

**Charles University in Prague**  
**Faculty of Philosophy and Arts**  
**Institute of Philosophy and Religious Studies**

**Philosophy**

**Marek Tomeček**

**Berkeley's Metaphysics and Epistemology between common  
sense and science**

**Berkeleyho metafyzika a epistemologie mezi *common sense* a  
vědou**

Dissertation

Supervisor – RNDr. Josef Moural, CSc.

2007

“I declare that the submitted dissertation was composed by me using the listed sources only.”

”Prohlašuji, že jsem disertační práci vykonal samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury”.

## Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| <b>Preface</b>  | 5  |
| <b>1. Introduction</b>  | 6  |
| <b>1.1 Berkeley flying in the face of <i>common sense</i></b>   | 8  |
| 1.2 <i>Common sense</i> in Descartes and Locke  | 9  |
| 1.3 Different approaches to common sense in Berkeley's works  | 14 |
| 1.4 The Hidden Metaphor   | 22 |
| 1.5 'Explicit' and 'implicit' common sense  | 25 |
| 1.6 Summary: Berkeley and common sense  | 29 |
| <b>2.1 'Idea' and 'thing' in primary sources: NTV</b>   | 30 |
| 2.2 'Idea' and 'thing' in PHK and DHP   | 31 |
| 2.2.1 Identification of 'idea' with 'thing' – 'changing ideas into things'  | 32 |
| 2.2.2 Is the Argument from Illusion used by Berkeley for the separation of 'idea' and 'thing'?  | 35 |
| 2.3 Can two people see the same thing? – The privacy of the idea  | 37 |
| 2.3.1 The Identity Problem and commentators – the 'Two Language' solution   | 43 |
| 2.3.2 The Realist Solution – ideas need not be private  | 48 |
| 2.3.3 The Realist Interpretation and Berman   | 51 |
| 2.3.4 The Realist Interpretation and Pappas   | 53 |
| 2.4 'Thing' as a collection of 'ideas', the negative reading and phenomenalism  | 54 |
| 2.4.1 'Collection of ideas' and some repercussions for phenomenalism  | 56 |
| <b>2.5 Continuity of unperceived objects</b>  | 59 |
| 2.5.1 The evolution of the Continuity Problem in the <i>Philosophical Commentaries</i>  | 63 |
| 2.5.1.1 <i>Esse is Percipi</i> , common speech and Continuity   | 66 |
| 2.5.1.2 The theological side of the problem   | 68 |
| 2.5.1.3 Argument Economy and Continuity   | 70 |
| 2.5.1.4 The Master Argument and Continuity  | 74 |
| 2.5.1.5 The Master Argument and commentators  | 77 |
| 2.5.1.6 The structure of immaterialism, the strict first person perspective, the lesson of NTV and the question of the <i>a priori</i> , immaterialism as a half of materialism | 83 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| 2.5.2 Continuity – temporary summary   | 85  |
| 2.6 Continuity and God – the Limerick interpretation   | 86  |
| 2.6.1 The twisting of the texts  | 88  |
| 2.6.2 The new goal – why is there no Continuity Argument in the <i>Principles</i> ?                | 90  |
| 2.6.3 Bennett’s criticism  | 93  |
| 2.6.4 Theological Interpretation of the Continuity Argument in DHP 230-1<br>(going beyond Bennett) | 94  |
| 2.6.5 Continuity – summary   | 96  |
| <b>3. How Does Berkeley Prove God Then? – The Passivity Argument and Beyond</b>                    | 98  |
| 3.1 Berkeley’s account of causality, connection with substance and <i>common sense</i>             | 99  |
| 3.2 The argument   | 104 |
| 3.2.1 The Polytheistic Objection   | 105 |
| 3.2.2 The number of Berkeley’s arguments in the corpus   | 107 |
| 3.2.3 Role of optics, and science in general, in proving God                                       | 110 |
| 3.3 God’s existence vs. His attributes   | 114 |
| 3.4 Summary of Berkeley on God   | 120 |
| 3.5 Conclusion   | 122 |
| <b>Bibliography</b>  | 124 |
| <b>Abstract</b>  | 129 |

## Preface

Quotations from Berkeley's works are taken mainly from *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, published by Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, London, 1948-57. However, as this edition is not available in the Czech Republic where some of this dissertation was written, not all quotes could be made to conform to the graphic layout of the standard edition. In referring to passages from individual works, the following abbreviations were used:

ALC for *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*

DHP for *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*

DM for *De Motu*

NTV for *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*

PC for *Philosophical Commentaries*

PHK for *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*

TVV for *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language shewing the immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity Vindicated and Explained*

The abbreviations are followed by the number of section or entry, except in DHP where the number refers to the page in Luce and Jessop's edition.

I would like to thank Stefan Storrie for many interesting debates about Berkeley and to Prof David Berman for his guidance and encouragement.

## 1. Introduction

Berkeley's system has the reputation of an implausible philosophy among modern commentators. They tend to look for a fatal flaw in his argument which brings down the whole structure. Muehlmann<sup>1</sup> thinks he finds it in Berkeley's extreme nominalism, Grayling<sup>2</sup> in his theism. There is, however, another commentary tradition, exemplified by Winkler<sup>3</sup> and Atherton<sup>4</sup>, concentrating on elucidating Berkeley's point without judging the whole project a failure. Such a 'sympathetic' approach is definitely less ambitious and perhaps also more alive to the danger of anachronism. For how are we to judge a failure of a philosophical system? If Berkeley is wrong, what about, for example, Plato? Or Heraclitus? Where do they go wrong? We consider these questions beyond our limited capabilities and accordingly will concentrate on the less ambitious, sympathetic goal of uncovering Berkeley's thought with the question of its plausibility being left to more able minds.

Consequently, the task of classifying Berkeley assumes little importance – whether he was an idealist, subjective idealist, phenomenalist or solipsist. All these labels were applied ex post and some function more as a diagnosis – Berkeley is seen as a subjective idealist by Kant because the latter has a certain notion of the history of philosophy as seen from his own position, which includes, among other things, saying what is wrong with Berkeley's system and identifying the flaw. Our task is best served by the term 'immaterialism' as a description of Berkeley's thought, partly because it was used by Berkeley himself and partly because it applies uniquely to his system and no other. We feel our author should be indulged and allowed to name his own creation. It would be absurd to insist that for instance Husserl was not the founder of phenomenology, that his system is in fact something else. Yet this is apparently what has been happening to Berkeley from the very beginning of the philosophical reception of his thought.

---

<sup>1</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, Indianapolis, 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Grayling, A.C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, 1987.

<sup>3</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Atherton, Margaret: *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

As an exercise in an historical interpretation, as opposed to systematic interpretation, close reading is our main method of analysis. And here we believe we bring new impulses to Berkeleian studies. One of these is our insistence on a function of the conjunction ‘or’ – this connective usually signals the relation of contextual synonymy in Berkeley’s baroque texts, thus drastically decreasing the number of philosophical entities we have to deal with in interpreting them. Another is our wariness of the terms ‘material object’ and ‘physical object’, none of which are used by our author, and we contend that with good reason.

Finally, a few words about the perspective of the whole project. The starting point is a realization that Berkeley was firstly a brilliant scientist in his own right. His first publication, *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, came out in 1709 and “was undeniably successful”<sup>5</sup>. Unlike his fellow empiricists Locke, Hume and Hobbes, Berkeley made important scientific discoveries<sup>6</sup> and came to generalize his hard-earned knowledge in a metaphysical system. The frame of the following thesis was in fact first suggested by Atherton: “If the *New Theory* and the *Principles* are read as dedicated toward the same overall project, then the arguments of the *New Theory*, by means of which Berkeley brought about a revolution in the study of vision, can provide a useful tool for interpreting those claims of the *Principles* widely held to be incredible.”<sup>7</sup> The following thesis is hopefully a fruitful application of this interpretative approach.

---

<sup>5</sup> Atherton, Margaret: *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> We regard Downing’s claim that “Berkeley himself made no major scientific discoveries, nor formulated any novel theories” as dramatically mistaken. See Downing, Lisa: ‘Berkeley’s natural philosophy and philosophy of science’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, Ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 230.

<sup>7</sup> Atherton, Margaret: *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 218.

## 1.1 Berkeley flying in the face of *common sense*

Berkeley's frequent exhortations<sup>8</sup> to the effect that in his system he defends common sense have met with incredulity on the part of most commentators<sup>9</sup>. Indeed, immaterialism is often considered the least commonsensical of all the philosophical views, though well-argued throughout<sup>10</sup>. So Warnock claims that "his purpose of vindicating Common Sense was in fact only half fulfilled."<sup>11</sup> Tipton notices "a striking discrepancy between the judgement most of us want to make on his general position and the judgement he seems to have expected us to make on it"<sup>12</sup> and, most recently, Pappas has claimed that the famous Berkeley's exclamation 'I side in all things with the Mob' (PC 405) "is definitely an overstatement on Berkeley's part, of course."<sup>13</sup>

So an exciting interpretative problem opens itself before us: our author says that he does not contradict common sense and most commentators disagree with him and end up with the uncharitable conclusion that he is in the wrong, often even relying on the precarious thesis that Berkeley changed his views in the course of his career.<sup>14</sup> So an interpretation which managed to show that Berkeley is not wrong to claim he does not contradict common sense would have two advantages: being more charitable to our author and not having to suppose that his views changed in the course of his life. To provide such an interpretation is our task now.

---

<sup>8</sup> PHK 35, 82, DHP 227-8, 234, 244.

<sup>9</sup> The notable exception being Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 1945, p. vi: "I hold that Berkeley's immaterialism is sound common-sense..." The way he arrives at this conclusion is, however, not without its problems, as will be apparent later. Luce's analysis of this topic has not become a mainstream interpretation subsequently and so it will be, for the time being, ignored.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Pitcher, George, *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p.4 "Berkeley's philosophy rises in the garden of British thought like some fantastic plant – beautiful and extravagant."

<sup>11</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 18.

<sup>12</sup> Tipton, I. C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1974, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup> Pappas, George S.: *Berkeley's Thought*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 209.

<sup>14</sup> Pitcher, p. 96.



## 1.2 *Common sense in Descartes and Locke*

Descartes in his metaphysical programme proposes a radical rethinking of our everyday assumptions, yet he has many qualms about its accessibility and relevance for common people. In his letters he mentions three times that he purposefully omitted the radical sceptical doubts from his *Discourse on the Method*, because it could “disturb weaker minds, especially as I was writing in the vernacular.”<sup>15</sup> He even adds that in the Latin version of this book, which was being planned, he could have it included. Nor was this a sentiment he voiced in private only, in his *Preface* to the *Meditations* he is again quite explicit: “I thought it would not be helpful to give a full account of it in a book written in French and designed to be read by all and sundry, in case weaker intellects might believe that they ought to set out on the same path.”<sup>16</sup> So the intended audience of the metaphysical doubting is not the literate minority of people, but a fraction still of these, those who read in Latin, in short scientists and divines. Quite an elitist programme, then, one whose aim is expected to be misunderstood by common people.<sup>17</sup>

This foreseen misunderstanding is echoed in many places in Descartes, when he, no doubt as a part of an opponent’s part, describes the radical doubt as insane<sup>18</sup> and, at

---

<sup>15</sup> *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 35, the other two instances being letters on pp. 31 and 46 (“...these thoughts did not seem to me suitable for inclusion in a book which I wished to be intelligible even to women...”).

<sup>16</sup> *Meditations on First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume II, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> “...I do not expect any popular approval, or indeed any wide audience.” *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 8. The impression of Descartes trying to communicate an epiphany of his own is strengthened by two facts: his having a ‘vision’ in a warm room in Germany, and the incomplete manuscript of *Search after Truth* found in his papers after his death. In this fraction of a dialogue, written probably around the time of composition of the *Meditations*, a character of Polyander, the Everyman, is supposed to be the common sense recipient of Descartes metaphysics. Would it be going too far if we suggested that the work on the French speaking dialogue was abandoned after Descartes realized that his metaphysical doubts sounded too absurd in the living language, and Latin was adopted together with the literary form of a meditation, which requires a certain degree of submission and suspension of judgement on the part of the reader? Also, is it not easier to convey a vision through a meditation rather than through a dialogue?

<sup>18</sup> *Meditations on First Philosophy*, pp. 11, 13.

the end of the *Meditations* the celebrated dream argument as laughable<sup>19</sup>. Also, the reader is guarded against revelling in metaphysical doubt, Descartes himself says he undertook it “once in the course of my life”<sup>20</sup>, and he advises his correspondent Princess Elizabeth “never to spend more than a few hours a day in the thoughts which occupy the imagination and a few hours a year on those which occupy the pure intellect. I have given all the rest of my time to the relaxation of the senses and the repose of the mind.”<sup>21</sup> The utility of “such extensive doubt is not apparent at first sight”<sup>22</sup> and it is positively harmful “as far as ordinary life is concerned”<sup>23</sup>.

The theme of the tension between ordinary language and science is also taken up many times, Descartes usually complaining about ordinary language being inadequate for scientific purposes: “...almost all our words have confused meanings, and men’s minds are so accustomed to them that there is hardly anything which they can perfectly understand.”<sup>24</sup> Not only knowledge is difficult and almost impossible to obtain for common people due to natural deficiencies in their language, the same holds also for certainty, which in practical affairs is inferior to certainty found in science: “It would indeed be desirable to have as much certainty in matters of conduct as is needed for the acquisition of scientific knowledge; but it is easily shown that in such matters so much is not be sought for nor hoped for.”<sup>25</sup> Descartes is careful to distinguish between “prudence

---

<sup>19</sup> *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> *Meditations on First Philosophy*, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, pp. 141-2, see also p. 143 “I think that it is very necessary to have understood, once in a lifetime, the principles of metaphysics, since it is by them that we come to the knowledge of God and of our soul. But I think also that it would be very harmful to occupy one’s intellect frequently in meditating upon them...”

<sup>22</sup> *Meditations in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume II, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, 1984, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> *Principles of Philosophy in The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 193.

<sup>24</sup> *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 6

<sup>25</sup> *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, p. 110.

in our everyday affairs” and that “perfect knowledge of all things that mankind is capable of knowing”<sup>26</sup>, reserving certainty only for the latter.

However, nowhere is the clash between ordinary life and science more apparent than in the key difficulty of Cartesianism that its author himself acknowledges<sup>27</sup> (if we are to take him speaking in earnest and not flattering his noble correspondent) – that of the connection between body and soul. The notion of the union of body and soul comes from everyday non-philosophical life, the notions of the separate body and soul are philosophical abstractions<sup>28</sup> and the problem of their connection is not philosophically or scientifically soluble. In fact, here the two different views of the matter exclude each other<sup>29</sup>.

Descartes’ scientific programme aiming to supplant the defects and prejudices of our common-sense view of the world inherited from childhood is expressed in technical terms which, not surprisingly, depart from ordinary usage. For example the word ‘idea’ is much broader than was usual at that time (hence the perceived need to define it) and includes basically everything mental and conscious.<sup>30</sup> Ideas we have in perception are

---

<sup>26</sup> *Principles of Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Volume I, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 179.

<sup>27</sup> *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 137, “I may truly say that the question you ask is the one which may most properly be put to me in view of my published writings.”

<sup>28</sup> “Metaphysical thoughts, which exercise pure intellect, help to familiarize us with the notion of the soul...But it is the ordinary course of life and conversation, and abstention from meditation and from the study of the things which exercise the imagination, that teaches us how to conceive the union of the soul and the body.” *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 141. Notice the mention of ‘ordinary course of life’ together with ‘conversation’.

<sup>29</sup> “It does not seem to me that the human mind is capable of conceiving at the same time the distinction and the union between body and soul, because for this it is necessary to conceive them as a single thing and at the same time to conceive them as two things; and this is absurd.” *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> “...if you take the word ‘thought’ as I do, to cover all the operations of the soul, so that not only meditations and acts of the will, but the activities of seeing and hearing and deciding on one movement rather than another, so far as depends on the soul, are all thoughts.” *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, p. 51.

caused by material or external things, even sensible and imaginable things (*Principles* I, 4). Knowledge is defined as clear and distinct perception, certainty is greatest in mathematics.

Locke shares Descartes' contempt for common sense with many of its complex features, sometimes even taking it to new, dizzying heights. Meanings of common words are muddled and not suitable for scientific purposes and should be redefined (*Essay* III, VI, 25 and III, XI, 12), however, the dream argument is not to be taken seriously (*Essay* IV, XI, 8), the testimony of our senses of the existence of things around us is not as certain as demonstration (*Essay* IV, II, 14 and IV, XI, 3), knowledge is reserved to scientists, common people know nothing (*Essay* IV, XX, 2), and the pinnacle of arrogance is reached in the statement that "there is a difference of degrees in men's understandings, apprehensions, and reasonings, to so great a latitude, that one may, without doing injury to mankind, affirm that there is a greater distance between some men and others in this respect than between some men and some beasts." (*Essay* IV, XX, 5) Locke's scorn for the common man immersed in practical affairs of his daily life is possible because the opposite of the theoretical scientist, the 'pure' mind, is for him usually a child or a savage, as is apparent from the first book and the arguments against innate ideas: "amongst *children, idiots, savages* and the grossly *illiterate*, what general maxims are to be found?" (*Essay* I, II, 27) In this list made in order of importance there is no 'the vulgar' to oppose the philosopher as later in Berkeley.

In his eagerness to make room for scientific progress, Locke comes dangerously close to what Berkeley will later call scepticism: "The meanest and most obvious things that come in our way have dark sides that the quickest sight cannot penetrate into. The clearest and most enlarged understandings of thinking men find themselves puzzled and at a loss in every particle of matter." (*Essay* IV, III, 22) Notice the careless conflation of 'the meanest and most obvious things' with 'particle of matter' in a relation of contextual synonymy. Science is also behind Locke's definition of 'real', which has two features. Real ideas are opposed to chimerical ideas and "have a conformity with the real being and existence of things, or with their archetypes." (*Essay* II, XXX, 1)

The basic metaphysical building blocks of a theory of knowledge are, nevertheless, the same for Locke as they were for Descartes and will be for Berkeley.

They are 'ideas' and at the very beginning of his *Essay* Locke feels the need to define this term since its usage is rather technical: "...the word *idea*...serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of human understanding when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *phantasm*, *notion*, *species*, or whatever it is which the mind can be employed about in thinking..." (*Essay* I, I, 8) And once again they are caused by external, material and sensible things.

To sum up, Cartesian dualism as a representative realism claims that there are 'external' things, which are material and the object of physics, and 'internal' things called ideas which are subjective and mental. *Common sense* within this system is the belief, not really certain on the scientific level, that these 'external' things exist and have the properties they seem to have, or even the confusion of the 'ideas of perception' with the 'external' things. The whole framework rests on the metaphor outside/inside, which is essentially a spatial metaphor but one liable to be misunderstood, since it is difficult to keep in mind that ideas are 'in' the mind but the mind itself is in no place since it is not extended. The 'outside' part, however, is comfortable with its spatiality and thus ceases to be metaphorical.

Within the Cartesian system, Berkeley's reaction was to some extent anticipated and precluded by Descartes himself. An Englishman, Henry More, asked Descartes in a letter if it was not better to define body as a perceptible, tangible or impenetrable substance rather than an extended substance. Descartes' argument against this view is to be found in his *Principles* II, 4. Hardness of bodies is indeed known through our sense of touch and whenever we touch a body our hand is stopped and excluded by its surface. Thus hardness would appear to be a defining characteristic of body. But then we can imagine a situation when every-time we approached a body, this body would recede and we could never touch it, still we would have no reason to suppose that the body lacks anything which makes it a body. Consequently, hardness, though admittedly a perceiver-dependent quality, is not essential to bodies in the same way extension is.

But is such an argument convincing? Can we really imagine the situation Descartes imagines to build his argument on? He seems to be fascinated with his hand reaching out and touching a body just to be repulsed. But what about his feet, can he also imagine that he is walking and the ground is eluding him? What about our other parts?

Actually, it seems to be quite clear that apart from the very rare moments of free fall and springing into the air we feel something hard all the time. Now when I am writing this I feel the chair I am sitting on pushing into my back and my posterior, when I lie down I feel the bed, when I walk I feel the ground. So it would seem that the situation Descartes describes to prove the perception-independence of bodies is quite unimaginable, bodies cannot be disassociated from our experiencing them and hardness really seems to be their defining feature for everybody.

Descartes' motivation is to separate science from our everyday affairs and make it pure and mathematical. For Berkeley, this was almost as bad as divorcing science from our sense of God, and Descartes' *Principles* III, 3 seems to justify his worry. There Descartes discusses the proposition that everything was created for man. While this sentiment is pious, it is 'utterly ridiculous and inept' in physics, because "many things exist, or once existed, though they are now here no longer, which have never been seen or thought of by any man, and have never been of any use to anyone."<sup>31</sup> Here we witness another clash between an anthropocentric religious belief of the time and emerging depersonalized and ultimately atheistic science, a clash Berkeley, as one of the most Christian philosophers of the era, will try to avoid. And the battle will be fought on the field of metaphysics, common sense and science.

### 1.3 Different approaches to common sense in Berkeley's works

Before evaluating Berkeley's response to this picture of common sense, it is necessary to treat of each work individually, for common sense plays a different role in each of them. And just as the target and aim of each work varies, so does the role of common sense in it<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>31</sup> *Principles of Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 249.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. "(in PHK and NTV) diverse notions advanced in these *Dialogues* are farther pursued, or *placed in different lights*, and other points handled, which naturally tend to confirm and illustrate them." (my italics), *Works II*, p. 169.

NTV is a scientific work whose conclusions are to be tested experimentally and so, rather unsurprisingly, there is not much talk of common sense. Even though Berkeley at the very beginning says “It is, I think, agreed by all, that distance, of itself and immediately, cannot be seen” (NTV 2), the ‘all’ does not mean all people, but rather all opticians, natural philosophers or specialists. And these people are the intended audience of the book, their problems are being discussed and at their assent Berkeley aims. Thus phrases like ‘received opinion’, ‘the ancient and received principle’, ‘the common supposition’, ‘it is well known that...’, ‘it has been shown’, and ‘a prevailing opinion’ all refer to a scientific consensus of Berkeley’s time. Even in “men are tempted to think that flat or plane figures are immediate objects of sight” (NTV 157) Berkeley is speaking not about all men, but about natural scientists and their beliefs<sup>33</sup>.

What we would call common sense, Berkeley labels ‘prejudice’ here (NTV 51, 66, 79, 92, 95, 120, 138, 146) and finds reasons for discarding it. The first reason is a matter of general scientific principle: men believe in many things which they have never questioned, and when these assumptions finally do get questioned, they are found wanting on scientific principles. This is the meaning of the word ‘prejudice’ in NTV 120, 138. There is, however, a more specialised meaning of ‘prejudice’ at play in NTV 51, 66, 79, 92, 95, and 146, this time referring to the assumptions built into our visual capacity. These are rejected through Berkeley’s specific optical programme and foremost of these is the assumption that we see and touch the same thing, which is challenged by Berkeley’s heterogeneity thesis<sup>34</sup>.

Berkeley’s analysis of the factors giving rise to prejudice is instructive. For example, in NTV 51 he lists three of them: “a long tract of time...the use of language, and want of reflexion”. The first and the third one we would expect in almost any analysis of prejudice, the second one signals a theme prominent in the metaphysical works and also in the essay on vision itself (NTV 46, 49, 120). Language is intimately connected with prejudice (and so with common sense), “being accommodated to the common notions and prejudices of men” (NTV 120), and in the revisionist aim of the

---

<sup>33</sup> Atherton, M.: *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 13.

<sup>34</sup> Atherton, M.: *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 8 claims that this lies at the very heart of Berkeley’s optics.

scientist's theory of vision it is his enemy. Truth is invoked as the opposite of prejudice and phrases like "in truth and strictness of speech" (NTV 45) signal a conscious effort on the part of the experimental scientist to get behind the wall of language and prejudice. "Strict inquiry" (NTV 42) is needed for this uneasy task, and Berkeley on such occasions finds himself "strictly speaking" (NTV 46, 154) or speaking "in a strict sense" (NTV 130). For the scientist, language is thus ambivalent at best. On the one hand, it allows for 'strict speech', on the other "common speech would incline one" to prejudice (NTV 46).

Nevertheless, when Berkeley moves from his science to his metaphysics, 'prejudice' will often be substituted by 'common sense' and language correspondingly enlisted as the immaterialist's staunch ally.

*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is Berkeley's main philosophical statement<sup>35</sup>. The question of its intended audience can be settled without much doubt from the opening paragraph of the Introduction. There Berkeley talks of "the illiterate bulk of mankind" and we can trust him in this – in his time the majority of people could not read nor write<sup>36</sup> and so addressing a book to them would have been futile. It is rather addressed to philosophers, theologians, students and perhaps even the general reading public. Once again, phrases like 'it is agreed on all hands' (PHK In 7), 'this prevailing notion' (PHK In 18), 'what everybody will allow' (PHK 3), 'an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men' and 'this principle ...entertained in the world' (PHK 4), 'the received opinion' (PHK 16) and explicitly 'the received principles of philosophy' (PHK 46), all refer to the philosophical opinions of Berkeley's predecessors and contemporaries and are contrasted with 'the principles we have premised' (PHK 48).

The only exception comes in paragraphs 54-7, where he discusses an eighth objection to his philosophy, which claims that if the whole world believes in the existence of matter, then there must be something in it. Yet even here Berkeley's first reaction is not to admit common sense into the debate, remarking instead: "I answer... that upon a narrow inquiry, it will not perhaps be found, so many as is imagined do really

---

<sup>35</sup> A. A. Luce: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 1945, p. vi "Master the *Principles*, and you have mastered Berkeley's immaterialism."

<sup>36</sup> Berkeley stresses this again in paragraph 10 of the Introduction: "The generality of men ...are simple and illiterate..."



believe the existence of matter or things without the mind.” (PHK 54) The issue is strictly between materialists and immaterialists as two competing philosophical theories. If ordinary people profess belief in matter, they only “impose upon themselves, by imagining they believe those propositions which they have often heard...” (PHK 54)

Nevertheless, Berkeley continues to treat this objection at least half seriously, for in the next three paragraphs he shows that even if it were true and all the people believed in matter, it is no proof of the validity of such an assertion for people often believe in things which, scientifically speaking, are simply wrong. And in §56 he offers an interesting diagnosis of materialism: the doctrine he set out to refute in fact contains two elements, one is a perverted common sense belief that things we see exist without the mind (perverted because Berkeley is quick to point out that men arrived at this conclusion “without ever dreaming that a contradiction was involved in those words” (PHK 56) and so in fact claims that such a view on the part of common sense would be trespassing into the scientist’s field of enquiry) and the other being a philosophers’ representative theory of perception. The mistake of the vulgar is more of a theological nature<sup>37</sup> (the failure to see the power of God in His uniform operation as opposed to the more spectacular miracles), as the next paragraph makes clear, and is shared even by the natural philosophers, and so is not inherently commonsensical. This is really the only time in the *Principles* Berkeley is willing almost to admit that there is a common sense element to materialism, but he immediately qualifies this and describes materialism as an impossible travesty and mix of the two hitherto sharply separated approaches.

The tightrope he is attempting to walk between common sense and science is at its most conspicuous in §§ 55 and 58. In the first mentioned section he says that a universal assent to a proposition does not make it true, citing the example of most people’s belief that the Earth is flat. If there are scientific reasons for discarding such a belief, it can be disproved. But in the second mentioned section he goes on to say, that even if Copernicanism is a useful scientific theory, it “amounts in reality to no more than ...if we were placed in such and such circumstances...we should see the (earth) to move among

---

<sup>37</sup> “...ordinary language, Berkeley believes, has one defect more serious than any so far mentioned; it fatally conceals the place of God in the universe.” Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 117. We will return to this theme in the third part of this thesis.

the choir of the planets” (PHK 58). So even though the theory of the movement of the earth is scientifically useful, it is in a sense irrelevant to the common sense view of the world. The two areas somehow do not overlap.

This message of the *Principles*, however, was not accepted by Berkeley’s readers, most of who simply ridiculed his tenets without trying to argue against them<sup>38</sup>. Painfully aware of the hostile reception, Berkeley decided to present the content of the book in a more engaging and easier manner of dialogue<sup>39</sup>, this time concentrating on the question which was probably not fully explained in the *Principles* – the compatibility of immaterialism with common sense. The emerging *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* are thus his most comprehensive statement on the problem.

While the emphasis of the book changes from that of the previous one, the theme and the intended audience do not<sup>40</sup>. This time, the audience are supposed to decide a contest between a materialist and an immaterialist. In an amusing volte-face, Berkeley begins to talk of “the prejudices of philosophers, which have so far prevailed against the common sense and natural notions of mankind.”<sup>41</sup> It is going to be philosophers, meaning the materialists, corpuscularianists, occasionalists and other rivals of our author, who are prejudiced in this book and need to be shown the truth. On the other hand, ‘common sense and natural notions of mankind’ are to be defended and even to be the standard against which the two rival philosophies will be measured: “that opinion (is) true, which

---

<sup>38</sup> “...I did but name the subject matter of your book (the *Principles*) to some ingenious friends of mine and they immediately treated it with ridicule, at the same time refusing to read it...A physician of my acquaintance undertook to describe your person, and argued you must needs be mad, and that you ought to take remedies. A Bishop pitied you that a desire and vanity of starting something new should put you on such an undertaking. ..Another told me an ingenious man ought not to be discouraged from exercising his wit, and said Erasmus was not the worse thought of for writing in praise of folly.” Rand, Benjamin: *Berkeley and Percival*, Cambridge University Press, 1914, p. 80.

<sup>39</sup> Berkeley’s friend Percival read both books and of the second he says: “The new method you took by way of dialogue, I am satisfied has made your meaning much easier understood...I declare I am much more of your opinion than I was before.” Above, pp. 120-1, which testifies to the new explanative strategy having some success.

<sup>40</sup> “...I thought it requisite to treat more clearly and fully of certain principles laid down in the (PHK), and to place them in a new light. Which is the business of the following *Dialogues*.” *Works II*, p. 167-8.

<sup>41</sup> *Works II*, p.168.

upon examination shall appear most agreeable to common sense, and remote from scepticism...” (DHP 172) On a scale of Berkeley’s works according to their attitude to common sense, the *Dialogues* would be on the opposite side from the *New Theory of Vision* with the *Principles* in the middle. The *Philosophical Commentaries* are also helpful in this respect, since they were intended for private use only and there was no ‘strategy’ involved in their composition.

The aim of the *Dialogues*, which is advertised at the beginning and at the end, is to bring men back to common sense<sup>42</sup>. But not all men, once again, the therapy is necessary only for “those men who have in all ages, through an affectation of being distinguished from the vulgar, or some unaccountable turn of thought, pretended either to believe nothing at all, or to believe the most extravagant things in the world.” (DHP 171) Later we learn it is the modern philosophy and its ‘innovations’, ‘novelties’ and ‘paradoxes’ (DHP 244) that are repugnant to common sense.

The source of these paradoxes is often identified as the language philosophers use to express their doctrines. When Hylas in DHP 172 charges Philonous with the seemingly absurd opinion that matter does not exist, Berkeley’s speaker calmly replies: “That there is no such thing as what philosophers call *material substance*, I am seriously persuaded.” (my underlying) The discussion is to take into account the difference between the speech of the vulgar and the philosophers’ jargon, the latter’s justification and use being often questioned. For example, Berkeley points out that philosophers like to call their physicalistic model the ‘real’ sound and this leads them to admit that the ‘real’ sound cannot be heard but only seen or felt, just as real motion is seen and felt only. (DHP 182) Thus, the insistence on the physicalistic model leads to paradoxical repercussions which are, however, most conspicuous on the level of language again, for they destroy the traditional network of meanings between the words concerned, in this case ‘sound’, ‘real’, ‘motion’ etc.

---

<sup>42</sup> “men (should be) reduced from paradoxes to common sense.” *Works II*, p. 168, “...the same principles which, at first view, lead to *scepticism*, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense.” *Works II*, p. 263.

“...I endeavour to vindicate common sense.” *Works II*, p. 244.

Philonous repeatedly forces Hylas into such paradoxical utterances – a practice usually explained as Berkeley’s able resurrection of the *elenchus* disputation of the Platonic dialogues<sup>43</sup>, but still a practice underlined by Berkeley’s exceptional feeling for ordinary speech: “P: Tell me, Hylas, hath everyone a liberty to change the current proper signification annexed to a common name in any language? ...H: Common custom is the standard of propriety in language.” (DHP 216) Far from being merely an imaginative exercise in the ancient hunt for the *aporia*, the *Dialogues* strive to defend the views of the vulgar together with the language that expresses them and, in their critical task, identify the philosophers’ departures from ordinary language as the cause of their errors<sup>44</sup>. At the same time, as far as the words ‘matter’ and ‘material substance’ (*sic*) are parts of ordinary language, they are to be retained. Only the philosophical theory behind them is to be rejected. Both words “are never used by common people; or, if ever, it is to signify the immediate objects of sense.” (DHP 261)<sup>45</sup> Here Berkeley’s tentative ‘or, if ever’ betrays his effort to wrest the words from the philosophers and give it back to ‘common people’. The very same technique is at play also in many entries in the *Philosophical Commentaries* (111a, 537, 552, 703, 725, 832, 862, and 867) and the high number of these entries alone testifies to a genuine general tendency of much of Berkeley’s thinking.

The tension between the language of the vulgar and the philosophers’ is brought out, for instance, at the beginning of the third Dialogue, where Hylas claims that it is impossible to know “the real tree or stone”. (DHP 227) Here the qualifier ‘real’ enables Hylas to insinuate Locke’s doctrine of the difference between the real and nominal essences of things. Philonous, rather naively, objects that the tree he sees over there and the stone he stands on are real. Also, he can distinguish between iron and gold, and therefore he knows what each is. And, as a last attempt to convince Hylas that even he

---

<sup>43</sup> Walmsley, Peter: *The Rhetoric of Berkeley’s Philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1990, p. 69.

<sup>44</sup> Nor is this conviction of Berkeley’s reserved to the *Dialogues*, it was a constant of his thinking: “Allow a man the privilege to make his own definitions of common words, and it will be no hard matter for him to infer conclusions which in one sense shall be true and in another false, at once seeming paradoxes and manifest truisms.” *Alciphron, Works III*, p. 324.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. also PHK 35, 82, DHP 225, PC 391, 517, 724, 862. It is biographically interesting to note that in four of the very earliest entries on the subject Berkeley identifies the common people with the Irish (392, 393, 394, 398).

himself knows some real things, or at least behaves as if he knew them, is his claim that when Hylas wants to write something down, he sends his servant to fetch him pen, ink and paper, and surely he at least knows what to expect when the servant returns. (DHP 228) For Berkeley, the word ‘real’ is anchored in everyday situations like distinguishing between two things and sending someone to fetch something, it is also anchored in everyday behaviour since “men eat, and drink, and sleep, and perform all the offices of life as comfortably and conveniently, as if they really knew the things they are conversant about.” (DHP 228) He also explicitly claims the word ‘real’, and at the same time ‘know’, back to ordinary language from Cartesian theoretical attempt to ward off scepticism: “What a jest is it for a philosopher to question the existence of sensible things, till he hath it proved to him from the veracity of God...” (DHP 230) He refuses even to be drawn into the Cartesian doubt, seeing, like some other contemporaries of Descartes, that his attempt to solve the sceptical questions fails: “I might as well doubt of my own being, as of the being of those things I actually see and feel.” (DHP 230) The words ‘real’ and ‘know’ must have application in our everyday life to stay meaningful and the vulgar are justified in their usage.

However, Berkeley is no hard-core ordinary language philosopher as the preceding analysis might have indicated, he does devise a technical meaning for the word ‘real’, but his technical notion of reality is remarkably vulgar-friendly. It is explained in PHK 33-36<sup>46</sup>, where ‘real’ things are contrasted with Chimaeras, illusions of the fancy and the like. PHK 41 shows that Berkeley would want to include dreams in the ‘unreal’ category, as well. And it is difficult to object from the common sense point of view against such a dichotomy, which cannot be said of the opinion that we never see the ‘real things’.

---

<sup>46</sup> This doctrine is in the making in PC 535 and 807, where it is also quite clear that the distinction between *entia rationis* and *entia realia* is not to be based metaphysically, both types of entities are of the same metaphysical type, which is another difference between immaterialism and representative realism, where the true ideas would be caused by another substance – the material substance. Here both types of ideas are caused by the same substance – the spirit.

The subject of ‘certainty’ is semantically intertwined with that of ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ and forms a certain corollary of the two philosophically nobler subjects<sup>47</sup>. Here Berkeley is unequivocal: “We must w<sup>th</sup> the Mob place certainty in the senses.” (PC 740) And in other entries he is even implicitly critical of Descartes’ programme of introducing mathematics as the most certain science (PC 336, 368) going as far as degrading the supposedly undeserved high status mathematicians enjoyed at that time (for example PC 371, 372, 373, 375, 376, 385, 386). Once again, it is more useful to read these remarks not as blind rage against competitors but as an effort to incorporate mathematics into immaterialist metaphysics with the aim of wrestling certainty back to the senses and common sense: “I see no reason why certainty should be confin’d to the Mathematicians” (PC 468)

What are some concrete examples of common sense for Berkeley? They include situations where I am certain of the existence of my glove because I see it, feel it and wear it (DHP 224), that the stone I stand on is real, the tree I see over there is real as well, I know what water and fire is and can distinguish between iron and gold (DHP 227), I know what pen, ink and paper are because I send my servant to get them (DHP 228), a servant knows where and when to meet you and how to get there (PHK 97) and generally people act as if they knew the things they meet in their everyday lives (DHP 228). All these examples are fairly tame and it is difficult to object to them.

#### **1.4 The Hidden Metaphor**

However, Berkeley never says that it is common sense to believe we see material, external things. He does allow the qualifier ‘sensible’ before ‘things’ when discussing the perceptual situation, but that is all. Let us have a look at why some qualifiers before ‘things’ are acceptable to Berkeley and some not.

We shall start with the adjective ‘material’. It is derived from the noun ‘matter’ and so someone attempting to refute the very concept of matter is sure to avoid the

---

<sup>47</sup> It asserted its independence comparatively late in the history of philosophy in Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*.

adjective as well. And also, there is simply no reason, apart from the materialists' prejudice, to call the things around us 'material'. Certainly ordinary people do not call them so and they do not divide the things they see into 'material' and 'immaterial'.

The adjective 'external' needs its opposite 'internal' to mean anything, just like other opposites are defined against each other: left and right, right and wrong, stupid and clever. It is impossible to imagine a world where only the right side was actual and not the left side as well. And sure enough, in the materialist's scheme of things the external things are contrasted with the internal ideas. But Berkeley rejects both sides of the metaphor, noting that this doubling of worlds leads to scepticism. For him there are just things, and these are neither 'external' nor 'internal'. (DHP 214)

The rejected metaphor inside/outside manifests itself in another way as well, and this time it is not rejected by Berkeley as resolutely as the external/internal pair<sup>48</sup>. It is the pair of opposite adverbs within/without and here the game is much more subtle. It is Berkeley's battle cry that there is nothing 'without the mind' and commentators have asked themselves: what does this mean? Curiously, the innumerable negative references to things 'without' the mind in the *Principles* are balanced by mere two mentioning of things 'within' the mind, and these two come in passages where the adverb 'within' means basically 'produced by one's own mind' without any spatiality included. (PHK 56, 90) So, far from employing the within/without pair as another mutation of the inside/outside metaphor, Berkeley is using 'without' always in negative contexts to reject that very metaphor inherent in the Cartesian dualism<sup>49</sup>. It is a negative programme, for by saying 'there are no things without' Berkeley does not want to be understood as saying 'everything is within' but rather 'there simply is no without/within'.

Another incarnation of the outside/inside metaphor is the opposite pair of absolute/relative. This couple comes very handy when one wants to contrast the changing and fleeting perceptions of our mind with the 'real' thing, which, by virtue of being 'real', stays the same all the time. Once again, this inseparable couple is brutally severed by

---

<sup>48</sup> For the hidden metaphors in our talk see for example Lakoff, George; Johnson, Mark: *Metaphors We Live By*, University of Chicago Press, 1980.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. PHK 15: "But the arguments foregoing plainly shew it to be impossible that ...there should be any such thing as an *outward object*." (My italics)

Berkeley 'Absolute' existence is coupled with the existence 'without' the mind and is rejected accordingly (PHK 3, 12) or it is incomprehensible and thus rejected (PHK 24) or just wrong (PHK 133), whereas 'relative' is a positive thing since it describes a dependence on the mind (PHK 11, 12)<sup>50</sup>.

Finally, perhaps the last instance of the ever changing and ubiquitous metaphor is the curious piece of philosophical jargon, 'the thing in itself'. It is used to describe the 'outside', 'absolute' and 'real' half of the equation, as opposed to mere 'appearance'<sup>51</sup>. ("...the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves, or without the mind." PHK 24) But Berkeley is on his guard even against this deceitful intruder masquerading as a technical term: "I know not w<sup>t</sup> they mean by things consider'd in themselves. This is nonsense, Jargon." (PC 832)

The only modifier Berkeley allows before 'things' is the word 'sensible', which he inherits from Locke. In it, we can perhaps see an optical-scientific grounding of his metaphysics, of which more later in the third part of this thesis.

Berkeley's comprehensive fight against the complex inside/outside metaphor is summed up and made explicit in PHK 87-8: "...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 not amuse ourselves with the terms 'absolute,' 'external,' 'exist,' and such-like, signifying we know not what." and again in PHK 24: "...it is (not) 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. ...It is on this therefore that I insist, to wit, that the absolute existence of unthinking things are words without a meaning, or which include a contradiction. This is what I repeat and inculcate, and earnestly recommend to the attentive thoughts of the reader."<sup>52</sup> It is clear that our writer is aware of the complex nature of the underlying metaphor and of its mutations and,

---

<sup>50</sup> Cf. DHP 256: "Then as to *absolute existence*; was there ever known a more jejune notion than that?"

<sup>51</sup> For 'appear', 'seem' and 'look' see Austin, J. L.: *Sense and Sensibilia*, OUP, 1962, pp. 33-43.

<sup>52</sup> Notice the added emphasis. The analogical place in the *Dialogues*: "But those and the like objections vanish, if we do not maintain the being of absolute external originals, but place the reality of things in ideas..." (DHP 258)



by refusing to employ one half of the pairs used in its construction, he effectively rejects it as an example of conceptual confusion together with its underlining Cartesian metaphysical dualism: “The supposition that things are distinct from Ideas takes away all real Truth, & consequently brings in a Universal Scepticism, since all our knowledge & contemplation is confin’d barely to our own Ideas.” (PC 606)

Also, his usage of the words ‘know’, ‘certain’ and ‘real’ is metaphysically less demanding and does not contradict common usage<sup>53</sup>. A natural philosopher does not know more about a thing because he knows more of its hidden nature (this was how Locke made room for scientific knowledge, reducing the knowledge of ordinary people to near ignorance), but he can just place his knowledge into a wider web of analogies and reduce it to general laws. This seems to be the import of paragraph 105 of the *Principles*. A blacksmith knows everything there is to know about the hammer he uses every-day, a physicist can only point out certain analogies with other bodies in nature. Berkeley’s account of science as uncovering laws rather than essences or natures of things leaves room for non-scientists to know things as well.<sup>54</sup>

### 1.5 ‘Explicit’ and ‘implicit’ common sense

By refusing to define a commonsensical position positively, Berkeley is espousing something we could call ‘implicit’ common sense. His consistent strategy is to exclude certain propositions as non-commonsensical but never to say things like ‘common sense is to believe in the existence of external physical things’ or such. That would be an attempt to accommodate common sense to a philosophical scheme of things, or an attempt at an ‘explicit’ common sense. So his doctrine escapes such broad

---

<sup>53</sup> Here we concentrate on the ‘surface’ semantic level of words. The philosophical arguments supporting it will be dealt with in later sections.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Ardley, G. W. R: *Berkeley’s Philosophy of Nature*, University of Auckland, 1962, p. 47: “(Berkeley’s) happy analogy of exact science to grammar is immensely rewarding.” and Atherton, M.: *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, Cornell University Press, 1990, p. 242: “Berkeley (tries) to replace a science based on the Cartesian model, which is essentialist in nature, with one, based on his own language model, which is law-like...more Newtonian view...”

characterisations as ‘realism’, ‘common sense realism’ or ‘idealism’.<sup>55</sup>

The temptation to make common sense explicit in their systems has been widely and wildly indulged by philosophers. Berkeley’s contemporaries, Claude Buffier and Thomas Reid “endeavoured to formulate axioms of incontrovertible common sense; such axioms, once isolated, are like Euclid’s first principles, to be beyond examination and argument. E.g. there are corporeal objects in the world, there are other people, etc.”<sup>56</sup> The aim of these ‘common sense’ philosophers would invariably be to combat post-Cartesian scepticism by ‘common sense’ (G. E. Moore and his refutation of idealism fits naturally into this group). But Berkeley, though eager to do the same, would never attempt to lay down any explicit principles of common sense.<sup>57</sup>

Though perhaps the first exponent of the ‘implicit’ version, Berkeley is definitely not the only one. Austin’s *Sense and Sensibilia* is a powerful statement of this philosophical programme (or, as some might say, rather the lack of it) and so is Wittgenstein’s *On Certainty*. And the tension between both versions is signalled by the fact that the target of Wittgenstein’s last book is Moore’s project in his ‘A Proof of the External World’ and ‘A Defence of Common Sense’. There, Moore seems to want to make a list of things he ‘really knows’, but Wittgenstein claims such a list is impossible and distorts the meaning of the word ‘know’ which requires particular circumstances for its use.

The friction between ‘explicit’ and ‘implicit’ approach to common sense spills into Berkeleian scholarship, as well. Commentators who claim that it is common sense to believe in the existence of ‘material objects’ beg the question against Berkeley’s immaterialism and are bound to find his system solipsistic. Unfortunately, almost all commentators share this basic misunderstanding. Warnock’s influential *Berkeley* is full of statements like: “But to those who wish, as surely as we do all wish, to maintain that

---

<sup>55</sup> Austin, J. L.: *Sense and Sensibilia*, OUP, 1962, pp. 2-4, though Austin later claims Berkeley uses the ‘argument from illusion’; I think he is too hasty there.

<sup>56</sup> Ardley, G.W.R.: *Berkeley’s Renovation of Philosophy*, The Hague 1968, p. 98.

<sup>57</sup> Ardley, G.W.R.: *Berkeley’s Renovation of Philosophy*, p. 100 “Where Buffier speaks of common sense as an array of first truths, Berkeley speaks of common sense as our home.” – the metaphor of coming home after a long journey through the systems of philosophers is used by Berkeley in the *Dialogues*.

there are about us physical objects at various distances from ourselves and each other...”<sup>58</sup> Pitcher amusingly confuses a certain physical theory with common sense in his *Berkeley*: “We exist, according to common sense, in a four dimensional world of three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension.”<sup>59</sup> He also mentions “our commonsensical beliefs about physical objects”.<sup>60</sup>

In more recent times, Muehlmann claims Berkeley to be “the first self-conscious and systematic philosopher of common-sense”<sup>61</sup> and it is the ‘systematic’ part that spoils this valuable observation, for Berkeley is seen as trying to defend “the possibility of common sense realism”<sup>62</sup>, an almost Herculean task in which he, almost inevitably, fails because common sense realism needs “some realistic ontology as an underpinning”<sup>63</sup>. But Berkeley appears to fail only because Muehlmann misconstrues his goals and ascribes the “strangely prevailing” opinion that houses exist unperceived (PHK 4) to the plain man instead of the learned elite.<sup>64</sup> Also Pappas has Berkeley defend, together with the direct realists, “the thesis that physical objects are typically immediately perceived.”<sup>65</sup>

Not surprisingly, these commentators see Berkeley as failing in his endeavour to reconcile immaterialism with common sense<sup>66</sup> simply because they see common sense couched in terms of the Cartesian metaphysics to which Berkeley was reacting and so are begging the question against him. On this basic and metaphysically neutral level, immaterialism could be summed up as ‘reasons why philosophers should not call the things people perceive material’.

Some commentators are more cautious. Winkler in his informed and well-

---

<sup>58</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, London: Penguin, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 53.

<sup>59</sup> Pitcher, G: *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 140.

<sup>60</sup> Pitcher, G: *Berkeley*, p. 162.

<sup>61</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, Indianapolis, 1992, p. 8.

<sup>62</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, p. 186.

<sup>63</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, p. 210.

<sup>64</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, p. 209.

<sup>65</sup> Pappas, George S.: *Berkeley's Thought*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 190.

<sup>66</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, London: Penguin, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 18, Pitcher, G: *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 254, Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, Indianapolis, 1992, p. 251, Pappas, George S.: *Berkeley's Thought*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 209.

researched interpretation feels the urge to define immaterialism with the help of ‘ordinary objects’<sup>67</sup>. Tipton also avoids the trap of talking about ‘physical objects’ and since his interpretation proved influential in subsequent Berkeleian scholarship and an alternative to Luce’s sympathetic and common-sense-friendly views, it deserves a more detailed discussion here. Two of the book’s seven chapters deal directly with common sense (2 Berkeley and Common Sense and 4 The Approach from Ordinary Usage), while numerous other allusions to the ‘plain man’ are scattered throughout the book. Tipton notices what he calls “Berkeley’s *Janus-faced* defence of common sense and ordinary language”<sup>68</sup> but unfortunately ascribes this to Berkeley’s moods (!) and does not look for underlying reasons why our author disregards the mob’s account of causality or heterogeneity of ideas while embracing ‘the certainty of the senses’. His overall interpretative strategy is that Berkeley was right to attack certain inherently sceptical tendencies of the then reigning materialism, but that he did that from an equally implausible immaterialist standpoint. So the negative side of Berkeley’s programme is justified and really defends common sense while the positive one creates new problems and is just another philosophical affront to the ‘plain man’.<sup>69</sup> To get Berkeley into this precarious position, Tipton pictures him as trying to do two things in the *Principles*: to convince the philosopher that there is no matter and at the same time to persuade the ‘plain man’ that immaterialism does not go against his beliefs about the world.<sup>70</sup> Such a strategy not only wrongly enlarges the audience of the *Principles*; it also distorts some of its passages. For example, “an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men” (PHK 4) is held by ordinary people as well as philosophers according to this reading, thus ignoring the fact that if an opinion is prevailing ‘strangely’, it cannot be a part of common sense. Also, when commenting on the first paragraph of the *Principles*, where Berkeley gives a list of ‘objects of knowledge’, Tipton rightly suggests: “Clearly this is a philosopher

---

<sup>67</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, 1989, pp. 191 and 193.

<sup>68</sup> Tipton, I. C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, Methuen & Co. Ltd, London, 1974, p. 17, the description is actually borrowed from Sullivan, C. J.: ‘Berkeley’s Attack on Matter’, in *George Berkeley*, ed. Aschenbrenner, K., Mates, Berkeley and Pepper, C. S., Berkeley, 1957.

<sup>69</sup> Tipton, I. C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 18.

<sup>70</sup> Tipton, I. C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 61 “...Berkeley has to fight on two fronts if he is to persuade the layman and the philosopher...”, see also pp. 21, 70.

writing for philosophers ... our plain man will presumably feel rather lost at this stage...”<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, it is not a question of stages, our plain man (who in Berkeley’s time was illiterate) will sadly feel lost throughout the whole book because the book is not intended for him at all. The debate takes place solely between the materialists and Berkeley; the plain man is not even a spectator.

### **1.6 Summary: Berkeley and *common sense***

We have tried to show why Berkeley felt so justified in claiming that immaterialism does not contradict common sense. The reasons being the much smaller role that common sense plays in the *Principles* and the *New Theory of Vision*, both of which are intended for natural philosophers. Berkeley as the first champion of ‘implicit common sense’ rejects the whole Cartesian inside/outside metaphor within which the traditional debate of direct vs. representative realism vs. idealism vs. phenomenalism takes place, and this rejection has unfortunately gone unnoticed by most of his commentators. His law-like theory of science does not distort the words ‘know’, ‘real’ and ‘certain’ and this lies at the heart of his claim that the reigning materialistic philosophy is paradoxical while immaterialism is not.

To account for the description of *Janus-faced* defence of common sense by Berkeley we construed him as admitting that he departs from common sense in two areas: heterogeneity of visual and tactile ideas, and causality. The first departure is necessitated by his scientific theory of perception and justified by its success in explaining several of the optical paradoxes of his time; the second is, upon a close examination, a mistake of a theological nature, as will be argued in the third chapter of this thesis.

---

<sup>71</sup> Tipton, I. C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 68.

## 2.1 'Idea' and 'thing' in primary sources: NTV

What does Berkeley mean when he says 'idea'? In his *New Theory of Vision* he uses it as "it is commonly used by the moderns" to signify "any immediate object of sense or understanding" (NTV 45). This, however, is too general, so it will help to have a look at how the word is actually used. In a work dealing with optics we would expect 'idea' to stand for some kind of visual image. And indeed, §44 talks of 'ideas or resemblances of things' and this idea is 'weak and obscure'. Later, ideas are described as 'light and colours' (NTV 103) and §117 is unequivocal in stating that "certain variety and disposition of colours ...constitute the visible man, or picture of a man". Finally, 'confused appearance of the object' (NTV 22) would be a borderline case of a possible visual image, whereas 'faintness' of the image (NTV 73) transcends the simple visual picture, even though a picture is an essential component of it, and it belongs to the following category, that of 'sensation'.

More often 'idea', surprisingly, does not mean 'visual image'. It occurs often in collocations with 'sensation' and 'perception' (for instance NTV 16, 17, 18, 26, 28, 73, 78), is connected to these words by the conjunction 'or' and is interchangeable with them. They are regarded by Berkeley as synonyms with the same meaning. The synonymy goes the other way, as well, i.e. where we would expect 'sensation' we often find 'idea'. Thus the feeling that is connected with our turning our eyes is an 'idea' and the 'idea of distance' is a feeling we associate with seeing things at a distance (NTV 17) because we can have "the idea of great distance, or small distance, or no distance at all" (NTV 26) and these can vary in degree (NTV 77 'the idea of farther distance'). Also the 'idea of approach' (NTV 37) is probably to be construed as a sensation that can be made conscious on introspection, the same holding for 'the ideas of greater or lesser' (NTV 56), 'the idea of greater magnitude' (NTV 70), 'ideas of upper and lower' (NTV 93) and 'idea of the intermediate objects' (*sic*) (NTV 77).

One of the main themes of Berkeley's optical project is the relationship between sight and touch, and the concept of 'idea' is equally at home in both senses – 'idea of touch' is a tactile sensation. That is why Berkeley can claim that there is no idea common to the senses of sight and touch – the famous heterogeneity thesis – because 'idea' here

means a visual or tactile sensation (“the ideas which constitute the tangible earth and man are entirely different from those which constitute the visible earth and man” NTV 102). The experience of the force of gravity seems to be somehow intimately connected with the tactile idea of ground: “by his touch (a person blind from birth) obtained an idea of earth or ground, towards which he perceives the parts of his body to have a natural tendency” (NTV 96).

The mind, however, combines ideas of different senses, according to arbitrary laws and to suit convenience, and calls these combinations or collections of ideas by one name (NTV 79, 107). This is a prejudice that is unhelpful for Berkeley’s optical project. The collections of ideas of one sense are by Berkeley called ‘complex ideas’: “one complex idea (consists of) all those particular ideas which constitute the visible head or foot” (NTV 110).

In his build up of a comprehensive psychology of vision as a part of his optical programme, Berkeley uses psychological entities only which were actually bequeathed to him by his predecessors in natural philosophy and so his usage does not deviate significantly from Locke’s or Descartes’ use, although his terminology is much more elaborate and worked out. If we were to look for an analogical concept in more recent philosophy, we would have to compare Berkeley’s ‘idea’ of NTV with what later was named ‘sense datum’. The comparison should, however, not be taken too literally as it risks being anachronistic – it should only point to the common features of privacy, subjectivity, incorrigibility and a connection to a theory of perception.

## **2.2 ‘Idea’ and ‘thing’ in PHK and DHP**

At the beginning of the *Principles*, ideas are still sense data: “By sight I have the ideas of light and colours, with their several degrees and variations. By touch I perceive hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and of all these more and less either as to quantity or degree. Smelling furnishes me with odours; the palate with tastes; and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition.” (PHK 1) The mind-dependent status of this idea/sense datum is immediately confirmed in the next

paragraph: "...the existence of an idea consists in being perceived." (PHK 2) and again in paragraph 89 ideas are described as "*inert, fleeting, dependent beings*", a description which was actually softened, for the first edition read "*fleetings, perishable passions, or dependent beings*." Once again, 'ideas' collocate frequently with 'sensations' (for instance in PHK 25) and, once again, are defined as "the objects of sense (that) exist only in the mind, and are withal thoughtless and inactive". (PHK 39) In both books Berkeley treats 'idea' as a technical term in need of a definition.

In DHP 'idea' again occurs in synonymic contexts with 'sensation' (for example DHP 177, 188, 203, 204, 206, 208, 215), and it is described as a "thing perpetually fleeting and variable" (DHP 205), it often collocates with 'quality' (DHP 217; in PHK as well). Neither in his metaphysical books does Berkeley swerve from using 'idea' for sense datum.

### **2.2.1 Identification of 'idea' with 'thing' – 'changing ideas into things'**

So far so good, idea is a sense datum and Berkeley can be called a solipsist. But this simple picture is complicated by his famous identification of 'ideas' with 'things' which occurs later in the *Principles*. (The transition is made easier by Berkeley's using 'sensible thing' in the opening sections, at first meaning 'idea' but later surreptitiously acquiring the meaning of 'thing', as well. The subtle dialectic is discernible for example in Paragraph 8, which contains the first objection to Berkeley's proof that there is no other substance than spirit from the previous paragraph. The anticipated objection concedes that ideas exist only in the mind, but it posits 'things' which the ideas are supposed to resemble. Berkeley's reply, however, talks not of 'things', but of 'external things', the added modifier signalling a philosophers' term that is to be rejected as a part of the inside/outside metaphor, thus allowing Berkeley to retain 'thing' for his purposes.)

On the purely textual level, the identification in the *Principles* does not occur yet, even though it is always in the background. Berkeley prefers to keep the two terms in an antagonistic relationship so that he can differentiate between real things and dreams, hallucinations and fantasies: "the difference betwixt *things* and *ideas*, *realities* and



*chimeras*” (PHK 82). And paragraph 89 is explicit in subsuming ‘idea’ under ‘thing’: “*Thing* or *being* is the most general name of all; it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing common but the name, to wit, *spirits* and *ideas*.”

In the Dialogues, on the other hand, the identification is textually well documented. Both terms occur in clearly synonymic contexts connected by ‘or’ (DHP 201, 214, 230), though ‘thing’ is usually accompanied by ‘perceived’.

The metamorphosis of ‘ideas’ into ‘things’ takes place mainly in paragraphs 38-9 of the *Principles*, where their intricate relationship is spelled out. The first important point to observe is that the two terms are not defined against each other, in fact, for Berkeley they are synonymous<sup>72</sup>: “we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas” and again “we are fed and clothed with those things which we perceive immediately by our senses.” The second important thing to notice is Berkeley’s awareness that he is abusing language when he calls things ‘ideas’: “it is more proper or conformable to custom that they should be called things rather than ideas”, but Berkeley claims that this is only a cosmetic problem. His revolutionary ontology can be paraphrased into the neutral: “we are fed and clothed with those things which we perceive immediately by our senses.” By using the word ‘idea’ Berkeley merely wants to get rid of dangerous connotations of the word ‘thing’ which “is generally supposed to denote somewhat existing without the mind”. (Notice the crucial hedging in ‘*is generally supposed*’ – Berkeley’s whole project aims to show that this general, and we would like to suggest that it is general only among philosophers, supposition is wrong.) And to stress that this is only a verbal dispute not concerning the truth of the proposition, Berkeley is content to use the usual ‘thing’ rather than ‘idea’ provided we reject the misleading connotations, which, however, are explicit and possible to formulate only on the philosophical level of speech: “If therefore you agree with me that we eat and drink and are clad with the

---

<sup>72</sup> Berkeley is well aware that his opponents use ‘idea’ and ‘thing’ as mutually defining opposites. Thus in PHK 87 he adopts their voice and says: “Things remaining the same, our ideas vary, and which of them, or even whether any of them at all, represent the true quality really existing in the thing, it is out of our reach to determine.” But from such analysis scepticism necessarily follows, and therefore the oppositeness of idea/thing is rejected as an instance of the absolute/relative transmutation of the inside/outside metaphor.

immediate objects of sense, which cannot exist unperceived or without the mind, I shall readily grant it is more proper or conformable to custom that they should be called things rather than ideas.” (PHK 38)

The identification of ideas and things is further enlarged on in PHK 87-89. Berkeley even explicitly states that “our supposing a difference between *things* and *ideas*” leads to scepticism (PHK 87)<sup>73</sup> and one possible interpretation of the scope of his famous maxim ‘*esse is percipi*’ could be to see it as connecting the specialists’ term ‘idea’ with the common ‘thing’.

The *Principles* account of the identification of ‘ideas’ with ‘things’ was probably felt by Berkeley to have failed to persuade his readers and in the *Dialogues* more space is devoted to this theme. The whole debate revolves around the nature of ‘sensible things’ (DHP 173-4), which ambiguous term is shortly narrowed down to sense data: “by sight (we do not immediately perceive) anything beside light, and colours, and figures: or by hearing, anything but sounds: by the palate, anything beside tastes: by the smell, beside odours: or by the touch, more than tangible qualities.” (DHP 175) After two dialogues, the mind-dependent status of these entities is sufficiently established, but Hylas still feels there is something missing in the picture. He feels that the visions of a dream and Chimaeras are also ideas and so how can Berkeley account for ‘real’ things? (DHP 235) These, however, are more orderly and vivid, and this almost Cartesian distinction between dreams and reality is thus available in immaterialism, as well. But a lingering suspicion remains, for then ‘idea’ is used in very much the same way as ‘thing’. This Berkeley concedes and claims that the advantage of ‘idea’ over ‘thing’ is its philosophical connotations of mind-dependence, the same point he had made in the *Principles*. Hylas is still not satisfied, he requires a more robust sense of reality, and accuses the immaterialist: “you are for changing all things into ideas” (DHP 244). Here Berkeley shrewdly turns the objection and through Philonous asserts: “You mistake me. I

---

<sup>73</sup> The identification of ‘idea’ with ‘thing’ is seen as Berkeley’s unique way of avoiding skepticism by most commentators. Tipton, p. 53: “Berkeley’s solution to the problem is staggeringly simple.” Pitcher, p. 137: “...he executes a masterstroke that allows him, as he thinks, to triumph on all fronts. I refer to his brilliant move of simply identifying what we call real physical objects (events, processes, or whatever) with ideas of sense.”

am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things” and offers an analysis of Hylas’ persistent feeling of a lack of robustness of immaterialism: “What you call the empty forms and outside of things seems to me the very things themselves. Nor are they empty or incomplete otherwise, than upon your supposition, that matter is an essential part of all corporeal things.” (DHP 244-5) Only as long as ‘ideas’ remain defined against ‘material things’ are they felt to be inadequate to constitute the reality of things. Only on the materialists’ supposition are they ‘empty appearances’.

In identifying ‘thing’ with ‘idea’, the departure from ordinary usage of the word ‘thing’ is admitted: “The difference is only about a name. And whether that name be retained or rejected, the sense, the truth and reality of things continues the same.” (DHP 251) but Berkeley is willing to pay the price since his philosophical arguments recoup his losses.

It is crucial for the defence of immaterialism against objections from common sense that its sentences translate into ordinary language without paradoxes. The identification of ‘idea’ with ‘thing’ goes a long way towards achieving that smooth translation. The aim is to eliminate, together with the metaphysical dualism underpinning the difference between the two terms, also the possibility of scepticism<sup>74</sup>. At what cost this is achieved, however, remains to be seen.

### **2.2.2 Is the Argument from Illusion used by Berkeley for the separation of ‘idea’ and ‘thing’?**

The first objection against the identification of ‘ideas’ with ‘things’ would go like this: The technical term ‘idea’ was introduced to account for cases of abnormal perception, cases listed by the ancient Argument from Illusion (sometimes called the Argument from Perceptual Relativity). To explain why we sometimes perceive ‘things’ as they are not philosophers came up with the concept of ‘idea’, which is defined against

---

<sup>74</sup> Both in PHK 87-9 and DHP 244-5, the identification of ‘idea’ with ‘thing’ is interwoven with Berkeley’s analysis of the roots of scepticism. The remedy is prescribed and the diagnosis follows.

the concept of ‘thing’. But Berkeley, though he uses the Argument from Illusion, uses both terms synonymously, which seems contradictory.

Now, Berkeley does use the Argument several times, for instance in the *Principles* 14-15 and in the *Dialogues* 178-9, 185-6, 258. The first occurrence is especially significant, for it is followed by Berkeley’s own evaluation of the Argument: “Though it must be confessed this method of arguing does not so much prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, as that we do not know by sense which is the true extension or colour of the object. But the arguments foregoing plainly shew it to be impossible that any colour or extension at all, or other sensible quality whatsoever, should exist in an unthinking subject without the mind, or in truth, that there should be any such thing as an outward object.” (PHK 15) The Argument is thus used only secondarily after the a priori arguments of the first seven paragraphs and together with them to show that what we perceive are ideas only<sup>75</sup>.

The occurrence in the *Dialogues* 178-9 is an *ad hominem* argument against Hylas’ naïve realism while that in 185-6 to force the conclusion that perceived qualities ‘are all equally apparent’. Nowhere is it used to introduce the term ‘idea’, let alone to define it against the term ‘thing’.

The limited efficacy of the Argument is also attested in the *Dialogues* 258: “Upon this supposition indeed, the objections from the change of colours in a pigeon’s neck, or the appearance of the broken oar in the water, must be allowed to have weight. But these and the like objections vanish, if we do not maintain the being of absolute external originals, but place the reality of things in ideas...” The sceptical corollaries follow from the Argument only if it is applied to the materialists’ doctrine, immaterialism is immune.

---

<sup>75</sup> For a similar view, see Pitcher, p. 260n. Warnock, pp. 146-53 also emphasizes the didactic role of the Argument from Illusion: “In the *Principles*, Berkeley had taken it as agreed in the learned world that what Locke had called ‘secondary qualities’ are ‘only in the mind’...But in the *Dialogues*, not assuming prior acceptance of Locke’s arguments, he undertakes *to prove* that secondary qualities are ‘in the mind’ (Warnock, p. 146), Tipton, p. 239, and Lambert, Richard T.: “Berkeley’s Commitment to Relativism”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 26: “Why did the *Dialogues*’ magnified assessment and use of relativity differ so from the role given that concept in the *Principles*? I contend that the major reason for this change was a rhetorical one.” For a slightly different and sophisticated discussion of the scope of the Argument, see Grayling, pp. 71-4.

Notice also the seemingly contradictory conclusion to the one drawn in the preceding example, for now it seems that all the qualities are 'equally real' because we 'place the reality of things in ideas'. But the problem of identifying the 'real' qualities arises only in the dualist scheme, in immaterialism the distinction apparent/real collapses when applied to sensible things; it is retained for the dream and fantasy vs. reality debate.

Berkeley did not feel the need to define 'idea' with the help of the Argument from Illusion, for that would involve defining it against 'thing' and an open road to scepticism. He simply took the term from his philosophical predecessors and, seeing its usefulness in his optical project and the place of pride of the optical investigations in his system, used it in his metaphysics, as well.

### **2.3 Can two people see the same thing? – The privacy of the idea**

Another objection to the identification of 'idea' with 'thing' points out the fact that ideas as sense data are subjective and private while 'thing' implies existence in a public space, it is objective. So, given the privacy of our ideas and the identification of ideas with things, it seems to follow that two persons cannot see the same thing. Now, Berkeley does assign both contradictory features to 'idea' (the public character of bodies is insisted on in PHK 48: "For though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not." and the privacy implied in PHK 140: "we conceive the ideas that are in the minds of other spirits by means of our own, which we suppose to be resemblances of them.") and so the objection seems to be a fair one.

Berkeley, through Hylas, poses this objection to himself in DHP 247-8 and some commentators see his treatment of it as inadequate<sup>76</sup> while others have attempted to

---

<sup>76</sup> Grave, S. A.: 'The Mind and Its Ideas: Some Problems in the Interpretation of Berkeley', in *Locke and Berkeley*, ed. Martin, C. B. and Armstrong, D. M., London, 1968, pp. 300-1, Marc-Wogau, K.: 'The Argument from Illusion and Berkeley's Idealism', in *Locke and Berkeley*, ed. Martin, C. B. and Armstrong, D. M., London, 1968, pp. 349-50.

defend it. Let us quote the passage in full, for close reading will be necessary in order to decide whether Philonous succeeds in meeting the objection or not:

HYLAS But the same idea which is in my mind, cannot be in yours, or in any other mind. Doth it not therefore follow from your principles, that no two can see the same thing? And is not this highly absurd?

PHILONOUS If the term *same* be taken in the vulgar acceptance, it is certain (and not at all repugnant to the principles I maintain) that different persons may perceive the same thing; or the same thing or idea exist in different minds. Words are of arbitrary imposition; and since men are used to apply the word *same* where no distinction or variety is perceived, and I do not pretend to alter their perceptions, it follows, that as men have said before, *several saw the same thing*, so they may upon like occasions, still continue to use the same phrase, without any deviation either from propriety of language, or the truth of things. But if the term *same* be used in the acceptance of philosophers, who pretend to an abstracted notion of identity, then, according to their sundry definitions of this notion (for it is not yet agreed wherein that philosophic identity consists), it may or may not be possible for divers persons to perceive the same thing. But whether philosophers shall think fit to call a thing the *same* or no, is, I conceive, of small importance. Let us suppose several men together, all endued with the same faculties, and consequently affected in like sort by their senses, and who had yet never known the use of language; they would without question, agree in their perceptions. Though perhaps, when they came to the use of speech, some regarding the uniformness of what was perceived, might call it the *same* thing: others especially regarding the diversity of persons who perceived, might choose the denomination of different things. But who sees not that all the dispute is about a word? to wit, whether what is perceived by different persons, may yet have the term *same* applied to it? Or suppose a house, whose walls or outward shell remaining unaltered, the chambers are all pulled down, and new ones built in their place; and that you should call this the *same*, and I should say it was not the *same* house: would we not for all this perfectly agree in our thoughts of the house, considered in itself? and would not all the

difference consist in a sound? If you should say we differed in our notions; for that you super-added to your idea of the house the simple abstracted idea of identity, whereas I did not; I would tell you, I know not what you mean by that *abstracted idea of identity*; and should desire you to look into your own thoughts, and be sure you understood your self. -- Why so silent, Hylas? Are you not yet satisfied, men may dispute about identity and diversity, without any real difference in their thoughts and opinions, abstracted from names? Take this farther reflexion with you: that whether Matter be allowed to exist or no, the case is exactly the same as to the point in hand. For the materialists themselves acknowledge what we immediately perceive by our senses, to be our own ideas. Your difficulty therefore, that no two see the same thing, makes equally against the materialists and me.

HYLAS But they suppose an external archetype, to which referring their several ideas, they may truly be said to perceive the same thing.

PHILONOUS And (not to mention your having discarded those archetypes) so may you suppose an external archetype on my principles; *external*, I mean, to your own mind; though indeed it must be supposed to exist in that mind which comprehends all things; but then this serves all the ends of identity, as well as if it existed out of a mind. And I am sure you yourself will not say, it is less intelligible.

The status of the objection is being decided in the latter part of the quote. Berkeley is generally very sensible to whether an objection can be made against him at a particular stage or not and whether it is an objection against immaterialism from materialistic positions or not. If an objection is felt to cut against materialism as well, it is usually dismissed, for Berkeley's contention is against the prevailing materialistic philosophy of his time: "that which makes equally against two contradictory opinions, can be a proof against neither." (DHP 248) The same principle, which we will call the Relevancy principle, is invoked in the discussion of Creation (DHP 250-5) and Berkeley even proposes it as a general interpretative approach to immaterialism in his correspondence with Johnson, advising him to consider "(w)hether the difficulties proposed in objection

to my scheme can be solved by the contrary; for if they cannot, it is plain they can be no objection to mine.”<sup>77</sup>

Is Berkeley then right to claim that the objection arises for the materialists as well? The materialists agree with Berkeley that the ideas two different persons perceive are not the same because they are subjective to each perceiving mind<sup>78</sup>, but the ideas themselves referring to one external object, two perceivers may be said to perceive the same thing. And this is exactly what Berkeley proposes in his own system to meet the objection. The external archetype in this case is in the Infinite mind and serves the double function of guaranteeing the use of the word ‘same’ on the everyday level and being not peculiar to one finite mind, unlike its ideas. So there is a parity between the competing doctrines, both solve the problem in the same way, the balance is tipped in favour of immaterialism by the nature of the crucial ‘external archetype’, not by the objection itself, since the immaterial ‘external archetype’ is an idea as well, one whose relationship with the perceiving mind is not compromised by an unexplained (or even unexplainable) causal relationship between two types of substances or the redundant metaphysical dualism of Cartesianism.

We might, perhaps, still feel that the materialists fare better *vis-à-vis* the objection. After all, they at least attempt to explain how we perceive the same thing, whereas Berkeley’s solution is simply parasitic on theirs. (The whole problem is presented as a possible paradoxical corollary of immaterialism, but the inference is denied in the end. It

---

<sup>77</sup> *Works II*, p. 283. In the same letter we find a nice illustration of the use of the Relevancy principle in a discussion which is perhaps easier to follow. If immaterialism makes God the cause of all movements, then it makes him the cause of murder, for example. But Berkeley replies that this objection makes God guilty of murder also on the occasionalists’ and materialists’ scheme, and concludes: “This theological consideration, therefore, may be waved, as leading beside the question; for such I hold *all points* to be which bear equally hard on both sides of it.” *Ibid.* p. 281, italics mine. This mirrors a discussion of the same objection in DHP 236, where the Relevancy principle is not mentioned explicitly, but is still implicit in Berkeley’s reply. Cf. also PHK 61.

<sup>78</sup> Winkler, p. 304, agrees with me, though very tentatively, on this controversial point. It is, however, the only way of making sense of the passage, the materialists must be in the same difficulty according to Berkeley, and so the subjective status of ideas is common to materialism and immaterialism. Below I argue in a more detailed way against a rival interpretation that assumes publicity of ideas.



is a purely negative treatment, there is not even a hint of a positive doctrine of how two people can be said to see the same thing.) And such an analysis would, in a way, be right. Berkeley simply assumes something materialism tries to account for: “Let us suppose several men together, all endued with the same faculties, and consequently affected in like sort by their senses, and who had yet never known the use of language; they would *without question* agree in their perceptions.” (DHP 247, my italics) And slightly earlier Berkeley has Hylas say and Philonous not correct him: “Pray are not the objects perceived by the *senses* of one, likewise perceivable to others present? If there were an hundred more here, they would all see the garden, the trees, and flowers, as I see them.” (DHP 246-7)

The refusal to even question how we perceive the same thing equals to casting the whole problem out of scientific enquiry. (Berkeley is on slippery ground here, too, for how are we to construe this ‘agreeing of perceptions’? Surely he cannot mean that the several men have the same ideas, for ideas are individuated by each perceiving mind. The verb ‘agree’ here signals that the correspondence of perceptions is not identity in any sense, but rather some presupposed pragmatic correspondence. Also, the ‘as I see them’ from the second quote should not be read as ‘in exactly the same way as I do’ but rather ‘as well as I do’.)

In this light we should read the much-misunderstood parable of the gutted house that Berkeley starts with. The talk of empty words is meant to highlight the uselessness of abstract philosophical notions of identity<sup>79</sup>, to dismiss the question whether the identity of house consists in its ‘shell’ or in its internal constitution. (A clue not picked up by his modern commentators who try to solve the riddle with heavy concepts like ‘numerical identity’ or ‘qualitative identity’.<sup>80</sup>) Still, we are not left hanging in the air, for the

---

<sup>79</sup> Cf. PHK 95: “...the supposition that a body is denominated the same, with regard not to the form or that which is perceived by sense, but the material substance, which remains the same under several forms? Take away this material substance, *about the identity whereof all the dispute is, and mean by body what every plain ordinary person means by that word*, to wit, that which is immediately seen and felt, which is only a combination of sensible qualities, or ideas: and then their most unanswerable objections come to nothing.” (my italics)

<sup>80</sup> See Pitcher, p. 147: “...if we accept Berkeley’s account of what ordinary language allows, that you and I have ideas that are numerically distinct...but that are qualitatively the same.” Baxter goes even further and

problem dissolves itself, the practical everyday level of language not being affected by materialism, immaterialism or any other philosophical doctrine: “whether philosophers shall think fit to call a thing the *same* or no, is, I conceive, of small importance.” (DHP 247, Berkeley’s italics) The problem is not a metaphysical problem, Berkeley’s metaphysics being in general much slimmer and razor-conscious than any of his predecessors’ or contemporaries’. (“My end is not to deliver Metaphysiques altogether in a General Scholastique way but in some measure to accommodate them to the Sciences, & shew how they may be useful in Optiques, Geometry &c.” PC 207)

Berkeley’s peculiar blindness in this direction stems from a different role the concept of substance plays in his system. Aristotle used *substance* (the Greek original of the concept is *usia*), among other things, to designate that which stays the same when a thing changes. Subsequent tradition made a great deal of what exactly this substance is, wherein the persisting identity of an entity lies and the scholastic analysis of change reached dizzying heights in such concepts as ‘substantial form’ or ‘quiddity’. Berkeley denies the status of substance to things (not minds, though) and for him the question of the exact location of identity of a thing makes no sense<sup>81</sup>. Notice also that the identity discussion is immediately followed by the debate of what constitutes the real cherry. It begins with Philonous’ exclamation: “And how are we concerned any farther?” (DHP 249) indicating the spuriousness of the whole problem, and then the ‘real cherry’ is identified with a collection of sense data, eschewing any ‘substantive’ analysis.

---

says: “...I take Berkeley when he distinguishes two acceptations of ‘same’, to be distinguishing two uses of ‘numerically same’. Things numerically distinct according to the usage of philosophers may be numerically identical according to the usage of the vulgar...things that are really distinct are considered identical for practical reasons.” in Baxter, Donald L. M.: “Berkeley, Perception and Identity“, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar., 1991), p. 91. Both authors are led into their employment of these terms by the contentious assumption that Berkeley distinguishes between two equally justified usages of ‘same’.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Hight, Marc and Ott, Walter: “The New Berkeley”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 34, Number 1, March 2004, p. 3: “Philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries operated within a substance/mode ontology largely inherited from Aristotle via the Scholastics...Substances for the moderns are best characterized by two principal features. Something is a substance if it is both persistent and exists independently.” Both substantial features are by Berkeley denied to things, which are repeatedly characterized as ‘fleeting’ and ‘dependent’, but they are obviously retained for minds.

It would be interesting to ask a modern-day optician or psychologist the question ‘in what does the identity consists of a thing perceived by two different observers?’ If they do have an answer to this question at all, I believe it would go along Berkeley’s lines, of the sameness being presupposed from outside the science.

What the discussion of the problem shows, however, is the fact that Berkeley is aware of the semantic tension between the words ‘idea’ and ‘thing’ and actively tries to minimise it, unlike his ‘fellow immaterialist’ Collier.<sup>82</sup> The worry about the tension manifests itself already in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, where Berkeley spends some time deliberating whether to use ‘idea’ or ‘thing’. (PC 757, 775, 807, 872) There, the identification of the two terms is affirmed (PC 775) and also the need to explain and justify the identification is expressed (PC 757, 807).

### **2.3.1 The Identity Problem and commentators – the ‘Two Language’ solution**

The difficult passage quoted above has been interpreted differently by some commentators. The tension between the private character of ideas and the publicity of objects is seen as a transposition of the ‘strict philosophical’ language of the ideas and the ‘loose language’ of everyday concerns. Strictly speaking, two people cannot perceive the same thing, for the ideas are peculiar to each perceiver, but it is pragmatically sanctioned to speak of the ‘same thing’ in the popular usage. The whole tension between the relativity of ideas and publicity of objects is merely a linguistic one; it can be alleviated by specifying which language we are using at the moment. Berkeley is thus seen as engaging in the same manoeuvre as, for example, in DHP 245-6, where he explains that strictly speaking we do not see and touch the same thing, the connection between the visible and tactile ideas being merely customary and pragmatically advantageous – a variation on his Heterogeneity Thesis from the *New Theory of Vision*.

---

<sup>82</sup> “...in his 1713 *Clavis Universalis*, Berkeley’s fellow immaterialist, Arthur Collier (1680-1732) accepted (the uncommonsensual position that two people cannot see the same [numerical] object.)” Berman, D.: *George Berkeley Idealism and the Man*, Oxford 1994, p. 40.

But this would mean that the loose sense of ‘same’ is justified by practice only and is, consequently and unfortunately, philosophically wrong. Berkeley, supposedly trying to avoid this conclusion, is seen in DHP 247-8 as ‘dissolving’ the whole problem by claiming that, given sufficiently loose criteria, the vulgar usage of ‘same’ is true as well. It all comes down to what we are trying to say, the facts are identical in both cases, and it is a dispute merely about a word. For “speaking loosely need not be speaking falsely; under criteria that are both generous and reasonable, perceptions really are public and continuous.”<sup>83</sup>

At first sight the case for the Two Language Solution looks impressively well argued. Berkeley explicitly mentions the contrast between ‘the vulgar acceptance’ and ‘the acceptance of philosophers’ in his discussion of ‘same’ in DHP 247. Also, he appears to use the very same move and the slogan ‘to speak with vulgar and think with the learned’ on two other occasions – when dealing with the seemingly absurd consequences of his Heterogeneity Thesis (NTV 46, 55) and his theory of causality for ordinary language (PHK 51). However, we intend to show a real dissimilitude between the Identity problem on the one hand and the other two cases on the other, and so we will have to reject the Two Language solution in favour of, and in contrast with, our own interpretation sketched above.

The corollary of the Heterogeneity thesis is that even though “common speech would incline one to think I heard, saw, and touched the same thing” (NTV 46), this long-riveted tendency is to be resisted because it is false. We may speak of one thing only “to avoid tediousness and singularity of speech”. (NTV 55)<sup>84</sup> The connection, though

---

<sup>83</sup> Lambert, Richard T.: “Berkeley’s Commitment to Relativism”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 31, other writers subscribing to the ‘Two Language’ analysis are Baxter, Donald L. M.: “Berkeley, Perception and Identity“, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Mar., 1991), 85-98, Bennett, pp. 153, S. A. Grave in Martin and Armstrong, pp. 301, 306, Marc-Wogau, Konrad: “The Argument from Illusion and Berkeley’s Idealism”, in *George Berkeley Critical Assessments II*, edited by Walter E. Creery, Routledge, 1991, pp. 333-37, Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 149 and “Berkeley on the Perception of Objects”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. XXIV (1)1986, pp. 99-105.

<sup>84</sup> ‘The same thing’ here, incidentally, refers to several ideas which have been experienced to occur together and so come to be ‘reputed’ one thing, not to a thing common to several observers.

perfectly arbitrary (one can imagine here putting on inverted glasses and having to reconnect the usual tactile ideas with the up-side down visual ideas over several days), nevertheless somehow justifies our talk of sameness. What we have on the part of everyday speech is a type of pragmatic shortcut. There are no two full-fledged languages with different criteria for truth standing against each other. The case is similar with Berkeley's account of causality, where the phrase 'think with the learned and speak with the vulgar' actually occurs (PHK 51).

But we find no mention of 'strictness of speech' in Berkeley's discussion of identity, nor do we encounter any eye-catching slogan here with a nice didactic simile of the sun's rising and Copernicus, as we do in PHK 51. Surely Berkeley would not have missed such a golden pedagogical opportunity in the easier accessible *Dialogues*! Unless, that is, there was *not* a problem with the relationship between the loose vulgar and the strict philosophical language, but with how to account for the talk of 'same' *within* the immaterialist's as well as materialists' scheme.

Another feature of the Identity debate which points to its difference from the Heterogeneity and Causality debates is Berkeley's explicit mentioning of the truth of the vulgar loose language in the present case: "they may, upon like occasions, still continue to use the same phrase, without any deviation either from *propriety* of language, or the *truth of things*", whereas in the other debates Berkeley clearly implies the opposite: "The *true* consequence is that the objects of sight and touch are two distinct things." (NTV 49) and "In the ordinary affairs of life, any phrases may be retained...how *false* soever they may be if taken in a strict and speculative sense. Nay, this is unavoidable, since, *propriety* being regulated by custom, language is suited to the received opinions, which are not always *the truest*." (PHK 52, in all three quotes the italics are mine) Notice that in the quote from the *Principles* propriety of the expression is reached at the expense of truth, which is not the case in the Identity debate quote from the *Dialogues*.

The unequivocal nature of truth seems to prevent any relativist interpretation of the Identity discussion, for Berkeley the loose language of everyday life and the strict philosophical language are not 'alternatives' in any sense, the one being true and the other, on the two occasions, simply false, even if useful. The house simile is not meant to convey the equal usefulness of the two languages; it is rather employed to ridicule the

quest for the location of identity *within one* – the philosophical – language. The vulgar know what the ‘same’ means, whereas philosophers “dispute about identity and diversity, without any real difference in their thoughts and opinions, abstracted from names” – they dispute whether the identity of a house consists in its outer walls or in its interior lay-out, while looking at the same house as before!

The distinction between the Heterogeneity and Causality debates on the one hand and the Identity problem on the other could scarcely be greater: in the former the philosophical language is right if awkward, while the usual way of talking is wrong but useful or accepted, while in the latter the vulgar are right to say what they say and it is the philosophers who are confused and try to define a needless distinction. Their ‘language’ does not work at all.

The Two Language solution posed an additional problem which we are now quite happy to get rid of. It purported to assign the word ‘idea’ to the strict philosophical language while keeping the word ‘thing’ for the vulgar. While at first sight an attractive proposal, one that even corresponds to the way the two words are expected to be used, it leaves the identification of the two concepts, which is crucial to our interpretation, quite unexplained or even unexplainable. Their relation would be the same as that between the German ‘der Hund’ and the English ‘dog’, ignoring Berkeley’s explicit efforts to identify the two concepts, even at the beginning of the precarious Identity debate: “...different persons may perceive the same thing; or *the same thing or idea* exist in different minds.” (DHP 247, my italics)

Berkeley does not ‘dissolve’ the whole Identity problem in relativistic acid, he rather acknowledges it as a problem for any philosophical account of perception and so not an objection against immaterialism as such: “*Your difficulty* therefore, that no two see the same thing, makes *equally* against the materialists and me.” (DHP 248, my italics) Almost at the very end of the discussion the ‘difficulty’ is still there and has not been satisfactorily met. It is also ‘your’, meaning Hylas’s, difficulty, made from outside philosophy, for Hylas has evolved from an ardent supporter of materialism through a more tentative phase to the position where the credentials of immaterialism only should be questioned and where objections against the whole of philosophy are not entertained, as Hylas himself admits in their discussion of Creation: “I must acknowledge, the

difficulties you are concerned to clear, are such only as arise from the non-existence of matter, and are peculiar to that notion.” (DHP 254)

Some commentators, who read Berkeley as solving the Identity problem through a relativistic dissolution where there are two parallel languages involved, nevertheless find this solution unattractive while others are quite happy with it. Lambert would be an example of the latter, and Bennett belongs to the former category: “...the residual ‘verbal’ dispute, far from being trivial, may be a serious conceptual disagreement with philosophical consequences depending on it.”<sup>85</sup> And Pitcher agrees with this estimate: “...it has been my contention that in the present dispute between Berkeley and common sense there certainly *is* a ‘real difference in their thoughts and opinions’.”<sup>86</sup> We agree that the relativistic reading would be disastrous for Berkeley’s system, but it is one that is neither necessary to explain the Identity discussion nor warranted by the close reading presented. Nor is it, accidentally, Berkeley’s position in the two other difficulties mentioned, the Heterogeneity Thesis and the Causality Discussion. In both of these the common way of speaking is just wrong, though sanctioned by convention, and is not to be entertained in serious philosophical thinking, so the two ‘languages’ are not ‘alternatives’ at all.

Now, Pitcher manages to portray Berkeley as a relativist only because he mistakes him as describing a conflict between the philosophical and vulgar language in the gutted house simile and the immediately preceding discussion instead of reading them as an illustration of the inconclusiveness and uselessness of the contemporary philosophical theories of identity (“for it is *not yet* agreed wherein that philosophic identity consists” DHP 247, my italics). His estimate of the solution that Berkeley eventually presents is more on the mark: “At the end of his treatment of Hylas’ objection, Berkeley reveals certain uneasiness about his own position, so it seems to me, by appealing to the archetype in God’s mind of each object in the world. This does, indeed, provide some kind of unity for the objects...”<sup>87</sup> The ‘uneasiness’ is there, we agree, and moreover can explain it on our interpretation, unlike Pitcher, for whom Berkeley has attempted to

---

<sup>85</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 155-6.

<sup>86</sup> Pitcher, George, *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 149.

<sup>87</sup> Pitcher, George, *Berkeley*, p. 149.

provide a positive solution to the difficulty, because Berkeley feels that the objection is a problem for the whole of philosophy and so the Archetype solution is not a wholehearted solution from him. Berkeley uses the term ‘archetype’ only in response to his opponents and as a part of their vocabulary, it plays no positive role in immaterialism. The Identity discussion is a nice illustration of this for it is Hylas who introduces the term into the debate and Philonous hesitantly repeats it and immediately qualifies its ‘externality’: “so may you suppose an external archetype on my principles; *external*, I mean, to your own mind: though indeed it must be supposed to exist in that mind which comprehends all things” (DHP 248, Berkeley’s italics), which is understandable, for earlier in the *Dialogues* the notion of ‘external archetype’ was used synonymously with ‘material substance’ and rejected accordingly.<sup>88</sup> Berkeley is fully aware that both his and the materialists’ solution of the difficulty are not satisfactory.

### 2.3.2 The Realist Solution – ideas need not be private

A competing interpretation of the Identity problem claims that Berkeley’s ideas are in some way public and so the objects composed of the ideas are also public. Luce is often mentioned as a precursor of this view, but the movement gained momentum in the 1980s and 90s<sup>89</sup>. The advantage of the Realist interpretation is that it purports to explain

---

<sup>88</sup> I am indebted here to the excellent analysis of the notion of archetype in Berkeley’s writings in Brykman, Genevieve: “Berkeley on ‘Archetype’” in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, Ed. By Ernest Sosa, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Holland, 1987. Another case, where the ‘Divine Archetype’ is forced onto Berkeley is in his correspondence with Johnson, especially Johnson’s second letter, where the American zealot has ‘archetype’ fulfil two crucial functions, which are anathema in orthodox immaterialism: it guarantees the identity of one thing in two perceivers and the continuity of unperceived objects. Berkeley is also in this case characteristically cautious: “I have no objection against calling the ideas in the mind of God archetypes of ours” (*Works II*, p. 292), but he conspicuously fails to sanction such a remedy for the two problems.

<sup>89</sup> Ayers, M. R.: “Introduction” to *George Berkeley, Philosophical Works including the Works on Vision*, M. R. Ayers, ed., David Campbell Publishers, 1998; Berman, David: “Berkeley’s Quad: The Question of Numerical Identity”, *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 16, (1986), pp. 41-45; Pappas, George: “Berkeley, Perception, and Common Sense” in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester



Berkeley's frequent appeals to common sense and avoids the trap of solipsism for immaterialism.

The first step in the Realist interpretation is the claim that Berkeley never *explicitly* states that ideas are private or peculiar to one mind only: "...there is no place in Berkeley's writings where he actually says that each idea is private..."<sup>90</sup> To arrive at this conclusion, Pappas acknowledges that the whole problem is brought up by Hylas in his objection that no two persons can see the same thing and he even correctly interprets the gutted house simile as showing that the philosophical theory of identity is muddled, but from this he further concludes that Berkeley himself does not know whether ideas are private or not! But surely the whole objection makes sense (and is moreover still seen by Berkeley as 'difficulty' after he has supposedly dealt with it) only if it *assumes* that ideas are private. And this assumption is significantly not questioned by Philonous after Hylas formulates the objection:

"HYLAS But the *same* idea which is in my mind, cannot be in yours, or in any other mind. Doth it not therefore follow from your principles, that no two can see the same thing? And is not this highly, absurd?" (DHP 247, my underlining)

Also, the subtle change from 'idea' in the mind to 'thing' perceived by two minds is essential to the objection<sup>91</sup>. It can get off the ground only if it assumes that 'ideas' are private and 'things' public, the two properties being contradictory, only then it is dangerous to Berkeley's *identification* of the two terms. Now we also see why Hylas

---

University Press, 1982, pp. 3-21; "Berkeley and Immediate Perception" in E. Sosa, ed., *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, Dordrecht, 1987, pp. 195-213; and "Berkeley and Common Sense Realism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol. 8, (1991), pp. 27-42; and Yolton, John: *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984, pp. 132-7.

<sup>90</sup> Pappas, George: "Berkeley, Perception and Common Sense", in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 9.

<sup>91</sup> I owe this observation to Winkler, p. 304: "It was Hylas's objection ... not that no two can see the same idea, but that no two can see the same thing... The question whether different people can perceive the same *idea* is never addressed...because all *philosophers* agree that they cannot, a point to some extent confirmed by the remarks about the materialists at the end of Philonous' reply." For a similar view see Yandell, David: "Berkeley on Common Sense and the Privacy of Ideas", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4, Oct.1995, pp. 411-423, especially his short discussion of Winkler in note 4 on p. 422.

thinks it is an objection against immaterialism, while materialism seems immune – since materialism keeps the distinction between ‘ideas’ and ‘things’, the former can be private while the latter guarantee publicity of perceived things. And Philonous scores a major victory when he manages to persuade Hylas (and us, too, for that matter) that the objection works equally against materialism as well as immaterialism. His ‘archetype external to my own mind but not to the Mind’ “serves all the ends of identity, as well as if it existed out of a mind.” (DHP 248) Again, the parity is conceivable because the materialists themselves believe that ideas are private: “...the materialists themselves *acknowledge* what we immediately perceive by our senses, to be our own ideas.” (DHP 248, my italics) The verb ‘acknowledge’ signals that it is a common assumption between the two rival theories. None of them succeeds in meeting the objection, though, and if Hylas does not see it as a problem for materialism, he should not level it against immaterialism either.

We might still want to reject the parity of the cases, but then Berkeley would surely employ the traditional ‘veil of perception’ arguments and the well-known and acknowledged causal impotence of matter *vis-à-vis* spirit to remind us that it is only a metaphysical prejudice that there are ‘material things’ ‘out there’ to guarantee the publicity of perceived things. And all these arguments have already been established a priori before the Identity discussion.

There are other reasons for the privacy of ideas in immaterialism, regardless of the Identity discussion. See above, Chapter 2.1.1 in particular. It is impossible to take the ‘idea of faintness’ or ‘the idea of distance’ as anything but a sense datum. Also, the privacy of ideas is clearly implied in PHK 140: “we conceive the ideas that are in the minds of other spirits by means of our own, which we suppose to be resemblances of them” and it is essential to Berkeley’s claim that we infer the existence of other spirits and ultimately that of God from our own ideas.

We conclude that though Berkeley himself does not call ideas ‘private’, we should not expect him to be doing that for none of his contemporaries used this word, but he, as well as his materialistic adversaries, clearly took ideas to be private and peculiar to one mind only.

### 2.3.3 The Realist Interpretation and Berman

Berman offers another reading with the aim of establishing the publicity of ideas.<sup>92</sup> For him, the publicity of ideas is expressed in PHK 49:

“...it may perhaps be objected, that if extension and figure exist only in the mind, it follows that the mind is extended and figured; since extension is a mode or attribute, which (to speak with the Schools) is predicated of the subject in which it exists. I answer, those qualities are in the mind only as they are perceived by it, that is, not by way of *mode* or *attribute*, but only by way of *idea*; and it no more follows, that soul or mind is extended because extension exists in it alone, than it does that it is red or blue, because those colours are on all hands acknowledged to exist in it, and nowhere else.”

Out of this long and fruitful section Berman uses only the statement ‘(ideas) are in the mind only as they are perceived by it’ which he reads as entailing that, since ideas are creatures entirely distinct from minds and not literally in it, “we can, I think, perceive the same idea without somehow impinging on each other’s mind.”<sup>93</sup> For Berman, then, the idea is in my mind only as I perceive it, but it itself is in God’s mind, for God is the omnipotent cause of our ideas of sense, and so his Divine ideas are the permanent idea-things which are public and accessible to many finite perceivers at the same time.

The key phrase ‘(ideas) are in the mind only as they are perceived by it’ is, however, taken out of its context and misread to furnish the base for Berman’s Realistic Interpretation. He reads it as ‘ideas are in the mind only *as far as* they are perceived by it’ whereas the context provides a more natural reading ‘ideas are in the mind in the way of ideas and not in the way of a mode in a substance’ as the explanatory clause after the dash makes clear: “that is, not by way of *mode* or *attribute*, but only by way of *idea*” (PHK 49). True, on our reading Berkeley repeats himself, but he signals this by the punctuation mark and the words ‘that is’ introducing a synonymic expression. His explanation is also quite opaque and idiosyncratic, since the ‘way of idea’ is not further

---

<sup>92</sup> Berman, David: “Berkeley’s Quad: The Question of Numerical Identity”, *Idealistic Studies*, vol. XVI, no.1, January 1986, pp. 41-45.

<sup>93</sup> Berman, David: “Berkeley’s Quad: The Question of Numerical Identity”, p. 44.

explained, it is just asserted, whereas the theory of modes and attributes and their relationship with substance was quite detailed. Nevertheless, this is perhaps a point in our favour, for Berkeley proceeds to scorn this very complicated and worked out system in his next sentence after the quote<sup>94</sup>: “As to what philosophers say of subject and mode, that seems very groundless and unintelligible.” (PHK 49)

The whole context gives a different reading which does not clash with ‘*esse is percipi*’ as Berman’s does – for on his reading ‘ideas are in the mind as they are perceived by it’ and, presumably, they are somewhere else as well, as they are not perceived by the mind. But ideas cannot exist without the mind. Berman might want to object that they are without my mind but not without God’s mind and that that is precisely what guarantees their publicity. We wish to object to that that ‘the mind’ includes God’s mind as well, for the question dealt with here is whether ‘idea being in the mind’ can be modelled on the relationship of substance and mode of the Cartesian tradition, which would imply the substance sharing the characteristics of the mode, and so in the present discussion the mind would be extended. Such a solution is understandably rejected, and the idiosyncratic solution of the ‘idea being in the mind by way of idea’ is offered instead. Admittedly, such a solution is suspicious and questions should be asked whether this innovation of the traditional substance-accident relationship is viable and not just *ad hoc*, but, however tempting and justified these questions might seem, we will not go into them and content ourselves instead with the observation that they should be the proper result of commenting on PHK 49. We should not look for answer to the question of publicity of objects here and our contention has been that Berman’s doing so rests on his misreading of the phrase ‘as they are perceived by the mind’.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> Luce agrees with my estimate of the main target of PHK 49 and adds that the way of ‘mode or attribute’ would make the idea’s features in the mind “as Spinoza’s space is in Spinoza’s god”, Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley’s Immaterialism*, 1945, p. 126.

<sup>95</sup> In a private conversation, Prof Berman informed the author that he no longer wishes to maintain the position described in his 1986 article. Nevertheless, we found it sufficiently representative of an interpretative tendency to be warranted a discussion here.

### 2.3.4 The Realist Interpretation and Pappas

But perhaps we are being a little bit unfair to those who defend the Realist interpretation. After all, their contention is not that all ideas are public but rather that the privacy of ideas, even if alleged, does not preclude the publicity of ‘things’<sup>96</sup>. They also notice a decidedly uncharitable result of the Two Language Solution and try to avoid it: “Pitcher’s position...would push one to the view that strictly speaking Berkeley does not really defend common sense at all. He only seems to be doing this when he is speaking loosely. His real view...is actually opposed to common sense.”<sup>97</sup> While we agree with this diagnosis, we do not think it is necessary to treat the condition with the Realistic Interpretation, for that in turn is not healthy itself.

What then are its shortcomings? When faced with the problem of how to squeeze the publicity of ‘physical objects’ from the privacy of ideas, Pappas offers the following example: “...two generals on different sections of the reviewing stand, may see different members of the troop, but still each would see the troop. Two people can see the same object even though they do not see the same parts or constituent elements of the object.”<sup>98</sup> Such an argument is open to the sceptic’s charge – granted that the generals see different men, what grounds do you have for claiming that the different men belong to the same troop? Is it not the case that you have just assumed the truth of this, whereas it is the bone of contention between us? In other words, what guarantees that the different soldiers belong to the same troop?

Perhaps we should not dismiss Pappas’s analogies so quickly. He is surely right when he says that when we perceive a constituent member of a collection we may be said to perceive the collection as such. It seems almost a truism that in our three-dimensional

---

<sup>96</sup> Pappas, George: “Berkeley, Perception and Common Sense”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, p. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Pappas, George: *Berkeley’s Thought*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 181.

<sup>98</sup> Pappas, George: *Berkeley’s Thought*, pp. 200-1, the same example was used by Pappas earlier in his “Berkeley, Perception and Common Sense”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, pp. 7-8, together with another example: “Just as one need not see all the attached parts of a car in order to see a car, so one need not immediately perceive all the constituents of a physical object in order immediately to perceive that object.”, *ibid*, p. 7.

space we always see only one side of things (if we do not employ elaborate mirrors) yet speak of seeing the thing and not a part of the thing. So the whole Realist solution seems to hinge on ‘physical things’ being ‘collections of ideas’ and to this presupposition we now turn<sup>99</sup>.

## **2.4 ‘Thing’ as a ‘collection of ideas’, the negative reading and phenomenalism**

So Berkeley identifies ‘things’ with ‘ideas’. In the same breath, however, Berkeley speaks of things being “the several combinations of sensible qualities”. As the relationship between ‘idea’ and a ‘collection of ideas’ is instrumental for the Realist interpretation, let us start with looking at the actual occurrences of ‘collection’ and ‘combination’ in Berkeley’s writings.

Both terms occur synonymously without any perceivable difference in meaning, though ‘combination’ greatly outnumbers ‘collection’ – the latter appearing only once in each major work (NTV, PHK, DHP), the former appearing on average six times as often. In the NTV ‘combination’ of ideas first occurs as another description for ‘visible object’ or ‘tangible object’ in the Heterogeneity discussion (NTV 49), the same function is recorded in NTV 96 where the complex idea of a tangible head is described as a combination of certain tangible ideas: “one combination of a certain tangible figure, bulk, and consistency of parts is called the head” and again in NTV 103, 109, 110 and 117. All the occurrences denote a certain arbitrary construct by the mind, which pertains to one particular sense, and thus portray the mind as constructing something out of its ideas.

The situation changes in the PHK, though. The first occurrence of ‘collection’ in the very first paragraph denotes a construct across the various senses, and this meaning is echoed also in the use of ‘combination’ in PHK 37(?), 38, 64, while in PHK 4, 26, 91 and 95 (and in *all* the 4 occurrences in DHP, for that matter) quite another thing is stressed –

---

<sup>99</sup> Pitcher also, incidentally, uses this model, but he calls the collection of ideas ‘natural object’, see Pitcher, p. 151: “...a natural object, for him, is a huge collection of ideas of sense, and although (to consider just the case of vision) one can see individual members of the collection, one cannot see the whole huge collection itself – and so one cannot see the natural object itself.”

namely that the ‘combination’ has the same status as a separate ‘idea’: “is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these (ideas or sensations) or any combination of them should exist unperceived?” (PHK 4) and “the objects perceived by sense are allowed to be nothing but combinations of those qualities” (PHK 91). Here there is no hint of any constructive role of the mind; on the contrary, ‘combination’ of ideas is on exactly the same level as ‘idea’ itself as far as its capability to exist without the mind is concerned. The unique occurrence of ‘congeries’ in place of the more common ‘combination’ is attested at DHP 249 with the same meaning.

The two meanings of the ‘combination or collection’ of ideas have also two corresponding functions in immaterialism, one positive and one negative. The first one describes the way the mind puts together ideas and forgetting (or rather not noticing) the arbitrariness of the connection considers the ‘combination’ one thing. But such a ‘combination’ is still peculiar to one mind only – for example the visual idea of an object belonging to a purlblind person will be connected to the corresponding tangible idea, but it will be different from the ‘combination of visible ideas’ that make up the image for a normally seeing person. Similarly, as the discussion of the Molyneux case shows, a blind person’s idea of a cube is combination of tactile ideas only, whereas for other people this combination includes visible ideas, as well. Significantly, both combinations must be limited to individual minds for the Molyneux question to arise at all.

Also, it is significant that it is the individual mind that does the combining of its ideas and it can connect only those ideas that it perceives. Such a connection cannot be created by the mind between an idea it perceives and an idea it does not perceive, or an idea that is only perceived by another mind. A combination of ideas stretching through several minds is a concept unknown to Berkeley’s immaterialism.

The negative role is a rejection of the substantial analysis of sensible things, ‘combination’ of ideas having the same ontological status as ‘idea’. This role occurs, not surprisingly, only in the metaphysical works – the *Principles* and the *Dialogues*.

Our analysis thus casts doubt on the careless dichotomy between ‘ideas’ and ‘collections of ideas’ that is essential for the Realist interpretation – if the former are repeatedly emphasized to be no different from the latter, what justifies the ascription of privacy to the one and publicity to the other? Neither of the two roles warrants ascription

of publicity to ‘combinations’ of ideas while rejecting it for the ideas themselves. Pappas’s example of two generals viewing the parade has no basis in the texts, it even goes against them.

#### 2.4.1 ‘Collection of ideas’ and some repercussions for phenomenism

Berkeley was not the first to use the term ‘collections of ideas’. As Luce notes, the phrase is probably borrowed from Locke’s *Essay*<sup>100</sup>. There, however, Locke talks of a ‘collection of simple ideas’, and so probably envisages a different ontological status for the collection as opposed to the simple ideas. Berkeley borrowed the phrase without this particular feature, as we have noted in the previous chapter, a discontinuity supported by Winkler’s analysis of the simple/complex idea dichotomy in his book on Berkeley<sup>101</sup>. While Berkeley had originally toyed with the concept of ‘simple idea’ extensively in his *Philosophical Commentaries*, he ultimately abandoned it and it scarcely features in his published writings. Consequently, Winkler concludes that “...it is wrong to classify Berkeley as an atomic sensationalist.”<sup>102</sup> Does such a finding have any repercussions for seeing Berkeley as a phenomenist?

Apparently not, for Winkler himself proposes a phenomenist interpretation of immaterialism. The relationship between ideas and things is one of reduction, construction or supervenience and the explicit identification by Berkeley of single ideas with things (PHK 4, 33, 38-9) is explained away as an aberration: “...neither idealism nor phenomenism takes Berkeley at his word when he identifies things with single ideas ... I will assume they are right in this; Berkeley’s tendency to shift from formulations referring to single ideas to formulations referring to collections of ideas is not, I think, a sign of uncertainty, but evidence of his willingness to treat a collection or congeries as a single idea.”<sup>103</sup> But surely this ‘willingness’ does not square up with Berkeley being

---

<sup>100</sup> Luce, p. 41, “The phrase occurs in Locke’s *Essay* (II xxvi i)”.

<sup>101</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, 1989, pp. 53-75.

<sup>102</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, p. 73.

<sup>103</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, p. 194.



serious on any ‘reduction, construction or supervenience’? Furthermore, Winkler notices that Berkeley is not very explicit on this ‘construction stuff’: “In Berkeley’s texts the sense in which objects are ‘collections’ or ‘combinations’ is left entirely unexplicated....there is no defect in Berkeley’s statements of phenomenalism as glaring as his failure to say what it is to be a *collection* or *combination* of ideas.”<sup>104</sup> Is it not, then, simpler *not* to read Berkeley as a phenomenalist, instead of attributing some early version of proto-phenomenalism to him?

What prompted Winkler on this dangerous journey? His analysis of Berkeley’s immaterialism as phenomenalism starts with the legitimate question “...what does it mean to say that houses, mountains, and rivers are ideas, or combinations of ideas?”<sup>105</sup> He then provides two answers, the idealist answer and the phenomenalist answer. Both contain phrases such as ‘a different set of co-referential expressions’, ‘truth-value preserving translations’, ‘subjunctive or counterfactual conditions’ and similar, which naturally have no basis nor counterparts in Berkeley’s texts. They are best seen as a modern philosopher’s attempt to make sense of an old and exotic doctrine, with a certain danger of anachronism and distortion looming in the wings. The difference between the two versions lies in the fact that the idealist answer provides translations between ordinary and philosophical statements term-by-term while the phenomenalist answers resorts to counterfactual or subjunctive conditionals. The latter entails that “objects *supervene* on ideas, instead of standing in the relation of identity to distinct collections of them”<sup>106</sup> and is ultimately preferred by Winkler.

But perhaps we do not need to undertake such extensive reconstruction and interpretation on Berkeley’s behalf, perhaps we can gather from his published writings the relationship he envisaged as holding between ideas and collections. Such an achievement would no doubt have the advantage of being a more friendly reading of the philosopher as well as a more concise one. Let us start with taking seriously Berkeley’s repeated claims that idea, combination of ideas and thing are identical (PHK 4, 33, 38-9). The positive, ‘constructive’ side of this identification is evident in his *New Theory of*

---

<sup>104</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, p. 201.

<sup>105</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, p. 192.

<sup>106</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, pp. 198-9.

*Vision*, where it helps to explain how we perceive by sight and touch and is at the heart of the Heterogeneity thesis. If we wanted to illustrate the dynamism between idea and collection of ideas, we could liken it to the movement of directing lights we see before road works when driving along a motorway at night. If we were to analyse our perceptual situation, we would have to admit that there are in fact only several lights next to each other that flash and dim in certain intervals and that it is our mind that connects these lights into one continuous sideway movement and understands it as a direction to change lanes. In a similar way our mind connects multiple visual ideas, not only patches of light and colours but also ideas of confused appearance, distance etc. and ‘forgetting’ the several components, treats the resulting combination as one thing. For scientific reasons it is nevertheless useful to be able to ‘deconstruct’ the combination and look at the individual members separately.

The scientific and constructive nature of the idea-combination model is complemented by the negative role it is assigned on the metaphysical level, mainly in the *Principles* and *Dialogues*. There it purely highlights the fact that the ‘combination of ideas’ is on the same ontological level as individual ‘ideas’ as a part of Berkeley’s campaign against scepticism and the Inside/outside metaphor. This fact is often overlooked by commentators, some of whom use the distorted ‘idea – collection of ideas’ relationship to account for publicity in immaterialism (as we tried to show in Pappas’s case above, and so is the case with Winkler, see below) or to account for perceivable but not actually perceived objects, as we will try to show in the next section. Their interpretation is on stronger grounds here, not least because of PHK 3, and a more detailed discussion of the *esse is percipi* principle will be required.

Seeing Berkeley as a phenomenalist is a many-faceted weapon, for in relying (quite erroneously, as we have tried to show) on the ontological difference between idea and collection of ideas it seems to be able to solve also the Identity problem that is the present topic of discussion. So Winkler proposes this solution to the problem: “If we are permitted to say that the ideas entering into combinations exist in many minds at once, we are free to say that an apple is a combination of ‘a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence’.”<sup>107</sup> Such a solution, apart from misrepresenting the concept of

---

<sup>107</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, p. 197.

‘combination of ideas’, relies on an individual idea’s existing in many minds at once, which we have tried to show is not supported by the texts.

Similar mechanism is employed by Pitcher, who has Berkeley develop a theory of a natural object, which is “a huge collection of ideas of sense”<sup>108</sup>. Such a construct fulfils several tasks in Pitcher’s analysis while failing in others in a nuanced discussion which we cannot go into here. Of more relevance to our objection is his insistence on the different status of ideas and combinations of ideas: “...his (Berkeley’s) very conception of a *family* of ideas of sense *requires* ...theoretical phenomenalism.”<sup>109</sup> (Pitcher’s italics)

Most recently Muehlmann<sup>110</sup> identifies real objects with congeries of sensible qualities. Here we would like to point out that for Berkeley ‘real object’ is defined as the opposite of an ‘object of fancy or dream’, while also these ‘objects of imagination’ are composed from ideas, as the cases of Pegasus or Chimaera show.

## 2.5 Continuity of unperceived objects

We have witnessed how the conceptual tension between ‘idea’ and ‘thing’ posed a serious challenge to Berkeley’s identification of the two terms that was crucial for his claim that immaterialism does not lead to scepticism and accords with common sense. The problem was in the supposed privacy of ideas and resulting impossibility of public things. Berkeley acknowledges the difficulty and tries to deal with it in the *Third Dialogue*. Another, and even more fundamental difficulty, is present already in the *Principles* as a possible objection to immaterialism and was also noted and frequently levelled against immaterialism by its earliest critics. If ideas exist only when perceived, and things are the same as ideas or combinations of ideas, does it not follow that when I cease to perceive a thing, the thing ceases to exist? In other words, what guarantees the continuous existence of things which are not perceived? Is not intermittency of things the natural corollary of immaterialism?

---

<sup>108</sup> Pitcher, G.: *Berkeley*, 1977, p. 151.

<sup>109</sup> Pitcher, G.: *Berkeley*, p. 162.

<sup>110</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, Indianapolis, 1992, p. 219.

Berkeley anticipates the objection in PHK 45 and his wording makes clear that he does not try to detract anything from its force:

“Fourthly, it will be objected that from the foregoing principles it follows, things are every moment annihilated and created anew. The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived: the trees therefore are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlour, no longer than while there is somebody by to perceive them. Upon shutting my eyes all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and barely upon opening them it is again created.”

Curiously, Berkeley does not seem to answer the objection straight away as in the previous three objections. His strategy is quite complicated and we shall start with isolating as many as three embryonic and different answers to the objection over the stretch of four paragraphs devoted to answering the Intermittency objection (PHK 45-8).

At first, Berkeley refers the reader back to paragraphs 3 and 4 which, however, contain nothing on intermittency, only a rejection of existence ‘without the mind’ and the introduction of the *esse is percipi* principle:

“In answer to all which, I refer the reader to what has been said in *Sect.* 3, 4, &c. and desire he will consider whether he means anything by the actual existence of an idea, distinct from its being perceived. For my part, after the nicest inquiry I could make, I am not able to discover that anything else is meant by those words. And I once more entreat the reader to sound his own thoughts, and not suffer himself to be imposed on by words. If he can conceive it possible either for his ideas or their archetypes to exist without being perceived, then I give up the cause: but if he cannot, he will acknowledge it is unreasonable for him to stand up in defence of he knows not what, and pretend to charge on me as an absurdity, the not assenting to those propositions which at bottom have no meaning in them.”

It is difficult to see how this can help us in the present predicament. To the challenge that the *esse is percipi* principle entails that things exist only as long as they are perceived Berkeley seems to be answering: ‘Indeed, and that is a good thing, for ideas cannot exist unperceived!’ thus making the Intermittency objection even sharper. But perhaps another role can be found for Berkeley’s falling back on sections 3 and 4 at this stage, one that would make it more relevant to the issue at hand and to the overall

strategy. Berkeley is probably making sure here that we do not raise the Intermittency objection from the materialist position, for he does not want to employ an answer to it which would utilise the already compromised material substance. So in affirming his immaterialist position he could in fact be preparing his ground to meet the objection on strictly immaterialist grounds, and for that aim the incidental sharpening of the objection would appear irrelevant. The first proposed answer, it has been argued, is only the first step in a more comprehensive argumentative build up.

The second move, which takes up the whole of section 46 and the first part of 47, reminds us of the Relevancy principle mentioned in the last section, for here even the materialists' position is alleged to be open to the Intermittency objection. Its three components, the charge that things are annihilated when we close our eyes, re-created when we open them and do not exist in between, are found to be present in the materialist scheme of perception, as well, since the visible objects are only light and colours, in short sensations, and these do not exist when our eyes are closed (here we get another confirmation that Berkeley agrees with his opponents on the nature of ideas, which for both sides are private and subjective sense data) and so are annihilated with our every wink. The re-creative part is discerned in the doctrine of divine conservation through continual creation and the beginning of section 47 is taken up with the charge that also the materialists' bodies do not exist between our perceiving them. Here the argument is that particular bodies can be distinguished only by perceivable particular qualities, and since these qualities do not exist when we do not perceive them, the individual bodies as distinct entities cannot exist either.

The rest of the section is devoted to drawing absurd consequences from the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of matter, with the result that also the materialists' bodies exist only in the mind, a result that would probably be hotly contested. We find it here because Berkeley attempts to squeeze the most out of the 'those pretended absurdities' when applied to materialism, setting with considerable rhetorical skills the scene for his own answer to the objection which he probably feared would not be entirely convincing if it stood on its own.

Even though Berkeley is saying that the Intermittency objection applies to some versions of materialism as well, he does not draw the consequence we saw him drawing

in our last section and does not dismiss the objection as irrelevant since it applies equally to both sides of the debate. He in fact stops short of invoking the Relevancy principle here and the whole two sections of 46 and 47 are mere rhetorical devices of softening the reader's mind and engulfing him with absurdities flowing from materialism. The immaterialist answer to the Intermittency objection comes only in section 48 after this tactical rhetorical massage:

“If we consider it, the objection proposed in *Sect.* 45 will not be found reasonably charged on the principles we have premised, so as in truth to make any objection at all against our notions. For though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not. Wherever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatsoever. It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles, that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perception of them.”

The actual solution seems to be staggeringly simple. It involves a shift in the burden of proof of the argument: when I see a tree in my garden, the tree exists because I see it, and when I close my eyes, the tree ceases to be perceived by me, but, since my eyes are closed, I cannot see or make sure that somebody else is not there perceiving the tree, I am in no position to say that the tree is not perceived at all. So the conclusion that the tree ceases to exist when I cease to perceive it is a non sequitur<sup>111</sup>. I would have to see that nobody sees it, which is impossible.

But why all this hedging before the final answer? Is the original reference back to previous sections really only a scene-setting device? The whole passage in PHK 45-8 seems to be too conscious of the expository strategy it adopts and the final result has been felt unsatisfactory by commentators since its publication. Fortunately for us, there have been preserved for us the authentic thoughts of the young Berkeley on Continuity without his careful manoeuvring in his *Commentaries* which we will now turn to in order

---

<sup>111</sup> Winkler, p. 219, correctly identifies the non sequitur and also hints at a broader strategy of Argument economy.

either to confirm our reading of the PHK 45-8, supplant it in important aspects or even to reject it as a camouflage.

### 2.5.1 The evolution of the Continuity Problem in the *Philosophical Commentaries*

A number of entries show Berkeley grappling with the problem from very early on in the development of his system<sup>112</sup>. Of particular interest to us will be Nos. 71, 98, 185, 185a, 194, 282, 293a, 408, 424a, 429, 429a, 472, 473, 477a, and 802. Berkeley's own thinking on Continuity takes place against his critique of the traditional (mostly Cartesian) conception of body and by the end a new and original conception emerges, one that no longer utilizes the term 'body', but substitutes it by the more vulgar-friendly word 'thing'.

The first relevant entry is the following: "71 By immateriality is solv'd the cohesion of bodies, or rather the dispute ceases" whereby the problem noticed but not solved by Locke is dissolved<sup>113</sup>. The absence of matter in immaterialism results in different problems for the notion of body, and these are frankly admitted in 194: "+ 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 (w<sup>ch</sup> being combin'd make all substances) being frequently interrupted, & they having divers beginnings & endings." The admittance that tying bodies to ideas leads to the danger of bodies being discontinuous amounts to recognizing the Intermittency objection. Here the problem is still posed as a question of 'where the identity of bodies consists in', a question we pointed out Berkeley felt he (and other philosophers) had not managed to solve as late as the Identity discussion in the *Third Dialogue*. Efforts to locate 'identity of bodies' disappear from subsequent entries on Continuity, as does the talk of thoughts making up 'substances', and the '+' sign generally appended by Berkeley to entries he later rejected or considered irrelevant

---

<sup>112</sup> I assume the traditional view of the order of the two books.

<sup>113</sup> Locke, *Essay*, II, XXIII, 22-27.

suggests that he came to see a solution to the Continuity problem couched in these terms a dead end.

No sooner is the Intermittency objection admitted than Berkeley hints at a solution to it, as earlier entries 98 and 185a testify: “The trees are in the Park, that is, whether I will or no whether I imagine any thing about them or no, let me but go thither & open my Eyes by day & I shall not avoid seeing them.” And “Colours in y<sup>e</sup> dark do exist really *i.e.* were there light or as soon as light comes we shall see them provided we open our eyes. & that whether we will or no.” Both entries reassure us of the continuous existence of things and stress their independence from the perceiving mind, but are scarce on detail. The emphasis seems to be on the contrafactual in our second quote, but even there it is coupled with the future act of seeing the thing, which is not enough to counter the charge that the thing does not exist precisely when we do not see it. We do not need to be told that the thing *will* exist or *would* exist; we want to know whether it *does* exist *now* that we do not perceive it.

Our worries will probably be only compounded by the immediately preceding entry 185: “Mem: to allow existence to colours in the dark, persons not thinking &c but not an absolute actual existence. ‘Tis prudent to correct mens mistakes without altering their language. This makes truth glide into their souls insensibly.” It is clearly a note for Berkeley himself on his expositional strategy which he intended to employ in writing his system down. Two levels of existence are proposed here, the first ‘absolute actual’ one should probably be read as conforming strictly to the principle *esse is percipi*, while the other is weaker and belongs to ‘colours in the dark’. We can only guess that Berkeley probably did not intend to disclose or at least not fully elaborate on the distinction between the two levels of existence, hence the talk of truth gliding insensibly into the souls of his unaware readers. But this is only a speculation. The use of the word ‘mistake’ for the (probably vulgar) opinion and its opposite ‘truth’ (and this word also incidentally reveals that there was to be employed no trick in the solution to the Continuity problem and that a full philosophical account was intended) for the strict and philosophical level makes the entry a primary candidate for inclusion in the ‘*think with the learned and talk with the vulgar*’ principle, as does the remark about correcting the language of the people.



Even if intended at this stage, the contrast is not exploited in the subsequent analysis of the problem or in the final solution.

Next we find two discarded entries: “282 + Bodies etc do exist whether we think of ’em or no, they being taken in a twofold sense. Collections of thoughts & collections of powers to cause those thoughts. these later exist, tho perhaps a parte dei it may be one simple perfect power.” And “293a + Bodies taken for Powers do exist w<sup>n</sup> not perceiv’d but this existence is not actual. w<sup>n</sup> I say a power exists no more is meant than that if in y<sup>e</sup> light I open my eyes & look that way I shall see it i.e. the body etc”

Both of them purport to provide a more viable theory of body, they toy again with the idea of a double existence – actual and possible (?), but the proposal is later discarded by the author himself<sup>14</sup>. Total opposition to the Cartesian theory of body is repeatedly affirmed in 424a: “I agree in Nothing w<sup>th</sup> the Cartesians as to y<sup>e</sup> existence of Bodies & qualities” but the attempts to construct an immaterialist positive theory of body reach a dead-end here and the word ‘body’ is quietly substituted by the more common ‘thing’ in Berkeley’s subsequent struggle with Intermittency. This substitution is explicitly commented on in a late entry 802: “Not to mention the Combinations of Powers but to say the things the effects themselves to really exist even w<sup>n</sup> not actually perceiv’d but still with relation to perception.”

However, the term ‘power’ and the emphasis on what it *means* to say a power *exists* in entry 293a anticipate the final solution Berkeley reaches in 408: “I must be very particular in explaining w<sup>t</sup> is meant by things existing in Houses, chambers, fields, caves etc w<sup>n</sup> not perceiv’d as well as perceiv’d. & shew how the Vulgar notion agrees with mine when we narrowly inspect into the meaning & definition of the word Existence w<sup>ch</sup> is no simple idea distinct from perceiving & being perceiv’d.” The shorter and more succinct entry 429 expresses the same discovery: “Existence is percipi or percipere. the horse is in the stable, the Books are in the study as before.”

So what does the solution consist in? The hitherto unwarranted assurance that we will see the thing we are seeing now is finally accompanied by a reason and is no longer

---

<sup>14</sup> The rejection of the two levels of existence is noticed by McKim, Robert: ‘Berkeley’s notebooks’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 87.

hanging in the air unsupported. The reason is the semantics of the verb ‘to exist’ where a happy collusion between the technical immaterialist meaning expressed in the *esse* is *percipi* principle and the common usage is noticed by Berkeley. This is the central and most important part of the whole system claimed to be in total agreement with common sense, and there is ample evidence in the Commentaries that Berkeley saw it this way: “589 There was a smell i.e. there was a smell perceiv’d. Thus we see that common speech confirms my Doctrine”

### **2.5.1.1 *Esse* is *Percipi*, common speech and Continuity**

The importance of this point is far-reaching<sup>115</sup>. For example entry 604: “I am persuaded would Men but examine w<sup>t</sup> they mean by the Word Existence they wou’d agree with me.” In quite general terms, Berkeley is talking here about ‘agreeing with me’ and it is not too far reaching to infer that he means here what he says – the agreement with the whole of immaterialism. And this ambitious goal is to be achieved when people realize what *they* mean by the verb ‘to exist’, i.e. by what that word means in ordinary talk. In a similar vein 593 claims: “Let it not be said that I take away Existence. I onely declare the meaning of the Word as far as I can comprehend it.” When noting that many ancient philosophers ended up sceptics he berates them in 491: “...this sprung from their not knowing w<sup>t</sup> existence was and wherein it consisted this the source of all their Folly, ’tis on the Discovering of the nature & meaning & import of Existence that I chiefly insist. This puts a wide difference betwixt the Sceptics & me. This I think wholly new. I am sure ’tis new to me” The triumphant Berkeley cannot suppress his glee at his ‘discovery’ and its importance for combating scepticism, one of his chief goals. And what is the discovery? His philosophical theory of ‘Existence’, and its universal and

---

<sup>115</sup> Winkler has a slightly less enthusiastic evaluation of the correspondence between philosophy and ordinary language: “Of the arguments for immaterialism reviewed ...the argument of (to exist means in language to be perceived) is the only one which does not rest explicitly on Berkeley’s views about intentionality, necessity, and intelligibility. But it is also...the least argumentative. Berkeley simply assumes a general view about the meaning of sentences or statements...”(Winkler, p. 178)

humble origin is affirmed in 279: “I wonder not at my sagacity in discovering the obvious tho’ amazing truth, I rather wonder at my stupid inadvertency in not finding it out before. ’tis no witchcraft to see”

The actual mechanism of Berkeley’s solution to the Continuity problem and the application of his belief that the ordinary meaning of ‘exist’ matches his technical notion are fully spelled out already in PHK 3. This could come as a surprise for there is nothing said on Intermittency in that early section, but our surprise will disappear once we realize that when the objection is raised in PHK 45, Berkeley refers us back to PHK 3&4 as containing the solution. What we initially and tentatively treated as a first step in a complicated strategy of responding turns out to be precociously the main answer after all, just like Berkeley himself says. So in the key section Berkeley answers the question “what is meant by the term exists, when applied to sensible things” by giving examples of the word ‘exist’ as it is used: “The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelt; there was a sound, that is, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions.”

In an age of television, the Internet, modern media and science operating at both micro- and macro-levels it is perhaps more difficult to appreciate the subtle point Berkeley is here making. He is commenting on the vital role verbs of perception play in the language game of Existence. When there is a doubt whether a thing that is perceivable by senses exists or existed, we are reassured when there is recourse to verbs of perception: “Your wife was in town yesterday.” When suspicious about the report we claim: “She can’t have been, she told me she stayed at home the whole day.” The answer “Well, I saw her there myself.” is usually enough to at least cast doubt on her veracity if not persuading us straight away. Basically a thing, which is capable of being seen, must be seen or must have been seen in order to exist. The relationship goes the other way, as well. If somebody claims to be seeing ghosts, we, knowing or at least supposing that ghosts do not exist, treat his ‘seeing’ as a hallucination or a sign of mental illness. That

which does not exist cannot be seen<sup>116</sup>. The relationship is not confined to the present, Julius Caesar is not seen by anyone now, but he existed because he was seen in his time by his contemporaries. Similarly, the prediction ‘there will be a snow storm tomorrow’ means ‘when you go out tomorrow, you will see/feel snow falling’.

Similar emphasis on the connection between perception and existence is to be found for example in PHK 24, 81, and 89. When we apply this lesson to the Intermittency objection, then the thing I do not perceive now still exists, for ‘exist’ here means that were I in a position to perceive it, I would perceive it: “The table I write on, I say. exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, *meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it*, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.” (PHK 3, my italics, the part after ‘or’ seems to be suggesting another solution, which we will discuss in a later section) In order for the table not to exist, it would have to cease to be perceivable. Existence is defined in terms of perception actual *and* possible<sup>117</sup>. And as for every other orthodox Christian thinker, for Berkeley the distinction between actual and possible collapses in God. So what from human perspective is only a possible perception (i.e. the table in my study when I am not there) is actual perception for God due to his omniscience.

### **2.5.1.2 The theological side of the problem**

The collapse of the two categories is not made explicit in the *Principles*; it is conspicuous only in the *Dialogues*, where the whole problem is rehearsed. At DHP 234, Hylas at first challenges Berkeley’s new semantics of the word ‘exist’ and its ordinary

---

<sup>116</sup> The intimate relationship between seeing and existing was exemplified by my fiercely atheistic and communist teacher in the 1980’s. Confronted by an overwhelmingly Catholic class of eleven-year-olds she one day exploded: “How can you boorish peasants believe in this God?! The Soviet astronauts flew in their rocket into the Space above the clouds and they did not see any God there!” Her logic was impeccable, except for the assumption that God is visible and resides in the Space.

<sup>117</sup> That, however, does not make an object a collection of past, present and future, even possible ideas, as Pitcher would have it: “...a so-called ‘object’ is nothing but a family of ideas of sense spread out over time...” (Pitcher, p. 165).

language credentials: “Ask the first man you meet, and he shall tell you, *to be perceived* is one thing, and *to exist* is another.” The reply again stresses the plain man’s agreement with the immaterialist principle: “Ask the gardener, why he thinks yonder cherry-tree exists in the garden, and he shall tell you, because he sees and feels it; in a word, because he perceives it by his senses. Ask him, why he thinks an orange-tree not to be there, and he shall tell you, because he does not perceive it. What he perceives by sense, that he terms a real, being, and saith it *is* or *exists*; but, that which is not perceivable, the same, he saith, hath no being.” Next, the identification of the actually perceived and the merely perceivable is challenged: “Yes, Philonous, I grant the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, but not in being actually perceived.” To which Philonous, rather unconvincingly, replies: “And what is perceivable but an idea? And can an idea exist without being actually perceived? These are points long since agreed between us.” Fortunately, the very next exchange makes his argument clearer, when the still unconvinced Hylas objects in DHP 235: “Ask the fellow whether yonder tree hath an existence out of his mind: what answer think you he would make?” The danger of things existing in one mind only, the solipsistic objection, is raised here, for Hylas takes it to follow from immaterialism that when things exist only when actually perceived, they exist only in the individual mind perceiving them. Berkeley in his reply effects the collapse of the perceivable and the actually perceived: “The same that I should myself, to wit, that it doth exist out of his mind. But then to a Christian it cannot surely be shocking to say, the real tree existing without his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is *exists in*) the infinite mind of God.” The theological dimension of the point is stressed once more: “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. This indeed some heathens and philosophers have affirmed, but whoever entertains notions of the Deity suitable to the Holy Scriptures, will be of another opinion.” The emphasis on the intersubjective existence echoes PC 477a: “...bodies & their qualitys I do allow to exist independently of Our mind.” where ‘Our mind’ should most easily be read as ‘any one individual mind’, as well as PHK 48, where ‘all minds’ are mentioned without bringing God in to rescue the unperceived. And surely, even here (DHP 235) where God enters the

explanation as a new element is His omniscient perception *conjoined* with the perception by all minds in an effort to prove the conceptual point about minds and the exclusive existence of things in them, essentially a repeat of the *esse is percipi* principle. God comes in as simply another mind perceiving its ideas. The great question of Berkeleian studies is, of course, if God enters the picture only in the DHP, which are only a re-telling of the PHK, can immaterialism function without Him? Or is He perhaps secretly present already in §§ 45-8 as the solution to the Intermittency objection? However tempting and important these questions may be, we will postpone answering them till the next sections.

Another point is worth of comment in DHP 235, as well, and that is Berkeley's re-stating of the dispute. Materialism *and* immaterialism both agree that the existence of things is not confined to an individual finite perceiving mind, so neither is solipsistic. The opposing doctrines disagree, however, about the existence of things unperceived even by God – these are forbidden by the orthodox-friendly immaterialism while being presupposed by materialism which in doing so diminishes God's omnipotence and is thus an ideal springboard for atheism. Again, we shall deal with these theological corollaries more fully in later sections.

### **2.5.1.3 Argument Economy and Continuity**

But to get back to those entries in the *Commentaries* that we singled out as being relevant to the Continuity debate. We have seen how some of them helped us appreciate the answer to it in §45, which consisted in stressing the dependence of Existence on the verbs of perception and the correspondence of this philosophical principle with common speech. In one sense, it sharpened the Intermittency objection by saying that there are no unperceived objects; in another it met it by implying that we do not need them. Considerable rhetorical effort was exerted in §§46-8 in order to sweeten the seemingly bitter corollary of the *esse is percipi* principle, some of which also has its predecessors in

the *Commentaries* and also ties in a surprising way with what came to be called the Master Argument by commentators<sup>118</sup>.

Let us quote then the interesting entry 472: “You ask me whether the books are in the study now w<sup>n</sup> no one is there to see them. I answer yes. you ask me are we not in the wrong for imagining things to exist w<sup>n</sup> they are not actually perceiv’d by the senses. I answer no. the existence of our ideas consists in being perceiv’d, imagin’d thought on whenever they are imagin’d or thought on they do exist. Whenever they are mention’d or discours’d of they are imagin’d & thought on therefore you can at no time ask me whether they exist or no, but by reason of y<sup>e</sup> very question they must necessarily exist.” The discussion here is carried out solely from the finite perspective, as we have noted of all discussions of Continuity prior to DHP, that is in PC and PHK. There is no recourse to the omniscient perceiver to save the day, and Berkeley even goes as far as saying that things exist when not actually perceived! He would explicitly contradict this later in DHP 234: “And can an idea exist without being actually perceived?” But we should not be too hasty here, perhaps there is no contradiction after all, for in PC 472 B speaks of ‘actually perceived *by the senses*’ implying that there are other ways of perceiving apart from ‘sensing’. He duly proceeds to name them: imagining things, thinking about them, mentioning them meaningfully in a discourse. There are multiple occurrences in Berkeley’s writings where ‘to perceive’ is conjoined by the conjunction ‘or’ in a clearly synonymic context with, for example, ‘to know’ (DHP 202, 212), ‘to comprehend’ (DHP 250), while other occurrences treat ‘to know’ and ‘to understand’ as synonymous (DHP 240). We may thus safely conclude that when it comes to the metaphysical status of intentional verbs, Berkeley treats them indifferently.

---

<sup>118</sup> See for example Gallois, Andre: ‘Berkeley’s Master Argument’, *Philosophical Review* 83 (1974), pp. 55-69, or Winkler, p. 183.

This broad concept of perception<sup>119</sup> including all intentional activity as well as perception by the senses is by no means unique to Berkeley. Descartes' clear and distinct perception does not need to involve senses and is closer to the certainty of knowing something. Locke claims that having ideas and perception is the same thing (*Essay*, II, I, 9) and includes thinking in perception: "What perception is, every one will know better by reflecting on what he does himself, when he sees, hears, feels, &c., *or thinks*, than by any discourse of mine." (*Essay*, II, IX, 2, italics mine)<sup>120</sup>

The inherited broader notion of perception enables Berkeley to meet the Intermittency objection in a new way: we simply cannot say that something is not perceived for when we say it, we think of it and it is therefore perceived. This marvellous shift in the argument is perhaps echoed in a truncated form in PHK 48 where Berkeley says that as we stop perceiving something we also lose the chance of making sure that nobody else perceives it.

Utilization of Argument economy occurs several times in Berkeley's writings (for example in PHK 42) and may seem inappropriate or even as philosophical cheating<sup>121</sup> at

---

<sup>119</sup> The wider meaning of 'perception' in Berkeley is also noticed by Grayling, p. 99, and Flage, Daniel E.: "Berkeley's Epistemic Ontology: The Principles", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 34, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 33-4: Some of the occurrences, where the verb 'to perceive' is treated coextensively with other intentional verbs in Berkeley's own writings, are also listed in Flage's article. For the opposite view see, for example, Pappas, p. 109: "God's merely knowing or knowing about ... objects is not perceiving them."

<sup>120</sup> Flage's articles alerted me to the broader notion of perception in Descartes and Locke.

<sup>121</sup> So Muehlmann, p. 253: "...the conclusion that his (Berkeley's) principles do not entail intermittency is, though technically correct, not a satisfactory response to the intermittency problem." On the same page, Muehlmann talks of 'Berkeley's lackadaisical attitude towards the problem.' Such a label is a misnomer given the extent of attention Continuity receives in the *Philosophical Commentaries* and hints rather at Muehlmann's underestimating the rhetorical layout of the presentation of the Continuity debate in PHK 45-8: "In the *Principles* Berkeley fails to appreciate the importance of continuity for the common sense conception of bodies. Indeed, he seems to think that this part of that conception is simply a vulgar prejudice." (p. 255) 'Body' is a term Berkeley does not use after the early stages of the Continuity discussion in the PC, and he does not label the belief that the perceived thing will be there again after we open our eyes 'a prejudice' – a term he reserves for useful fancies that are strictly speaking wrong, for example our belief that we see and touch the same thing. He rather attempts to analyse this belief philosophically and purports to show that at no stage do we need the supposition that things exist



first glance, but it is a sign of Berkeley's accurate awareness of the structure of the argument, the interdependent and not arbitrary order of presuppositions and objections. We have tried to point out this awareness in discussing the Relevancy principle in the previous section. And when Argument economy occurs, it does not usually constitute the main line of defence, it is only the first trench, as it were. Even in PHK 42 in discussing the third objection to immaterialism which says that we see things at a distance from us and therefore the things cannot exist in our mind, Berkeley retorts that in dreams things also seem to be at a distance from us and yet we cannot claim that they exist outside of our mind. This almost sceptical counter-objection is followed by a lengthy explication of what it means that things are seen at a distance from us, §§43-4 in fact summarizing Berkeley's findings in NTV, the arbitrary connection between the visible and tactile ideas and the way we perceive distance.

If Berkeley has this positive explanation of seeing things at a distance at hand, why does he bother with mentioning dreams before it at all? And which of these two answers is actually the answer to the worry at hand? They both seem to be working at different levels and complementing each other. The negative one invoking Argument economy could with some tentativeness be ascribed to the metaphysical/logical level while the positive optical account may belong to the epistemological/scientific level. The same strategy as in PHK 42-4 is to be found in the immediately following PHK 45-8, albeit in a reversed order. There we first get the cryptic reference to PHK 3&4 containing the epistemological, admittedly mostly but not exclusively phenomenalist account of the perceivable, while the negative point comes only later as a reassurance after finding the 'pretended absurdities' even in materialism.

The entry 472 is interesting not only for the embryonic use of Argument economy, it also reveals the connection between the immaterialist conceptions of Existence and Reality, for the very next entry 473 seems to draw some disturbing consequences of the broadened concept of perception and diffuse them at the same time: "But say you then a Chimaera does exist. I answer it doth in one sense. i.e. it is imagin'd. but it must be well

---

unperceived in the strong, absolute and metaphysical sense. For him, the belief in the continuous existence of things is pragmatically useful and it is metaphysically underpinned by God's willingness to excite our ideas in an orderly fashion so as not to confuse us.

noted that existence is vulgarly restrain'd to actual perception. & that I use the word Existence in a larger sense than ordinary." While Berkeley enlists the support of the vulgar for his *esse is percipi* principle, he does not do so for his philosophical notion of Existence, since for him everything we imagine exists, although not everything is real: such an enlarged scope of existence comes handy when explaining such intricate matters as perception of distance through visual clues and other problems in his optical programme. All the individual constituents of our visual (and perceptible generally) world exist and have a scientific explanatory value, but our everyday conception of reality is concerned only with the final 'picture' put together by the mind for pragmatic reasons.

In the final exposition of immaterialism in the *Principles*, the topic of Reality is divorced from that of Continuity<sup>122</sup> and assumes the place of pride as the first objection (actually subdivided into two) Berkeley puts to himself in PHK 34-41. Such arrangement is perhaps detrimental to clarity of meaning, especially when compounded by the fact that the actual solution to the Intermittency objection, the new meaning of existence, was disclosed earlier in PHK 3-4 and the discussion of the objection merely refers back to it, instead of elaborating more fully. Also, the use of Argument economy in PHK 48 gave rise to another interpretation of the whole Continuity discussion to which we turn in Chapter 2.6.

#### **2.5.1.4 The Master Argument and Continuity**

First, however, the connection between Continuity and the Master Argument needs to be investigated. What is the Master Argument and where does it occur? Most commentators agree that it occurs in two places in Berkeley's writings: PHK 22-3 and DHP 200. We would like to add two other important occurrences, which tie it with the subject of Continuity, namely PC 472 – the embryonic version of all the other occurrences, and PHK 45 – the most important section on Continuity in the *Principles*. In the latter case, we should speak rather of an allusion to the Master Argument, which had

---

<sup>122</sup> For a different view see Grayling, p. 120.

already been fully laid out in PHK 22-3, but also this allusion takes the form of a challenge: “If he can conceive it possible either for his ideas or their archetypes to exist without being perceived, then I give up the cause...” and is intimately intertwined with the subject of Continuity, just like the earliest mention of the Argument in PC 472. The other two entries are, however, much more explicit than these vestiges and also divorced from any mention of Continuity and so they have, unfortunately, been taken as the standard expositions of the Master Argument. Let us quote them in full:

“22...that which may be demonstrated with the utmost evidence in a line or two, to any one that is capable of the least reflexion? It is but looking into your own thoughts, and so trying whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or figure, or motion, or colour, to exist without the mind, or unperceived. This easy trial may perhaps make you see, that what you contend for, is a downright contradiction. Insomuch that I am content to put the whole upon this issue; if you can but conceive it possible for one extended movable substance, or in general, for any one idea or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause....

23 But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and no body by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call *books* and *trees*, and the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it does not shew that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and doth conceive bodies existing

unthought of or without the mind; though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in itself...”

The name The Master Argument is justified by its position in the structure of the Principles; it follows the *a priori* arguments for immaterialism and is by Berkeley himself heralded as expressing the preceding paragraphs “in a line or two”. In DHP 200 Philonous is no less ambitious:

“...I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.

HYLAS. If it comes to that, the point will soon be decided. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

PHILONOUS. How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

HYLAS. No, that were a contradiction.

PHILONOUS. Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing which is *unconceived*?

HYLAS. It is.

PHILONOUS. The tree or house therefore which you think of, is conceived by you?

HYLAS. How should it be otherwise?

PHILONOUS. And what is conceived, is surely in the mind?

HYLAS. Without question, that which is conceived is in the mind.

PHILONOUS. How then came you to say, you conceived a house or tree existing independent and out of all minds whatsoever?

HYLAS. That was I own an oversight; but stay, let me consider what led me into it. – It is a pleasant mistake enough. As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it, methought that was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, not considering that I myself conceived it all the while. But now I plainly see, that all I can

do is to frame ideas in my own mind. I may indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from proving that I can conceive them *existing out of the minds of all spirits.*”

Our previous analysis of the entry PC 472 will stand us in a good stead here and, assuming we are dealing with the same argument<sup>123</sup>, the enlarged but still traditional conception of perception as involving all the intentional verbs, including *conceive* will help us unravel the difficulty at hand. The Master Argument really just challenges the reader to conceive something unconceived, ‘which is a manifest repugnancy’ and it tries to make him realize that whenever he comes up with something that is not perceived (i.e. conceived) at the moment, he perceives (i.e. conceives) it in the very act of mentioning it.

To such an argument the standard reply is that there is a difference between my conjuring something in my mind and its real existence. True, but that is not the issue here, the Master Argument does not claim that when I conceive something, it must also really exist.

Our interpretation of the Master Argument and the essential role of PC 472-3 in it will perhaps get clearer if we contrast it with interpretations of other commentators.

### **2.5.1.5 The Master Argument and commentators**

Philosophers have been mesmerised and baffled by the Master Argument. Their fascination, however, has been purely negative, they agree that the Argument is a bad argument, disagree on where the mistake lies, and try to account, with varying success, for the curious fact that Berkeley himself found the Argument convincing. Bennett’s reaction is typical: “One can hardly credit that Berkeley was satisfied with this argument,

---

<sup>123</sup> This assumption is shared by Bennett, p. 194, but he mentions the connection only in passing and does not use PC 472-3 to shed light on the Master Argument, his aim is the Continuity debate only. Other commentators do not make the connection at all, thus missing the opportunity to unravel the Argument in its explicit embryonic version.

and yet apparently he was, for he published it twice.”<sup>124</sup> Tipton joins in: “With reason commentators have tended to treat this argument with scant respect. ...Warnock just ignores it. Berkeley, though, set great store by it.”<sup>125</sup> More recently, Muehlmann even calls Berkeley’s satisfaction with the Master Argument the “most troubling problem of Berkeleian scholarship” and after asking “why does (Berkeley) even *use* such a flawed argument?”<sup>126</sup> he duly proceeds to diagnose the almost psychologically deviant feature of Berkeley’s mind. We contend, on the other hand, that the Master Argument is not flawed when viewed in its proper place in the structure of immaterialism, and consequently we feel no need to explain why Berkeley himself felt content with it.

Let us start with Muehlmann. His whole project is driven by the assumption that he has uncovered the fundamental flaw of immaterialism, and this flaw is “Berkeley’s central doctrine, his nominalism”<sup>127</sup>. While the effort to link the semantic arguments in the Introduction of the *Principles* to the main argument for immaterialism in Part I of the book is laudable, the undue emphasis Muehlmann places on Berkeley’s linguistic exploits distorts much of his subsequent analysis, especially his critique of the Master Argument. For Muehlmann sees a great difference between the way the challenge preceding the Master Argument is worded in PHK 22: “I am content to put the whole upon this issue” and in DHP 200: “But (to pass by all that hath been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this issue.” The difference is, of course, the added parenthesis in the *Dialogues* version. This could not have occurred in the *Principles* version, reasons Muehlmann, for there it would have wiped out also the ‘antiabstractionist’, to wit, nominalist, argument of the Introduction, which logically and chronologically precedes all the arguments in Part I. And indeed, the impossibility of conceiving things existing unperceived is due to the fact that, on Berkeley’s terms, “one cannot peel off the sensing from the quality sensed, the seeing from the sensible thing seen, or the conceiving from the object conceived.”<sup>128</sup> But,

---

<sup>124</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford University Press, 1971, p. 194.

<sup>125</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 160.

<sup>126</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, Indianapolis, 1992, p. 148.

<sup>127</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, p. 4.

<sup>128</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, p. 148.

Muehlmann being a realist, he claims that because the nominalist argument itself is flawed, the Master Argument is flawed as well, and we can, presumably, cut off the sensing from the quality sensed. Thus, we have explained what is wrong with the Master Argument and also why Berkeley put so much faith in it – the mistake had been committed earlier and not noticed by him.

We would like to object to Muehlmann's analysis in its key joint – the explanation of the difference between the two versions of the challenge before the Master Argument. The difference is due to the different genre of the two works; in the *Principles* it is a fitting restatement of the main argument with the emphasis on the reader performing the experiment for himself. In the *Dialogues* the same is compounded with a reminder to Hylas that he is once again contradicting what he already approved of, a reminder that occurs often as Hylas tries out different versions of the materialist position. His difficulties in formulating his position exactly provide a feeling of a record of an actual discussion and are thus an integral part of the philosophical genre of dialogue. Muehlmann is simply reading too much into the difference and treating the two books as written in the same style.

Pitcher<sup>129</sup> sees the Master Argument as a first part of a two-sided attack on the two main functions of 'Lockean Matter' – material objects existing unperceived and their resemblance of our sensory ideas. We have tried to show that the structure of the *Principles* as well as the *Dialogues* is more consistent with the Argument's being a summary and climax of immaterialism rather than an a priori argument, while its predecessor in PC 472-3 ties it intrinsically with the Continuity debate. But let us postpone the discussion of the structure of immaterialism till later and concentrate on Pitcher's reading of the Master Argument itself.

In Pitcher's view, it fails, because Berkeley does not consider the distinction between "what an idea is an idea *of*, and the idea itself...between what is represented and what represents."<sup>130</sup> While that which represents (an idea) cannot exist without the mind, the thing itself, which the idea represents, can exist unperceived. So Berkeley seems to forget that ideas represent. But what do they represent? That is precisely the disputed

---

<sup>129</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, pp. 111-5.

<sup>130</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, p. 113.

point. Berkeley would claim that the step behind ideas to something that is totally different from them (yet somehow manages to resemble them) is not warranted and should be resisted. Ideas represent indeed, but only other ideas, according to the principle ‘nothing can be like an idea except for another idea’. A supreme example of the new nature of representation of ideas by ideas is to be found in NTV, where visual ideas are signs of (represent) the tactile ideas<sup>131</sup>. So Pitcher’s objection begs the question against Berkeley, for even with the help of representation we cannot get to extra-mental objects.

The same mistake, although in a different wording, is committed by Tipton<sup>132</sup>, who analyses the Master Argument with the help of the word ‘image’. He takes Berkeley to mean by ‘conceive’ framing a mental image and perceiving this mental image<sup>133</sup>. On such a reading, the Master Argument fails because Berkeley “confuses the object thought about with the mental image we may frame in thinking about it”<sup>134</sup>, and while the latter can be mind-dependent, the former most certainly is not.

But when we look at Berkeley’s actual usage of the word ‘image’ in PHK, for example, we will discover that all its occurrences are in negative contexts, i.e. an idea cannot be an ‘image’ of something without the mind, with the exception of PHK 33, where ideas excited by our imagination are called ‘ideas, or images of things’ as opposed to ideas imprinted on our minds by the Author of Nature. Both, however, are ideas. This should not surprise us, for the pair ‘object/image’ is another transmutation of the ‘inside/outside’ metaphor, so handy to the dualist but relentlessly pursued and disclosed by the anti-dualist immaterialist. The following quote from PHK 56 expresses Berkeley’s sentiment towards the word most succinctly: “(It is a) mistake (to suppose) that there are certain objects really existing without the mind, or having a subsistence distinct from being perceived, of which our ideas are only *images* or *resemblances*, imprinted by those objects on the mind.” My italics in the quote indicate that the same point applies to ‘resemblance’ as well, for it is the same metaphor. Berkeley spends considerable time

---

<sup>131</sup> I am indebted here to Atherton; see for example p. 15 of her *Berkeley’s Revolution in Vision*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1990.

<sup>132</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, pp. 158-178.

<sup>133</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 165.

<sup>134</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 166.



explaining that ideas do not ‘resemble’ anything extra-mental (PHK8): “an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure...it (is) impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas.” And the very next sentence includes another crucial word in the forbidden image-resemblance/object metaphor: “...I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the *pictures* or representations, be themselves perceivable or no?” (my italics) By depriving the dualist of the words in which to express his doctrine, Berkeley in effect precludes him from setting it up.

But let us confront Tipton in the very example that he gives as the most evident token of Berkeley’s failure to distinguish the image from the object: “But in the case of the sun the point is really quite evident. The sun I imagine is hot and huge; the image I frame is not. The object is, in fact, totally distinct from the image.”<sup>135</sup> Our objection to this strict dichotomy is related to the one mentioned by Dennis Grey<sup>136</sup>.

In order to conceive the object and its relationship to its image in the mind, we have to, as it were, step outside of the mind and outside of the object, as well, to view them both from the side, a move that is contemplated and rejected by Berkeley in NTV 116:

“...what greatly contributes to make us mistake in this matter is that when we think of the pictures in the fund of the eye, we imagine ourselves looking on the fund of another’s eye, or another looking on the fund of our own eye, and beholding the pictures painted thereon. Suppose two eyes A and B: A from some distance looking on the pictures in B sees them inverted, and for that reason concludes they are inverted in B: But this is wrong. There are projected in little on the bottom of A the images of the pictures of, suppose, man, earth, etc., which are painted on B. And besides these the eye B it self, and the objects which environ it, together with another earth, are projected in a larger size on A. Now, by the eye A these larger images are deemed the true objects, and the lesser only pictures in miniature. And it is with respect to those greater images

---

<sup>135</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 175.

<sup>136</sup> Grey, Denis: “The Solipsism of Bishop Berkeley”, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 9. (Oct., 1952), pp. 338-49.

that it determines the situation of the smaller images: So that comparing the little man with the great earth, A judges him inverted, or that the feet are farthest from and the head nearest to the great earth. Whereas, if A compare the little man with the little earth, then he will appear erect, *i.e.* his head shall seem farthest from, and his feet nearest to, the little earth. But we must consider that B does not see two earths as A does: It sees only what is represented by the little pictures in A, and consequently shall judge the man erect: For, in truth, the man in B is not inverted, for there the feet are next the earth; but it is the representation of it in A which is inverted, for there the head of the representation of the picture of the man in B is next the earth, and the feet farthest from the earth, meaning the earth which is without the representation of the pictures in B. For if you take the little images of the pictures in B, and consider them by themselves, and with respect only to one another, they are all erect and in their natural posture.”

True, the passage quoted deals with the rather technical problem of inverted vision, but it ties in with another passage, this time from the DHP 209, which makes the same point:

“PHILONOUS. I would first know whether I rightly understand your hypothesis. You make certain traces in the brain to be the causes or occasions of our ideas. Pray tell me, whether by the *brain* you mean any sensible thing.

HYLAS. What else think you I could mean?

PHILONOUS. Sensible things are all immediately perceivable; and those things which are immediately perceivable, are ideas; and these exist only in the mind. Thus much you have, if I mistake not, long since agreed to.

HYLAS. I do not deny it.

PHILONOUS. The brain therefore you speak of, being a sensible thing, exists only in the mind. Now, I would fain know whether you think it reasonable to suppose, that one idea or thing existing in the mind, occasions all other ideas. And, if you think so, pray how do you account for the origin of that primary idea or brain itself?

HYLAS. I do not explain the origin of our ideas by that brain which is perceivable to sense, this being itself only a combination of sensible ideas, but by another which I imagine.

PHILONOUS. But are not things imagined as truly in the mind as things perceived?

HYLAS. I must confess they are.

PHILONOUS. It comes therefore to the same thing; and you have been all this while accounting for ideas, by certain motions or impressions of the brain, that is, by some alterations in an idea, whether sensible or imaginable it matters not.”

By now, the metaphysical importance of the position alluded to in the two quotations should be evident. There is no outside, absolute space from which we could compare our ideas and their supposedly causal originals, for there is no absolute Newtonian space.<sup>137</sup> Therefore, there is no position from which to define the dichotomy idea (image)/thing, when all we are aware of are our ideas. This spatial objection combines with the semantic objection to the ‘image/original’ metaphor described earlier to yield a unique strict first-person perspective of Berkeley’s immaterialism, which is perhaps behind all the accusations of solipsism.

Tipton’s and Pitcher’s readings of the Master Argument are carried out from the dualistic position<sup>138</sup> which has, however, been pre-empted by Berkeley in his rejection of the ‘image/original’ metaphor and which the immaterialist never needs to reach for the following reasons.

#### **2.5.1.6 The structure of immaterialism, the strict first person perspective, the lesson of NTV and the question of the *a priori*, immaterialism as a half of materialism**

The strict first-person perspective of immaterialism is present from the very

---

<sup>137</sup> Grey, Denis: “The Solipsism of Bishop Berkeley”, p. 347.

<sup>138</sup> Pappas’s complicated analysis of the Master Argument suffers from the same mistake, he finds a dualistic dichotomy between mind dependent ideas and “*compages* of external bodies” (PHK 22), failing to see the ironic use of this rare word by Berkeley. See Pappas, *Berkeley’s Thought*, p. 132.

beginning of the programme, the NTV being its primary application. By providing optics with its psychological part, Berkeley saw the successes of his theory in solving the problems of the discipline that were not soluble on the strictly dualist Cartesian basis. The main exposition of immaterialism in the PHK starts with the solitary thinker's position, as well, and through *a priori* arguments<sup>139</sup> a viable metaphysics is constructed in the first six paragraphs, which does not need the second Cartesian substance – the material one – and is thus lighter in comparison with its traditional Cartesian dualistic counterpart.

To be sure, such metaphysics sometimes appears revisionist and circumlocutory, for example the constancy of our perceptions is not explained by independently subsisting and persisting material substances, but by the love of an Omnipotent Spirit, and this explanation is considered advantageous over the classical dualistic one for its theological focus. Or the theory of other minds seems to be compromised in immaterialism, according to Bennett. We will have more to say about these traditional metaphysical concerns later, for the moment let it suffice to say that any objections to immaterialism from dualistic positions are begging the question against it, for both systems start with the strict first-person perspective (here Descartes' *Meditations* represents a superb example), and while the dualist advances from here to hypothesize another substance, thus widening his position and opening the route to scepticism, the immaterialist is content to remain in the tight space of the mind, especially when such lighter metaphysics is deemed sufficient to account for perception, nay, it is even more suited than its adversary to account for our dominant sense, vision.

To illustrate the contrast between the two metaphysics once more, let us entertain the thought experiment which is, according to Berkeley, metaphysically forbidden but which he himself undoubtedly carried out many times scientifically, for he was very much aware of the anatomy of the eye. Let us imagine that we are looking at our own eye 'from the side' and see it seeing the computer screen before it. Thus we have the 'object' and its 'image' on the retina. But which of these two does the eye see? We are tempted to say that the eye sees the object, but then if the eye moves a bit back, the image diminishes

---

<sup>139</sup> According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Berkeley was the first writer to use the word 'a priori' in English.

while the object stays the same. If we say that the eye sees only the image (as most philosophers in the early modern period would say), then the eye sees something changeable and subjective while the ‘real’ thing is hidden. It seems we say something nonsensical either way, and Berkeley’s solution is simply to prevent the movement that enabled the dichotomy in the first place. The metaphysical position of the strict first-person perspective is simpler and more basic as metaphysics, useful as science and does not violate language by redefining words like ‘real’, ‘know’ and ‘thing’.

Within the carefully wrought structure of PHK and DHP the Master Argument serves as a grand finale of the immaterialist position, summing it up in a psychologically persuasive way through a thought experiment which the reader (in DHP Hylas) is asked to carry out in his own mind. It highlights the impossibility of even mentioning anything extra-mental. In a way, it is the principle ‘*esse is percipi*’ in the form of a challenge, for it strives to identify the same two concepts – perception/conception and existence as that principle. Let us illustrate the mechanism of the argument with an analogy: if someone was to ask ‘what is the colour of flesh?’ I would feel justified to say ‘red’. But my interlocutor might object, ‘no, no, that is the colour of blood, because when you remove skin you necessarily cut through blood vessels and the spilt blood colours the flesh red. I want to know the colour of flesh, not that of blood. What colour is it before you remove the skin?’ To this I would have to say that there is no ‘before you remove the skin’, one cannot see through it and so the concept of ‘the colour of flesh beneath the skin’ makes no sense. Admittedly, the colour of flesh is the same as the colour of blood; the two colours are really the same, even though we usually do not realize this and treat them as separate. The case is analogous with perception and existence, we get to existence only through perception/conception, the two concepts are united on a deeper level, and though we do not usually realize the unity, the Master Argument attempts to elucidate it.

### **2.5.2 Continuity – temporary summary**

We have tried to untangle the complicated solution to the objection of Intermittency through showing that the real answer to it is to be found in PHK 45 and

involves a reference back to PHK 3-4 (meaning of ‘exist’) plus a torso of a challenge referring back to PHK 22-3 to the Master Argument. It is our contention, that the crucial entries PC 472-3 contain instances of both, but in the final layout of the *Principles*, the Master Argument was moved forward to PHK 22-3 and in the Continuity discussion in PHK 45-8 is present only in a rudimentary form, albeit in a crucial place in PHK 45, where Berkeley refers back to the meaning of ‘exist’ as explained in PHK 3-4 and “desire(s) he (the reader) will consider whether he means anything by the actual existence of an idea distinct from its being perceived.”

Another feature pointing to the common source of the Master Argument and the solution to the Intermittency objection is the burden shifting nature of the ‘smoke screen’ secondary solution of PHK 48. This second solution, however, represents a potential trap for interpreters, one that has been noticed by Grey who correctly sees that the actual solution to the Intermittency objection involves “the ‘strict’ interpretation of ‘*esse is percipi*’”<sup>140</sup> which is to be found in PHK 4-6. But Grey still claims Berkeley is ‘muddled’ for letting God turn into a constant observer of things not observed by any finite mind<sup>141</sup>. We agree that the two solutions are mutually exclusive, but wish to contend that the second one is not Berkeley’s position in the end. We so attempt to be more charitable to Berkeley and to show how the Limerick interpretation of him is, though prevalent, by no means an obvious one.

## 2.6 Continuity and God – the Limerick interpretation

When we quoted PHK 3 as giving the meaning of the verb ‘to exist’, we concentrated on the contrafactual analysis presented there and postponed the appended analysis in terms of actual perception until later: “The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or *that some other spirit actually does*

---

<sup>140</sup> Grey, Denis: “The Solipsism of Bishop Berkeley”, p. 342.

<sup>141</sup> Grey, Denis: “The Solipsism of Bishop Berkeley”, p. 349: “Berkeley makes a ...mistake when he turns God into an Absolute Percipient.”

*perceive it.*” (my italics) Now is the time to treat the other part of the disjunction and the interpretations it gave rise to.

Many interpretations take this second part of the conjunct seriously and, though varying in detail, build upon it. The area overlapping between them is expressed in the famous limerick by Ronald Knox:

There once was a man who said, “God  
Must think it exceedingly odd  
If He finds that this tree  
Continues to be  
When there’s no one about in the Quad.”

“Dear Sir:  
Your astonishment’s odd:  
I am always about in the Quad  
And that’s why the tree  
Will continue to be,  
Since observed by,  
Yours faithfully,  
God.”

The solution presented here has become the orthodox solution to the Continuity problem and has been adopted by many commentators. For example, Warnock says: “...the role of God in Berkeley’s philosophy is...put forward as the only means of *avoiding* gross conflict with ordinary views...”<sup>142</sup> In a similar vein, Grayling speaks of “...the standard interpretation (where) God continuously perceives sensible objects and thus holds the entire order of nature in being...”<sup>143</sup> More recently Pappas finds that “...objects not perceived by finite spirits are nonetheless perceived by God, and this fact underwrites

---

<sup>142</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, London: Penguin, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 123-4.

<sup>143</sup> Grayling, A. C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, 1987, p. 117.

their existence”<sup>144</sup> This standard account was criticized by Bennett<sup>145</sup>, and even though some of his criticisms were accepted by later commentators (notably Tipton), the general radical thrust of his challenge came to be rejected.

### 2.6.1 The twisting of the texts

Let us have a look at the discussion in a more detail. Warnock’s is a classical interpretation in the Limerick tradition. He gives this reading to the key section PHK 48: “Indeed, it is not only that there *may* be some other spirit that perceives them (the furniture in an unoccupied room); for ‘sensible things do really exist: and if they really exist, they are necessarily perceived by an infinite mind: therefore there is an infinite mind, or God.’ ...though much is not perceived by men, there is nothing which God does not perceive.”<sup>146</sup> And Berkeley was, according to Warnock, happy to use this argument to shore up the continuity of unperceived things, for this belief forms a part of common sense: “(Berkeley) knows that any plain man would insist that the furniture in an unoccupied room actually does exist, not merely would exist if the room were occupied.”<sup>147</sup>

At one stroke, the nascent phenomenalistic account is rejected and superseded by one emphasizing actual perception. Let us analyse Warnock’s second claim first. If we compare it with what Berkeley actually says, for example in PHK 3: “The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it...” we see that Warnock grossly oversimplifies the situation. For Berkeley does not say that the table in my study *would* exist only if there was somebody by to see it, but that it *does* exist

---

<sup>144</sup> Pappas, George S.: *Berkeley’s Thought*, Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 108.

<sup>145</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, pp. 163-198.

<sup>146</sup> Warnock, *Berkeley*, pp. 113-4, the quote of Berkeley is from DHP 212, a similar view is present in Luce, *Berkeley’s Immaterialism*, pp. 124-5.

<sup>147</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, p. 113.



because if there *was* somebody in the room, he *would* see it. We do not need to insist on actual perception in order to secure existence, the verb ‘to exist’ is semantically more elastic than that and uses as its support possible perception *as well as* actual perception, as the continuation of PHK 3 makes clear: “...*or* that some other spirit actually does perceive it.” (my italics) Warnock’s ‘plain man’ need not worry at all about the existence of the table, but if he did worry, he could enter the room and see it, a procedure that is explicitly sanctioned by Berkeley.

The first quote by Warnock discloses another disturbing feature of the standard account – the need to stretch the texts to make them mean what the Limerick commentators want them to mean. The actual wording of PHK 48 does not give Warnock the result he needs. In Berkeley’s words: “... we may not ... conclude (the objects of sense) have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there *may* be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not.” (my italics) but, on Warnock’s reading Berkeley’s system here demands a ‘must’. Our interpretation, on the other hand, is on strong grounds here for it explains precisely why ‘may’ instead of ‘must’ should be used here, and that is due to Berkeley’s use of Argument Economy<sup>148</sup>.

Similarly, Luce, another proponent of the Limerick interpretation, is too hasty when he concludes that PHK 6 contains a proof of God’s existence in his index to the *Works*: “so long as (bodies) are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit...” Tipton, on the rare occasion of accepting Bennett’s criticism of such an inaccurate reading, says: “...first, this is not the only possible interpretation of PHK 6, second (and this is a stronger claim) ... it is not the most natural interpretation”<sup>149</sup>

The last passage in the *Principles*, which was thought to contain the continuity argument, is PHK 90: “...when I shut my eyes, the things I saw may still exist, but it

---

<sup>148</sup> A similar conclusion is reached by Thomas, George H.: “Berkeley’s God Does Not Perceive”, *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 14, 1976, pp. 163-168. On page 164 he puts it succinctly: “‘we’ ... refers ... to himself and some other human beings...Berkeley would not use ‘may’ of God’s perceiving, but would say ‘necessarily’ as in DHP, p. 212”.

<sup>149</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 324.

must be in another mind.” Once again, however, the words mean something different here and the usage of ‘may’ instead of ‘must’ ruins the Limerick interpretation. Berkeley is here basically saying: “I do not know whether the things I saw still exist now that my eyes are shut precisely because my eyes are shut, but if they are to exist, they must exist in another mind, so the fact that they no longer exist in my mind is no argument for them existing independently of any mind.” And such a minimalist approach is captured by our notion of Argument Economy without doing damage to the text itself.

### **2.6.2 The new goal – why is there no Continuity Argument in the *Principles*?**

After Bennett’s criticism, these important textual points were accepted by Tipton<sup>150</sup> and Pitcher<sup>151</sup> (later writers sadly ignore them altogether), but commentators were still loath to part company with the traditional continuity argument! They merely changed priorities, for now it became necessary to explain why Berkeley chose to ‘suppress’ the continuity argument in the *Principles*, when he had spent so much time on it in the *Philosophical Commentaries* and it actually occurs in the *Dialogues*. Such a strategy seems to be inherently weakened by the need to relegate the *Principles* from the position of the most important metaphysical book in Berkeley’s canon, which position is subsequently occupied by the *Dialogues*. Such realignment is explicitly contradicted by Berkeley’s *Preface* to the *Three Dialogues*, where he claims to place the content of the previous book, the *Principles*, in a new light.

We will turn to the one occurrence of the continuity argument Bennett concedes in DHP 230-1 and calls ‘a momentary aberration’<sup>152</sup> later (in Chapter 2.6.4), let us now

---

<sup>150</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 323: “...I am inclined to accept (that)...contrary to what has often been supposed, *Berkeley does not use* (the continuity argument) *on many occasions.*” (Tipton’s italics)

<sup>151</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, p. 174: “An extraordinary feature of these (PHK 6, 45-8, 90) statements is the studied refusal to make a firm commitment to the existence of unperceived objects.”

<sup>152</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume Central Themes*, p. 171.

concentrate on the valiant and futile efforts of the Limerick commentators to explain Berkeley's silence on continuity in the *Principles*.

Tipton believes that the embryonic solution to the Intermittency objection is to be found in PC 52 and it involves God and powers in him to cause our ideas<sup>153</sup>. But this raises another problem: "...he (Berkeley) cannot solve the continuity problem *just* by appealing to God's present perception...this move leaves a *discontinuity* problem...because any idea God perceives now will be an idea he has always perceived."<sup>154</sup> But when the problem of Creation is raised in DHP 253-4, Philonous invokes the Relevancy Principle to show it is not a problem he needs to be concerned with. But according to Tipton "...B....could do himself justice on the continuity issue *only* with help from an appropriate theology, but saw that doing (so) would involve committing himself to a solution which he had decided *not* to reveal *because* he was aware of difficulties with the theology."<sup>155</sup> Is it not simpler to suppose that if Berkeley's solution to continuity involved problems that were not easy to solve, then it was not a good solution after all? How do we explain the eventual publication of the solution in DHP 230-1, did Berkeley change his mind in the end about its usefulness?

Pitcher's explanation of Berkeley's reticence on continuity in the *Principles* is categorical: "In the *Principles* ...Berkeley takes no definite stand on the question of whether unobserved objects exist or not, for he does not know what stand best to take."<sup>156</sup> He sees Berkeley struggling in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, wavering in the *Principles* and finally hitting on the wrong solution in the *Three Dialogues*: "Rather than connecting the existence of unperceived objects to ideas in God's understanding, Berkeley would do far better to tie their existence to God's *will*...in *Three Dialogues* Berkeley flirts briefly with the idea ....when he suggests that the creation of the world might have consisted in God's decreeing that objects 'should become perceptible to intelligent creatures'...But this is just a brief interlude, unhappily..."<sup>157</sup> The charitable

---

<sup>153</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 335.

<sup>154</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 349.

<sup>155</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 345.

<sup>156</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, p. 174.

<sup>157</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, p. 172.

interpretation that Berkeley had solved his problems *before* he came to publish his books and that he actually published the solution in PHK 45 with reference back to PHK 3 is precluded for Pitcher, even though he comes tantalizingly close to it. For him PHK 3 with its crucial definition of ‘existence’ contains only ‘traces’ of the real solution!<sup>158</sup>

Lately, Muehlmann has provided another explanation for Berkeley’s silence on continuity in his central metaphysical text. He acknowledges that in the notebooks Berkeley had been very concerned with finding a solution to the Intermittency objection, but “by the time Berkeley publishes the *Principles* his stance has hardened ... he here takes it to be a specious objection.”<sup>159</sup> One consequence of this ‘hardening’ is that Berkeley does not treat the objection seriously, and the vexed ‘may’ instead of the expected ‘must’ is simply an example of “Berkeley’s lackadaisical attitude towards the problem”<sup>160</sup>. Only later in the *Dialogues* does Berkeley *again* realize the gravity of the problem and he then offers a solution to it, namely in DHP 214, and this solution involves archetypes: “...archetypes are *not* bodies, but they provide an item, as enduring as God wishes, which Berkeley can plausibly insert into the analysis of bodies.”<sup>161</sup> So the pair ectype-archetype saves the day, for ectypes are the intermittent objects in our minds while archetypes are enduring in God’s mind. Let us overlook the fact that this introduces dualism back into immaterialism, and the fickle attitude of Berkeley towards the whole problem (concerned in the *Commentaries*, dismissive in the *Principles*, concerned again in the *Dialogues*), as textual analysis of the key part of DHP 214 will suffice to show the implausibility of such an interpretation: “...ideas or things by me perceived, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of my mind, since I know myself not to be their author... they must therefore exist in some other mind...” This sentence appears in a summary of Philonous’ position introduced by: “Take here in brief my meaning.” and as such is unlikely to contain any new solution, especially as the discussion in which it functions sees Philonous defending himself against the charge that he is a cryptic Malebranchian, i.e. that we see external things through the essence of God,

---

<sup>158</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, p. 169.

<sup>159</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, p. 252 n6.

<sup>160</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, p. 253.

<sup>161</sup> Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley’s Ontology*, p. 258.

a topic not related to the Continuity discussion in any way. Finally, the ‘or’ conjoining ‘ideas’ and ‘archetypes’ here indicates contextual synonymy of the two terms, as is clear from the previous occurrence of the conjunction between ‘ideas’ and ‘things by me perceived’. The two terms consequently cannot be forced into any opposite dualistic partnership.

Unfortunately, recent scholarship tends to ignore Bennett’s exegetical points and even the need to explain Berkeley’s ‘evasion’ of continuity in the *Principles* and contends itself with blunt statements: “...objects not perceived by finite spirits are nonetheless perceived by God, and this fact underwrites their existence.”<sup>162</sup>

### 2.6.3 Bennett’s criticism

Apart from raising the textual points, Bennett offers also some structural criticism of the Limerick account. He distinguishes between the Passivity Argument for God’s existence – I know that some of my ideas are not caused by me, and since all ideas are mind-dependent, there must be some other mind, that causes these ideas in me, and the Continuity Argument for God’s existence – things not perceived by humans are kept in their existence by God’s constant perception. Limerick commentators read the Continuity Argument<sup>163</sup> into passages where in fact only the Passivity Argument is present, thus distorting the passages, as we have seen in section 2.6.1.

If the Passivity as well as the Continuity Arguments were used by Berkeley to prove the existence of God, how come only the first one “is celebrated as ‘this great truth’ (PHK 149) and is saluted by Hylas (DHP 215) (?) The continuity argument, in both its occurrence and its pseudo-occurrence, slides by without the slightest fanfare.”<sup>164</sup> Also,

---

<sup>162</sup> Pappas, George S.: *Berkeley’s Thought*, p. 108. Prof. Berman informed me in a private conversation that he feels Bennett’s challenge has not been met satisfactorily by the proponents of the standard account.

<sup>163</sup> The Continuity Argument appears only once in Berkeley’s corpus, and that in DHP 230-1, according to Bennett, “and should be dismissed as a momentary aberration.” Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, p. 171, for Bennett’s analysis of the misreading of key texts in the *Principles*, see pp. 172-6.

<sup>164</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, p. 185.

the two arguments seem to be ideally designed to complement each other: While the Passivity Argument proves God when we perceive things, the Continuity Argument would seem to prove Him exactly when we do not perceive things. Both the existence of perceived *and* unperceived things would be secured, *together* with the existence of God. Why is Berkeley so strangely silent on this beautiful pattern, when his avowed goal is to “to promote Useful Knowledge and Religion”?

Another of Bennett’s (and not only his, see for example Tipton, p. 322) criticism against the Continuity Argument is the charge that it is circular, but proponents of the Limerick account try to explain this by saying that Berkeley first proves God by the Passivity Argument and then uses God’s existence to shore up the continuity of unperceived bodies. But surely the Continuity Argument cannot then *again* be used to prove God? In other words, it cannot cut both ways; either it proves Continuity or God. We do not wish to become embroiled in this discussion, however, for there is a surer way of dispatching the Limerick interpretation, and that is by showing that the Continuity Argument does not occur even once in Berkeley’s writings, that it is purely the commentators’ fabrication. In order to accomplish this, we need to look at the one place where even Bennett concedes the Continuity Argument appears.

#### **2.6.4 Theological Interpretation of the Continuity Argument in DHP 230-1 (going beyond Bennett)**

The crucial passage which Bennett claims “is right out of line with everything else Berkeley says about the continuity of objects, and should be dismissed as a momentary aberration”<sup>165</sup> runs as follows:

“HYLAS. Supposing you were annihilated, cannot you conceive it possible, that things perceivable by sense may still exist?

PHILONOUS. I can; but then it must be in another mind. When I deny sensible things an existence out of the mind, I do not mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now it is plain they have an existence exterior to my mind, since I find

---

<sup>165</sup> Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, p. 171.

them by experience to be independent of it. *There is therefore some other Mind wherein they exist, during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them: as likewise they did before my birth, and would do after my supposed annihilation.* (my italics) And as the same is true, with regard to all other finite created spirits; it necessarily follows, 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.*”

My italics in the quote highlight what all commentators agree is an instance of the Continuity Argument. And Berkeley does say that things exist in God’s mind between the times when I, or other created spirits, do not perceive them. But he arrives at this conclusion through an interesting step, for he does not claim straight away that this other mind which perceives things while I do not and perceived them before my birth and will do so after my death is divine. On the contrary, fully in line with Argument Economy, this other mind, or minds, has properties that we cannot identify yet from the fact that it perceives things while we do not. We ascertain its divinity only after we have considered the case of all other finite minds.

The context of the quote furthermore suggests that continuity of unperceived objects is *not* the theme of the discussion here. The whole passage is introduced by Hylas’s question: “...you say you cannot conceive how sensible things should exist without the mind. Do you not?” Now clearly this is a demand for a justification of the mind-dependent status of ideas, *not* a question on what happens to things we do not perceive at the present moment. And what immediately follows after the passage is a discussion of how we can know God’s mind. Only as a part of his theology, one that in this respect is quite orthodox, does Berkeley allow himself to say that things exist in God between the times of the finite spirits’ perception, immediately softening and diluting the claim by expanding it to include the periods before the individual’s birth and after his death. And these two periods are actually contained in Hylas’s question; the time between an individual’s perception of things occurs as an unnecessary aside, almost an embellishment of the position. What is more, the fact that God perceives all things is simply an explication of his omnipresence, an orthodox feature, and the new part that is

unique to Berkeley's metaphysics, is his exhibiting them to us in a regular manner so that we can predict them through science.

The theological twist makes this critical statement a part of Berkeley's theology, not metaphysics, a new emphasis on which is evident in the *Dialogues*, but missing from the *Principles*. Hence the discussion of how we can know God if no idea can represent Him, and the later immaterialist account of the Creation. Furthermore, these seemingly new theological problems and their solutions cannot be made to represent a development in Berkeley's thinking or a change of position. One of the first queries after the publication of the *Principles* in 1710 was put to Berkeley by Lady Percival and concerned the possibility of an immaterialist account of the Creation. Berkeley satisfied this query in a letter as early as September 1710<sup>166</sup>, and it probably only served to convince him that he should pay more attention to theological problems in later expositions of his immaterialism.

God is ubiquitous in the *Dialogues* and Berkeley presents himself as an orthodox Christian: "HYLAS. What! this is no more than I and all Christians hold; nay, and all others too who believe there is a God, and that he knows and comprehends all things." (DHP 212) and enlists his immaterialism in the services of orthodoxy: "...to a Christian it cannot surely be shocking to say, the real tree existing without his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, *exists in*) the infinite mind of God." (DHP 235) The one thing that is not addressed in the *Dialogues*, though, is the metaphysical question of whether objects continue to exist when there is nobody by to perceive them. The view that objects not perceived by finite spirits are nevertheless perceived by the omniscient and omnipresent God is simply a part of the theological orthodoxy of the time.

### **2.6.5 Continuity – summary**

We have tried to untangle the complicated solution to the objection of

---

<sup>166</sup> Letter to Percival of 6<sup>th</sup> September 1710, where Berkeley even says: "I know not whether I express myself so clearly as to be understood by a lady that has not read my book." clearly implying that the objection rests on a misunderstanding of the *Principles* and is not new. *Works VIII*, pp. 37-8.



Intermittency by showing that the main solution is located in PHK 45 and involves a reference back to the definition of existence in the early paragraphs of the *Principles*. With the ‘*esse is percipi*’ principle in mind, the Intermittency objection makes no sense and is specious. A remnant of a challenge helped to connect this solution with its original in PC 472-3, thus tying it with the Master Argument which we interpreted as the immaterialist principle in challenge form and consequently exploiting the synonymy of ‘perceive’ and ‘conceive’. Then we criticized the standard, ‘Limerick’ interpretation based on PHK 48 which according to us does not constitute Berkeley’s reply to the Intermittency objection, but rather an occurrence of the rhetorical device of Argument Economy. God plays no role in securing the existence of unperceived objects, contrary to what has been maintained by almost all commentators, and the standard account suffers not only from internal inconsistencies, but it also twists the crucial texts. The only alleged appearance of the Continuity Argument in DHP 230-1 was explained as a part of the theological orthodoxy of Berkeley’s time and plays no metaphysical role in his immaterialism.

In discussing secondary literature we have explored certain structural points of immaterialism, its interconnection with Berkeley’s optics, its rigorous order of exposition and its dependence on the background of materialism.

### 3. How Does Berkeley Prove God Then? – The Passivity Argument and Beyond

We have tried to show the way Berkeley does *not* prove the existence of God – namely by giving Him the metaphysically useful role of a constant cosmic observer guaranteeing the existence of unperceived things in the so-called Continuity Argument. It is, however, certain that Berkeley is keen on proving God in his philosophy of immaterialism, even though he does not advertise this aim in the titles and subtitles of his books, unlike for example Descartes in the subtitle to his *Meditations*. The closest Berkeley comes to signalling his intentions in the titles of his books is the proclamation that he wishes to inquire into the grounds of “Atheism, and Irreligion” in PHK, to demonstrate “the immediate providence of a Deity” in DHP and again to show “the immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity” in TVV, goals which notably fall short of a full-scale metaphysical proof of God’s existence. Though not advertised explicitly, the goal to show that God is and what He is jumps at the reader from many lines of Berkeley’s writings. So for example in the Preface to PHK the author intends the book for those who “want a demonstration of the existence and the immateriality of *God*”, in DHP he claims that immaterialism supplies an “immediate demonstration ... of the *being of a God*” (DHP 212), etc. So how does Berkeley accomplish his goal? What role does God play in immaterialism, and what is the demonstration of His existence?

In answering these questions, we will have to venture into untrodden land, one that to modern commentators seems to be even a useless minefield. So Fogelin in his useful commentary on the *Principles* says: “Except for ...noting the weaknesses in his proofs for the existence of God, I will say relatively little about the distinctively theological aspects of Berkeley’s position.”<sup>167</sup> In a similar vein, Tipton apologizes for saying little about Berkeley’s views of God and admits: “we regard his views on the

---

<sup>167</sup> Fogelin, Robert J.: *Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Routledge, 2001, p. 28.

nature of the sensible object as more worth discussing than his views on the nature and attributes of God.”<sup>168</sup> The hesitation and respect is understandable, the centuries that separate us from Berkeley have brought enormous changes into the ways we conceive God, and the shifts in our expectations of what a viable theological doctrine should be able to explain threaten to distort any understanding of a theocentric philosophy, such as Berkeley’s immaterialism, which was formulated three centuries ago. However, we will take the risk in the hope of finding out more about Berkeley’s overall philosophical position. But before we get to Berkeley’s arguments for God’s existence, we will have a look at a closely related issue, namely his account of causality.

### 3.1 Berkeley’s account of causality, connection with substance and *common sense*

The immaterialist account of causality belongs to the Philosophical Museum today; though in its day it was a natural and logical consummation of a trend in seventeenth century thinking<sup>169</sup>. Malebranche pointed the way for Berkeley on causation. The immaterialist agrees with the occasionalist in denying activity to all objects of sense and in granting true causality to spirit only. But he differs from him in reserving the power to move our limbs also to human agents, as evidenced in PC 548: “We move our Legs our selves. ‘tis we that will their movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch.”

Also Locke deals with the issue in his *Essay* II, xxi. His position seems to be that the concept of *power* is essential to our idea of causality as opposed to simple succession, and we somehow come about this concept through our repeatedly perceiving connections of ideas. We are, however, not directly aware of power in our perceptions, we just

---

<sup>168</sup> Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 299, cf. also pp. 320-1: “The considerations which lead (Berkeley) to suppose that we should recognize here the benevolent God of Christian monotheism are of less interest.”

<sup>169</sup> The trend carried over well into the next century: „So strong was the bias in favour of the view that all genuine causation requires a mind, that even after Hume’s revolution a philosopher as astute as Thomas Reid...was unwilling to abandon it.”, Cummins, Phillip D.: “Berkeley on Minds and Agency”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 225.

attribute it to things around us. The closest we come to having a clear idea of power is actually from within, from reflection on the activity of our mind when, say, we decide to move our fingers. The section 4 of chapter II, xxi is even called “The clearest Idea of active Power had from Spirit”. To sum up, in Locke’s philosophy there seem to be two types of causality, a spiritual one and a material one, and the former is, at least on the epistemological level, primary.

In Berkeley’s hands the Lockean system changes in a way which is rather characteristic of him and which we have uncovered in his treatment of the outside/inside metaphor: one half, the causality in material objects, is rejected, and the other, the causality of spirit, is retained. But let us have a look at the text of the *Principles* itself.

“25. All our ideas, sensations, notions, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive – there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce or make any alteration in another. To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas. For, since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived: but whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is, therefore, no such thing contained in them. A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything: neither can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from sect. 8.”

Berkeley here says that ideas are ‘visibly inactive’ and totally passive, that on introspection we will not perceive any trace of activity or power in them. Winkler here makes the useful suggestion that apart from the ‘phenomenological argument’ there seems to be also the ‘conceptual argument’ in PHK 25. Berkeley not only relies on introspection to prove his point, he also draws on the meaning of idea as explicated earlier, for example in PHK 2 “the existence of an idea consists in being perceived” and again PHK 6, where “the being of a sensible thing” is to be perceived<sup>170</sup>. True, but what

---

<sup>170</sup> Winkler, Kenneth P.: *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, 1989, p. 116.

of the curious phrase “visibly inactive”? Luce’s comment on this place is, as usual, very perceptive. He contrasts Berkeley’s point here with that of Locke and other corpuscularians who “attributed mysterious powers and potencies to ‘every drop of water, every grain of sand’ (§101)”<sup>171</sup>. A more recent commentator, Cummins, sees Berkeley employing here the Manifest Qualities Thesis which is explained with the help of a difference between alteration and causation and existence in the mind. When for example I perceive fire and see its alterations, these cannot be deemed actions since the fire exists only as perceived in the mind and there is no perception of activity accompanying my perceptions of the fire<sup>172</sup>. Be it as it may, the most repeated complaint by commentators is that Berkeley’s account of causality is too brief. Cummins even laments that “[a]t this juncture Berkeley reveals his indifference to what might seem the important but purely philosophical task of spelling out exactly what his volitional theory of causes comprises. He proceeds, instead, to an argument for the existence of God...”<sup>173</sup> This hits the nail on the head, Berkeley is really interested in causality only as far as it is necessary for his argument for God’s existence, perhaps deferring its full exposition to the second part of the *Principles*, which was to treat more fully of spirits but which never materialised. And since God is the topic of our present discussion as well, let us leave causality and concentrate on the next section:

“26. We perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear. There is therefore some cause of these ideas, whereon they depend, and which produces and changes them. That this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of ideas, is clear from the preceding section. It must therefore be a substance; but it has been shewn that there is no corporeal or material substance: it remains therefore that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal active substance or Spirit.”

This is a curious argument with many premises not explicit, in particular it draws on the contemporary assumption that only substances are active and on the conclusion of

---

<sup>171</sup> Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley’s Immaterialism*, Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1945, p. 93.

<sup>172</sup> Cummins, Phillip D.: “Berkeley on Minds and Agency”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 198.

<sup>173</sup> Cummins, Phillip D.: “Berkeley on Minds and Agency”, pp. 199-200.

PHK 7 that the only substance is spirit. It affirms the view prevalent among early modern philosophers that causation is the prerogative of a substance and adapts it to a specifically immaterialist context<sup>174</sup>. It follows that the mind takes on itself all the other roles traditionally attributed to substances, and *ides* become equivalent to accidents. For example in PHK 135 Berkeley says that “a spirit has been shewn to be the only substance or support wherein unthinking beings or ideas can exist” thereby affirming the old metaphor of *support* present in the very Latin word *substancia*. (This metaphor is, nevertheless, rejected for the *material* substance in DHP 197-8, presumably because on the metaphysical level of analysis the two completely different types of substances – material and spiritual – would somehow have to share the same accidents – ideas, whose mental nature was the great discovery of modern science.) The dependency of ideas on minds for their very existence is attested many times by their attribute “fleeting” and the whole parallel between substance/accident and mind/idea is explicitly affirmed at PHK 98: “(Spirits) are active, indivisible substances: (ideas) are inert, fleeting, dependent beings, which subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in minds or spiritual substances.”

So the connection between Berkeley’s account of causality and his rejection of the material substance seems to be a very close one. But for a philosopher who takes pride in his rapport with common sense, the immaterialist restriction of causality to spirits harbours certain dangers. These, however, are anticipated by our author and PHK 51-2 discuss the clash of the immaterialist account of causation with our linguistic intuition, because for an immaterialist the sentences “fire heats” and “water cools” are not true, because ideas cannot cause anything and so cannot heat or cool. What an immaterialist has to say is that spirit heats and spirit cools, which sounds weird. Berkeley

---

<sup>174</sup> Berkeley’s commitment to the spirit being a substance has been questioned by Stephen Daniel in his “Berkeley, Suarez, and the *Esse-Existere* Distinction”, *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000), pp. 621-36, and by Robert Muehlmann in his *Berkeley’s Ontology*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992. Both would like to see Berkeley adopting a ‘congeries’ account of the mind along Humean lines, the first likening Berkeley to Suarez and Gregory of Nyssa, the second accusing him of deflection and camouflage. The traditional view that for Berkeley spirit is a substance with all its customary functions and attributes has been ably defended by Marc Hight and Walter Ott in their joint “The New Berkeley”, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 34, 1 (2004).

acknowledges this and devises a little trick, summed in his slogan “*think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar*” – we should keep the old false phrases but keep in mind the metaphysical truth, which makes them false, in the same way that a Copernican does when he says that the sun sets, even though he knows that it is actually the earth that moves and the sun stays still. Here science/philosophy should correct our notions without disturbing the superficial level of language, much like in the Heterogeneity thesis in his optical programme, where we were allowed to say we see and touch the same thing even though science proved this assumption to be wrong.

Some readers and commentators, however, would rather stick to their uneducated vocabulary to the detriment of speculative truths. To these, Luce has tried to provide an answer in his commentary on the *Principles*. He contends that the ordinary man is actually much closer to Berkeley than we think; for he expects causality from the animate world around him while the inanimate world ‘stays put’. And this might well be true, if we remember that first of all we are interested in the activity of other people, what they say to us, what they do to us, whether they hate us or love us. This is also reflected in our vocabulary, where the majority of verbs describe social interaction. Then perhaps we expect activity from animals we keep and perhaps plants that we grow. Only then comes the activity of the inanimate world, and here we ascribe activity to “very big things, the minute parts of things, and very distant things.”<sup>175</sup> Here Luce gives the cases of the Moon causing the tide and the apple being attracted to the centre of the Earth as examples of ‘big and distant things’ acting, and the case of the magnetic needle being moved as an example of ‘minute things’ acting. “If we are asked how such ‘causes’ act, we must remain silent; we have no notion of activity other than that of animate beings; and when we scrutinize any case of physical causation, the alleged causality oozes out of it...”<sup>176</sup>

---

<sup>175</sup> Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, p. 94.

<sup>176</sup> Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, pp. 94-5, Pitcher is also impressed by the introspective power of Berkeley's account of causality: “It is regrettable that he does not work out and defend this position, so central to his whole philosophy, more fully in his published works...But his view is an immensely appealing one, even without an elaborate defence. There is something altogether special about the causality of our own actions; we can just feel ourselves making them happen. Thus, if I decide to raise my left arm now, and do it, there is no temptation for me to think that I have merely learned from experience that such acts of volition are generally followed by my left arm going up. One is irresistibly drawn to the idea that

Perhaps only the scientist/philosopher would be interested in reducing causality to one materialistic principle that explains all change in nature, and to such a person immaterialism offers an alternative solution in an instrumentalist account of the scientific explanation based on the language analogy. Berkeley's metaphysics strives to be anthropocentric and theocentric, as well as scientifically useful, as evidenced in PHK 156: "what deserves the first place in our studies is the consideration of *God*, and our *duty*".

### 3.2 The argument

Armed with his immaterialist account of causality, Berkeley then proceeds to lay out his proof of God's existence in the next sections, PHK 28-29. Importantly, the whole section 28 is devoted to describing how we manipulate our ideas in our imagination. So Berkeley's first premise in the argument is very minimalist, it is restricted to a single mind and its ideas of fancy in accordance with his Strict First-Person Perspective of his whole philosophy, so often mistaken for solipsism. In the very next section the scope is enlarged to include also the ideas of sense, that is the real world, whose existence is not questioned at all. Every idea needs a cause; my ideas of fancy are caused by my own mind, but what about my ideas of sense? They are not caused by me because I have no power over them and since the only true cause is a spiritual substance, it remains that they are caused by another spirit. "There is therefore some other Will or Spirit that produces them." is the conclusion of the proof for God's existence in Berkeley's own words.

Commentators label this argument the Passivity Argument or the Causal Argument, in order to distinguish it from the other argument, the Continuity Argument. Since it is our contention that there is no such thing as a Continuity Argument in immaterialism, we can dispense with the qualifier 'passivity' and 'causal' and talk simply about *the* immaterialist argument for God's existence. Thus we will not contradict Berkeley's own words, for he always speaks about *one* argument and the division into

---

here, with volitions, and only here, we experience real causality, real agency. Berkeley doubtless thinks that a truth as obvious as this needs no extended defence." Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, Routledge, 1977, p. 133.



two arguments seems to be a commentators' invention<sup>177</sup>.

### 3.2.1 The Polytheistic Objection

The best way to treat more fully of the argument seems to be the consideration of the most common objection levelled against it, namely that it entails not only that there is one mind causing our ideas of sense, but there is nothing in it that precludes there being two or more minds fulfilling the role of the providers of our sensory ideas. I will call this objection the Polytheistic Objection.

It occurs in many writers on Berkeley, there is none that does not at least mention it<sup>178</sup>. From the many versions we choose to discuss Grayling's take on the objection because he devotes considerable space to it for it forms an integral part of his sympathetic interpretation of immaterialism as a well-argued system which is viable even without the role of God in it, and because his position is well argued and sufficiently representative of a modern interpretative trend: "If we consider only the bare existence of the sensible world, then...we have as much right to infer that there are two minds that cause our ideas of sense, or that there are sixteen...as we have that there is one infinite mind, namely God's, causing our ideas of sense. Whatever plausibility there is in making God the cause of all our ideas of sense stems from the fact that the sensible world is so tremendously vast, complex and orderly: only a single mind possessing infinite powers, so the reasoning goes, can be responsible for such a world."<sup>179</sup> Grayling is even more exact in his overall analysis of the problem; he distinguishes two conclusions which follow from Berkeley's argument, the weaker one being that the cause of my ideas of sense is indeed a spirit distinct from me, the stronger one being that this spirit is one, infinite and causes

---

<sup>177</sup> In this way we can avoid, for example, the question which argument is more important or primary, as exemplified in Tipton: "Now the passivity argument is certainly Berkeley's *main* argument for the existence of God. But he does have another argument..." (Tipton's italics), Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 321.

<sup>178</sup> Examples would be Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 299, Pitcher, George, *Berkeley*, pp. 133-4, Grayling, A.C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, pp. 194-6.

<sup>179</sup> Pitcher, George, *Berkeley*, pp. 133-4.

all my sensory ideas not caused by me. While the weaker conclusion is warranted by the argument and also, unfortunately for Berkeley, consistent with polytheism, the stronger conclusion, which apparently Berkeley attempted to reach because it identifies this external spirit with the God of the Christian tradition, does not follow from the argument provided and “is simply a result of (Berkeley’s) religious commitments, and is otherwise unsubstantiated.”<sup>180</sup> That is a rather strong claim since it goes directly against what Berkeley himself says in many places.

How then did Berkeley, according to Grayling, jump from the weaker conclusion that our ideas of sense are caused by an external spirit or external spirits to the stronger conclusion that this spirit is one and has the attributes traditionally ascribed to the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition? Having established that some of our ideas are caused by another spirit, “from the *character* of these independently caused ideas Berkeley then proceeds to infer the nature of their source”<sup>181</sup>, that is in PHK 30 these ideas are stronger and more vivid than our ideas of fancy and so their cause is adequately stronger than us, and in PHK 32 this is even strengthened to include the wisdom of God inferred from the ‘constant uniform working’ of the nature. But this is where Berkeley goes wrong in Grayling’s eyes, for it amounts to supplementing “the causal dependence argument with the argument from design, or ‘teleological’ argument...But the argument from design, familiarly, does not work, and a fortiori does not license a derivation of the stronger conclusion from the weaker.”<sup>182</sup> So what is really entailed by Berkeley’s argument is at most that our ideas are caused by a mind, it does not follow that this mind is one, infinite, caring and loving us, its creatures.

Berkeley himself realizes that more needs to be said to squeeze the Christian God out of the metaphysical entity his system warrants, for in PHK 146 he seems to be doing just what Grayling accuses him of doing. After referring back to PHK 29, he fleshes out his God with the traditional attributes:

“if we attentively consider the constant regularity, order, and concatenation of

---

<sup>180</sup> Grayling, A.C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, p. 188, see also pp. 194-200.

<sup>181</sup> Grayling, A.C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, p. 195.

<sup>182</sup> Grayling, A.C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, p. 196, the ‘familiar’ failure of the argument from design is to be expected from an author claiming that Descartes was a Jesuit spy and that Kant was a crypto-atheist.

natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but above all the never-enough-admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals; I say if we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and import of the attributes One, Eternal, Infinitely Wise, Good, and Perfect, we shall clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid Spirit, ‘who works all in all,’ and ‘by whom all things consist.’”

If Grayling is right and Berkeley needs the argument from design to arrive at his defence of God, and in fact uses the argument in this way, then Berkeley’s often proclaimed aim of defending religion and refuting atheism fails and what is left is a system which, contrary to its author’s wishes, functions on an idealistic and phenomenological basis and is still interesting in its own right for its well-wrought structure, but which sadly does not prove the existence of God. Now it is incumbent on us to explore the connection between Berkeley’s argument and the argument from design.

### **3.2.2 The number of Berkeley’s arguments in the corpus**

Numerous attempts have been made to classify Berkeley’s proof of the existence of God. But first we need to be certain what we are classifying, for many writers<sup>183</sup> contend there are as many as three different proofs of God’s existence in the Berkeleian corpus: the Continuity Argument occurring at least in DHP 230-1, the Passivity Argument occurring principally in PHK 28-29 and 145-8, and the Divine Language

---

<sup>183</sup> Hooker, Michael: “Berkeley’s Argument from Design”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, Klime, A. David: “Berkeley’s Divine Language Argument”, in *George Berkeley – Alciphron in Focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993: “The argument (of ALC IV, 4-14) is not the traditional design argument nor a version of the passivity or continuity arguments found in the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, respectively.” p. 185, Berman, David: “Cognitive theology and emotive mysteries in Berkeley’s *Alciphron*”, in *George Berkeley Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993, p. 201.

Argument from the Fourth dialogue of *Alciphron*, namely ALC IV, 4-14. Since we have dealt with the first two, let us explain the third one.

When challenged by the mouthpiece of free-thinking atheism, Alciphron, to provide a proof of God's existence that is not ontological or from authority, but based on sense-perception, Euphranor, Berkeley's spokesman, first gets Alciphron to admit that men have souls, even though these are not perceived directly but rather inferred from sense-perception. And in the same manner we arrive at the knowledge of God, which we infer from the motions of nature, according to Euphranor. So far, we seem to be dealing with a version of the traditional argument from design, so disparaged by Grayling. But the next move is peculiar to Berkeley: when Alciphron admits that he sees no ready answer to this argument, but that the existence of a person is still more certain than the existence of God, because we see the person standing there in the flesh whereas we only infer the existence of God, Euphranor counters by pointing out the structure of inferring is the same in the case of a person as in the case of God. "Berkeley's readers are forced to choose between God and solipsism: between having the company of other minds, including God, or being entirely alone (apart from one's ideas) in the universe."<sup>184</sup> The novelty here is, of course, the enriching of the design argument with the dilemma of other minds.

After some consideration, this argument is not accepted by the picky Alciphron, on the grounds that a manifestation of movements does not guarantee a soul behind them. The only certain mark of a soul operating is the use of speech – I know that the body in front of me is not a robot but a real person when the person starts speaking to me. And so is the existence of other minds secured, because they speak to us, while the existence of God is still unproven, for He does not speak to us (barring the contentious 'inner voices' of prophets). Here Berkeley through Euphranor answers with the second phase of his argument that came to be called the Divine Language Argument in which he contends that God does speak to us through our visual ideas constituting a visual language – vision is literally a language, something that will be necessary to explore in more detail further on.

---

<sup>184</sup> Berman, David: "Cognitive theology and emotive mysteries in Berkeley's *Alciphron*", in *George Berkeley Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993, p. 201.

Despite being considered a separate argument for God's existence in the Berkeleian corpus, both phases of the argument have their predecessors in earlier works, the first phase in PHK 145-8 and the second in NTV, especially sections 147 and 152<sup>185</sup>. Also the *Principles* insists on the same structure of the argument for other minds and for God, and the being of God is to be inferred more certainly than that of other people, as well, (PHK 147-8: "we need only open our eyes to see the Sovereign Lord of all things, with a more full and clear view than we do any one of our fellow-creatures"). The second phase of Euphranor's argument is taken from NTV where the arbitrary connection between our visible and tangible ideas is at the heart of Berkeley's proposed doctrine, resulting in the Heterogeneity thesis. The fact that Berkeley appended NTV to all three editions of *Alciphron* in 1732, and with the role of God in speaking the language of nature explicit this time, testifies that he considered it to be essential for his purpose of proving God. So it is our contention that the Divine Language Argument appearing in *Alciphron* is in fact a rehearsal of two earlier theses and their artful combination which was probably originally supposed to be made explicit in the second part of the *Principles*.

A different evaluation of the relationship between the argument in NTV and in *Alciphron* is presented by Cummins. He suggests that in NTV it was a 'mere metaphor' which later "became an element in a relatively complex argument"<sup>186</sup>. Such an interpretation, however, has several loose ends. The question is, was Berkeley aware of the usefulness of this 'mere' metaphor for the task of proving God when writing NTV?

---

<sup>185</sup> It is true that the first two editions of NTV mention only an universal language of Nature without drawing the conclusion that it is God who speaks through it to man, the phrase 'an universal language of the Author of Nature' appearing only in the third edition of NTV which was appended to *Alciphron* in 1732. Nevertheless, we believe that the change is merely cosmetic, that Berkeley knew from the very beginning that his optics is theocentric, just like his metaphysics, and he would have drawn the conclusion in the second part of the *Principles*. Also, the conclusion that it is God who speaks to us through vision is drawn as early as the 1710 edition of the *Principles*. "It is...evident from what has been said ...in sect. 147 and elsewhere of the Essay concerning Vision, that visible ideas are the Language whereby the Governing Spirit on whom we depend informs us what tangible ideas he is about to imprint upon us... But for a fuller information in this point I refer to the Essay itself." (PHK 44)

<sup>186</sup> Cummins, Phillip D.: "Berkeley on Minds and Agency", in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, Ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 203.

The fact that he appended it to *Alciphron* in 1732 virtually unchanged and that in TVV 1 he explicitly claims that it contains ‘a new and unanswerable proof’ lead us to believe that he considered the argument to be present already in his 1709 work but made it quite explicit and connected it with its metaphysical part only in his 1732 *Alciphron*.

Berman’s analysis is more on the mark. He suggests that the second phase of the *Alciphron* argument “is taken largely from the *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*”<sup>187</sup>, without, unfortunately, providing more detail or spelling out the exact relationship between NTV and *Alciphron*.

### 3.2.3 Role of optics, and science in general, in proving God

So far we have considered Berkeley’s metaphysical arguments for the existence of God, but the previous chapter may have alerted us to the importance of his optical theory for the field of philosophical theology. It is now necessary to explore the role of Berkeley’s optics in his argument for God’s existence to round off the subject. Let us then start with the immaterialist account of the relationship between metaphysics and science (natural philosophy in Berkeley’s time).

Here the remarks from which we will attempt to reconstruct a whole picture are scattered through PHK 107-8, DM 34, 41-2, 71-2, TVV 1-2, 8, 43, 71, PC 207, and their perusal gives us the following picture: metaphysics is to be sharply distinguished from science (DM 34), the former is concerned with true causality, demonstration and ‘the existence of things’ (DM 71), the latter merely with signs that help us predict future events and discover laws which govern the course of nature (PHK 108), science uses experiments (DM 34, 41) whereas metaphysics is concerned with ‘the truth of things’ (DM 39, 71), science is limited to ‘experiments, laws of motions, mechanical principles’ and is clearly subservient to ‘superior science’ whose province is theology, metaphysics and morality (DM 42). In such an instrumentalist view of science the existence of God falls clearly into the domain of metaphysics and not science.

---

<sup>187</sup> Berman, David: “Cognitive theology and emotive mysteries in Berkeley’s *Alciphron*”, in *George Berkeley Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993, p. 201.

It is rather surprising, then, that at the very beginning of *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* we find this categorical proclamation: "...the *Theory of Vision*, annexed to the *Minute Philosopher*, affords to thinking men a new and unanswerable proof of the existence and immediate operation of God, and the constant condescending care of his providence..." (TVV 1) Berkeley is here in fact saying that his proof of God is to be found not in the *Principles*, his most important metaphysical statement, where commentators identify at least two different arguments for God's existence, the Continuity Argument and the Passivity Argument, nor in *Alciphron*, where the Divine Language Argument is supposed to be located, but in his earliest work, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* from 1709, which is withal a scientific work, not a metaphysical one! How are we to reconcile this startling claim that the proof is scientific with Berkeley's insistence that proofs of God fall into the province of metaphysics?

Certainly, Berkeley allows for metaphysical proofs of God: "...those good men who shall not care to employ their thoughts on this *Theory of Vision* have no reason to find fault. They are just where they were, being in full possession of all other arguments for a God, none of which are weakened by this." (TVV 8) But once again, Berkeley insists that "...a new argument of a singular nature in proof..." (TVV 8, my italics) is to be found in his optical programme, if the reader has the will to comprehend it. Is the scientific nature of immaterialist optics compromised or is it the only exception where a scientific argument is put on the same level with metaphysical arguments? We believe that neither of these two extreme alternatives is correct and that a compromise between them can be devised which will be concerned with the status of immaterialist optics between science and metaphysics.

In section 43 of TVV Berkeley considers the relation between his optics and the geometrical optics and in the course of doing so discloses some important facts about how he himself saw his optical theory:

"43. To explain how the mind or soul of a man simply sees is one thing, and belongs to philosophy. To consider particles as moving in certain lines, rays of light as refracted or reflected...is quite another thing, and appertaineth to geometry. To account for the sense of vision by the mechanism of the eye is a third thing, which appertaineth to anatomy and experiments. These two latter

speculations are of use in practice, to assist the defects and remedy the distempers of sight, agreeably to the natural laws obtaining in the mundane system. But the former theory is that which makes us understand the true nature of vision, considered as a faculty of the soul. Which theory... may be reduced to this simple question, to wit – how comes it to pass that a set of ideas, altogether different from tangible ideas, should nevertheless suggest them to us, there being no necessary connexion between them? To which the proper answer is, that it is done in virtue of an arbitrary connexion, instituted by the Author of Nature.”

This rich section gives us many clues. First of all Berkeley's optics explains how a man sees – a task in its simplicity on a par with the question of ‘the existence of things’ claimed for metaphysics, as opposed to all the geometrical apparatus of Descartes' optics and the anatomy of the eye which are only ‘of use in practice’, read of instrumental value. Furthermore, only Berkeley's optics discovers ‘the true nature of vision’ – a phrase with clear metaphysical aspirations, a part of the science of the soul – and the soul is a metaphysical topic par excellence (“...all the notion I have of God is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections” DHP 231-2). Still, it remains a theory (supposedly a scientific one?) albeit with a recourse to God – another metaphysical feature. So Berkeley's optical discoveries are not on the same level as the earlier geometrical explanations, they are purposefully distanced from them and the psychology of vision does not replace the geometrical explanation, it merely puts it in its right place, that of a science subservient to metaphysics. The programme of NTV itself, however, remains a theory that is to be proved experimentally (cf. the last words of NTV “I should gladly see my notions either amended or confirmed by experience.” and TVV 71) but, being concerned with the soul, it is a half-way house to metaphysics. The hybrid nature Berkeley claims for his optics is apparent from the last two sentences of the quoted TVV 43, where a scientific question is solved through recourse to God, i.e. metaphysics suddenly bursts into science.

Berkeley drops hints pointing towards a special place for his optics in theology in other places as well. So in the Preface to the *Three Dialogues* we find the extraordinary statement that it is a desired goal that “the principles of natural religion (be) reduced into



regular sciences”, and in DM 42 we read: “...if anyone were to extend natural philosophy beyond the limits of experiments and mechanics, so as to cover a knowledge of incorporeal and inextended things, that broader interpretation of the term permits a discussion of the soul, mind, or vital principle. But it will be more convenient to follow the usage which is fairly well accepted...” Why does Berkeley bother mentioning this ‘extension’ at all? Why does he not stick to his own definition of the role of science as opposed to the role and province of metaphysics? We suggest it is because he himself sees his optics doing just that: being a part of natural philosophy but treating of incorporeal things and the mind. And the most explicit pointer is to be found in DM 34:

“34. ... But to treat of the good and great God ... and to show how all things depend on supreme and true being, although it is the most excellent part of human knowledge, is, however, rather the province of first philosophy or metaphysics and theology than of natural philosophy which *today* is almost entirely confined to experiments and mechanics. And so natural philosophy either presupposes the knowledge of God or borrows it from some superior science. Although it is most true that *the investigation of nature every where supplies the higher sciences with notable arguments to illustrate and prove the wisdom, the goodness, and the power of God.*” (my italics)

Once again, Berkeley here laments the fact that natural philosophy underachieves by concentrating on experiments and mechanics and leads the reader to infer that such a state is not final nor necessary and that his natural philosophy (i.e. his optics) is not limited in this way. But even such limited natural philosophy is able to supply metaphysics, whose primary task it is to prove the *existence* of God, with arguments to prove his Christian *attributes*. And herein lies an answer to Grayling’s objection that, having proved God in his metaphysics, lazy Berkeley then turns to the traditional metaphysical argument from design to embellish Him with the traditional Christian attributes. For Berkeley, these attributes are provided by science, more specifically by his optics.

### 3.3 God's existence vs. His attributes

So Berkeley's immaterialism succeeds, at least in the eyes of its author, in the dual task of proving the *existence* as well as the *Christian attributes* of God because of its dual and ambivalent nature of metaphysics cum science. And we, having taken the little optical detour, hopefully see more clearly the nature of Grayling's complaint. When commenting on PHK 146, he thinks he finds a traditional metaphysical argument from design so easily dispatched later by Hume. Consequently, he misreads the two steps of the argument as the metaphysical God vs. the traditional personal God and tries to drive a wedge between the two, ignoring the special status of optics in the equation science-metaphysics. The argument really starts in Berkeley's science which is only then generalized into a metaphysics that is much lighter by contemporary standards. This unique perspective of a scientist-turned-metaphysician is attested already in the first quarter of Berkeley's private notebooks, in PC 207: "My end is not to deliver Metaphysiques altogether in a General Scholastique way but in some measure to accommodate them to the Sciences, & shew how they may be useful in Optiques, Geometry &c." What we witness in Berkeley's case is something akin to Einstein finding out that the theory of relativity formula in fact reads  $YAH=WE$  and then having the leisure and inclination to work out this scientific discovery into a full-blooded metaphysics.

The effort to drive a wedge between the existence of God and his attributes is a serious challenge for it goes directly against what Berkeley says in many places. Unlike for example Descartes who aims to demonstrate the existence of God in his *Meditations* and then leave the question of his exact attributes to theology (and in fact presupposes God's goodness from outside of philosophy altogether), Berkeley's programme is very different and much more ambitious. In the subtitle to his *Three Dialogues* he aims to prove "the immediate providence of a Deity" (notice there is no mention of proving the existence of God), and also in the subtitle to *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* we find "the immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity". So it seems Berkeley's main aim, and one that he advertises often, is to elaborate on the topic of God's love for His creatures and not to provide a simple metaphysical proof of His

existence<sup>188</sup>.

The elaboration is to be found primarily in PHK 30-2, 44, 57, 72, 107-8, 146-150 which sections summarize the theological argument of NTV: the visible ideas are connected to tangible ideas only by a habitual connection (NTV 62), only the tangible ideas are relevant to the preservation of our bodies because only they can hurt them or benefit them (NTV 59), the only function of vision and visible ideas is to warn us in advance what tangible ideas we are about to encounter so that we can avoid the harmful ones and seek out the beneficial ones (NTV 59), this warning or foresight takes the form of a visual language that we learn when we grow up by connecting our tangible ideas with their visible relatives relying on our experience (NTV 147), we are literally in the position of a blind person who is told by a sighted person that if he advances ten more steps he will fall down a precipice and hurt himself, such a warning helps us avoid being hurt and is surely given by someone who cares for us (NTV 148), reflection on this whole mechanism provides us with intimations as to what lies in store for us once we are not confined to the senses (NTV 148). The conclusion that it is in fact God who speaks to us in this manner is not drawn in the pre-1732 NTV editions for it requires further steps in the argument that occur in PHK, namely the argument that the only causality can be spiritual and that therefore it is God who causes our ideas of sense, which we discussed above.

Nevertheless, even the *Principles* offers us additional illustrations of God's providence. PHK 30-2 shows that God is so many times stronger than humans how many times the ideas of sense are stronger than the ideas of fancy and then it spells out that all our predictions are based on experience and on the habitual connections we make between certain ideas, without which we would be in the position of a new-born baby. PHK 57 and 72 ascribe the regularity and order of our ideas of sense to the goodness of God who does not want to confuse us and PHK 107-8 explicitly connects this to God's good will towards His creatures and our supposition that the like actions will be followed by

---

<sup>188</sup> Jessop hits the nail on the head: "A mere proof of the *existence* of God was not enough. His interest was in the kind of God, and in the kind of relation He stands in to the corporeal universe and us as humans, which his religious sensibility demanded." Jessop, T. E.: "Berkeley as a Religious Apologist", *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus, 1966, p. 106.

like effects cannot be demonstrated<sup>189</sup> because it rests on God's will which is free to change. The alternative to this benevolent predictability is the situation where every our movement does not have its desired trajectory, every event in nature happens contrary to what we have come to expect – snow falling in August and destroying harvest, heavy things not falling to the ground but rather flying in all direction and injuring people, an individual screaming but nobody being able to hear him, total chaos of apocalyptic proportions. That this is not so is thanks to God's good will towards us, according to Berkeley. We find a similar insistence on God's unrestricted will in the main theme of the famous sermon *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* by Jonathan Edwards: "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any one moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God. By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but God's mere will had in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men one moment." The stress here is on wicked men, their sins and supposed unworthiness, while Berkeley's goal is more positive and definitely more metaphysically subtle and sublime, but the basic idea is the same.

It is probably not surprising that this highly original contribution should be overlooked by many and misinterpreted by some. So Warnock<sup>190</sup> says: "Strangely enough, Berkeley was more than usually confident that the correlations on which we rely are and always will be reliable, so long as we are reasonably careful in studying the ordinary course of events."<sup>191</sup> Berkeley was not at all sure about the reliability of our predictions,

---

<sup>189</sup> This is rather similar to Hume's contention that our expectation of causation is subjective and does not correspond to anything in nature. The atheist draws sceptical corollaries here while for the immaterialist this is evidence for God's benevolence.

<sup>190</sup> Others, however, read Berkeley with more sympathy here: "We can never attain certain knowledge of (God's) intentions, since there is no necessary connection between what God willed in the past and what he might will in the future...", Olscamp, Paul J.: *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1970, p. 34.

<sup>191</sup> Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, London: Penguin, 1953, sec. ed.1982, p. 44. One cannot but suspect that Warnock's particular blindness towards the role of God in immaterialism stems from the fact that in his mind Berkeley's God has already a different function – that of a cosmic observer guaranteeing the existence of unperceived objects.

on the contrary, he claimed we cannot demonstrate them but must trust to God here: “all deductions of that kind depend on a supposition that the Author of nature always operates uniformly, and in a constant observance of those rules we take for principles: which we cannot evidently know.” (PHK 107)

And with this perspective in mind should we approach the grand finale of the *Principles*, namely PHK 146-9 where Berkeley sums up his position on the existence of God and His benevolence and providence. PHK 146 begins by recapitulating the *Principles* argument that some other spirit must be the cause of our ideas of sense and then duly identifies this spirit as God in what Grayling considers the traditional argument from design. The text does indeed mention “the constant regularity, order, and concatenation of natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but above all the never-enough-admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals” but we must proceed warily here and postpone our judgement. The next two sections, PHK 147-8, contain the ‘other minds’ twist of the argument later used in *Alciphron* while PHK 149 comes clear on the nature of God – “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” (my italics). In immaterialism, not only the existence of God is derived from the fact that He produces ideas of sense in us, but also from the manner in which He does it is arrived at His benevolence and providence. There is no need for unperceived objects to shore up the existence of God, nor for the traditional argument from design to prove His goodness.

The efforts to classify Berkeley’s argument as a version of the design argument<sup>192</sup> or an argument to the best explanation<sup>193</sup> miss its unique nature of the scientific argument

---

<sup>192</sup> Hooker, Michael: “Berkeley’s Argument from Design”, in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, ed. by Turbayne, Colin, Manchester University Press, 1982, Grayling, A. C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, 1987.

<sup>193</sup> Fogelin, Robert J.: *Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Routledge, 2001, Klime, A. David: “Berkeley’s Divine Language Argument”, in *George Berkeley – Alciphron in Focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993.

that is peculiar to immaterialism. For the strength of the explanation lies in the fact that vision is literally a language – the connection between a word and the thing it signifies is arbitrary just like the connection between visible ideas and the tangible ideas they stand for, the system of such arbitrary signs can be used for expressing different meanings in different combinations of the signs just like one square visible idea can relate to a small square object close by or to a distant round object, for instance a tower, both systems of signs are governed by laws making up a grammar and syntax, grammarians and linguists study the first system while scientists attempt to uncover the second system, people must learn both languages, we are born with neither (a fact Berkeley believed could be established experimentally for vision, but one which is on display in small children and their initial erratic spatial behaviour), in both language systems we are more concerned with the things signified than with the mere signs (the exact grammatical classification of words in a sentence is usually overlooked and the attention is focused on their meaning in the same way that we disregard colours of trees when finding our way through a forest), in deciphering the language systems we sometimes make mistakes and misunderstand, in speech due to homonyms, irony etc., in vision we find illusions, mirror reflections etc., the aim of both systems is to direct and regulate our actions and produce emotions, the visual image of a cliff should serve as a warning as well as the sentence “Stop, you are going to fall!” which both in the same way should prevent our falling down, signs of the systems have to be considered in a context, a word can mean a different thing when uttered in a different situation as well as a visual clue can have its traditional role reversed (see NTV 73), and finally the aesthetic dimension of both sign systems should not be overlooked, here a poem and a beautiful sky during a sunset being the corresponding points of interest<sup>194</sup>.

Such an extensive correspondence in features between vision and speech can mean only one thing for Berkeley – vision is literally a language, and treating vision as a language is not only a useful explanatory scientific metaphor, it is a metaphysical fact. And since it is God who speaks it to us, we arrive at a theological perspective whose

---

<sup>194</sup> I am indebted to Prof Berman for pointing out the similarities mentioned here and also to his useful summary of them in his “Cognitive theology and emotive mysteries in Berkeley’s *Alciphron*”, in *George Berkeley Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in focus*, ed. by David Berman, Routledge, 1993, pp. 202-3.

radical nature surpasses even the Bible. Not only is God closer to an individual than any other individual, He also speaks to him every moment of his waking conscious life – these two features make Berkeley’s theological position unorthodox at best, and probably heretical. Recent textual criticism of the Old Testament<sup>195</sup> reveals a worrying tendency in the relationship between God and man – God gradually disappears from human view. While in the Genesis He freely mingles with His creatures in the Garden and chats with them, He wrestles with Jacob only *in absentia*, the last He speaks to is Moses and is last seen by Solomon. After that, He reveals His will only in prophets’ visions. He becomes distant and humanity is largely left to its own devices, thus achieving maturity. But Berkeley’s theology makes the closeness of God its main theme, his target is other theistic philosophers who make God into a distant cause. For him, the Pauline quote about a Spirit “in whom we live, move, and have our being” is not a metaphor but an adequate expression of his metaphysics. Again and again Berkeley insists on God’s closeness to man: “Fain would we suppose Him at a great distance off, and substitute some blind unthinking deputy in His stead, though (if we may believe Saint Paul) ‘He be not far from every one of us.’ ” (PHK 150) taking the Biblical metaphors literally. “When I say the being of a God, I do not mean an obscure general Cause of things...” (DHP 257) Also, the motivation is theological-moralist: “...the apprehension of a distant Deity naturally disposes men to a negligence in their moral actions; which they would be more cautious of, in case they thought Him immediately present, and acting on their minds...” (DHP 258).

Some commentators approve the emphasis on closeness of God and contrast it favourably with other philosophical theologies. So Pitcher talks about “the danger of atheism lurking in Locke’s system”<sup>196</sup>. The traditional view acknowledges independent mental and material substances which somehow interact, but then God is needed only to create the whole mechanism and set it into motion at the beginning, and it will sustain

---

<sup>195</sup> Friedman, Richard Elliott: *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery*, Little, Brown and Co., 1995.

<sup>196</sup> Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 92, see also p. 135: “Perhaps the most striking advantage that Berkeley sees in his view that it is God who causes all our ideas of sense is that it moves God into the very centre of our lives. The intimate concern that God thus demonstrates for our individual welfares can only make us love and trust Him. Atheism is thereby crushed.”

itself according to the laws of motion discovered at that very time by Newton. At best, the traditional view of natural philosophy removes God from everyday concerns of the ordinary man. At worst, the road is open to the material substances existing permanently without any creation and being the sole causal power in the universe. Luce's commentary also diagnoses this danger and sees matter as an anti-God with a pedigree stretching back to the secularised Greeks: "The ancient Greeks worked out the notion of matter because they had no usable notion of deity."<sup>197</sup> Jessop is also on the mark when he says: "Quite clearly (Berkeley's) most general antipathy was towards the conception of God as First Cause...the deistic conception was too thin to ground anything that deserves to be called religion, too unrelated to man's circumstances and inner needs to supply any strong stimulus to worshipful and virtuous living. For religion, God must be *close* to His creation..."<sup>198</sup> (my italics) And the closeness of God and man in immaterialism is absolute.

### 3.4 Summary of Berkeley on God

While Berkeley is very serious about God in his system, he does not advertise that he is going to prove His existence in the subtitles to his main works. He does, however, claim in the subtitle to the *Three Dialogues* that immaterialism demonstrates "the immediate providence of a Deity". Thus, the traditional interpreters' reticence, when confronted with Berkeley's philosophical theology, seems to be in danger of mistaking his priorities at best, and distorting the whole tightly-knit system at worst.

Berkeley's explanatory strategy has two stages – the logically first is the proof that God exists, and the second is the logically subsequent demonstration of His attributes. We contend that their chronological order was in fact reversed, NTV of 1709 contains largely an illustration of God's goodness to his creatures and the main metaphysical work, the 1710 *Principles* has the immaterialist proof of God's existence.

---

<sup>197</sup> Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 1945, p. 71.

<sup>198</sup> Jessop, T. E.: "Berkeley as a Religious Apologist", *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus, 1966, p. 106.



The proof itself has been traditionally called the Passivity Argument or the Causal Proof and it has rightly been diagnosed as a corollary of Berkeley's conception of substance and his original, for some extreme, doctrine of causality. The second stage – that of proving that the external spirit causing our ideas of sense is in fact God with all the traditional Christian attributes of love, providence etc. has been either ignored or identified as resting on the traditional metaphysical design argument, and consequently of not much philosophical interest. Especially Grayling is very active in voicing his doubts about Berkeley's identification of the external spirit as God and so tries to drive a wedge between the two phases of Berkeley's theological programme.

The two phases correspond, in our view, to two arguments: the first is the Passivity Argument, while some flesh is put on the metaphysical God by the Divine Language Argument which occurs already in NTV. However, it is in *Alciphron* that we find the two phases connected explicitly for the first time, probably because Berkeley planned to connect them only in a second part of the *Principles* that never occurred. Berkeley states explicitly in TVV that his early optical work NTV contains a proof of God's existence and he even appends the work to his editions of *Alciphron* in 1732. After examining Berkeley's optics we found that he claims a special place for it in between science and metaphysics, it is concerned with vision as a faculty of the soul but it is still subjected to experimental testing. As such, it is uniquely suited to provide a demonstration of God's attributes of benevolence, providence and love.

### 3.5 Conclusion

So what is the final picture of Berkeley's thought? Berkeley as the first writer in the history of philosophy devotes a whole book to explaining his position on common sense. By a careful reinterpretation of key words which for him define common sense – 'know', 'certain', 'real' – he attempts to show that his immaterialism does actually less damage to the views of the man in the street than its adversary materialism. Two aspects are worth stressing: Berkeley never claims he agrees with the plain man in everything, he just claims that he agrees with him more than the materialist, the immaterialist disagreements being necessitated by science. Secondly, immaterialism is possible thanks to, and should always be viewed only against a backdrop of, materialism.

However, Berkeley was not successful in his attempt to redefine common sense; his contemporaries and commentators insisted on viewing it as dealing somehow with 'material objects' or 'external objects' (things without, objective things, absolute things, the thing in itself, etc.) and consequently tended to see his system as somehow depriving these 'physical' things of their reality. Our author saw this as a failure which in fact precluded the publication of the rest of his philosophical system. After 1713 we get only bits and pieces and the literary activity of the early 1730s is directed towards a different goal, that of defending the Christian religion. But what of the bone of contention here, the term 'material object' itself? How could Berkeley do without it? We suggest the answer to this question is to be found in his optical programme – having successfully explained everything there was to be explained in the science of vision purely by psychological entities, he proclaimed them the new metaphysical building blocks of the world. They alone fulfil the two roles expected of metaphysical entities in the early modern period: they explain how and what we perceive (they are in fact better at this job than psychological entities *plus* material objects, as exemplified in NTV), and provide a *more robust ontology*, of which what we perceive is actually only a fraction. Berkeley's whole optical programme consists in tearing asunder ideas which by constant repetition have become blended together and are in fact perceived as one. Plenty of space for the attentive natural philosopher to dive into and fish out new discoveries! So it is not true

that Berkeley limits the world to what we perceive, on the contrary, he enlarges our perception into an exciting possibility for scientists, philosophers and even divines.

Still, the nagging question remains: can such light metaphysics account for everything we need? If the being of a thing consists in its being perceived, what about the books in a closed closet? Do they not exist until someone opens the door? Here Berkeley says, despite generations of commentators, that the books do not exist when they are not perceived, and even more radically, there is not anything that could not exist there. The books are just visible (or tangible) ideas and when we do not see (feel) them we do not have the ideas. When we open the closet again we are again provided with the visible ideas. True, we somehow expect that the books will be there, but that is because we have learnt the appropriate connections between ideas. So we can *say* that the books are in the closet even though the closet is now shut and we do not see them, meaning thereby merely that when we open the closet we will see them again, *not* that they exist in the dark unperceived. With the supposition that ideas are private and subjective and that there are many more ideas than we are aware of (the more robust ontology) the problem of continuity of unperceived objects disappears. It is also the supposition from which a psychologist of vision departs when building his immaterialist optical theory.

There is no need to bring in God to guarantee the existence of unperceived things, for it is a contradiction that there should be unperceived things in the first place. God's existence is evident from the fact that we have no power over some of our ideas and since only a spirit can cause ideas, the ideas of sense are caused in us by God who thereby instructs us how to conduct our lives. Therefore He is not a distant cause but a loving father of the tradition. And this is once again revealed through the science of vision which provides the best example of our ideas of sense forming a language through which God speaks to us. He is thus intimately present in our every waking experience.

## Bibliography

- Ardley, G. W. R.: *Berkeley's Philosophy of Nature*, Auckland, University of Auckland, 1962.
- Armstrong, David M.: *Berkeley's Theory of Vision*, Parkeville, Melbourne University Press, 1960.
- Armstrong, David M.: "Editor's Introduction", in *Berkeley's Philosophical Writings*, New York, Macmillan Publishing, 1965.
- Atherton, Margaret: *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1990.
- Austin, J. L.: *Sense and Sensibilia*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962.
- Ayers, M. R.: "Berkeley and Hume: a Question of Influence" in *Philosophy in History*, eds. Richard Rorty, J. B. Schneewind, Quentin Skinner, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Ayers, M. R.: "Divine Ideas and Berkeley's Proofs of God's Existence", in Sosa.
- Ayers, M. R.: "Introduction", in *George Berkeley: Philosophical Works*, London, David Campbell Publishers, 1998.
- Baxter, Donald L. M.: "Berkeley, Perception, and Identity", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1991, pp. 85-98.
- Baybrooke, David: "Berkeley on the Numerical Identity of Ideas", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 1955, pp. 631-636.
- Belfrage, Bertil: "The clash on semantics in Berkeley's *Notebook A*", in Berman (4).
- Bennett, Jonathan: *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Berman, David (1): "Berkeley's Quad: The Question of Numerical Identity", *Idealistic Studies*, vol. 16, (1986), pp. 41-45.
- Berman, David, (2): "Cognitive theology and emotive mysteries in Berkeley's *Alciphron*", in Berman (3).
- Berman, David, ed. (3): *George Berkeley: Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in focus*, London, Routledge, 1993.

- Berman, David, ed. (4): *George Berkeley: Essays and Replies*, Dublin, Irish Academic Press, 1985.
- Berman, David (5): *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994.
- Bracken, Harry M.: "Berkeley's Realism", *Philosophical Quarterly* 8 (1958), pp. 41-53.
- Bracken, Harry M.: "Substance in Berkeley", in Steinkraus.
- Brykman, Genevieve: "Berkeley on 'Archetype'" in Sosa.
- Buchdahl, Gerd: *Metaphysics and the Philosophy of Science*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1969.
- Cummins, Phillip D.: "Berkeley on Minds and Agency", in Winkler (2).
- Cummins, Phillip D.: "Berkeley's Ideas of Sense", *Nous* 9 (1975), pp. 55-72.
- Cummins, Philip D.: "Perceptual Relativity and Ideas in the Mind", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 24 (1964), pp. 202-14.
- Descartes: *Descartes – Philosophical Letters*, translated and edited by Anthony Kenny, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1970.
- Descartes: *Meditations on First Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume II*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- Descartes: *Principles of Philosophy* in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, Volume I*, translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985.
- Downing, Lisa: "Berkeley's natural philosophy and philosophy of science", in Winkler (2).
- Dancy, Jonathan: "Editor's Introduction", in *George Berkeley: A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Flage, Daniel E.: "Berkeley's Epistemic Ontology: The Principles", in *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 34, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 25-60.
- Fogelin, Robert J.: *Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge*, London, Routledge, 2001.
- Foster, John & Howard, Robinson: "Introduction", in *Essays on Berkeley: A Tercentennial Celebration*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1985.

- Friedman, Richard Elliott: *The Disappearance of God: A Divine Mystery*, Boston and New York, Little, Brown and Co., 1995.
- Gallois, Andre: "Berkeley's Master Argument", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 83, No.1 (1974), pp. 55-69.
- Garber, Daniel: "Locke, Berkeley, and Corpuscular Scepticism", in Turbayne (1).
- Grave, S. A.: 'The Mind and Its Ideas: Some Problems in the Interpretation of Berkeley', in Martin and Armstrong.
- Grayling, A. C.: *Berkeley: Central Arguments*, London, Duckworth, 1987.
- Grey, Denis: "The Solipsism of Bishop Berkeley", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 9. (1952), pp. 338-349.
- Guzzo, Augusto: "Berkeley and 'Things'", in Steinkraus.
- Hight, Marc and Ott, Walter: "The New Berkeley", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 34, Number 1, March 2004, pp. 1-24.
- Hooker, Michael: "Berkeley's Argument from Design", in Turbayne (1).
- Jessop, T. E.: "Berkeley as a Religious Apologist", in Steinkraus.
- Klime, A. David: "Berkeley's Divine Language Argument", in Berman (3).
- Lambert, Richard T.: "Berkeley's Commitment to Relativism", in Turbayne (1).
- Locke: *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. A. C. Fraser, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1959.
- Luce, A. A.: "Berkeley's New Principle Completed", in Steinkraus.
- Luce, A. A.: *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, London, Thomas Nelson, 1945.
- Marc-Wogau, K.: 'The Argument from Illusion and Berkeley's Idealism', in Martin and Armstrong.
- Martin, C. B., and Armstrong, David, eds.: *Locke and Berkeley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, New York, Doubleday, 1968.
- Mauil, Nancy L.: "Berkeley on the Limits of Mechanistic Explanation", in Turbayne (1).
- McCracken, C.: "What Does Berkeley's God See in the Quad?" *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie* 61, 1979, pp. 280-92.
- McKim, Robert: "Berkeley's notebooks", in Winkler (2).
- Muehlmann, Robert G.: *Berkeley's Ontology*, Indianapolis, Hackett, 1992.

- Pappas, George: "Abstract ideas and the 'esse is percipi' thesis", in Berman (4).
- Pappas, George: "Berkeley and Common Sense Realism," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, vol.8, (1991), pp. 27-42.
- Pappas, George: "Berkeley and Immediate Perception" in Sosa.
- Pappas, George: "Berkeley, Perception and Common Sense", in Turbayne (1).
- Pappas, George: *Berkeley's Thought*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Pitcher, George: *Berkeley*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977.
- Pitcher, George: "Berkeley on the Perception of Objects", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. XXIV (1) 1986, pp. 99-105.
- Prior, A. N.: "Berkeley in Logical Form", *Theoria*, Vol. XXI, 1955, pp. 117-122.
- Ramsey, Ian T.: "Berkeley and the Possibility of an Empirical Metaphysics", in Steinkraus.
- Rand, Benjamin: *Berkeley and Percival*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914.
- Sosa, Ernest, ed.: *Essays on the Philosophy of G. Berkeley*, Dordrecht, Holland, D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987.
- Steinkraus, Warren R., ed., *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966.
- Stoneham, Tom: *Berkeley's World: An Examination of the Three Dialogues*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Tipton, Ian C.: *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, London, Methuen, 1974.
- Thrane, Gary: "The Spaces of Berkeley's World", in Turbayne (1).
- Turbayne, Colin, ed. (1): *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretative Essays*, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1982.
- Turbayne, Colin M. (2): "The Influence of Berkeley's Science on His Metaphysics", *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, 16 (1956), pp. 476-87.
- Turbayne, Colin M. (3): "Lending a Hand to Philonous: The Berkeley, Plato, Aristotle Connection", in Turbayne.
- Turbayne, Colin M. (4): "The Origin of Berkeley's Paradoxes", in Steinkraus.
- Turbayne, Colin M. (5): *The Myth of Metaphor*, Columbia, University of South Carolina Press, 1970.
- Urmson, J. O.: *Berkeley*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1982.

Walmsley, Peter: *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Warnock, G. J.: *Berkeley*, London, Penguin, 1953, sec. ed.1982.

Winkler, Kenneth P. (1): *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1989.

Winkler, Kenneth P., ed. (2): *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Yandell, David: "Berkeley on Common Sense and the Privacy of Ideas", *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 12, No. 4, 1995, pp. 411-423.



## Abstract

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

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

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

But if things are just collections of ideas and ideas are mind-dependent entities, what happens to things when the ideas are not in the mind, when they are not perceived? The orthodox interpretation has Berkeley bring in God, the never-sleeping cosmic observer who sees everything, thus keeping everything in existence. But this interpretation has little support in the texts and in some places goes against them, so it has to be rejected. Berkeley in fact takes the hard line and claims that unperceived things do not exist at all. His ontology is still strong enough for all scientific purposes since there are many more ideas than we are actually aware of in sense perception, due to constant repetition many ideas have been run together and it takes great skill and patience to disconnect them again.

God plays another vital role in immaterialism – that of exciting ideas of sense in our mind and putting them into a regular pattern that we can learn to decipher. In fact, this pattern forms a visual language and so God speaks to us every time we open our eyes.

## Abstrakt

Cílem práce je vstřícná interpretace Berkeleyho imaterialismu, která nevychází z předpokladu, že celý systém je v zásadním smyslu chybný. Čtení základních textů odkrývá nové sémantické vztahy mezi důležitými filozofickými pojmy v imaterialismu.

Tradiční interpretace vnímá rozpor imaterialismu a *common sense* (zdravý rozum), přestože Berkeley věnuje celou jednu knihu vysvětlování své pozice v tomto směru. Tvrdí, že jeho systém je bližší *common sense* než materialismus, protože nepřekrčuje významy klíčových slov “vědět”, “jistý” a “skutečný”. Zároveň poukazuje na nesmyslnost slov “vnější předmět”, “absolutní existence” atd., čímž zamítá už samotný sémantický rámec, ve kterém se odehrává tradiční diskuse o realismu, idealismu, fenomenalismu a solipsismu.

Berkeleyho vlastní definice předmětu vnímání se primárně nachází v jeho vědecké teorii vidění, ze které je zobecněna na metafyzickou úroveň. A jelikož jeho optický program se v podstatě skládá z psychologie vidění, je i jeho metafyzické ukotvení omezeno na spojování idejí jakožto psychologických entit, které jsou privátní každému vnímajícímu, z nichž tento konstruuje předměty vnímání.

Pokud jsou ale věci pouhými soubory idejí a ideje závisejí na vnímající mysli co do své existence, co se s věcmi stane, když ideje nejsou v mysli, když nejsou vnímány? Ortodoxní interpretace tvrdí, že se Berkeley v tento okamžik odvolá na Boha, všudypřítomného věčného pozorovatele, který všechno vidí a tím i všechno udržuje v existenci. Tato interpretace má však v textech minimální oporu a na několika místech jim explicitně odporuje, a musí být proto odmítnuta. Berkeley ve skutečnosti zastává extrémní pozici a tvrdí, že nevnímané věci vůbec neexistují. Jeho ontologie je přesto dost silná i pro vědecké účely, protože existuje daleko více idejí, než jsme si vědomi při vnímání – díky stálému opakování totiž už jednotlivé ideje nevnímáme, ale spojujeme si je automaticky do souborů.

Bůh má v imaterialismu jinou důležitou roli – vyvolává v naší mysli smyslové ideje v pravidelném sledu, abychom je byli schopni dekodovat a řídit se jimi. Tento pravidelný sled idejí tvoří vlastně visuální jazyk, kterým k nám Bůh promlouvá, když otevřeme oči.