

*Berkeley and the Irish Enlightenment:
How ‘Irish’ Are ‘We Irish’
A Reply to My Critics¹*

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Abstract: The contemporary view of scholars that Berkeley’s legacy stems from his philosophical work has traditionally dominated discussions of his significance, despite the prolific nature of his writings. This disjunction between his reputation and historical interests can be addressed by locating Berkeley’s career within his Irish context(s) and examining those aspects of his career that have often been disregarded as immaterial to his philosophical projects. When seen from this perspective, the trajectory of Berkeley’s intellectual pursuits mirrored those of the broader Irish Enlightenment and represents an important contribution to this emerging field.

Generations of thinkers have wrestled with Berkeley’s insights regarding the nature of perception and the limits of understanding, firmly establishing his place in the history of philosophy. My *Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context²* was predicated on the simple fact that while George Berkeley was undoubtedly an important philosophical figure, his significant contributions to economic, social, and moral thought have often been overlooked in studies of his work, especially within the context of early eighteenth-century Irish studies. Writing from the perspective of an intellectual historian and not as a philosopher, it seemed to me that that contemporary scholarship on Berkeley heavily favors his epistemological work at the expense of the actions he took during his lifetime and his contemporaries’ views of his contributions to Irish (and British) society.

This disconnect between how Berkeley was seen during the eighteenth century and how his work is interpreted today parallels a similar problem that some scholars have identified as the *Das Adam Smith Problem*. Smith scholars have long had trouble reconciling Smith’s views in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* with those expounded in the *Wealth of Nations*.³ Similarly, the discrepancy between Berkeley’s legacy and his actions leads to a question that could be termed the “Two Berkeley” problem. In this case, the work of Berkeley “the philosopher” has been rightfully well-explored, but this

¹ An earlier version of this essay was originally presented at the 2013 APA Meeting in New Orleans. I would like to thank my fellow panelists and those in attendance for their insightful comments.

² New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

³ For an overview of the ‘Two Adam Smith’ problem, see Laurence Dickey, “Historicizing the ‘Adam Smith Problem’: Conceptual, Historiographical, and Textual Issues,” *Journal of Modern History* 58 (1986), 579-609. Also see Dogan Gocmen, *The Adam Smith Problem: Reconciling Human Nature and Society in “The Theory of Moral Sentiments” and “Wealth of Nations”* (London: Tauris Academic Studies, 2007), and Leonidas Montes, “*Das Adam Smith Problem: Its Origins, the Stages of the Current Debate, and One Implication for Our Understanding of Sympathy*,” *Journal of the History of Economic Thought* 25 (2003), 63-90.

focus has come at the cost of neglecting the vast corpus of Berkeley “the Bishop” whose writings (particularly those dealing with Ireland) were even more influential. *Recovering Bishop Berkeley* was meant to be a step toward redressing this disjuncture and exploring his works written after he left Dublin in 1713.

Although a number of factors have contributed to this state of affairs, two are of particular note: the dominance of philosophical readings of Berkeley’s significance and the reluctance of scholars to appreciate the Irish dimension of his work. Berkeley’s reputation in the history of philosophy has traditionally been built upon the belief that there was a developmental sequence running from Locke to Berkeley to Hume. French writers published the earliest engagements with Berkeley’s thought, reading him as a disciple of Malebranche, but by the 1730s English and Scottish thinkers began to grapple with the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*.⁴ Anecdotal evidence suggests that Berkeley came to the attention of the Scottish Rankenian Club attention as early as the 1720s, although Thomas Reid and James Beattie published the first extensive responses to Berkeley in Scotland during the second half of the eighteenth century.⁵

Between 1764 and 1784 both Reid and Beattie surveyed the history of philosophy and noticed an apparent continuity between Locke, Berkeley, and Hume. Reid’s major works developed a critique of Hume’s philosophy that advanced the Locke-Berkeley-Hume sequence.⁶ In a telling passage, Reid outlined how philosophy had fallen (unwittingly) into the very skepticism that it originally sought to refute, tracing its development from Descartes, through Malebranche and Locke, and eventually culminating in Berkeley and Hume.⁷ With this fell stroke Reid set up a conceptualization of the history of philosophy that contrasted nicely with his own theories and has lingered to the present day. During the 1770s, Reid’s fellow Scot, James Beattie adopted his analysis and his work likely became the vehicle through which the Locke-Berkeley-Hume interpretation spread to the continent (via Kant).⁸

⁴ In December 1713, the French Jesuit journal *Mémoires de Trévoux* published announcements of Berkeley’s *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* in its *Nouvelles Littéraires* section, in which Berkeley was charged with being a “Malbranchiste de bonne foi.” See *Mémoires de Trévoux* (May 1713), 921-22; reprinted in Harry Bracken, *The Early Reception of Berkeley’s Immaterialism, 1710-1733* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1959), 17.

⁵ According to M. A. Stewart, the first recorded link between Berkeley and the Rankenian Club was an anonymous obituary for Robert Wallace, in the *Scots Magazine* (July 1771). In this obituary, the writer mentions Wallace’s role in the formation of the Rankenian Club, and suggests that the “abstruse principles vented by Dr. Berkeley” were “accurately canvassed in it.” See M. A. Stewart, “Berkeley and the Rankenian Club,” in *George Berkeley: Essays and Replies*, ed. David Berman (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1986), 25.

⁶ See Reid’s *Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) and *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* (1788).

⁷ Thomas Reid, *Principles of Common Sense*, in Thomas Reid, *Philosophical Works*, ed. Sir William Hamilton (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1967), 1:103.

⁸ In particular, see Chapter II, section I of Beattie’s *Essay*, “General Observations, Rise and Progress of Modern Scepticism.” Beattie’s analyses are taken almost verbatim from Reid’s *Inquiry into the Human Mind*. See also James Beattie, *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*, reprinted in *The Philosophical and Critical Works of James*

Within the history of philosophy, this identification of Berkeley as the central link in a philosophical chain running from Locke to Hume has been quite influential. Many modern accounts identify this triad as advancing a specific theory of mind, from its origins in Locke's thought to its culmination in Hume's skepticism. According to this interpretation, Berkeley's philosophical writings are "classics," whose meaning can be disclosed only by careful reading of the texts themselves, with no knowledge of the author's biography or his historical context(s) deemed necessary. Even among philosophers sympathetic to Berkeley's corpus (e.g., Ian Tipton), investigations of Berkeley's work focus almost exclusively on "the views he was concerned to propound in the *Principles* and *Dialogues*," rather than the full body of his work.⁹

Paul Ricoeur has called attention to this interpretive problem, arguing that individual authors' writings are typically seen as existing within one of two frames of reference. First, the writings of Plato (or Berkeley) may be "raised to the status of a *work*, a network of significations where the author's biography is expressed or masked but where it is nevertheless suppressed in favor of a *meaning*." In this sense, the corpus of ideas associated with the author is seen as possessing a "truth" that is dependent upon the totality of his or her work and the subjectivity of the historian (or philosopher) investigating it. The other alternative, according to Ricoeur, centers on developing an understanding of the "philosophical singularities" associated with "the meaning of the work and not that of the author's peculiar experience." Instead of stressing the meaning of a philosopher's corpus, this type of exploration narrows its focus to a single text, seen as the "singular essence" that the historian is seeking to explain.¹⁰ This attitude can be seen in a wide range of recent and not-so-recent works by philosophers, some of whom would express astonishment that Berkeley even had a moral or social philosophy.¹¹ Thus, one of the fundamental goals of my book was to illustrate and explore Berkeley's concern for virtue and morality across the corpus of his works.

Beattie, ed. Bernhard Fabian (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1975), 1:141-69; and Robert Wolff, "Kant's Debt to Hume via Beattie," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960), 117. Werkmeister suggests that Kant may have been exposed to Berkeley's philosophy through Beattie, since the first of his essays were translated into German in 1781, while the first German edition of the *Principles* was published only in 1869. See W. H. Werkmeister, "Notes to an Interpretation of Berkeley," in *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Warren Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 164.

⁹ Ian Tipton, *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism* [1974] (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994), 10. Also, see George Pappas, *Berkeley's Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 1; John Russell Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xv; and Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006), 1 and 7.

¹⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 47.

¹¹ This can be seen by a quick survey of bibliographies of Berkeley scholarship. See Colin Turbayne, "A Bibliography of George Berkeley: 1963-1979," in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, ed. by Colin Turbayne (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); Matthew Kapstein, "A Bibliography of George Berkeley: 1980-85," in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. by Ernest Sosa (Boston: D. Reidel, 1987); and the running bibliography compiled by Silvia Parigi for *Berkeley Studies* (<http://berkeleystudies.philosophy.fsu.edu/Berkeley-Bibliography>).

The second major issue that I aimed to address in *Recovering Bishop Berkeley* was the fact that these philosophical investigations of Berkeley's work have failed to account for the Irish context within which he wrote. On this point, it is essential to note that Berkeley was "Irish" and wrote extensively about Irish issues. While Berkeley "the philosopher" played a crucial part in shaping modern traditions of thought, scholars have not accounted for the depth of his engagement with eighteenth-century society and thus have failed to locate his work within the intellectual context of the early Irish and British Enlightenments. As a result, Berkeley's commitment to Irish economic, social, and moral issues has been obscured or overlooked. In fact, as I hoped to suggest, Berkeley's contributions to the Irish Enlightenment were much more significant and in a much different arena, than is typically understood.¹²

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The current essay was originally written for a panel focused on "responses to our critics," so I would like to use a few of the comments in these reviews as a point of departure for clarifying and amplifying some of the key arguments in the book. In his review of *Recovering Bishop Berkeley*, Tomokiyo Nomura mentions the problem of determining the nature of Berkeley's legacy and locating his work within contemporary scholarship.¹³ Nomura sees this book as contributing to the vein of Berkeley scholarship initiated by David Berman, which focuses Berkeley's place within the "Irish philosophical tradition." Technically, this is correct, but does not entirely get at the point of my project. Although I located Berkeley's work in a variety of intellectual contexts in my book, these were focused on issues of politics, economics, society, and morality. In a broad sense, these areas can certainly be considered "philosophical," but within the Irish context what I was trying to do was more specifically linked to the contours of Irish history and has implications for how we understand the key issues associated with Irish intellectual history during the first half of the eighteenth century. Berkeley's emphasis on the importance of "virtue" throughout his work was reflective of a broader trend within the Irish Enlightenment to establish a language and terminology for Anglo-Irish thinkers to address the "common good" in a manner that elided the confessional divides throughout the nation. Thus, my goal was to not to explore Berkeley's philosophical debts, but rather to look at his writings outside the Irish philosophical tradition—taking a cue from Berman, but moving in a different direction.

The prolific nature of Berkeley's writings makes the task of exploring the depth of Berkeley's engagement with social issues and the question of virtue throughout his life difficult. Many of his contributions to these fields have been overshadowed by his philosophy, and thus any discussion of them requires some contextual explanation. Writing from the perspective of an historian, my main concern was to explicate the ideas

¹² For a variety of perspectives on the Irish Enlightenment, see the essays in the spring 2012 issue of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* (45.3), ed. Sean Moore. Also see Michael Brown, "Was there an Irish Enlightenment? The Case of the Anglicans," *Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century* (2008), 49-64.

¹³ Tomokiyo Nomura, "Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context (review)," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 45 (2012), 455-57.

that he advanced (and revised) throughout his career within his specific intellectual contexts. Catherine Skeen's review of *Recovering Bishop Berkeley* suggests that the "astute and linguistically incisive Berkeley" is relatively unexplored, claiming that this could be overcome through more engagement with his "rhetorical choices."¹⁴ Skeen's call for a close examination of Berkeley's rhetoric raises an important point; however, my primary concern was not to explore his use of language *per se*, but rather how he understood notions of virtue and society. His rhetorical choices are certainly an important part of this process, but since other scholars have already focused on this aspect of Berkeley's writings, my goal was more historical in nature.¹⁵

The first goal of *Recovering Bishop Berkeley* was to balance the traditional philosophical interpretation of his work with one that took his social engagement seriously, but I also sought to locate Berkeley within his Irish contexts. In his review, Nomura argues that it is important to place Berkeley's work within a global context. I agree, but would further suggest that the study of Berkeley allows us to place an Irish tradition within a global context as well. In fact, I would like to suggest that the trajectory of the Irish Enlightenment in general is best followed through the careful study of Berkeley's writings outside the realm of epistemology or "pure philosophy."

Marta Szymanska's review identifies the key to what I mean about this vision of the Irish Enlightenment, although it too does not quite capture the larger implications of what I would like to argue.¹⁶ Szymanska notes that the main thesis of my book is that Berkeley was an "Irish and cosmopolitan patriot." This is generally accurate, since much of my book focuses on Berkeley's devotion to his native land and projects for ameliorating the lives of his countrymen; however, I would suggest that these ideals were core principles of the Irish Enlightenment itself. In this sense, my contention that Berkeley was a "representative figure" actually indicates his broader reflection of the development of the Irish Enlightenment as a whole.

In order to address both Nomura and Szymanska's points, it is useful to consider the nature of the Irish Enlightenment. Traditionally, notions of the Enlightenment have been associated with the French *philosophes*, but this perception has been challenged by a number of studies highlighting the contributions of other nations and traditions of thought to eighteenth-century culture. As a result of this work, historians are now familiar with the explosion of intellectual fervor in such diverse places as Naples, Königsberg, Edinburgh, and London. Along with a host of others, each of these cities was a place where thinkers from a wide variety of backgrounds could participate in a conversation about ideas holding domestic and international relevance. While the scholarly task of

¹⁴ Catherine Skeen, "Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context (review)," *The Scriblerian and the Kit-Cats* 45 (2013), 275.

¹⁵ For consideration of Berkeley's use of rhetoric, see Peter Walmsley, *The Rhetoric of Berkeley's Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Michael Prince, *Philosophical Dialogue in the British Enlightenment: Theology, Aesthetics, and the Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); and Tom Jones, *Pope and Berkeley: The Language of Poetry and Philosophy* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

¹⁶ Marta Szymanska, "Berkeley's Moral and Social Considerations Vindicated," *Berkeley Studies* 22 (2011), 15-19.

recovering the contours of these debates along the “periphery” of the Enlightenment has made great progress, there are still a number of glaring lacunae to be filled.¹⁷ The study of the Irish Enlightenment is one such field.

A number of factors have contributed to the relative neglect of the Irish Enlightenment, despite the fact that the volume and quality of thought in Ireland during this period rivaled that of more celebrated Enlightenment centers. One of the fundamental problems facing this field stems from the paucity of intellectual histories of Ireland. While there have been a number of studies of specific Irish thinkers, until recently there has been almost no comprehensive overview of Irish intellectual traditions during the eighteenth century. David Berman’s pioneering work on the early Irish Enlightenment does provide an important point of entry, but he highlights primarily the philosophical fervor in Dublin during this period and fails to address its larger historical context.¹⁸ Thomas Duddy’s recent wide-ranging study has also helped illuminate the robust nature of Irish thought, but his effort to outline thinkers ranging from John Scotus Eriugena to William Desmond results in a corresponding lack of detailed analysis for many of these figures.¹⁹ Additionally, there have been a few important collections of essays that have investigated Irish political thinkers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but these too neglect to locate their subjects within a larger Irish context.²⁰

Writing as a student at Trinity in 1707, Berkeley rejected the contemporary theories of Locke and Newton with the claim that “we Irish men cannot attain to these truths” (*NB* 392; also 393-94 and 398). It was this brazen refutation of the dominant English philosophy that led Yeats to praise Berkeley as a “fierce young man” whose intellectual struggles concerned “all those who feel a responsibility for the thought of modern Ireland.”²¹ While Yeats lauded Berkeley’s connection to Ireland, the confessional divides that split the nation during the eighteenth century raise questions as to how he defined the nation. During this career, Berkeley served as a leading figure the Church of Ireland, yet

¹⁷ See Franco Venturi, *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); Roy Porter and Mikulas Teich, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); *Peripheries of the Enlightenment*, eds. Richard Butterwick, Simon Davies, and Gabriel Espinosa (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2008); and *The Atlantic Enlightenment*, eds. Susan Manning and Francis Cogliano (London: Ashgate, 2008).

¹⁸ David Berman, “Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in Irish Philosophy,” and “The Culmination and Causation of Irish Philosophy,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 64 (1982), 148-65 and 257-79 [respectively]; and “The Irish Counter-Enlightenment,” in *The Irish Mind: Exploring Intellectual Traditions*, ed. Richard Kearney (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1984).

¹⁹ Thomas Duddy, *A History of Irish Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2002), and Thomas Duddy, “Thinking Ireland: Cultural Nationalism and the Problem of Irish Ideas,” *New Hibernia Review* 7 (2003), 14-23. Also see *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*, ed. Stephen Gersh and Dermot Moran (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

²⁰ Perhaps most notably, see *Political Discourse in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth Century Ireland*, eds. D. George Boyce, Robert Eccleshall, and Vincent Geoghegan (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Jane Ohlmeyer, ed., *Political Thought in Seventeenth Century Ireland: Kingdom or Colony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); and *Political Ideas in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. S. J. Connolly (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000).

²¹ W. B. Yeats, Introduction to *Bishop Berkeley*, J. M. Hone and H. M. Rossi (New York: Faber & Faber, 1931), xv-xvi.

exhibited an abiding concern for the social well-being of Protestants and Catholics alike. Furthermore, a quick survey of Berkeley's career illustrates that over time he became more engaged with the practical problems facing the nation. In this sense, his proscriptions for the economic well-being of his native land demonstrate his vision of Irish "patriotism" grounded in practical recognition of the challenges facing Ireland as a whole: a trend that was reflected by the leading Ascendancy intellectuals of his time. While his (and their) mature position contained elements of religious prejudice, these were tempered by a concern for creating a self-sufficient state able to weather the storms of social upheaval. If this is the case, what then was the Irish Enlightenment?

The hesitancy of scholars to associate Irish thinkers with a larger Irish Enlightenment was also encouraged by the traditional readings of the Enlightenment as a monolithic movement grounded in reason, liberty, and toleration. In many ways, this was not the Enlightenment that developed in Ireland. Rather, I would like to suggest that between 1689 and 1750s (roughly the years of Berkeley's life), the Irish Enlightenment passed through three distinct phases that were mirrored by Berkeley's work. In this sense, Berkeley may be seen as a representative figure of the broader trends in Irish thought, since the trajectory of his career mirrors these movements.

The first period began in 1689 in the aftermath of the Glorious (or Bloodless) Revolution, the political settlement of which acted as the dominant concern for much of Irish thought. During this time, Ireland did not grant liberty to large sections of the population, and toleration for Catholics and Dissenters was a distant dream. By this reading, an age commonly remembered for its Ascendancy culture and Penal Laws would seem to be an unlikely place to find aspects of political enlightenment. Still, while the bulk of the population may have unfortunately been political disenfranchised, does this mean that there were no glimmerings of enlightenment?

As the generation of Irish Protestants who lived through 1689 justified their actions (or inaction), Lockean principles were the touchstone of debates in Dublin. According to traditional accounts, one of the fundamental political texts of the Enlightenment was John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* (1690), which was grounded in notions of natural law and the right to resist oppressive government. Along with his epistemological writings, this work has led Roy Porter to dub Locke the "father" of the Enlightenment. It is telling that his influence was quite prominent in Irish thought as well.²²

Locke's political thought was primarily articulated in Ireland through William Molyneux's famous 1698 tract, *The Case of Ireland's being bound by acts of parliament in England, stated*.²³ Although known during his lifetime for his philosophical and

²² Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: Norton, 2000), 418. Also see Ultán Gillen, "Varieties of Enlightenment: the Enlightenment and Irish Political Culture in the Age of Revolutions," in *Peripheries of the Enlightenment*, 167.

²³ *The Case of Ireland's being bound by acts of parliament in England, stated* was published at least eleven times during the eighteenth century and was commonly cited by Irish thinkers wishing to refute English claims of authority. See Patrick Kelly, "William Molyneux and the Spirit of Liberty in

scientific experiments (such as the famous thought problem bearing his name), Molyneux's legacy has been dominated by the influence of this vindication of Irish Protestant rights, which has been described as one of the most influential Irish political pamphlets of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Stressing the legacy of the "original compact" between Henry II and the people of Ireland, Molyneux argued that Ireland was a kingdom, empathetically *not* a colony, and was linked to England only through the person of the monarch.²⁴ Molyneux's arguments were supported by William King's *State of the Protestants*, which relied heavily upon Locke's position to justify the actions of the Irish Church during this period.²⁵

When considering Berkeley, it is significant that the main writings we have from him during this period are his *Sermons on Passive Obedience*. While these have raised questions concerning his political beliefs, they illustrate that he was closely engaged with questions of politics, the right to resist, and sovereignty. While Berkeley was not a leading figure in these debates, his work reflected the larger trends in Irish society and the early Irish Enlightenment focus on political issues.

During the late 1710s the Irish Enlightenment shifted away from politics and toward consideration of economic development and the social sphere. This change stemmed from series of steps that formalized English control over Ireland and had significant ramifications upon the contours of the Irish Enlightenment. First, in 1707, the Anglo-Scottish Union called into question the dreams of Irish Protestants who wished for a complete political union between Ireland and England. These hopes were further dashed by the events associated with the Jacobite uprising of 1715 and the 1720 Declaratory Act, which effectively eliminated the political power of the Irish Ascendancy within their own nation. Collectively these changes resulted in a shift of focus by the Irish intellectuals (and the Irish Enlightenment) towards the Irish social sphere.

On this point, the uneven distribution of power may indicate that Ireland had faint claim to being considered an "Enlightened" country, recent scholarship concerning the role of "improvement" during the Enlightenment suggests that this needs to be reassessed. Drawing upon his work on the Scottish Enlightenment, John Robertson argues that due to the political loss of independence caused by the 1707 Act of Union, Scottish thinkers sought to fashion a new sense of identity in the commercial field.²⁶ According to Robertson, Scottish Enlightenment explorations of human nature, political economy, and the civilizing process "converged upon the concept of 'sociability' . . . to establish the material and moral conditions and mechanisms of sociability, the better to clear the path

Eighteenth-Century Ireland," *Eighteenth Century Ireland* 3 (1988), 133-48, and Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth-Century Commonwealthman* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), 138-43.

²⁴ William Molyneux, *The Case of Ireland's being bound by acts of parliament in England*, *stated* (Dublin: Joseph Ray, 1698), 115-16.

²⁵ See William King, *State of the Protestants of Ireland under the late King James's Government* (London, 1691).

²⁶ John Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment: Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25-26.

for human betterment, and to assess the prospects of its realization.”²⁷ If Robertson’s analysis is correct, then political economy may be a more useful standard of “enlightenment” during the early eighteenth century. By this criterion, the second phase of the Irish Enlightenment, which ran from the early 1720s through the 1740s, was at the forefront of this broader movement.

In addition to Swift’s *Drapier’s Letters*, the Irish writers associated with the Dublin Society confronted the challenge of placing their nation on the track for growth during the 1730s and shared a number of common concerns. Although the foci of their investigations differed, they tended to eschew grand theories in favor of solving immediate, practical issues.²⁸ Taken as a whole, thinkers such Thomas Prior and David Bindon agreed with Berkeley’s identification of three interrelated problems as underlying Ireland’s economic plight: the actions of absentee landowners, the lack of coinage in the realm, and the dangers of luxury. In terms of “enlightened” sociability, the Dublin Society served as an important model of an improving organization for similar groups throughout Europe and helps bolster the claim that Ireland possessed a modicum of “enlightenment” during this period.

This is strengthened if we consider a second point concerning “sociability.” Although historians have identified the Scottish Enlightenment as providing particularly fertile ground for ideas of an innate sociability, questions concerning the nature of human interaction had been addressed across the Irish Sea prior to consuming the drawing rooms and lectures halls of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Once again, Berkeley’s writings reflect the larger movement of the Irish Enlightenment. His essays in *The Guardian* illustrated a sophisticated vision of sociability grounded in contemporary scientific notions. His economic writings during this period, including *An Essay toward Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain* and *The Querist*, advanced proposals for improving the nation via practical and moral means.

Finally, the third phase of the Irish Enlightenment began in the mid-1740s and was characterized by a more inclusive (nearly cosmopolitan) program of national renewal. In this case, the famine conditions of the early 1704s, coupled with the end of the political danger of Jacobitism in 1745, led Irish thinkers such as Berkeley to devise patriotic plans designed to help Protestants and Catholics alike. Berkeley’s *Siris* and popularization of tarwater, as well as his *Maxims Concerning Patriotism*, all indicated an increasingly inclusive Irish Enlightenment that was shared by his contemporaries.

This has been a cursory sketch, but I think an important one. The Irish Enlightenment was certainly not a single “moment” in time, any more than other philosophical

²⁷ Robertson, *Case for the Enlightenment*, 29-30. On the notion that concerns about the “civilizing process” were particularly acute on the “peripheries” of the Enlightenment, see Richard Butterwick, “Peripheries of the Enlightenment: an introduction,” 7.

²⁸ See James Livesey, *Empire and Civil Society: Ireland and Scotland in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale, 2009), and Toby Barnard, “The Dublin Society and other improving societies, 1731-85,” in *Clubs and Societies in Eighteenth-Century Ireland*, ed. James Kelly and Martyn Powell (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2010), 53-88.

movements. I would like to suggest that for the first fifty years of the Irish Enlightenment, Berkeley's work reflected this larger movement. While Berkeley's philosophy has long been seen as a staple of Enlightenment thought, his works on virtue, society, and religion have not received the same accolades. However, if we consider his writings within the context of this more nuanced reading of the Irish Enlightenment, a different view emerges. Rather than dismissing his contributions to these areas of inquiry as being peripheral to his thought, we can see how this engagement with questions of human nature, political economy, and sociability were central to his goals for improving Ireland and thus mark a crucial part of his contributions to this under-researched field.

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