defines the finite spirits. Rather, it is the specific execution of their substantiality: spiritual activity. Presumably, Berkeley alludes to this individuation when he says that there is *"no identity than perfect likeness in any individuals besides persons."*[239] Stated in the terminology of the spiritual reality: finite spirits are defined by how they exercise their activity, their substantiality, or by how they lack activity encountering the activity of other spirits – first and foremost, God. The answer to the above-posed questions is then that our embodiment does not make us the persons we are and it does not play a part in our individuation, because passively and immediately perceived sensations are ultimately to be understood as the activity of God: *„Every sensation of mine which happens in Consequence of the general, known Laws of nature & is from without i.e. independent of my Will demonstrates the Being of a God, i.e. of an unextended incorporeal Spirit which is omniscient, omnipotent etc."*[240]

That some perceptions, even the ideas of our body, eventually arise, is always dependent on God. Hence, Berkeley even claims that the identity of persons, that is what

[237] Daniel (2011), p. 245. Cf. Daniel (2000), p. 635.
[238] Cf. High (2004) or Bettcher (2011).
[239] PC 192.
[240] PC 838.

they are at their core, does not consist *"in actual consciousness".*[241] And he admits the following:

> *"On account of my doctrine the identity of finite substances must consist in something else than continued existence, or relation to determin'd time and place of beginning to exist. The existence of our thoughts (which being combin'd make all substances) being frequently interrupted, & they having divers beginnings, & endings."*[242]

In other words, our specific and individual nature is ultimately reducible to what is spiritual, because it depends on the pure act of God by which he creates and ordains the universe. This much seems to be clear from this strong statement made in *Siris:*

> *"We cannot make even one single step in accounting for the phenomena without admitting the immediate presence and immediate action of an incorporeal Agent, who connects, moves, and disposes all things according to such rules, and for such purposes, as seem good to Him."*[243]

Clearly, such interpretation strictly rules out that the perceived world and consequently our embodied existence play any substantial part in our nature. For the perceived is ultimately reducible to the spiritual reality that depends on the creation of the divine language and on our specific way of being placed in it by God.

c. The immaterialist person and the world

Our embodiment is crucial to our knowledge of the world and God. As Berkeley claims, God's existence should be, with the help of our notional self-knowledge, known through the *"effects of Nature"*, ergo from the perceived knowledge made possible by our embodied existence.[244] Even in *Siris,* where Berkeley often devalues the contribution of senses, he admits that the perceivable is, for finite spirits, an indispensable springboard towards philosophical knowledge:

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[241] PC 200.
[242] PC 194.
[243] SI §237.
[244] PHK §147. Cf. DHP 212.

"(...) he [Berkeley's *"curious observer"*] *ascends from the sensible into the intellectual world, and beholds things in a new light and a new order (...) and perceive that what he took for substances and causes are but fleeting shadows; that the mind contains all, and acts all, and is to all created beings the source of unity, and identity, harmony and order, existence and stability."*[245]

In general, however, the corporeal, the ideational, the perceived and the passive must, in the framework of Berkeley's immaterialism, ultimately depend on the substantial, the spiritual, the causal and the active. This is clear not only in *Siris* but also in *Principles* and *De Motu.*[246] Berkeley never hesitated about the fact that spirits are the only substances and that everything is traceable to their activity. Compare the striking similarities between the *Essay* and *Siris,* which are separated by a time span of thirty-five years:

„It is therefore plain, that nothing can be more evident to any one that is capable of the least reflexion, than the existence of God, or a spirit who is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations, which continually affect us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short, in whom we live, and move, and have our being."[247]

„But those who, not content with sensible appearances would penetrate into the real and true causes (the object of theology, metaphysics, or the philosophia prima), will rectify this error, and speak of the world as contained by the soul, and not the soul by the world."[248]

Unfortunately, Berkeley never precisely articulated how such containment of the world by the soul should be understood. Hence, the question of the human embodiment, and its role not only in our reaching for philosophical knowledge, but also its significance to our nature, seems remain an object of speculations like these made in this thesis.

[245] SI §295. Cf. SI §303.

[246] PHK §141 and DM §42. Cf. DM §72. *Principles* as a work embody a philosophical approach to knowledge: it starts with the perceptual and ends glorifying the omnipotence of God.

[247] PHK §149.

[248] SI §285.

Nevertheless, it must be clear that our limited existence does not depend on ideas, for the ideas arise only when, so to say, our and other wills meet and, in some degree even clash. Summarised: our body is a collection of ideas ultimately traceable to the acts of God, which are passively perceived by us because of our limited nature. Ultimately, our embodiment is the passively perceived activity – i.e. the effect – of the omnipotent substance, which is somehow intimately sensed and subsequently organised by us, as finite spirits, into a collection of ideas which we conceive as our body and through which we are related to entirety of other ideas and ultimately back to God.

*

Interestingly enough, such reading of Berkeley portrays our limitation in a more positive light than mere privation. For thanks to God's benevolence we perceive some ideas more intimately than others. Due to this act of his, we can perceive his activities and obtain knowledge about him. As Berkeley notes: *"person is really that which exists, inasmuch as it participates of the divine unity."*[249] In some sense, then, if we can dare a final tentative interpretation, the person is a finite spirit which is given a place in the world of God and is made by God in such a way that he can be aware of the unity and harmony present in God's creation. In other words, our body enables us to be aware of God's omnipotence by participating in it.

Many questions and specifics of our participation in God's activity remain open and unanswered. Hence, all these considerations reveal one major limitation of Berkeley's philosophy. He clearly builds his whole philosophy on the intuitive knowledge obtained by finite spirits which is grounded on the fact that the whole world is composed of them and their activities: *"Nothing properly but persons i.e. conscious things do exist, all other things are not so much existences as manners of the existence of persons."*[250] Yet, he devotes little to no space treating the topic of what it means to be a finite spirit. So even when he asserts that the mind is *"chained"* to an *"animal nature"*,[251] that is to the corporeal body, he gives us little specifics about what this enchainment means. In this thesis, I tried to present some interpretative ways in which his thoughts on the embodiment of persons could be made more lucid.

[249] SI §346.

[250] PC 24. Clearly, the term 'person' is used here slightly problematic, for it seems that it denotes spirits in general. Should we conceive God as person? Certainly, my usage of the term 'person' is disputable.

[251] SI §340.

We shall conclude by noticing that this introduces us to a paradox at the core of Berkeley's philosophical project: by trying to steer the attention of philosophers to the person and his intuitive knowledge of the world and God, Berkeley brought attention to the fact that we have quite scanty knowledge about how we express ourselves as limited substances. If he indeed intended to show just that, this thesis, ending with ambiguities about the human corporeality and what it means to be a person, reflects the nature of Berkeley's admirable, yet rather entangled and, as it appears, incomplete project of immaterialism.

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