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# Getting Beyond “The Curtain of the Fancy:” Anti-Representationalism in Berkeley and Sergeant<sup>1</sup>

Peter West

**Abstract:** This paper argues for a re-evaluation of the relationship between Berkeley and his predecessor, the neo-Aristotelian thinker John Sergeant. In the literature to date, the relationship between these two thinkers has received attention for two reasons. First, some commentators have attempted to establish a *causal* connection between them by focusing on the fact that both thinkers develop a theory of “notions.” Second, some have argued that both Berkeley and Sergeant develop “anti-representationalist” arguments against Locke’s epistemology. The first issue has received much greater attention, particularly from commentators seeking an explanation for Berkeley’s use of the term “notion.” Only one scholar (G. A. Johnston in 1923) has considered Berkeley and Sergeant’s anti-representationalism in any depth. In this paper, I argue that the weight given to the causal connection between Berkeley and Sergeant’s “notions” is misplaced since the evidence in favor of this connection is weaker than is usually acknowledged. Instead, I build on Johnston’s analysis of the conceptual connection between Berkeley and Sergeant’s anti-representationalism. I first corroborate Johnston’s claim that there are striking similarities between their criticisms of Locke before going beyond that analysis to identify two important similarities between their anti-representationalist arguments.

Colour, figure, motion, extension, and the like, considered only as so many *sensations* in the mind, are perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived. But, if they are looked on as notes or images, referred to *things* or *archetypes* existing without the mind, then are we all involved in *scepticism*. (Berkeley, *Principles*, 87)

We cannot possibly know at all the Things themselves by the Ideas, unless we know certainly those Ideas are Right Resemblances of them. But we can never know (by the Principles of the Ideists) that their Ideas are Right Resemblances of the Things; therefore we cannot possibly know at all the Things by their Ideas (Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy*, 31–32)

## Introduction

According to many Early Modern philosophers, we can only gain knowledge of external things in virtue of having ideas in the mind which represent them. In the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, this view was referred to as “ideism” or “the way of ideas,” while in contemporary historical literature it is more commonly known as

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<sup>1</sup> An earlier version of this essay—along with Manuel Fasko’s “Representation, Resemblance and the Scope of George Berkeley’s Likeness Principle”—won the 2019 Colin and Alisa Turbayne International Berkeley Essay Prize Competition. Thanks to the judges of that prize for helpful comments. If you’d like to read that version of the paper, visit Berkeley’s former home in Whitehall, Newport, Rhode Island, where you’ll find a hard copy.

“representationalism.”<sup>2</sup> Representationalists are those who posit a *tertium quid* in the process of cognizing the external world, namely, ideas. Push-back against this view, amongst Early Modern thinkers, is evident in early critical responses to Locke’s *Essay*. Several treatises criticizing Locke’s epistemology had already been published by the end of 1697 (three years after the second edition of the *Essay* in 1694).<sup>3</sup> These early criticisms of Locke bear a close resemblance to Thomas Reid’s critique of the way of ideas at the end of the eighteenth-century. Whilst these critics of Locke and other ideists hold a variety of different “positive” views about the nature of reality and the *right* way to understand knowledge of the world around us, there is a central line of argument that is at the heart of their respective epistemologies. The argument is as follows: any view that leads to skepticism should be rejected; representationalism leads to skepticism; therefore, representationalism should be rejected. As such, this line of thinkers can appropriately be characterised as *anti-representationalist*. In this paper, I focus on two critics of Locke who adopt this “anti-representationalist” line of argument: John Sergeant (1623–1707) and George Berkeley (1685–1753).

Scholarship on the relationship between Berkeley and Sergeant has run in one of two directions. First, several commentators have turned to the possibility of a *causal* connection between Sergeant’s writing and Berkeley’s thought to explain Berkeley’s decision to introduce the technical term “notion” into the revised editions of his *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* in 1734.<sup>4</sup> The case for this interpretation rests on Sergeant’s own use of the term “notion” and textual evidence that Berkeley read Sergeant (which I discuss in section one). The second way the Berkeley–Sergeant relationship has been explored is in regard to similarities between their “anti-representationalist”

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<sup>2</sup> John W. Yolton [*Perceptual Acquaintance: From Descartes to Reid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 113; and *Perception and Reality: A History from Descartes to Kant* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996)] argues against attributing representationalism to the likes of Descartes and Locke; see also Monte Cook, “Arnauld’s Alleged Representationalism,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974): 53–62. I do not take my claims in this essay to depend on the accuracy of scholarly claims about representationalism. For, even if it is inaccurate to talk of a representationalist tradition (i.e., even if Yolton is right), both Berkeley and Sergeant explicitly situate themselves in opposition to views that *they* take to be representationalist.

<sup>3</sup> The publication of the *Essay* led to a flurry of critical writings, including James Lowde’s *A Discourse Concerning the Nature of Man* (1694), Henry Lee’s *Anti-scepticism* (1702), and Edward Stillingfleet’s correspondence with Locke in *The Works of John Locke: A New Edition*, corrected (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823). For discussion of the early reception of Locke’s *Essay*, see John W. Yolton, “Locke’s Unpublished Marginal Replies to John Sergeant,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 12 (1951): 528–32; Yolton, *John Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), especially 1–26; Dmitri Levitin, “Reconsidering John Sergeant’s Attacks on Locke’s *Essay*,” *Intellectual History Review* 20 (2010), 457–58; and Kenneth L. Pearce, “Berkeley’s Lockean Religious Epistemology,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 75 (2014): 423–24. For a comparison of Berkeley and Lee’s criticisms of Locke, especially his theory of abstraction, see Hans Peter Benschop, “Berkeley, Lee, and Abstract Ideas,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 5 (1997): 55–66.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley’s Thought* (New York: Garland, 1934), 104; Daniel Flage, *Berkeley’s Doctrine of Notions: A Reconstruction based on his Theory of Meaning* (London: Croom Helm, 1987), 174; Pearce, “Berkeley’s Lockean Epistemology,” 425, and Kenneth L Pearce, *Language and the Structure of Berkeley’s World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 126.

arguments. Rather than a *causal* connection, this line of interpretation seeks to identify a *conceptual* connection between Berkeley and Sergeant's thought (i.e., this connection could still stand even if Berkeley never read Sergeant). However, in his *Development of Berkeley's Philosophy* (published in 1923), G. A. Johnston is the only commentator to examine this side of the Berkeley–Sergeant connection in any depth.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while the possibility of Berkeley's having inherited his theory of notions from Sergeant has received a good deal of scholarly attention, the relationship between Berkeley and Sergeant's anti-representationalism has been neglected for almost a century. In what follows, I argue for a re-evaluation of that relationship.

My aim in this essay is to push the discussion about the Berkeley–Sergeant connection back in the direction that Johnston took. I do so by showing that we stand to learn more about both thinkers' views by examining the similarities between their anti-representationalist arguments than we do by focusing on the possibility of Berkeley's having been (causally) influenced by Sergeant. Two important insights come out of an exploration of the *conceptual* connection between Berkeley and Sergeant's arguments. First, it becomes clear that the relation of *resemblance* is crucial to their shared commitment to the view that representationalism leads to skepticism. According to both Berkeley and Sergeant, if ideas are meant to *resemble* their objects, then ideas cannot do the (epistemological) work that representationalists take them to do. Second, I show that both Berkeley and Sergeant think a relation of *identity* between things in the world and things in the mind is necessary to avoid skepticism. In other words, the relation of resemblance underlies their “negative” attacks on representationalism, while the relation of identity underlies their own anti-skeptical, “positive” views. In this way, I argue that a comparison of Berkeley and Sergeants' arguments provides us with important insights into the kind of anti-representationalist attacks with which Locke's *Essay* was met.

In section one of my essay, I show that the emphasis on the possibility of a *causal* connection between Sergeant and Berkeley in the literature to date is misguided. I demonstrate that the case a causal connection remains tenuous at best. In sections two and three, instead, I corroborate Johnston's claims about a *conceptual* connection between Berkeley and Sergeant's thought. In section two, I outline Sergeant's arguments against ideism, with particular emphasis on his view that resemblance (between ideas and external things) will not suffice to provide genuine knowledge. In section three, I focus on Berkeley's own arguments and, again, show that his views on resemblance underlie his attacks. In section four, I demonstrate that both Berkeley and Sergeant confront Locke (and other representationalists) with a dilemma. I do so because holding up these two dilemmas alongside one another makes clear the important similarities between both their “negative” attacks on representationalism and their own “positive” anti-skeptical epistemologies.

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<sup>5</sup> See G. A. Johnston, *The Development of Berkeley's Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1923). Kenneth Winkler [*Berkeley: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989): 246, ft. 18] does note the relevant similarities but does not examine them in depth.

## 1. The Berkeley–Sergeant Connection

In this section, I make the case for thinking that there is *not* enough evidence to establish a *causal* connection between Berkeley and Sergeant—contrary to a range of interpretations available in the literature.

Of course, one of these thinkers will be more familiar to most readers than the other, so it's worth briefly introducing Sergeant's philosophy before proceeding.<sup>6</sup> In the final decade of the seventeenth-century, having previously written on theological matters, Sergeant published two philosophical tracts in an effort to “beat down” skepticism (MS Preface 22).<sup>7</sup> The first, *The Method to Science* (1696), is an attempt to reinstate Aristotelian syllogistic reasoning as the true ground of science and refute the ideism of Descartes and the Cartesians.<sup>8</sup> The second, *Solid Philosophy Asserted Against the Fancies of the Ideists* (1697), is a criticism of the ideism that Sergeant finds in Locke's *Essay*. Sergeant's view is that ideism leads to numerous errors of reasoning (SP, Epistle 5).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, he explains, “I saw it was necessary to Stub up by the Roots that Way [of ideas] *it self*” (SP, Epistle 8–9). Sergeant therefore sets out to instigate a “Reformation” in philosophy where the way of ideas will be completely rejected.<sup>10</sup>

While several scholars have provided in–depth studies of Sergeant's philosophical writings,<sup>11</sup> even by comparison to other thinkers outside the canon, such as Malebranche, Gassendi, Newton, and Reid,<sup>12</sup> it remains the case that Sergeant has received very little

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<sup>6</sup> Primary sources for Sergeant include *The Method to Science* [MS] (London, 1696) and *Solid Philosophy asserted against the Fancies of the Ideists* [SP] (London: A. Roper, 1697). References to the latter work are to section numbers in the Preface and page numbers elsewhere in that edition. I also refer specifically to Locke's copy of that work in St John's College Library, Cambridge, shelf mark Aa.2.27.

<sup>7</sup> For discussion of the connections between Sergeant's theological work and his philosophical work, see Levitin, “Reconsidering Sergeant's Attacks.”

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of Sergeant's Aristotelianism and his advocacy of syllogistic reasoning, see Dorothea Krook, *John Sergeant and his Circle: A Study of Three Seventeenth-Century English Aristotelians* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); Beverly C. Southgate, “Beating Down Scepticism: The Solid Philosophy of John Sergeant, 1623–1707,” in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. M.A. Stewart (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 281–315; Levitin, “Reconsidering Sergeant's Attacks,” 457–77; Han Thomas Adriaenssen, *Representation and Scepticism from Aquinas to Descartes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 198–220; and Patrick J. Connolly, “Locke and Sergeant on Syllogistic Reasoning,” in *The Lockean Mind*, eds. Jessica Gordon-Roth and Shelley Weinberg (New York: Routledge, 2021), 191–202.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Sergeant suggests that had Locke concentrated on the nature of *things* and not his own ideas, he would not have concluded that “none knows what a *Thing* or *Substance* is” (SP, Epistle 7).

<sup>10</sup> Readers of Reid will here recognize similarities with his own “common sense” philosophy.

<sup>11</sup> See Krook, *Sergeant*; Southgate, “Beating Down”; and Adriaenssen, *Representation*.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lisa Shapiro, “Revisiting the Early Modern Philosophical Canon,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* (2016): 366.

airtime in Early Modern scholarship.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, although it is something of an overstatement, not a great deal has changed since Norman Bradish claimed, in 1929, that “there are few names in the history of philosophy as little known as that of John Sergeant.”<sup>14</sup>

Having said that, Sergeant’s name *does* appear quite frequently in discussions about the sources of Berkeley’s thought. Indeed, the idea that there is a causal connection between Berkeley and Sergeant’s views has several advocates. Most commentators who focus on this connection subscribe to the line of thought that Sergeant’s writing influenced Berkeley to introduce the term “notion” in the revised 1734 edition of the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. In these revised editions, Berkeley uses “notion” to refer to the kind of knowledge we have of spirits and relations (PHK 89).<sup>15</sup> To say that we have notions of spirits or relations, Berkeley explains, is to say that we “know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK 27, 140).<sup>16</sup> While Berkeley also uses the term “notion” in earlier editions of the texts, he does so much less frequently and in those cases the term seems to be roughly synonymous with “idea.”<sup>17</sup> A. A. Luce, Daniel Flage, and Kenneth Pearce are all proponents of the view that Berkeley inherited his account of “notions” from Sergeant.<sup>18</sup> Pearce even goes so far as to suggest that Sergeant’s influence on Berkeley was “likely quite significant.”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For example, despite their non-canonical status, Malebranche, Gassendi, Newton, and Reid have dedicated *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* entries. Sergeant only appears in the SEP twice, in articles on real essences and personal identity in Locke’s philosophy.

<sup>14</sup> Norman C. Bradish, “John Sergeant: A Forgotten Critic of Descartes and Locke,” *The Monist* 39 (1929): 571.

<sup>15</sup> References to Berkeley’s *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [PHK section] and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* [DHP page] are to *The Works of George Berkeley* [W], ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–57), vol. 2. References to Berkeley’s *Notebooks* (erroneously called the *Philosophical Commentaries*) [NB entry] are to George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works* [PW page], ed. Michael R. Ayers (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> For in-depth discussion of Berkeley’s theory of notions, see Désirée Park, *Complementary Notions: A Critical Study of Berkeley’s Theory of Concepts* (The Hague: Springer, 1972); Flage, *Berkeley’s Doctrine*; Robert Merrihew Adams, “Berkeley’s ‘Notion’ of Spiritual Substance,” in *George Berkeley: Critical Assessments*, vol. 3, ed. Walter E. Creery (London: Routledge, 1991), 424–44; and Melissa Frankel, “Something–We–Know–Not–What, Something–We–Know–Not–Why: Berkeley, Meaning and Minds,” *Philosophia* 37 (2009): 384–87, 396, 401–402.

<sup>17</sup> For example, he writes (in the 1710 edition): “it is evident there can be no idea *or notion* of a spirit” (PHK 138, my emphasis). The term “notion” was omitted from this section in the 1734 edition. As an anonymous reviewer pointed out to me, Berkeley’s early use of the term “notion” may have been influenced by Locke; specifically, his comment in the *Essay* that the term “idea” is used “to express whatever is meant by Phantasm, *Notion*, Species, or whatever it is, which the Mind can be employ’d about in thinking” (*Essay* 1.1.8, my emphasis).

<sup>18</sup> See Luce, *Berkeley*, 104; Flage, *Berkeley’s Doctrine*; 174; Pearce, “Berkeley’s Lockean Epistemology,” 425; and Pearce, *Language*, 126. Stephen H. Daniel [*George Berkeley and Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 99] suggests that Berkeley “retrieves” Sergeant’s concept of notions. However, Daniel does not say enough to make it clear whether he is identifying a causal or a conceptual connection.

<sup>19</sup> See Pearce, “Berkeley’s Lockean Epistemology,” 425.

However, there is another reason to compare Berkeley and Sergeant. On this line of interpretation, the important connection between Berkeley and Sergeant is not a *causal* one, but a *conceptual* one (that is, a connection that does not depend on Berkeley's actually having read Sergeant). The important *conceptual* connection between the two thinkers is that they both develop criticisms of Locke's epistemology that can appropriately be described as "anti-representationalist." To date, only one commentator has suggested that *this* is the most important reason to examine the Berkeley–Sergeant connection. G. A. Johnston, writing in 1923, notes that the similarities between Berkeley and Sergeant's argument are striking, that at times it seems as though Sergeant "almost stumbles upon" Berkeley's own idealist views, and that their mutual concerns "bear a remarkable testimony to the existence at the time of an atmosphere of opposition to Locke."<sup>20</sup> In the remainder of this section, I show that those commentators who, unlike Johnston, focusing on the theory of "notions" are misguided since the evidence for there being a causal connection is weaker than is usually acknowledged.

The case for thinking there is a causal connection between Sergeant and Berkeley rests upon a crucial piece of evidence; an entry in Berkeley's *Notebooks* in where he writes: "I say not with J.S. that we see solids I reject his Solid Philosophy, Solidity being only perceived by touch" (NB 840). This indicates that Berkeley was aware of Sergeant and at least one of his philosophical texts since Sergeant published under the initials "J.S." and "Solid Philosophy" was the title of his 1697 treatise. The suggestion, then, has been that this reference provides *prima facie* evidence that Sergeant was read by Berkeley.

Yet, the actual *content* of this notebook entry makes it far less obvious that Berkeley engaged with Sergeant in any depth. For Berkeley seems to be using Sergeant's reference to "Solid Philosophy" as a foil for his own views concerning the heterogeneity of the objects of vision and touch that would later appear in the *New Theory of Vision* (1709). If one had never read Sergeant, it would be reasonable to take from this remark that Sergeant's "Solid Philosophy" refers to the view that we can perceive solidity (a sensible quality) by means of another of the five senses (e.g., sight). But this is not what Sergeant means *at all*. When Sergeant talks of "Solid Philosophy," he means philosophy grounded upon certainly known (often self-evident) first principles (SP, Epistle 2). He is *not* referring to solidity construed as a sensible quality of things in the world around us. In other words, the "solid" in "Solid Philosophy" is a metaphor; he is not talking literally.

With this background knowledge in mind, Berkeley's remark in NB 840 starts to look quite odd. It seems uncharitable to suggest that Berkeley is responding to the *title* of Sergeant's work alone—but then again Berkeley's *Notebooks* were never intended to be published. He composed them early in his career and they do not constitute a polished philosophical treatise. In any case, the content of this notebook entry clearly dampens the suggestion that Berkeley was significantly influenced by Sergeant. Consequently, it cannot be taken as a decisive indicator of whether Berkeley actually read Sergeant. The Berkeley–Sergeant connection, construed as one of causal influence, thus remains ambiguous.

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<sup>20</sup> Johnston, *Development*, 66–67.



The case for a causal connection is further weakened when we consider what Berkeley and Sergeant actually *mean* by the term “notion.” To have a notion of something, for Sergeant, is for that thing to come to exist in the mind. Berkeley, however, only uses the term when referring things (like spirits and relations) of which we cannot possibly have ideas. What’s more, Sergeant’s use of the term “notion” is likely to have been influenced by his engagement with the epistemology of “common notions” adopted by the followers of Thomas White (a.k.a. “Blacklo”).<sup>21</sup> There is no evidence that Berkeley was drawing on talk of “common notions” in his own use of the term.

In fact, there is quite clear evidence that the term “notion” is not unique—or even original—to Sergeant (or, indeed, the Blackloists). As Johnston notes, another contemporary of Sergeant, Richard Burthogge, also uses the term “notion” in his *Essay upon Reason and the Nature of Spirits* in 1696.<sup>22</sup> And even prior to Burthogge, Margaret Cavendish uses the term “notion” to describe the kind of concepts (like infinity or nothingness) that we cannot clearly picture in the mind.<sup>23</sup> All of which shows that, prior to Berkeley, “notion” was *not* a term found peculiarly in Sergeant’s writings. As it turns out, then, the “evidence” that Berkeley read Sergeant, or *must* have inherited his use of the term “notion” from him, is not very compelling at all.

I stated in my introduction that there are two routes one might take when exploring the relationship between Berkeley and Sergeant. One of those routes, the one which considers the possibility of causal influence, is well-trodden. But, as I have emphasized, the evidence for any *causal* connection is tenuous at best. The other route, taken by Johnston,<sup>24</sup> compares Berkeley and Sergeant because of the insights this comparison can provide us concerning “an atmosphere of opposition to Locke” at the turn of the eighteenth-century. In the remainder of this essay, I set out on the same route that Johnston embarked on nearly a century ago—one that leads to a *conceptual* connection between Berkeley and Sergeant.

## 2. Sergeant’s Anti-Representationalism

### 2.1 *The problem with ideas*

Like Berkeley,<sup>25</sup> Sergeant maintains that God has provided us with the means of gaining true knowledge of the world around us. He explains that “Mankind was put into a plain

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<sup>21</sup> See Krook, *Sergeant*; and Andreas Blank, “Composite substance, common notions, and Kenelm Digby’s theory of animal generation,” *Science in Context* 20 (2007): 15–18.

<sup>22</sup> See Johnston, *Development*, 166, ft. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Cavendish, *Philosophical and Physical Opinions* (London: William Wilson, 1663), 89.

<sup>24</sup> More recently, Winkler (*Berkeley*, 245–46) notes that Sergeant and Berkeley both argue that representationalism leads to skepticism, but he doubts that the connection between representationalism and skepticism is one of causal influence (246, ft. 18).

<sup>25</sup> In the Introduction to the *Principles* (sec. 3), Berkeley writes: “We should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach.”

Road-way of gaining *Clear Intellectual Light*, by the Common Providence of our Good Creator” (SP, Epistle 2). It is for this reason that Sergeant argues we should only accept an epistemology that provides us with *solid* philosophy: because only a philosophy immune to skepticism is consistent with God’s benevolence.<sup>26</sup> A solid philosophy, for Sergeant, is one in which we have direct knowledge of the very “Natures of Things” in the world. For example, Sergeant claims that, unlike Modern ideists, “those who follow’d *Aristotle’s* Principles (as the great *Aquinas* constantly endeavored) did generally discourse even in *such* Subjects . . . very *solidly*” (SP, Epistle, 3).

What was it about Aristotle and Aquinas’ views that made them “solid”? According to Sergeant, it was their commitment to an epistemology of *forms*. To gain genuine knowledge of something, according to the Aristotelian scholastic tradition that Aquinas was a part of, is for the form of that object to come to exist in the mind. As we will find, Sergeant also maintains that knowledge involves the form of an object coming to exist in the mind (as what he calls a “notion”). But this is *not* possible if one accepts ideism. This is because ideism entails that the mere *ideas* of things, rather than their true natures or forms, come to exist in the mind. One of Sergeant’s primary aims is to show if ideists are right, then human knowledge is not solid but built upon “ ‘*Fantastick Resemblances*’, ‘*Imaginary and Visionary Ideas*’, or ‘*unsolid Aiery Bubbles*’ ” (SP, Epistle 6). In fact, he argues, knowledge built on the ideas of things and not the things themselves is no more reliable than “a Looking-glass” or “a Dream . . . composed of Fancies pretty well Coherent with one another” (SP, 49). In other words, there’s no clear indication that such “knowledge” reaches out into the world and informs us about anything beyond itself.<sup>27</sup>

Sergeant claims that knowledge gained via an idea is akin to knowledge gained by looking at a picture. For example, he explains that without prior knowledge of what trees are really like, *a painting of a tree* would merely appear to be “a Cloth, Board, or Paper, this figured and colour’d.” In other words, a painting of a tree, in and of itself, cannot provide knowledge of the *nature* of trees. This is because, when we look at a painting of a tree, it is the nature of the *painting* (and not an actual tree) that we are acquainted with. Likewise, he argues, a painting of a tree cannot (alone) provide knowledge of the *existence* of that tree, for “it might be some Fancy of the Painter, for ought I know by the Picture.” Sergeant’s point is that familiarity with a picture does not provide any certain knowledge that it actually represents something. Likewise, perceiving an idea is not enough, in and of itself, to provide us with certain knowledge that the idea accurately represents what we take it to represent. In fact, we have no good reason to believe it *represents* at all. As such, he thinks, if we directly perceive *only* ideas, we have no basis on which to assume that ideas really are representations of things in the world.

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<sup>26</sup> For Sergeant, a solid philosophy must leave *no room for skepticism at all*. This is a very strong position; one which, we might think, is only plausible when backed up by appeals to the nature of God or perhaps (in the style of G. E. Moore) dogmatic appeals to common sense.

<sup>27</sup> It is worth noting that Sergeant (like Berkeley) is working on the “internalist” assumption that unless we *know* that a particular relation holds between an idea and its object (i.e., that the idea represents its object), we cannot be said to have gained knowledge of that object via its idea. For a critical discussion of this kind of internalist view in an Early Modern context, see John Greco, “Modern Ontology and the Problems of Epistemology,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 32 (1995): 241–51.

It is worth emphasizing, at this point, the important role that the *resemblance* relation between an idea and its object plays in Sergeant's argument.<sup>28</sup> This "resemblance thesis" dictates that the mechanism by which an idea represents its object is resemblance. In other words, to accept the resemblance thesis is to accept that underlying any representation relation is a resemblance relation. Sergeant assumes that, according to his opponents, it is this kind of representation mechanism that is supposed to be at work when we talk about "ideas." This encourages him to draw an analogy between ideas and paintings since, he thinks, in both cases, if they represent something, then they do so by virtue of *resembling* their object.

Sergeant's argument rests on the claim that to know that two things resemble one another, we must *already* be familiar with both. As he puts it, we simply cannot know, with any certainty, that a "Prototype" and its apparent "Likeness" are genuinely alike, "unless they be both of them in our Comparing Power" (SP, 32). To know with certainty that our ideas resemble what *we take them to resemble*, Sergeant argues, both "the *Thing it self*, as well as the *Idea*" would need to be subject to our mind's comparing power. But, as he points out, this is "directly contrary to their [i.e., ideists'] Principles" (SP, 32), since ideism entails that we only have ideas (and not things) in the mind. On this basis, he argues:

We cannot possibly know at all the Things themselves by the Ideas, *unless we know certainly those Ideas are Right Resemblances of them*. But we can never know (by the Principles of the Ideists) that their Ideas are Right Resemblances of the Things; therefore we cannot possibly know at all the Things by their Ideas (SP, 31–32, my emphasis)

Once again, Sergeant employs an analogy involving paintings to illustrate his point:

I [may]<sup>29</sup> walk in a Gallery, and see a Hundred Pictures in it of Men, and many other Things in Nature; and yet not know one jot the better, any one of the Things represented, unless I had known them formerly . . . [although] I may *remember* them *again*, indeed, if I had known them *before* (SP, 340).

I might be able to judge of a portrait whether it is an accurate representation of a friend (by considering whether it is an accurate likeness), but it would be impossible for me to do so in relation to an individual with whom I was entirely unfamiliar (*I* cannot determine whether a statue accurately represents Caesar, for example, since I have never encountered him). If ideism is right, Sergeant argues, our knowledge of things in the world would be closer to the latter case, because ideism dictates that the *very first* knowledge we receive of a thing is via an idea which represents it (SP, 340); there's no prior acquaintance with the thing itself for us to draw on. The problem with ideism, for Sergeant, is that we already need to be acquainted with a thing's nature to know that it has genuinely been represented (say, in a portrait), while ideism entails that *we only ever access* representations. Consequently, were ideists right, our knowledge of the external

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<sup>28</sup> See Richard Glauser, "John Sergeant's Argument Against Descartes and the Way of Ideas," *The Monist* 71 (1988), 586; and Adriaenssen, *Representation*, 205.

<sup>29</sup> The text itself (mistakenly, I take it) reads "way."

world would be like that of a person walking around a gallery, unable to know with certainty whether any of the people and places depicted do or do not exist. And even if they did exist, Sergeant maintains, we could never know if they were accurately represented. We would be forever trapped behind what he calls “the Curtain of the Fancy” (SP, 20).<sup>30</sup>

It is also worth bearing in mind that *Solid Philosophy* was, first and foremost, a criticism of Locke’s *Essay*. Indeed, in questioning whether ideas are “Right Resemblances” of their objects, Sergeant is drawing on Locke’s own discussion of “real knowledge.” Locke explains that “where-ever we are sure those *Ideas* agree with the reality of Things, there is certain real Knowledge.”<sup>31</sup> Sergeant’s claim, in response, is that ideism thus entails we can never have any real knowledge of anything all. This is because, according to Sergeant, the *only* way to confirm that ideas “agree with the reality of Things” would be to compare an idea and its object in order to discern whether they are “Right Resemblances”; something that is impossible.

Thus, the efficacy of Sergeant’s critique depends on the plausibility of reading the resemblance thesis into Locke’s own epistemology (and those of other representationalists). This is something that Locke himself picked up on when he encountered Sergeant’s arguments. In his own copy of *Solid Philosophy*, Locke made several marginal notes where he denies having accepted the resemblance thesis. For example, Locke notes: “he [Sergeant] will have Mr Locke to mean *resemblances* by *Ideas* though Mr L says expresley he does not.”<sup>32</sup> Here, Locke seems to seem to be picking up on his claim in the *Essay* that only ideas of primary qualities resemble their objects while ideas of secondary qualities do not (ECHU II.8.15). Locke, it seems, realized that the resemblance thesis was crucial to the kind of objection raised by Sergeant.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> In doing so, Sergeant pre-emptly more recent discussions about whether thinkers like Locke are committed to a “veil of ideas” or “veil of perception.” See, for example, Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 69; and Lex Newman, “Locke on Sensitive Knowledge and the Veil of Perception—Four Misconceptions,” *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 85 (2004): 273–300.

<sup>31</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) [ECHU], ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), IV.4.18.

<sup>32</sup> SP [Locke’s copy], 137; see also 23 and 37. I use the original spelling in citations from Locke’s marginal notes.

<sup>33</sup> As Locke’s comments suggest, an ideist might simply contest Sergeant’s characterization of ideas as resemblances. In Sergeant’s defense, he does explicitly claim that his reasoning applies to all relations whatsoever, and not just resemblance relations. He writes: “No Relation can be known without Knowing both the Correlates: Therefore no Idea, which being a Resemblance of the Thing must necessarily be related to it, can be known without knowing also the Thing to which ’tis related as that which is resembled by it” (SP, 32). Whatever the mechanism of representation between idea and thing turns out to be, the two, Sergeant argues, must be related in one way or another. And we cannot know any relation, he thinks, without knowing both the *relata*.

## 2.2 Sergeant's notions

For Sergeant, Locke's epistemology is not "solid" because it leads to skepticism. In turn, this means that, along with other "ideist" theories, it is inconsistent with the benevolence of God and ought to be rejected. Instead, Sergeant argues:

Things themselves, and not Ideas, Resemblances, or Fancies, (which can never make us know the Things,) are and must be the only Firm Foundation of Truth, and of our Knowledge of all Truths whatsoever. (SP, Preface 13)

A plausible epistemology, Sergeant maintains, must explain how we gain knowledge of "Things" and not just ideas. He claims that his theory of notions does just that.

According to Sergeant's theory of notions, what comes to exist in the mind, in an instance of genuine knowledge acquisition, is not an idea—a mere resemblance of an object—but something that is *identical* to that object: what Sergeant calls a *notion*. Note, then, that the relation of *identity* is at work here—rather than the relation of resemblance which, Sergeant assumes, is what the representationalist's epistemology relies on. A notion, Sergeant explains, is "the very thing it self existing in my understanding" (SP, 27), and "that Object in my mind which informs my Understanding Power, and about which that Power is Employed" (SP, 26; see also *Method*, 100–101). Since notions just are things themselves which have come to exist in the mind, they *can* provide us with genuine knowledge of things and, in turn, are an appropriate basis on which to build solid philosophy. As he puts it, they are the very "*Seeds*" (SP, Epistle 2) or "*Embryo's of Knowledge*" (*Method*, 4). When we have a notion in the mind, we can be sure that it reaches out into the external world it purports to inform us about because it is *identical* with its object.<sup>34</sup>

Ideas, according to Sergeant, have "*nothing at all of the Thing*" in them since they exist in the mind alone and are mere resemblances of those things (SP, Epistle 6). Therefore, acquaintance with an *idea* is not the same as acquaintance with a genuine thing in the world. However, when the mind has a *notion* of a thing, that thing is "within her [i.e., the mind] . . . as the things in Nature *are*" (SP, 42). For instance, Sergeant explains that to have a notion of a church bell is to "have the Bell existent in the Steeple *within her* [i.e., the mind], but also . . . the Bell in the Steeple is *without her*" (SP, 43). To have an *idea* of the church bell, on the other hand, is merely to have a *resemblance* of it—and not *it*—in the mind. Sergeant's claim is that having a *notion* of a thing, unlike having a mere *idea* of a thing in the mind, constitutes genuine knowledge. In Locke's terms, Sergeant thinks we can be sure that we have "real knowledge," since there's no room for doubt that notions "agree with the reality of Things" (ECHU IV.4.18). Again, it is important to note that, for Sergeant, *identity* relations can do what resemblance relations cannot—that is, ensure that we have genuine knowledge of things in the world.

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<sup>34</sup> Note that Sergeant must have numerical, rather than qualitative identity in mind here. For Sergeant, a resemblance relation (even a very strong one) simply isn't enough to guarantee knowledge; only an identity relation will suffice.

Sergeant's view is that genuine knowledge involves having notions of things in the mind which, he explains, is one and the same with having *that very thing itself* existing in the mind. This is a striking claim to say the least, and we might justifiably ask how Sergeant can plausibly maintain that something which exists in the mind is identical to something which exists out there in the world. Sergeant's theory comes equipped with an answer. He explains:

I deny that either its Existing, or Manner of Existing do enter into the Notion . . . but that the Notion is the Thing, precisely according to what is Common to it both in the Understanding, and out of it, abstractedly from both those Manners of Existing. (SP, 38)

Sergeant's answer is that a notion of a thing—that which comes to be known—is abstracted from *the way* in which it exists (see *Method*, 3).<sup>35</sup> Sergeant claims that God is the only being for whom existence is essential and that no created being contains its manner of existing in its nature, for it cannot be said of any created being that it exists *necessarily*.<sup>36</sup> Thus, an exhaustive description of the nature of a created being would not include its existing either *in* or *externally to* the mind. This allows Sergeant to consistently maintain that an object, once known, exists both within *and* externally to the mind. It follows that what we come to know are abstract entities—that is, they are abstracted from their manner of existence. Having a notion of a tree means conceiving of the tree and all that is included in its nature, but that does not include any particular *way* that the tree exists.

Two further points are worth raising at this stage. First, while Sergeant's claim that knowledge involves having the thing known come to exist in the mind may sound surprising to the contemporary reader,<sup>37</sup> it is possible to situate this claim within the Aristotelian framework Sergeant saw himself as working in. For, rather than replacing a flawed epistemology with a novel one, Sergeant's aim is to revive Aristotelian epistemology as a buttress to skepticism. As I previously noted, Sergeant claims that unlike Modern ideists, Aristotle and Aquinas were able to develop *solid* philosophies which left no room for skepticism (SP, Epistle, 3). This is because both Aristotle and Aquinas developed epistemologies in which knowledge involves the *form* of an object coming to exist in the mind. While Sergeant uses his own term "notion," his claim that

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<sup>35</sup> See also Yolton, "Locke's Replies," 548.

<sup>36</sup> This raises a question about human knowledge of God: can we have a notion of God? If so, does that mean that God (for whom his manner of existing *is* part of his nature) comes to exist in the mind? Locke raises this issue in a marginal note, writing: "It should have been inferred according to wt JS says in this *by wch the soul becomes god*" (SP [Locke's copy], 40). I think this question is worth addressing, but it is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>37</sup> In early critical responses to Sergeant's writing, this claim was subjected to heavy ridicule. For example, Sergeant's theory of notions was mocked in the satirical *A Dialogue Between Mr. Merriman and Dr. Chymist: concerning Sergents paradoxes, in his new method to science, and his solid philosophy*, published under the initials "T.M." in 1698 (London). There, Mr. Merriman, who takes Sergeant's theory of notions to be absurd, suggests that one could steal "a Gold Watch, a Diamond Ring, a Rope of Pearl, a Purse of Gold" just by having a notion of them, since a notion just is the thing itself existing in the mind (13).

the “Manner of existing” (SP, 38) is not part of that notion is consistent with Aristotelian views where forms come to exist in the mind.

In the next section, it will become clear that Berkeley also maintains that a pre-requisite for genuine knowledge is that the thing known comes to exist in the mind. For Berkeley, that is, (as for Sergeant) an *identity* relation between an object in the mind and an object in the world is the only way to avoid skepticism.

### 3. Berkeley’s Anti-Representationalism

#### 3.1 Are ideas “true representations”?

In both the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley claims that skepticism arises because of a philosophical mistrust of the senses whereby, “we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived” (DHP 167). This is particularly clear in *Principles* 87, where he claims that if ideas are “looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then we are all involved in scepticism.” Berkeley thus establishes a link between the view that ideas are “images” of mind-independent “archetypes” and skepticism.<sup>38</sup>

Like Sergeant, Berkeley uses an analogy involving paintings to demonstrate that if his opponents are right then we cannot be certain that our ideas accurately represent their objects. In the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley’s spokesperson Philonous points out that there is a difference between (i) seeing a painting of Caesar *as a representation* of Caesar and (ii) simply seeing it as “some colours and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole” (DHP 203–204). Philonous goes on to explain that the difference lies in the fact that “reason and memory” pertaining to prior knowledge of Caesar are required in order to know that the painting is indeed *of Caesar*. Note the similarity with Sergeant’s example of a painting of a tree. Both Berkeley and Sergeant point out that without some prior knowledge, a painting is simply a collection of “colours” and “figures.” Both also maintain that it is prior knowledge, or “reason and memory,” that makes for the difference between a *presentation* of colors and figures and a *re-presentation* of a person, a tree, or some other object.

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<sup>38</sup> It remains a live issue whether Berkeley himself is committed to some form of representationalism concerning human knowledge of divine ideas. Those who argue that Berkeley is committed to this sort of Malebranchean representationalism do so on the basis of Philonous’ acknowledgement of “a twofold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archeptypal or eternal” in the *Three Dialogues* (DHP 254) and a remark in Berkeley’s correspondence with Samuel Johnson where he writes: “I have no objection against calling the ideas in the mind of God archetypes of ours” [*The Correspondence of George Berkeley*, ed. Marc A. Hight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 318]. For recent commentary on this issue, see Melissa Frankel, “Berkeley on the ‘Twofold State of Things’,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 80 (2016): 43–60; or Keota Fields, “Berkeley’s Semiotic Idealism,” in *Berkeley’s Three Dialogues: New Essays*, ed. Stefan Storrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 61–83. I do not weigh in on this issue here because it does not have direct bearing on the aims of this paper, but it should be noted that the citations above are outlier cases. For the most part, Berkeley explicitly rejects the representationalist model of knowledge of things in the world.

Like Sergeant, Berkeley argues that the possibility of gaining genuine knowledge of things in the world via ideas depends entirely on those ideas being true or accurate representations;<sup>39</sup> what Sergeant calls “Right Resemblances” (SP, 31–32). Similarly, Berkeley’s argument also draws on Locke’s talk of “real knowledge”:

It is your opinion, the ideas we perceive by our senses are not real things but images or copies of them. *Our knowledge therefore is no farther real, than as our ideas are the true representations of those originals.* But as these supposed originals are in themselves unknown, it is impossible to show how far our ideas resemble them, or whether they resemble them at all. We cannot therefore be sure we have any *real knowledge*. (DHP 246, my emphasis)

Again, like Sergeant, Berkeley takes issue with Locke’s talk of “real knowledge” as the kind of knowledge that results from an assurance that ideas “agree with the reality of things” (ECHU, IV.4.18). As Berkeley sees it, *no knowledge* could be “real knowledge,” if Locke is right, because in order to discern whether an idea agrees with the reality of its object, we would need to determine whether that idea is a “true representation.” But since, Berkeley thinks, ideas are supposed to be “images or copies” of things (DHP 246), the relevant relation would need to be one of resemblance. As such, as long we accept the representationalists’ epistemology, we are stuck with the same problem that Sergeant raised: trying to identify a resemblance relation between an idea and its object. The problem is that according to Locke (and other ideists), we can never be acquainted with an external object *except* via the idea that purportedly represents it. Thus, Berkeley maintains, if we accept Locke’s view “we are thrown into the most hopeless and abandoned scepticism” (DHP 246).

It is worth explicitly noting that Berkeley also assumes that if his opponents are right, then the mechanism by which ideas represent their objects is *resemblance*. Berkeley’s argument thus also depends on the resemblance thesis.<sup>40</sup> This is most evident in Berkeley’s argument against representationalism from what is known as the “likeness principle.” On the assumption that ideas represent by means of resembling their objects, Berkeley argues that representationalism should be rejected, since “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (PHK 8).<sup>41</sup> Berkeley, like Sergeant, also places significant emphasis on the role of *comparison*. In entry 378 of his *Notebooks*,<sup>42</sup> Berkeley argues from the fact

<sup>39</sup> Note that Berkeley shares Sergeant’s “internalism” about knowledge via representations.

<sup>40</sup> For discussion of *why* Berkeley might have accepted the resemblance thesis, see Jonathan Hill, “Berkeley’s Missing Argument: The Sceptical Attack on Intentionality,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (2011): 47–77; and Manuel Fasko and Peter West, “The Irish Context of Berkeley’s ‘Resemblance Thesis’,” *Royal Society Supplements* 88 (2020): 7–31.

<sup>41</sup> I discuss the likeness principle in greater depth in the next section.

<sup>42</sup> For discussion of NB 378, with a particular emphasis on its relation to Berkeley’s “likeness principle,” see Winkler, *Berkeley*, 145–47; Todd Ryan, “A New Account of Berkeley’s Likeness Principle,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 562–63; and Frankel, “Something–We–Know–Not–What,” 411–413. It is likely that both Berkeley and Sergeant are drawing on Locke’s own discussion of comparison in the *Essay*. There, Locke writes: “The Understanding, in the consideration of any thing, is not confined to that precise Object: It can carry any Idea, as it were, beyond it self, or, at least, look beyond it, to see how it stands in conformity to any other” (ECHU II.25.1).



that (i) “[t]he mind can compare nothing but its’ own ideas” and (ii) “saying that two things are alike requires comparing them” to the conclusion that (iii) “[t]herefore, the only things I can say are alike are ideas.” Berkeley’s point is that to *assert* that two things are alike we need to be able to *verify* that they are—by carrying out a comparison between the two. But, again, like Sergeant, Berkeley points out that the principles of representationalism render this impossible since the only things we can compare (on this view) are our ideas.

### 3.2 Collapsing the thing–idea distinction

I turn now to Berkeley’s own epistemology. While Sergeant’s aim is to replace the way of ideas entirely with his theory of notions, Berkeley’s aim is to collapse the thing–idea distinction, upheld by representationalists, and thereby *turn ideas into things* (DHP 244). Note, then, that both Sergeant and Berkeley, albeit in different ways, render the objects of knowledge *identical* to things in the world. Thus, while both Berkeley and Sergeant’s criticisms of representationalism depend upon claims about knowledge via *resemblance*, their own “positive” views emphasize that only a relation of *identity* (between an object in the mind and an object in the world) will suffice to avoid skepticism.

However, their starting points *differ* when it comes to the philosophical traditions they take themselves to be working in. For Sergeant, as we saw, the objects of knowledge are Aristotelian forms or natures. He is thus placing himself in a tradition where a thing known has two instantiations: once in the mind of the knower, once externally to the mind.<sup>43</sup> However, Berkeley’s starting point is closer to that of his contemporaries (like Locke). For, unlike Sergeant, he does accept one of the tenets of “ideism”; namely, the claim that the only things we have immediate knowledge of are ideas (DHP 262).

From this starting point, Berkeley diverges from his contemporaries quite considerably. Contrary to the representationalist’s account, for Berkeley, to gain immediate knowledge of an idea is *one and the same* with gaining immediate knowledge of the thing itself. Ideas are not *mere* appearances (or “resemblance”) of things, for Berkeley, but the very things themselves. Thus, the difference between Berkeley and his opponents is that while ideists take ideas to be *distinct* from things in the world, Berkeley takes things and ideas to be *identical*. This pushes Berkeley’s view much closer to Sergeant’s, where to *know* something is for *it* to come to exist in the mind. There is no question, for Berkeley, of *how* we know that what exists in the mind accurately represents what exists in the world. This is because a thing’s existence is *constituted* by its being perceived. As Berkeley famously puts it, a thing in the world’s *esse* just is its *percipi* (PHK 3).

Thus, there are some important differences in how Berkeley and Sergeant go about providing a philosophy immune to the skepticism inherent in the way of ideas.<sup>44</sup> But it

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<sup>43</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for this very helpful presentation of the differences between Berkeley and Sergeant’s solutions to the skeptical problem.

<sup>44</sup> Johnston’s discussion of Berkeley and Sergeant includes a footnote outlining two further differences (*Development*, 166, ft. 1). First, Sergeant thinks of ideas as mere copies of things and “has nothing corresponding to Berkeley’s idea–thing.” Second, for Berkeley, notional knowledge applies

ought to be clear by now that both are driven by a commitment to the claim that it is *only* if it can be explained how things in the world, when known, come to exist in the mind, that we can avoid skepticism. That is, both argue that there must be an *identity* relation between what exists in the mind and what exists in the world for us to have genuine knowledge.

In the final section, my aim is to draw out the similarities between Berkeley and Sergeant's anti-representationalism even further. I do so by demonstrating that both thinkers present representationalists with a dilemma. On one side of the dilemma is the view that things known come exist in the mind, while on the other side is a skeptical position that follows from thinking of ideas as mere *resemblances* of things in the world. By zooming in on these dilemmas with which Berkeley and Sergeant's opponents are confronted, the similarities between both their "negative" case against representationalism and the "positive" case for their own views should become even clearer.

#### 4. Two Dilemmas

To anyone familiar with Berkeley's argument from the likeness principle, one passage in Sergeant's *Solid Philosophy* will strike a very familiar tune. Sergeant begins the passage by re-affirming his commitment to "solid philosophy" before presenting ideists with the choice between his own theory of notions or skepticism:

Philosophy is the Knowledge of Things; But if I have nothing but the Ideas of Things in my mind, I can have Knowledge of Nothing but those Ideas. Wherefore, either those Ideas are the Things themselves, as I put Notions to be, and then I have gain'd my Point; or else they are not the Things, and we do not know the Things at all; and so adieu to the Knowledge of Things, or Philosophy. (SP, 30)

The aim of this passage is to demonstrate that as long as we accept the principles of ideism, we set ourselves on a direct path to skepticism. But Sergeant offers us another route: by accepting that things come to exist in the mind as notions, we can avoid skepticism. Thus, the first horn of the dilemma results in Sergeant's own position where "*the very thing it self... [exists] in my understanding*" (SP, 27). If his opponents choose to avoid skepticism, by accepting this horn, then, as Sergeant puts it, "I have gain'd my Point." On the other hand, rejecting Sergeant's own view comes at the cost of bidding "adieu" to philosophy entirely.

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only in special cases (spirits and relations), whereas for Sergeant to know *anything* is to have a notion of it. On the first point, I think Johnston is right to say that Sergeant construes ideas as mere copies, but I'm not convinced he has *nothing* corresponding to Berkeley's idea-things. As I have emphasized in this section, Berkeley's aim in collapsing the thing-idea distinction is to provide an account of how things known come to exist in mind. Thus, Berkeley's thing-ideas do play the a very similar role as Sergeant's notions which are *identical* to the things known. On the second point, I think Johnston is right and, as I noted in section one, this further dampens the case for thinking Berkeley got his theory of notions from Sergeant.

Berkeley is doing something very similar in *Principles* 8. The argument put forward in this passage, which relies on Berkeley's likeness principle, is much-discussed.<sup>45</sup> The likeness principle is intended to undermine a version of representationalism where, even though ideas exist only in the mind, they represent to us, *by means of resemblance*, the qualities of mind-independent objects. Berkeley characterizes representationalism as the view that

though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking substance. (PHK 8)

After considering this objection, Berkeley puts forward the likeness principle and points out that it is impossible to “conceive a likeness except only between our ideas” (PHK 8), before pressing his opponents with a question:

I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures of representations, be themselves perceivable or no?

Of course, Berkeley thinks this question only has two possible answers:

If they are, then they are ideas, and we have gained our point; but if you say that they are not, I appeal to any one whether it be sense to assert a colour is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest. (PHK 8)

The implications of Berkeley's question are clear: one can either answer “yes” and accept that the purported external things are perceivable. Choose this option, Berkeley claims, and one can avoid the difficulties entailed by a “no” answer but must also accept that “we [Berkeley, that is] have gained our point,” for any perceivable thing *is* an idea (i.e., they would share an identity relation). Note the clear verbal parallel here with Sergeant's claim that “I have gain'd my Point” (SP, 30). The alternative is for his opponents to answer “no” to the question which, Berkeley stresses, commits them to a highly implausible position: one in which colors, which are inherently *visual* qualities, resemble the qualities of invisible objects, and so on. But of course, Berkeley does not think his opponents can accept this position anyway because it undermines the likeness principle. Ideas cannot, in fact, represent unperceivable qualities by means of resemblance. Consequently, the representationalist is left without an explanation of how we get beyond

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<sup>45</sup> There is considerable discussion amongst commentators as to how and if Berkeley provides an argument *in favor of* the likeness principle. For example, see Phillip D. Cummins, “Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966): 63–69; Winkler, *Berkeley*, 141–48; Ryan, “New Account,” 562–64, 577–80; Frankel, “Something–We–Know–Not–What,” 388–91, 399–400; Georges Dicker, *Berkeley's Idealism: A Critical Examination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 154–63; Peter West, “Why Can An Idea Be Like Nothing But Another Idea? A Conceptual Interpretation of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7 (2021): 530–48; and Dávid Bartha, “Resemblance, Representation and Scepticism: The Metaphysical Role of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 4 #1 (2022): 1–18. For my current purposes, I am simply interested in the structure of Berkeley's reasoning *from* the likeness principle.

our ideas and gain knowledge of things in the world. In other words, they are, by Berkeley's lights, reduced to skepticism.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

In the work of Berkeley and Sergeant, representationalists are confronted with a dilemma: either accept that things known must exist in the mind or fall into skepticism. That is, accept that there must be an identity relation between what exists in the mind and what comes to be known in the world, or rely on a relation of resemblance between ideas and objects that can never be adequately established. Both thinkers' anti-representationalist arguments are intended to establish the second horn of the dilemma and thus that representationalism leads to skepticism. This leaves only the first horn: Berkeley and Sergeant's own views. Neither thinker is oblivious to the fact that their own views may sound strange or novel. Sergeant describes his theory of notions as just "as strange as it is true" (SP, 27), while one of Berkeley's *Notebook* entries describes his own position as the "obvious tho' amazing truth" (NB 279). Yet, even despite the novelties that their views entail, both argue that they *must* be true, for the possibility of skepticism *must* be stamped out.

As Johnston notes, Berkeley and Sergeant's arguments bear witness to the fact that there was an "atmosphere of opposition to Locke" soon after the publication of the *Essay*. More specifically, it is Locke's representationalism that both thinkers take issue with. However, I have demonstrated that, going beyond Johnston's analysis, a comparison of Berkeley and Sergeant's arguments reveals that this "atmosphere of opposition" was fostered by an assumption that *if* we gain knowledge of external things only in virtue of ideas which represent them, then those ideas would have to do so by means of resemblance. With *that* account of representation in mind, it is natural for Berkeley and Sergeant to worry about an epistemology in which we are "veiled" behind our ideas. But of course, as others have pointed out and as Locke himself makes clear in his replies to Sergeant, that may not be how Lockean representation should be understood.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, there are limits to the comparison. For instance, Berkeley frequently expresses a distaste for Scholasticism, while Sergeant is committing to reviving Scholastic theories of cognition to combat skepticism. This suggests Berkeley would (if, indeed, he did read Sergeant) have been quite unsympathetic to his approach.<sup>48</sup> There are also questions over whether, despite their shared commitment to knowledge via identity, Sergeant would have considered Berkeley's position "Solid Philosophy." If a solid philosophy is one where there is a reliable connection between the mind and an extra-mental world, then of

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<sup>46</sup> Berkeley characterizes a skeptic as one who either "denies the reality of sensible things or professes the greatest ignorance of them" (DHP 173).

<sup>47</sup> For discussion of Locke's account of representation, see Thomas Lennon, "Locke on Ideas and Representation," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's 'Essay Concerning Human Understanding'* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 231–57; and Walter Ott, "What Is Locke's Theory of Representation?" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20 (2012): 1077–1095.

<sup>48</sup> Thanks to an anonymous referee for making this point.

course Berkeley's idealism is not solid.<sup>49</sup> But if solid philosophy is simply epistemology that is immune to skepticism, then perhaps there is a sense in which it is.

Despite such differences, I have shown that a comparison of Berkeley and Sergeant—one that establishes a *conceptual* rather than a *causal* connection—provides two important insights into their “anti-representationalism.” First, both think knowledge via resemblance (between idea and object) is not sufficient to avoid skepticism. Second, both insist, instead, that we should adopt a position wherein we gain knowledge of the world via an *identity* relation. For Sergeant, that identity would be one between a notion as it exists in the mind and the form of a thing in world. For Berkeley, the identity would be shared between “things” and “ideas”—which, of course, Berkeley maintains are really two names for the same thing.

A comparison with Sergeant reveals that, far from being an outlier in arguing for idealism, Berkeley was in good company in developing an anti-representationalist epistemology where things known come to exist in the mind. In the context of Early Modern epistemology, a lot turns on the question of whether an idea represents by means of resembling its object. Berkeley and Sergeant's dilemmas effectively demonstrate that *if* the answer is “yes,” then representationalism faces serious difficulties. In Berkeley and Sergeant, we find two thinkers—albeit with different methodological starting points—for whom only identity will suffice.

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<sup>49</sup> Thanks to another anonymous referee for making this point.

# Why Can't Animals Imagine? Berkeley on Imagination and the Animal–Human Divide<sup>1</sup>

Dávid Bartha

**Abstract:** In this paper, I present and analyze Berkeley's sporadic claims on the animal–human divide, concentrating on his early works, especially his *Notebooks*. Before drawing our attention to the importance of imagination, I start by contextualizing Berkeley's views on animal cognition more generally. More specifically, I aim to clarify that though he verbally agrees with Descartes that animals cannot imagine like we do, Berkeley's view is motivated by fundamentally different considerations. What he ultimately denies is that animals can imagine in a sense that requires the sort of spontaneous and creative activity we share more with God than animals.

In many respects, Descartes and Berkeley are contrasting figures of early modern philosophy. But there is a perhaps surprising agreement that interpreters rarely mention, let alone dwell on: they both thought that (non-human) animals—or, as they called them, brutes or beasts—cannot imagine, at least not in the way we do. Indeed, both thought that this fact tells us something important about the animal–human divide, constituting one of the ways humans can be set apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. As I aim to clarify in this essay, though he verbally agrees with Descartes, Berkeley's view is motivated by fundamentally different considerations. The fact that animals cannot imagine, for Descartes, is simply an incidental implication of a much deeper, ontological, difference: animals do not imagine because they are mere physical mechanisms and hence are incapable of any cognitive mental state whatsoever. Berkeley's point, by contrast, is not that they do not have minds or can have sensory experiences like we do. What he denied is that animals can imagine in a sense that requires the sort of spontaneous and creative activity we share more with God than animals. As such, he not only has something else in mind than Descartes when denying imagination to animals, but for him, it indeed tells us something *specific* about what differentiates human cognitive abilities from animal capacities.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Most commentators ignore the question of animal cognition in Berkeley, perhaps due to their (implicit) agreement with Cummins's summary that “neither the question do nonhuman animals have consciousness, nor the question are they capable of reasoning, is addressed in *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision, A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, or Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*” [Philip D. Cummins, “Berkeley on Mind and Agency,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 190]. The most important exception who discusses the issue of animal cognition in Berkeley is Sébastien Charles, “The Animal according to George Berkeley,” in *George Berkeley: Religion and Science in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Silvia Parigi (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 189–199. See also Sébastien Charles, “Berkeley et l'imagination,” *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger* 135 (2010), 97–108. As we will see, while he recognizes the particular importance of imagination, I disagree with various details of his reading, including the question whether, for Berkeley, the difference between human and animal imagination is merely a difference in degree. As we will also see, Stephen H. Daniel, *George Berkeley and Early Modern Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), especially 96–97, touches on related issues as well. But in line with his unique and controversial interpretation of Berkeley on minds, he focuses

## 1. Animal Cognition in Berkeley

Before turning to imagination more specifically, let me start by contextualizing Berkeley's views on animal cognition. Animal cognition, as well as its difference to human cognition, was a hot topic in the early modern period, widely debated even before Descartes, let alone in the aftermath of his provocative "animal-machine" thesis. As is clear from the objections to Descartes' *Meditations* as well as his subsequent correspondence, many agreed with (earlier) skeptical authors such as Montaigne and Charron in holding that human and animal cognition differ only in degree. Indeed, they argued, animals not only perceive as we do but are also capable of reasoning and making basic inferences.<sup>3</sup> In Berkeley's more immediate context, Bernard Mandeville is an important example who follows this tradition. But many in his time reacted to such views by sticking to the Scholastic position that animals differ from us in kind, insofar as their souls completely lack our minds' higher capacities (e.g., reasoning). Specifically, most held that animals do not share with us a spiritual (and immortal) intellect capable of abstract thought or self-reflection.<sup>4</sup> Descartes and many of his followers, infamously, went even further and adopted the view that all the operations of animals, including their lower-level cognitive processes, can be explained in the same way as the blind or non-conscious mechanism of a clockwork or an automaton. Even if the processes and hence the explanations are much more complex in the case of the former, it does not warrant the attribution of any sort of (immaterial) soul or non-mechanistic principle to animals. Of course, animals are not merely complex beings but also living organisms; but as Descartes suggests, life itself, with all its complexity, can be explained in mechanistic terms. Simply put, animals are mere "automatons" who do not have "any real feeling or emotion" (AT 2: 41, CSMK 100; see also AT 3: 85, CSMK 148).<sup>5</sup> In contemporary terms, while they might make use of physical representations, it is not only that they cannot think and reason, but there's no phenomenal quality to any of their "cognitions."<sup>6</sup>

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on the active aspect of human cognition. Consequently, on his reading, imagination does not really play a special role: even the way human beings perceive their surroundings is completely transformed by the higher cognitive (discriminatory, conceptual and linguistic) activities animals lack.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful overview of the seventeenth-century skeptical and the Cartesian views on animals, see Peter Harrison, "The Virtues of Animals in Seventeenth-Century Thought," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 59 (1998): 463–484.

<sup>4</sup> As we will see, Locke is an obvious example when it comes to abstract thought. Nonetheless, he also thinks that "if we will compare the Understanding and Abilities of some Men, and some Brutes, we shall find so little difference, that 'twill be hard to say, that that of the Man is either clearer or larger" (*Essay* IV.16.12, 666). Moreover, he famously entertains the possibility that human consciousness is a property of our bodies superadded by God. In any event, many of Berkeley's contemporaries think that animals lack our spiritual intellect and its higher faculties much more unambiguously, including critics of Locke (e.g., Stillingfleet and Andrew Baxter). The anonymous author of "Two Dissertations Concerning Sense, and the Imagination" (London, J. Tonson, 1728)—which is traditionally (but probably falsely) attributed to Zachary Mayne—also argues that sensory cognition, both in humans and animals, is completely independent from our uniquely human intellection or understanding. Interestingly, according to the author, the view "That Brutes have the same Powers or Capacities of Understanding, with Mankind [. . .] is a direct and immediate Consequence of Mr. Locke's Doctrine of Ideas" (*Two Dissertations*, Preface, 2). For others endorsing a similar position, see my note 7.

<sup>5</sup> Citations refer to the Charles Adam–Paul Tannery [AT] edition of the *Oeuvres de Descartes* (12 vols.; J. Vrin/C.N.R.S., 1964–1976), and *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. 1 & 2, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch [CSM] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984–85); and vol. 3, ed. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny [CSMK] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>6</sup> Of course, there are dissenting views in the literature. The classic is John Cottingham, "A Brute to the Brutes? Descartes' Treatment of Animals," *Philosophy* 53 (1978): 551–59. In the face of the rather unambiguous textual evidence, these "revisionist" attempts have hardly been deemed successful by Descartes scholars.

By contrast, Berkeley never questioned the traditional view that animals perceive their environment by their “external” senses and use “internal” senses (e.g., memory, imagination) to keep and retrieve, associate and manipulate earlier experiences, dream, and, of course, feel sensations such as pain and pleasure just like we do. Indeed, some of his readers, such as the American Samuel Johnson—a rare follower of his idealism—worry about the opposite problem, namely that Berkeley might end up attributing too much to animals—specifically, a conscious mind that is immaterial and hence naturally immortal.<sup>7</sup>

At the outset, it is worthwhile to clarify that it is not due to his idealism that Berkeley did not accept the Cartesian “animal–machine” view. One might think that it is his idealism or immaterialism that pushes Berkeley away from such a position. But idealism does not preclude the possibility or even tenability of this doctrine insofar as animals could still be construed as machines or machine–like living beings, mere ideas in the world of perceptions but not genuine perceivers themselves. Interestingly, even though Berkeley talks about “the admirable mechanism in the parts of animals” and the “clockwork of Nature” (PHK 60), his view that they have minds and conscious experiences is a substantive, if hardly controversial, commitment on the idealist Berkeley’s part. Indeed, animal perception plays an important role in his argumentation for immaterialism, more precisely against the alternative of direct realism. For at a crucial juncture of the argumentation in the first of the *Three Dialogues*, he appeals to the old skeptical trope concerning perceptual relativity as attested to by different species, namely that certain animals perceive differently than we or other animal species do. This does not only apply to (Locke’s and others’) secondary qualities, such as colors—as Berkeley discusses in DHP 181—but the size (dimension of extension) of the objects too. As he memorably claims in DHP 188, mites perceive their own limbs to be larger than we do theirs. Since material objects are supposed to have fixed intrinsic natures, it follows that not all the different perceptions perceivers have of objects can be truthful representations of their mind–independent qualities. That is, not all the properties we perceive (or ones *like* those) can be instantiated by the external objects themselves. This famously leads to all sorts of skeptical worries Berkeley alludes to: not only that direct realism is untenable, but even for indirect realism the problem arises as to determining which of our ideas represent the object truly. Simply put, what could be a clear criterion or standard to adjudicate between these different, often incompatible, but apparently true perceptions or representations?<sup>8</sup>

One might think the argument from the species–relativity of perception is premised on the view that animals, just like us, have experiences with phenomenal quality—and hence on the rejection of the Cartesian animal–machine thesis. As I already indicated, while Berkeley shows no sympathy for such a view, it is far from clear that the animal–machine view is indeed incompatible with Berkeley’s appeal to the species–relativity of perception. Why

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<sup>7</sup> See Letter 197 in *The Correspondence of George Berkeley*, ed. Marc Hight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 314; *Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne*, eds. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons: 1948–57), 2: 289–90; cf. Charles, “The Animal,” 189–91). Johnson’s worry seems to be that Berkeley ends up having no argument for our natural immortality, as he cannot appeal to the claim that we, and only we humans, have a perceiving mind. The argument that attributing an immaterial soul to animals based on their ability to perceive is a slippery slope towards gifting immortality to them was widely circulated in the period. For instance, see Peter Browne, *The Procedure, extent and limits of the Human Understanding* (London: William Innys, 1728), 173. But Andrew Baxter, *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (London: James Bettenham, 1733), 242–43, defends this view by emphasizing that natural immortality is compatible with God destroying their souls after the death of the animal’s body.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of the relativity of perception, and species–relativity in his argumentation, see Melissa Frankel, “Revisiting Berkeley’s Perceptual Relativity Argument,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 30 (2013): 161–76 (esp. 168–69).



couldn't Descartes argue along similar lines invoking only physical representations or brain images in the animal case, which, as I suggested, can be reformulated in idealistic terms? In other words, it seems to me that Berkeley's argument from the species-relativity of perception does not need to presuppose that animal and human representations are ontologically similar. Even if one questions, as a matter of fact, that animals have perceptual experiences, the argument can be made in counterfactual terms: if they did have experiences, their physical or mechanical representations would make them experience different sensible qualities than those we perceive. Alternatively, if we were in their shoes (being as small as a mite, for instance), we would have those different experiences.

As for the textual evidence, one passage is of particular interest. In DHP 188, Berkeley clarifies that the function or role of perception for animals is the same as for us, namely the "preservation and well-being in life" enabling them "them to perceive their own limbs, and those bodies which are capable of harming them." This is why, as we have seen, their perceptions have to be relative to their sizes for instance. This still might be acceptable for Descartes and an idealist proponent of the animal-machine thesis, but as Sébastien Charles ("The Animal," 191–92) rightly emphasizes, for Berkeley the pragmatic aim of perception is closely connected to the laws of pain and pleasure God has established in nature for both humans and animals. In PHK 146, Berkeley speaks about "the never enough admired laws of pain and pleasure" alongside "the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passion of animals." It seems, then, that, on the most natural reading, for Berkeley, animals navigate their environment in accordance with the pain and pleasure they actually *feel* (like we do) when trying to preserve their life as well as possible.

Interestingly, though, just before clarifying this practical function of perception, Berkeley seems to throw in the Cartesian view.

PHILONOUS. Have all other animals as good grounds to think the same of the figure and extension which they see and feel [i.e., that figure and extension "exist in the outward object"]?

HYLAS. Without doubt, if they have any thought at all. (DHP 188)

Now, one might be tempted to read Hylas as raising Descartes' animal-machine doctrine, given that in the period "thought" was often used to include all conscious mental states. If so, Hylas accepts Philonous's starting point only hypothetically: if they are not like mindless machines and have "any thought at all," then they have grounds to think that what they perceive is a true quality of mind-independent objects. Unfortunately, Berkeley does not explicitly address the antecedent of this conditional. He rather goes on to emphasize the same pragmatic purpose of animal and human perception, from which he derives that they perceive the world differently than us (according to their different size, for instance). It might be, as Charles ("The Animal," 194) seems to take it, that instead of raising the possibility of the Cartesian view, Hylas's qualification concerns the sort of *higher-order* thought or judgment humans have but animals possibly lack. The conditional Hylas raises, then, is the following: were they able to form judgments about external objects, they would justifiably infer, just as we do, based on their own perceptual experiences that the size they perceive is the real size of the object. Whether they actually have thought in this higher-order sense is something Berkeley does not address here, either. Indeed, despite his other, especially later, works emphasizing much more clearly the intellectual, spiritual and ethical differences between animals and humans,<sup>9</sup> it seems fair to say that he remained rather undecided about the

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<sup>9</sup> In *Alciphron*, he notes that animals are "without reflexion or remorse, without foresight, or appetite of immortality, without notion of vice or virtue, or order, or reason, or knowledge" (*Alc* II.14, 86–87) as

possibility, and the extent to which, some basic form of higher-order thought, reasoning, or inferential capacities could be attributed to animals. In any event, even if this exchange does not prove or rest on this conviction strictly speaking, we have no evidence to question that Berkeley thought that animals have first-order, phenomenally conscious experiences.

He draws some further analogy between animal and human perception. Animals not only perceive the size of objects, as well as their other intrinsic qualities (color, etc.), they also perceive visually their spatial features, including their distance from them:

We are not to think, that brutes and children, or even grown reasonable men, whenever they perceive an object to approach, or depart from them, do it by virtue of geometry and demonstration. (NTV 24)

Here Berkeley likens animal distance perception to human visual perception in order to illustrate that even we do not rely on innate geometry or demonstration to perceive the distance of objects through vision. As he makes clear in TVV, perception and (perceptual) judgment are different things, and our immediate perceptions of visible objects and the basic associative mechanisms accompanying them (suggesting tangible size, distance, position, or other sensory qualities that we have often experienced together with them) are similar to how animals perceive the world around them. One aspect of this similarity is that immediate perception is never conceptually saturated, and strictly speaking, humans (just like animals) perceive mere patches of colors and sounds (even in combinations and associative networks of ideas), as opposed to perceptual objects intrinsically unified under concepts such as apple or carriage. As Berkeley suggests, appealing again to the animal case, we definitely do not need to possess such lofty general ideas as unity or existence in order to perceive the particular qualities of objects.

Will any man say that Brutes have y<sup>e</sup> ideas, unity & Existence? I believe not. yet if they are suggested by all the ways of sensation, tis strange they should want them. (NB 746)

Just like the absence of geometrical reasoning or the possible lack of any higher-order thought and judgment, lacking these general concepts doesn't entail that animals do not perceive or have sensations like we do. Note, however, that what Berkeley attacks here is not a Kantian or conceptualist theory of perception, which holds that perception requires the application and hence possessions of concepts such as unity or existence. Berkeley indeed endorsed what Stoneham aptly called 'Pre-Kantian Innocence': on the basic level, there is no representation—as involved in perception, we are simply presented with the (God-) 'given' data.<sup>10</sup> Nonetheless, this comment from the NB actually targets (the empiricist) Locke's view that these general concepts are brought to us by every instance of sense perception (and of reflection on our mental processes). Similarly, in PHK 13, Berkeley criticizes the view that unity as a primary quality could belong to external objects, and that it supposedly accompanies all perceptions of both sensation and reflection. For Berkeley, unity is just another abstract idea we do not find in ourselves. A noteworthy difference between the two

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distinguishing human features animals lack. Unlike animals, humans also have free "will and higher principle; by virtue whereof he may pursue different or even contrary ends," and "Man alone of all animals hath understanding to know his God" (*Alc* V.28, 207). But even earlier, for instance in his essays and sermons, he mentions on various occasions that the "faculty of reason and understanding [...] placeth us above the brute part of the creation" (*W* 7: 222; see also 7: 96 and 7: 216). In *Siris* 251, animals, who do not observe and interpret the rules of the divine language that is nature, are compared to "a man who hears a strange tongue but understands nothing."

<sup>10</sup> See Tom Stoneham, "Some Issues in Berkeley's Account of Sense Perception," in *Berkeley's Three Dialogues: New Essays*, ed. Stefan Storrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 24–39.

passages is that the NB passage does not mention reflection, but only sensation as the alleged source of these general ideas. This omission seems to suggest that, even in his early works, Berkeley thought that animals do not have the capacity to reflect on their own mental operations and experiences, and hence, they might—but do not, after all—get the idea of unity (and existence) only from their sense perceptions.

To be sure, Berkeley does not think that we get these ideas from any experience (and even less so that they are innate). As he is clear in the introduction to the PHK, even humans are incapable of forming and entertaining abstract, that is, intrinsically general, concepts—and, arguably, unity and existence are among the most abstract ones. As such, the point Berkeley makes is not exactly, as Charles (“The Animal,” 193) puts it, that “complex ideas like unity or existence seem entirely to escape [animals].” Indeed, based on his anti-abstractionist criticism of Locke, he concludes in IN 11 that the capacity for abstraction and the possession of abstract ideas cannot constitute the difference between animals and humans for the simple reason that even we cannot do it.<sup>11</sup> But whether he thinks that animals cannot make use of their particular ideas in a general way by applying them to many things indifferently—as we humans can, despite our inability to abstract—is a different question, one he, again, does not give a definitive answer to. In other words, he clearly thinks animals have no abstract general ideas, just like us, but it is unclear if he thinks they do not even have general thoughts or representations, that is, they do not use particular ideas in a general way like we do.<sup>12</sup> Maybe he would deny it to most but not all animals. Perhaps he would accept the belief that primates or even dogs are capable of understanding general rules, since they seem to indicate it through their behavior and their ability to be trained while obviously having no abstract ideas of, say, treats and sitting. In any event, in sharp contrast to Locke, he does not spell out the human–animals divide in terms of the capacity for general, if not inherently abstract, thinking—not even when clarifying where the denial of human abstraction leads us with regard to this question:

If you take away abstraction, how do men differ from Beasts. I answer by shape. By Language rather by Degrees of more & less. (NB 594)

Berkeley lists three alternatives to the Lockean view: difference in shape, language, and “degrees of more and less.” These are, arguably, not mutually exclusive, but constitute a system of criteria. Language is pretty straightforward: it is, of course, one of the two tests Descartes famously relies on in his *Discourse on Method*. As is evidenced most clearly in *Alc* IV.12, 157, Berkeley also accepts this as a crucial distinction: animals use and understand signs (perhaps, with general content) but do not do so with the “articulation, combination, variety, copiousness, extensive and general use and easy application of signs [...] that constitute the true nature of language.”

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<sup>11</sup> Berkeley’s argument is too witty and sarcastic not to quote: “There has been a late deservedly esteemed philosopher, who, no doubt, has given it very much countenance by seeming to think the having abstract general ideas is what puts the widest difference in point of understanding betwixt man and beast. [...] I readily agree with this learned author, that the faculties of brutes can by no means attain to abstraction. But then if this be made the distinguishing property of that sort of animals, I fear a great many of those that pass for men must be reckoned into their number.” There are, of course, various interpretations of why Berkeley thinks that even humans cannot abstract—something that does not have to concern us here.

<sup>12</sup> *Alc* IV.12, 157 (see it partially quoted in the next paragraph) is cited by Charles, “The Animal,” 194 to suggest that the general use of ideas is a uniquely human capacity. But it is not completely clear to me if by “general use” Berkeley means to refer to the representational content of a particular sign or idea, as opposed to the regular nature of divine and human language as a sign system.

But what can shape mean in this context? It is helpful to look (again) at the anonymous *Two Dissertations Concerning Sense, and the Imagination*. In its preface, the text argues that by reducing the difference between animals and humans to only a matter of shape or figure, one makes us one of the animal kingdom, which is “a very dangerous and pernicious opinion which prevails almost everywhere” (*Two Dissertations*, Preface, 2). The problem comes from regarding sense perception and imagination as cognitive faculties that are *not* fundamentally different from understanding or intellection. If so, the fact that animals have these abilities entails that they have some form of intellection as well, and we are left with no essential or categorical distinction. On my reading, one way to understand this complaint is that if, as is generally accepted in the empiricist tradition, thinking relies on or perhaps is reduced to entertaining and associating images deriving from the senses, and animals have imagination as well as sense perception, then they can think at least in some basic sense. Hence, we are not different from them, only in our particular humanoid shape and the extent to which we can use these faculties. In NB 594, Berkeley seems to bite the bullet: we might categorically differ from animals in outward appearance only—and, apart from the use of language, anything else is simply a difference in degree.

Of course, in addition to the use of language, he *could* have mentioned, as we have also seen, (geometrical) reasoning, reflection or self-consciousness, and perhaps the general use of ideas. Maybe these things are not listed here as they are already included among the aspects in which we differ from animals only in degree. If so, Berkeley seems to think at this early stage of his career that we do not have any capacity animals do not have in some basic sense too. It is, then, only that we exercise them better: we reason *better*, for instance, with a geometrical accuracy and strictness or by extending reasoning to general notions; we can use signs in a *more* systematic, various etc. manner, that is, as a proper language; and we can turn our same ability to perceive not only outside but *also* inside, to our ideas themselves.

But what does it mean, as Charles’s reading suggests, that the difference is merely in degree when it comes to our sensory capacities, that is, sense perception and imagination? Do we perceive better than animals in any meaningful sense? As many in the period, Berkeley was surely aware that animals can perceive, see or smell with much more sharpness or in much more detail than we do. Don’t animals (like elephants) remember as well as we do, or even better in some cases? Cannot they make instinctive associations—almost like simple inferences—even quicker than we do, for instance when seeing a shape or hearing a sound that is associated with some good experience? Even Descartes acknowledged their superiority in many respects, suggesting that since they do not have a free will that could hinder their decision-making and action, making them vacillate and waste time on considering options and their potential outcomes, they can exercise their activities with so much perfection (see *Olympica* AT 10: 219; CSM 1: 5). The same perfection in acting could also show the perfection of their cognitive capacities underlying these actions. In any event, we do not have any textual reason to think that Berkeley believed that humans perceive and imagine better or more clearly than animals. Moreover, perhaps he would argue that none of us perceive “better” than the other, as the adequacy of one’s perceptual capacities can be measured only relative to the particular kind of being we are talking about and its particular needs for navigating its environment—in which case, a perfect match is guaranteed by God’s providence in all his creatures. Indeed, for Berkeley, every *instance* of perception is correct, and it is only our perceptual judgments (judgments animals perhaps do not make at all) that can be mistaken about what other perceptions we expect based on an allegedly “illusory” perception—as is the case with the famous and, in fact, straight oar looking crooked when

submerged into water.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, perhaps Berkeley thought that we do not surpass, or differ even in degree from, animals in terms of these bare sensory capacities, after all.

## 2. Why can't animals imagine?

But let us dwell on the case of imagination, which can be seen as a more complex phenomenon than perception and the basic (imaginative) associations that accompany our perceptions very closely and are often hardly noticeable. As Berkeley introduces it in PHK 1, imagination has two kinds which we might, respectively, call “creative” (involving the composition and division of ideas we perceived earlier) and “reproductive” imagination (when, as he puts it, we are “barely representing” ideas). While the latter arguably belongs to (some) animals as well, and arguably they can exercise it just as well as we can, the former is something they lack. As he writes in the *Notebooks*:

Qu: whether Composition of Ideas be not that faculty which chiefly serves to discriminate us from Brutes. I question whether a Brute does or can imagine a Blue Horse or Chimera. (NB 753)

Here the composition of ideas we perform in creative imagination is strongly suggested to be what “chiefly serves to discriminate us from Brutes.” In fact, such imaginative capacities seem to be an aspect of our cognitive lives where we *fundamentally* differ from animals. Accordingly, I propose that despite saying in NB 594 that we differ from animals “by Degrees of more & less,” what he seems to actually believe is that, on the one hand, some of our cognitive capacities might not differ from those of animals even in degree, and, on the other, we have more *kinds* of cognition, including at least and even most notably, a creative sense of imagination he emphatically denies to animals. It is, of course, similar to the imagination we share with them, insofar as both consist in the production of images of things not currently in front of us. But, for Berkeley (just as for many in the period, such as Descartes or Malebranche), imagination is not really a unified capacity that can be exercised to a higher (human) or lower (animal) degree, but encompasses a reproductive and a creative capacity to have images of things in the absence of a corresponding external stimulus. This creative imagination, which is said to be so important to our essence, is something animals *completely* lack, and hence it seems that the distinction between animals and humans is more than merely in degree. In other words, our cognitive repertoire includes more capacities than theirs—even when we only talk about sensory capacities, that is to say, even when we ignore the question of linguistic capacities, intellect or self-reflection that, according to his later remarks, they perhaps more obviously lack.

In the remaining part of this essay, I want to understand better what this creativity consists in, and why Berkeley thinks that animals cannot imagine in this sense. In other words, what is the difference between human and animal imagination? As we'll see, the creativity of imagination not only differentiates us from animals but, in Berkeley's view, allows for a comparison with divine activity, revealing the sense in which humans are similar to God. But first, it might be helpful to reiterate a few things we have already seen. Firstly, as opposed to Descartes, Berkeley clearly cannot claim that animals lack this sort of imagination simply because they lack all sorts of mental states. Secondly, and relatedly, Berkeley does not deny imagination to animals *as such*. He apparently thinks that animals can receive simple ideas, perceive what is in front of them, as well as keep, retrieve, and associate these ideas. What he

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<sup>13</sup> Though not exactly in this sense, the author of the *Two Dissertations* also thinks that “Brutes make no Discrimination between Appearance, and Reality” (46–47).

clearly denies is only that they cannot come up with new compositions of ideas, and, perhaps, they cannot divide them in interesting ways either.

A third point to keep in mind is that the issue is not about lacking some higher-order cognition. Animals cannot imagine in this creative sense not because they have no reason or intellect (at least, at the required level), or that they do not have abstract ideas, complex thoughts, or even perhaps, that they cannot think in general terms or organize their experiences in terms of meaning and linguistic concepts. Locke thought so, and even if Berkeley agrees to some extent, on my reading (in contrast to Daniel, *Berkeley*, 96–97), it is not his reason for denying creative imagination to animals. His claim is spelled out on a much more mundane level, referring simply to the fact that animals lack the creativity of our sensory imagination, which allows us to compose new combinations of ideas and thus think up things we've never seen before. This apparently has nothing to do with our higher intellectual or linguistic capacities that, as Berkeley's later works tend to emphasize, animals lack.

Hence, my reading differs from Daniel's, who thinks that the "inability of animals to imagine an idea of a blue horse is thus simply an indication of their inability to think of the world as intentional and open to semantic realignments (NB 753)" (Daniel, *Berkeley*, 97). According to him, animals cannot perceive the (divinely ordered) intentionality and meaning of the ideas they sense purely passively because they do not have the prerequisite linguistic understanding to actively discriminate and interrelate objects. While it might be the proper reading of Berkeley's later views, endorsed in *Alciphron* and *Siris*, it does not seem to be what Berkeley had in mind in his *Notebooks*, nor does it align very well with his insistence on the passivity of human perception (see NB 301, 378 and 706, as well as DHP 196–97). But even in the later works, Berkeley does not claim (explicitly, at least) that the human mind differs from animal cognition in terms of anything else but our higher, intellectual faculties, without any suggestion that these somehow penetrate our sensory perception, making the human form of sense perception fundamentally different from how animals perceive the world around them.<sup>14</sup> Daniel's reading also entails that animals, being unable to recognize the meaning of their ideas and organize them linguistically, do not have minds in the sense human beings are minds. This reading, in my eyes, extends the gap, almost in a Cartesian manner, much more than what Berkeley's occasional notes suggest to me. Nonetheless, I agree that, for Berkeley, even in the early stage of his thinking, the distinction with regard to imagination is categorical and hence bigger than what claims by Charles let us believe, such as that animals have a "weak and limited imagination" (Charles, "The Animal," 193). It does not seem to be a weakness and limitation of imagination, but rather a complete lack of creativity that sets animals apart from us.

In trying to unpack what Berkeley exactly had in mind, it is helpful to start discussing a closely related phenomenon, "that strange mystery" he mentions in his *Notebooks*:

Mem: to enquire diligently into that strange Mystery viz. How it is that I can cast about, think of this or that Man, place, action w<sup>n</sup> nothing appears to Introduce them into my thoughts. w<sup>n</sup> they have no perceivable connexion w<sup>th</sup> the Ideas suggested by my senses at the present. (NB 599)

We might call this strange phenomenon "the mystery of spontaneity." How come that we can just think up or imagine things independently of what we actually perceive around ourselves?

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<sup>14</sup> In his sermons and in later works, he speaks about "the corporeal part with the senses and passions which we have in common with brute beasts" (W 7.96, see also W 7.216 and 7.222, cf. my footnote 9).

Though Berkeley does not explicitly connect this issue to the question of the animal–human divide, I propose he thought that we differ from animals in this respect. Unlike us, they seem to be only reactive in their cognitive states, and moved by their perceptions and affections not only in their movements but also their cognitive states, being limited to what is directly present to their senses or what is associated with those due to their earlier experiences. They can remember but perhaps only when and what the present outside stimuli (through the complex net of associated ideas) make them remember. Say, a dog can imagine or remember the taste of a treat if it sees one. But arguably, they cannot just think up a random person, place, or event in their past. Just as they cannot create new compositions of ideas, why would they imagine random things out of the blue? As such, it is reasonable to think that they lack the creativity of our imagination because they lack the perhaps more basic spontaneity our imaginative exercises (whether reproductive or creative) often display. Rather, animals are merely passive perceivers of their environments, being limited in their imaginative exercises by their sense perceptions and what has been associated with them in their (reproductive) imaginations.

Note that the problem is not exactly that animals cannot initiate any mental act at their own will. This might simply be the difference for Descartes, but for Berkeley, the issue is not merely that our spontaneous and creative use of imagination is a *mental* activity. Though he agrees with Descartes that this sort of imagination requires a will and an understanding, including the consciousness of what one wills, he has no principled objection to attributing those to animals—especially because, his concept of “understanding” is not as “pure” as Descartes’ more intellectualist one, but rather relies on the use of sensory images we acquire through perception. Animals have a faculty of will, and some of them, presumably, even consciously, if not self–consciously, know what they will. Indeed, Berkeley has to accept that they are active at least in some sense, because for him, having a soul with a will (and understanding) is basically identical with being an active entity, as opposed to the passivity of ideas or perceived objects. And why wouldn’t animals be able to remember or imagine in the reproductive sense intentionally, just like they can apparently move their bodies volitionally. So, for Berkeley, it is not simply the lack of volitional activity that is the reason why animals cannot imagine like we do in a spontaneous and creative way. It is not that they cannot will their own mental states, and exercise their imagination, but that they cannot do so *spontaneously*—exercising their will to create images independently from the outward stimuli and the associative and psychological processes they trigger in their minds. We can conjure up ideas of anything regardless of what we actually perceive or where we are.<sup>15</sup>

Accordingly, it is the spontaneity of our acts of imagination specifically, as opposed to the mere exercise of our volitions that makes human cognizers unique. Nonetheless, as other passages indicate, the unique exercise of our imagination lies not only in our spontaneous capacity to come up with ideas that are not in any observable relation to the things actually perceived by us, but in our ability to create contents that transcends all of our earlier experiences. Descartes himself tends to speak about active, human imagination in terms of imagining things that do not exist, like a chimera or other factitious ideas he mentions in the Third Meditation as “inventions of my own imagination,” such as “sirens, hippogriffs” (AT 7: 37, CSM 2: 26). Indeed, he claims that we do not “simply jumble up the limbs of different animals” to imagine sirens and satyrs; we might also “manage to think up something so new that nothing remotely similar has ever been seen before—something which is therefore

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<sup>15</sup> Compare it to PHK 28: “I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy: and by the same power it is obliterated, and makes way for another. This making and unmaking of ideas doth very properly denominate the mind active.”

completely fictitious and unreal” (AT 7: 20, CSM 2: 13). For Berkeley, this is the ultimate difference: animals cannot imagine blue a horse or a chimera, not because they do not have the required cognitive faculties (i.e., a will and an intellect); nor it is merely that they are not spontaneous or free from outside stimuli in exercising their volitions. The latter is true, but for Berkeley, the difference lies also, if not primarily, in the *creativity* of our imagination—that is, in our capacity for putting things together and composing ideas in a novel and unique way.<sup>16</sup>

I propose that the clue to understanding why Berkeley denies this creativity to animals is not only that it requires the spontaneity they seem to lack. But, even more importantly: this sort of imagination is almost divine territory, and it is where our similarity to God is perhaps the most conspicuous and perspicuous.<sup>17</sup>

Why may we not conceive it possible for God to create things out of nothing. Certainly we ourselves create in some wise whenever we imagine. (NB 830)

To repeat, this sort of imagination separating us from animals testifies not merely to our volitional or intentional activity (which animals might equally have), and not even to our unique spontaneity in willing our mental states, but more so to our capacity for creating ideas almost *ex nihilo*. It is, of course, only “in some wise” like God’s creativity, because what we can create is limited to our own minds, and as Berkeley famously specifies the differences in his published works (for instance, *Three Dialogues* 235), our ideas of imagination are much vaguer and more irregular than the ideas of sense created by God. Moreover, our imagination relies on our previous experiences as the basic constituents it can work on, unlike God’s completely self-sufficient and spontaneous creation out of nothing. In fact, we might not even create new tokens of ideas, but only compose new content by merging two existing or pre-given ideas into one, and hence do not create any new idea in the same way God creates the world of our perception.<sup>18</sup> In any event, the most important aspect of the creativity of our imagination, I believe, is that it nonetheless produces new content—content that we have not encountered in that exact form before.

If so, Berkeley emphatically goes further than what he himself suggested in an earlier entry of the *Notebooks*, namely that we only differ from animals in shape, language and in degree

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<sup>16</sup> A similar reading is presented in Charles, “Berkeley et l’imagination,” 102–104, but he does not seem to disentangle creativity from spontaneity in the way I have done. Rather, he seems to collapse the latter into the former. According to my reading, spontaneity (i.e., the ability to form volitions that are not suggested by our current sense perceptions) is different from creativity (i.e., the ability to transcend all our previous sense perceptions)—but just as distinctive of human imagination. More specifically, spontaneity is a necessary requirement for creativity, but ultimately the latter indicates our higher cognitive abilities more clearly. Another important difference is that while spontaneity characterizes both our creative acts and some of our reproductive acts of imagination, creativity is a unique feature of the former type of imagination. In Charles, “The Animal” (193), the distinction between animal and human imagination is simply said to lie in the “capacity of men to elaborate upon sensible ideas.”

<sup>17</sup> Apart from Charles (“The Animal” and “Berkeley et l’imagination”), only a few commentators mention the analogy between divine cognition and human imagination even generally when they highlight how, in both cases, the perceiving mind is active as opposed to our sense perceptions. For example, see Jonathan Dancy, *Berkeley: An Introduction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 53, 59; and Samuel Rickless, “Berkeley’s Argument for the Existence of God in the *Three Dialogues*,” in *Berkeley’s Three Dialogues: New Essays*, ed. Stefan Storrie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 99.

<sup>18</sup> By contrast, Charles (“Berkeley et l’imagination,” 103–104) identifies the difference between human and divine production of ideas as concerning merely its scope: *human* imagination cannot grasp and work with intellectual notions but only sense perceptions. For me, the difference concerns more fundamentally the limited sense and way in which humans can “create” new (sensory) ideas.



when it comes to our cognitive capacities. While, in this early stage, he conspicuously avoids any reference to lofty intellectual capacities only humans have (suggesting perhaps that he was unsure if those are not just other examples where we differ only in degree), he ultimately identifies a categorical distinction between animals and humans even with regard to our sensory capacities. As I argued, this crucial divide is displayed by our spontaneous and creative use of imagination. But as I also noted, he did not depict this uniquely human capacity as unlimited in comparison to its divine counterpart, placing our cognitive capacities firmly between those of animals and God.

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# A Revised Metaphysical Argument for Berkeley's Likeness Principle

Manuel Fasko

**Abstract:** Contra Todd Ryan's interpretation, I argue that it is possible to reconstruct a metaphysical argument that does not restrict likeness in general to ideas. While I agree with Ryan that Berkeley's writings provide us with the resources to reconstruct such an argument, I disagree with Ryan that this argument entails a restriction of likeness to ideas. Unlike Ryan, I argue that Berkeley is not committed to the claim that we can compare only ideas, but to the view that the only thing that can be compared to an idea is another idea.

## 1. Introduction

In *Principles* 8 Berkeley famously states that “[a]n idea can be like nothing but an idea.”<sup>1</sup> Over the years, this so-called “Likeness Principle” (LP)<sup>2</sup> has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly because it seems that Berkeley neither offers an explicit argument for the LP nor provides his readers with the resources to reconstruct an argument on his behalf.<sup>3</sup> My aim in this essay is to demonstrate, contra Todd Ryan, that Berkeley's writings offer the resources to construct a metaphysical argument on his behalf that does not restrict likeness to ideas.<sup>4</sup> This is important because, as Ryan notes

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<sup>1</sup> References to Berkeley's *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [PHK section] and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* [DHP page] are to *The Works of George Berkeley* [W], ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–57), vol. 2; *New Theory of Vision* [NTV section] and *New Theory of Vision Vindicated* [TVV section], vol. 1; and *Alciphron* [Alc dialogue: section], vol. 3. References to Berkeley's *Notebooks* [NB entry] are to George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works* [PW page], ed. Michael. R. Ayers (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Philip D. Cummins, “Berkeley's likeness principle,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966), 63.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, George Dicker, “An Idea Can Be like Nothing but an Idea,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 39–52; Jonathan Hill, “Berkeley's Missing Argument: The Sceptical Attack on Intentionality,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (2011): 47–77; Michael Jacovides, “How Berkeley corrupted his capacity to conceive,” *Philosophia* 37 (2009): 415–429; Todd Ryan, “A new account of Berkeley's likeness principle,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 561–80, esp. 561–63; Peter West, “Why Can An Idea Be Like Nothing But Another Idea? A Conceptual Interpretation of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7 (2021): 530–48, esp. 530–32; Kenneth P. Winkler, *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 141–48 to name just a few.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the existence of such a metaphysical argument *prima facie* fits nicely with the recently defended metaphysical role of Berkeley's LP [see David Bartha, “Resemblance, Representation, and Scepticism: The Metaphysical Role of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 4.1 (2022): 1–18, [doi.org/10.32881/jomp.180](https://doi.org/10.32881/jomp.180)]. Moreover, it is worth noting that this does not imply that Berkeley accepts the LP *only* because of this metaphysical argument. Rather, the claim is that Berkeley, *at the very least*, has such an argument. West (“Why Can an Idea,” 532),

(578), volitions (which are non-ideational for Berkeley) should also be “candidates for resemblance.” Moreover, a restriction of likeness to ideas, which are fundamentally different from minds (PHK 25–27), would conflict with Berkeley’s commitment to the view that other minds are like his own (DHP 231–32). Berkeley even writes that other minds are in a “large sense” the “image or idea” of his own (PHK 140). Since this claim also includes God’s mind, a restriction of likeness to ideas would entail that Berkeley could not uphold his commitment to the *imago-dei* thesis; that is, the thesis that human beings are made in the image of God after his likeness (cf. *Genesis* 1: 26–27). This thesis implies that the minds of God and human beings are alike (e.g., they are both active). Most notably and explicitly, Berkeley affirms his commitment to this thesis in his sermon “On the Mystery of Godliness” where he states: “The mind which is pure and spiritual [...] is made in the image of God” (*Works* VI, 88).<sup>5</sup> Thus, a restriction of likeness to ideas also conflicts with Berkeley’s theological commitments.

In light of these problems I argue, unlike Ryan, that Berkeley does not believe that we can only compare ideas and hence does not restrict likeness relations to ideas. Rather, I claim, Berkeley holds that the only thing comparable to an idea is another idea.<sup>6</sup>

I defend this interpretation in two steps. First, I introduce the metaphysical argument for the LP as espoused by Ryan, reconsider its problematic implications, and demonstrate why I agree with Ryan on its first premise (P1) that likeness is a relation. I then scrutinize the second premise (P2) that there are no relations without an act of comparison, and I argue that this second premise needs to be modified to indicate that there are no *likeness* relations without an act of *comparison* (P2\*).<sup>7</sup> In this second step, I draw on Berkeley’s *Notebooks* to argue that he does not assume that we can only compare ideas (P3). Instead, the only thing that can be compared to an idea is an idea (P3\*). This means that an idea cannot be compared to a mind and, thus, as Berkeley claims (PHK 89), an idea can never

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for instance, has convincingly shown that Berkeley also has conceptual reasons for accepting this principle. See also Melissa Frankel, “Berkeley on the ‘Twofold state of things’,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 80 (2016): 43–60, esp. 50–53, who argues there are several arguments for LP. Thus, while I remain neutral on the question of what the best reading of the LP is or what Berkeley’s strongest argument for it is, I reject George Pitcher’s claim [*Berkeley* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 115–20] that Berkeley has no compelling grounds to hold LP, because there is at least one metaphysical argument.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also the seventh sermon (*Works* VI, 95f.). Moreover, there are several passages in Berkeley’s works where he commits himself to this thesis (cf. DHP 231–33; Alc 4.21–22; *Siris* 333–34). I thank Marc Hight who pointed out the passages in the sermons to me. A more recent discussion of Berkeley’s interpretation of this thesis is found in John R. Roberts, “A Puzzle in the *Three Dialogues* and Its Platonic Resolution,” in *Berkeley’s Three Dialogues: New Essays*, ed. Stefan Storrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 152–57.

<sup>6</sup> Given my focus on the supposed restriction of likeness, I will not consider the argumentative force of the LP in more detail. It is beside the point for my purposes if the LP suffices to construe a valid argument against a Lockean type of representational realism or representational realism in general [see e.g., Georges Dicker, *Berkeley’s Idealism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–62].

<sup>7</sup> Note that this modification holds on Ryan’s understanding of the role of comparing for likeness relations, which reduces such relations to acts of comparisons (see my next section).

be like a mind. This, however, allows for the possibility of comparing minds and, thus, the possibility that minds can resemble other minds.

## 2. The Metaphysical Argument and Likeness as Relations

The metaphysical argument for the LP that Ryan attributes to Berkeley can thus be formalized in the following way:

- P1: Likeness is a relation.
- P2: There are no relations without comparing.
- P3: We can compare only ideas.
- C: There is likeness only between our ideas.

Although the LP is not explicitly mentioned in this argument, it is entailed by the conclusion, because if likeness is restricted to ideas, an idea can only be like another idea (PHK 8). However, as Ryan acknowledges (“New Account,” 578), this would be problematic for Berkeley because volitions should also be “candidates for resemblance.” Ryan solves this problem by suggesting a more charitable reading of the second argument in NB 378, particularly line 16: “Two things cannot be said to be alike or unlike till they have been compared.” This reading allows for a “more limited result,” according to which likeness in general is not restricted to ideas but “immediate objects” of awareness (Ryan, “New Account,” 578). While this allows for likeness between volitions, he points out that the resulting principle is “too narrow” because it cannot guarantee that ideas and volitions are not alike (579). As suggested in my introduction, the problem is even more fundamental because it conflicts with Berkeley’s commitment to minds being alike as well. If Ryan’s solution would be extended to cover these as well, it would then seem that Berkeley, on this reading, cannot secure his commitment to the fundamental difference between ideas and minds, which would be deeply problematic considering the textual evidence (e.g., PHK 25–27, 89).

Given these consequences it is tempting to reject the attribution of this metaphysical argument to Berkeley altogether. However, as I argue in the following, I agree with Ryan we can reconstruct a metaphysical argument, but I disagree with him that this argument restricts likeness to ideas. By considering the premises of the argument, I demonstrate that it is possible to reconstruct a metaphysical argument that can avoid the issues Ryan’s version faces.

To establish that Berkeley does in fact accept P1, one need look no further than TVV 39 where he explicitly speaks of a “relation of similitude” (see also NB 503 and PHK 43). The case, however, is slightly more complex when it comes to P2 (that is, there are no relations without comparing). The key passage for this premise is PHK 142 of the 1734 edition of the *Principles*. There Berkeley refers to “*all relations including an act of the mind*” (my emphasis). Following Muehlmann,<sup>8</sup> Ryan takes this as evidence that Berkeley endorses the view that all relations can be reduced to (mental) acts of comparing (“New

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robert G. Muehlmann, *Berkeley’s Ontology* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 29, 67–68.

Account,” 578). For the sake of the argument, I will not dispute the claim that relations can be reduced to mental acts, that is, that Berkeley is an anti-realist about relations.<sup>9</sup> But even on this interpretation there is reason to push back against the assumption that *all* relations are reducible to acts of *comparing*.<sup>10</sup> After all, Berkeley never says in PHK 142 that relations include an act of comparing; instead, he says that the identification of relations is simply “an act of the mind.” In fact, never in his published works does Berkeley say that relations can be reduced to acts of comparing. On the contrary, the only time he discusses the role of comparing is in the context of likeness relations (PHK 104). And since he explicitly calls causation, for example, a “relation” as well (NTV 65), there is no good reason to assume that likeness relations are the only kind of relations.<sup>11</sup> As West notes (“Why Can an Idea,” 535), other than PHK 104, Berkeley does not discuss acts of comparing and their importance for relations outside the *Notebooks*.<sup>12</sup> In the latter, however, Berkeley’s focus is again confined to *likeness* relations and acts of

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<sup>9</sup> I argue in detail in *Die Sprache Gottes: George Berkeley's Auffassung des Naturgeschehens* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2021), Ch. 3, that Berkeley should be understood as a “conceptual foundationalist.” [See Walter Ott, “‘Archetypes without Patterns’: Locke on Relations and Mixed Modes,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99 (2017): 300–325 for a similar reading of Locke on relations.] That is, drawing from the work of Katia Saporiti [*Die Wirklichkeit der Dinge: eine Untersuchung des Begriffs der Idee in der Philosophie George Berkeley's* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), 242–44] and Tom Stoneham [*Berkeley's World: An Examination of the Three Dialogues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238–44], I contend that acts of comparing play a metaphysical role for likeness relations to obtain. Such interpretations have been (implicitly) rejected by West (“Why Can an Idea,” 542–43, 546) who has defended a “realist” interpretation of Berkeley’s notion of relations. For the sake of this essay, I remain neutral on this question because my aim is to show a metaphysical argument without a restriction of likeness to ideas can be construed even if Ryan’s anti-realist interpretation is accepted—the background assumption being that Ryan’s problem would dissolve anyway if one, for instance, were to take a realist interpretation. After all, on this interpretation the issue of whether we can compare only ideas is separate from the question of whether minds share intrinsically given features in *rerum natura*.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, according to Muehlmann’s (*Berkeley's Ontology*, Ch. 2) interpretation, Berkeley endorses the same position as Locke, who is also understood to be an anti-realist about relations, because he writes that “[w]hat we call relation [...] consists in the consideration and comparing one idea with another” [*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.12.7].

<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this essay, we can bracket the question what distinguishes different kinds of relations. In *Die Sprache Gottes* (153), I have suggested that there is reason to assume that Berkeley holds that different kinds of relations (such as likeness, causation, signification) require different mental acts to obtain. For instance, Berkeley writes that signification is “depending altogether on the arbitrary appointment of men” (NTV 152).

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to West (“Why Can an Idea,” 531–33), however, I am inclined to take the *Notebooks* seriously, to the point where its entries have the same value as other remarks Berkeley chose to publish—unless they conflict with or even contradict them [see John R. Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7], something that is not the case for his remarks about relations. After all, there are various places in the *Notebooks* where Berkeley expresses views he clearly holds on to in his published works. For a recent interpretation that takes the *Notebooks* as seriously as any other works, cf. Stephen H. Daniel, *George Berkeley and Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4–9, 291–301; and “Berkeley’s Doctrine of Mind and the ‘Black List Hypothesis’: A Dialogue,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51 (2013), 24–41.

comparing—and he repeatedly draws a close connection between the two (NB 46–47, 51, 299, 378, 861).

In sum, the scarcity of Berkeley's remarks on the issue of relations and mental acts makes it impossible to rule out with absolute certainty that he believes that any kind of relation can be reduced to an act of comparing. But those passages, in which he discusses the issue of relations and comparing, strongly suggest a modification of (P2) that there are no relations without comparing. Rather, Berkeley's *Notebooks* entries suggest that he is committed to P2\*: there are no likeness relations without acts of comparing. With these clarifications in mind, we can now turn to the third premise (P3) which holds that Berkeley endorses the view that we can compare only ideas.

### 3. Comparing Ideas

In his *Notebooks*, Berkeley seems committed to the view that we can compare *only ideas* (P3) (NB 47, 51, 299, 378, 861). However, as I argue in the following, these *Notebooks* entries that supposedly support the attribution of P3 to Berkeley, support rather the attribution of two slightly different versions of what I will call the Comparability Claim—only one of which leads to a restriction of likeness in general to ideas. Although the textual evidence is thus inconclusive, I argue there are philosophical reasons to prefer one Comparability Claim over the other.

The first version of the Comparability Claim is expressed in NB 51, 299, and 378. According to this version we can compare *only ideas* (P3)—and nothing but ideas. Berkeley states, for example, that we can compare only what we perceive (i.e., only ideas) (NB 51). Moreover, he rhetorically asks: “How you can compare anything besides your own ideas” (NB 299). Finally, he says “comparing is the viewing two ideas together,” which entails that “the mind can compare nothing but its' own ideas” (NB 378, 17–18).

The second version of the Comparability Claim is found in NB 47 and 861. In NB 47 Berkeley rhetorically asks, “Did ever any man see any other things besides his own ideas, that he should compare them to these & make these like unto them?” In this entry Berkeley raises the question if it is possible to compare an idea to anything other than an idea. Berkeley does not explicitly answer this question at this point. But in NB 861 he writes: “What can an Idea be like but another Idea, we can compare it with Nothing else, a Sound like a Sound, a Colour like a Colour.” In this entry, Berkeley explicitly answers the rhetorical question raised in NB 47. He clearly states that we can compare an idea “with nothing else” but “another Idea.” Thus, instead of the version captured by P3 (“the only things you can compare are ideas”), those entries support the attribution of the following Comparability Claim to Berkeley (P3\*): “The only thing we can compare to an idea is another idea” (P3\*)

Briefly put, the *Notebooks* entries support ascribing two different versions of the Comparability Claim to Berkeley and, thus, are in themselves inconclusive. It could be argued the textual evidence in the *Notebooks* does slightly favor P3 because it seems to

be supported by one more entry than P3\*. However, it is worth noting that NB 861—which has hitherto not been considered by most scholars dealing with the LP<sup>13</sup>—contains the version of the comparability claim that most resembles Berkeley's published remarks in PHK 8. In particular, NB 861 is the only entry of all the entries containing a version of the comparability claim that references color:

What can an Idea be like but another Idea, we can compare it with Nothing else, a Sound like a Sound, a Colour like a Colour. (NB 861)

[A]n idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. (PHK 8)

This similarity in itself is, of course, not decisive. But acknowledging it, I suggest, is enough to push back on the assumption that the textual support for attributing P3 to Berkeley is stronger. After all, just because NB 378 is more elaborate than other entries does not mean that it contains Berkeley's final view on the matter. For even though the *Notebooks* should be taken seriously (see note 13), it is worth to keep in mind that they are notebooks and therefore may contain conflicting reflections on certain issues because Berkeley is still developing his views at the time of writing it (i.e., 1706–1708).<sup>14</sup> And while it may be possible to render the entries consistent with each other, I assume for the remainder of this paper that there is a conflict between them.<sup>15</sup> For even if there is a

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<sup>13</sup> With the exception of Saporiti (*Wirklichkeit*, 222n3)—who does not further comment on this similarity—none of the previously mentioned Berkeley scholars dealing with the LP consider it: see Dicker, “An Idea Can Be,” and *Berkeley's Idealism*, Ch. 7; Hill, “Missing Argument”; Jacovides, “Berkeley Corrupted”; Melissa Frankel, “Something–We–Know–Not–What, Something–We–Know–Not–Why: Berkeley, Meaning and Minds,” *Philosophia* 37 (2009): 381–402; Frankel, “Twofold State”; Ryan, “New Account,”; West, “Why Can an Idea,”; Winkler, *Berkeley*, 141–49. For example, Winkler (145–48) places great emphasis on NB 378 and does not pay particular attention to the others (cf. Ryan, “New Account,” 574), which is problematic in itself. For even though there is no doubt that NB 378 contains the “most extended treatment of LP” in the *Notebooks* (Ryan, 562), neither of the two arguments he develops are found in his published works. This is despite Berkeley's reminder to himself to do so (NB 378a). Thus, I agree with West's assessment that Berkeley did not feel comfortable with the arguments in NB 378—at least in the versions he develops (546–47). For a more thorough discussion of how NB 378 in particular has been exegetically overrated in previous discussions of LP, see West, “Why Can an Idea,” 532–37.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bertil Belfrage, “The Order and Dating of Berkeley's ‘Notebooks’,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 39 (1985): 196–214; and Bertil Belfrage, “A New Approach to Berkeley's *Philosophical Notebooks*,” in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. Ernest Sosa (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), 217–230. On this interpretation it is assumed that Berkeley's understanding of likeness and comparing undergoes a development, and one can speculate that Berkeley comes to realize how problematic P3 and the restriction of likeness to ideas in general it entails would be for him. Also note that Berkeley seems to have been thinking about relations even after this time, because the previously discussed remarks in PHK 142 about relations (including acts of the mind) were added only in 1734 when he revised the *Principles*.

<sup>15</sup> In *Die Sprache Gottes*, Ch. 3.2, I argue that NB 51, 299 and 378 #18 can be plausibly read as somewhat hyperbolic versions of P3\*. That is, it is possible to read these entries as saying that the only thing you can compare an idea to is another idea. For instance, in NB 51 Berkeley says that you cannot compare two things *together* unless both are perceived. This does not entail that you can only compare what you perceive (i.e., ideas) but merely that you cannot compare what you perceive (i.e., ideas) with something you do not (i.e., a mind). In fact, on the anti–realist interpretation of relations,

conflict, there are still philosophical reasons that support the attribution of P3\* to Berkeley.

First, Berkeley's Conceivability Claim in PHK 8 does not require that only ideas can be compared (P3). Rather, Berkeley can make his point if he holds that an idea can be compared only to another idea, because in this section he wants to establish that it is inconceivable that an idea could be like a non-idea. Berkeley starts PHK 8 with a rebuttal on behalf of a representational or indirect realist whose position—namely, that we gain knowledge of the world in virtue of our representations (i.e., ideas) of it—he aims to refute. Berkeley argues in PHK 7 that colors and other sensible qualities only exist when they are perceived, that is, they exist only in a mind. This is accepted by his imagined potential opponent. However, the interlocutor then suggests these ideas could be “copies or resemblances” of things existing without the mind, such as matter or material substance. In response to this, Berkeley says:

I answer, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. If we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. Again, I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? (PHK 8).

Berkeley's Conceivability Claim is made in the following context: If *X* is an idea that represents an original, both of which is, according to Berkeley, admitted by the representational or indirect realist, then as Berkeley points out at the end of PHK 8, this original has to be an idea as well.<sup>16</sup> This is already evident as we cannot even conceive an idea should be like anything else. As the materialist Hylas puts the point in the *Three Dialogues*: “Upon inquiry, I find it is impossible for me to *conceive or understand* how any thing but an idea can be like an idea (my emphasis)” (DHP 206). Despite the different formulation, it is natural to read what Hylas says as essentially a clearer statement of the Conceivability Claim in *Principles* 8. For if we read this claim in the context of PHK 8, it becomes evident that Berkeley's point is *not* to say likeness is inconceivable except between ideas, but that you cannot conceive an idea *that is like a non-idea*.

Claiming we cannot conceive of likeness relations between an idea and a non-idea is not only consistent with Berkeley's acceptance of the impossibility to compare an idea to

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Berkeley is committed to the incomparability of ideas and minds because they are entirely unlike each other, and according to this reading, likeness can be reduced to mental acts of comparing. This is consistent with Berkeley's writings, which suggest that minds and ideas are so different that not even fundamental terms like “exist,” “know,” “thing,” or “being” can be univocally attributed to them (PHK 89 and 142). In other words, the reason that there is no likeness relation between minds and ideas is *not* that we fail to find any agreement when we compare them. Rather, Berkeley thinks no likeness relations obtain between minds and ideas because we cannot compare them in the first place. Thus, Talia Mae Bettcher is right to stress how “extreme” Berkeley's dualism is [see Bettcher, “Berkeley's Dualistic Ontology,” *Analisis Filosofico* 28 (2008): 147–73, esp. 167–68]. I thank one of the anonymous judges of the Turbayne Essay Prize committee for raising this worry.

<sup>16</sup> See also Frankel, “Something–We–Know,” 388–90.



anything but another idea (P3\*), but it also seems to be a direct consequence of P3\*. If you can only compare an idea to another idea, and comparing is necessary and sufficient for a likeness relation to obtain, it follows you cannot conceive of likeness relations between an idea and a non-idea, because such relations *do not exist*—and given Berkeley’s metaphysics, it seems impossible that they ever could. Rather, to paraphrase Philonous (DHP 206), Berkeley is committed to the view that whatever is sensible (i.e., ideas) cannot be like that which is insensible (i.e., non-ideas). To put it differently, what Berkeley draws our attention to in PHK 8 is *not* that we cannot conceive *any* likeness except only between ideas, but that we cannot conceive likeness between anything but ideas *if one relatum is an idea*.

Second, the previous section has established how problematic a restriction of likeness to ideas in general would be for Berkeley. Such a restriction would conflict with his ontological dualism which presupposes that all minds are at least *alike in one respect*—that is, in how (unlike all ideas) each mind is active (PHK 27 and 139; DHP 232–234). Moreover, a restriction of likeness to ideas, which follows from accepting P3 conflicts with Berkeley’s theological commitment to the *imago-dei* thesis, because the latter entails some sort of likeness between the divine and human minds. As Berkeley puts it: “The mind which is pure and spiritual [...] is made in the image of God” (*Works* VI, 88). These problems dissolve however, if we attribute P3\* instead of P3 to Berkeley. So, if Berkeley holds that the only thing that can be compared *with an idea* is another idea, his view is consistent with the view that minds are alike. And that has no bearing on the potential likeness of minds if ideas can only be compared to (and hence resemble) other ideas. To put it differently, just because ideas cannot be compared to minds does not entail that minds cannot be compared with each other. Thus, the fact that the problems that arise from attributing P3 to Berkeley can be avoided if Berkeley holds P3\* offers strong philosophical support for attributing the latter to Berkeley.

Third, if Berkeley holds P3\*, it is still possible to reconstruct an argument for the LP similar to the one Ryan attributes to Berkeley. To highlight the difference, compare Ryan’s reconstruction of a metaphysical argument for the LP which is primarily based on NB 378 (on the left) to my reconstruction which is based on various remarks we can find in Berkeley’s writings (on the right).

P1: Likeness is a relation.	P1: Likeness is a relation (cf. TVV 39).
P2: There are no relations without comparing.	P2*: There are no likeness relations without comparing (cf. PHK 104).
P3: We can compare only ideas.	P3*: The only thing that can be compared to an idea is an idea (cf. NB 861).
C: No likeness except between our ideas.	C*: The only thing that can be like an idea is another idea (cf. PHK 8).

In sum I have argued that Berkeley accepts P1, P2\* and P3\*. If this reading is correct, the conclusion C does not follow anymore and thus the LP cannot be inferred from C. On my reconstruction, however, the LP becomes the conclusion of the argument (i.e., C\*) and does not need to be inferred from a more general claim. Thus, if we attribute P3\* to Berkeley, the argument for the LP can be retained. To put it differently, one of the key

contentions of Ryan's paper can be salvaged without any of its previous problematic consequences.

## Conclusion

My aim in this essay has been to demonstrate that it is possible, in the vein of Ryan, to reconstruct a metaphysical argument for the LP which does not restrict likeness to ideas in general. Working with Ryan's assumption that Berkeley is an anti-realist about relations (i.e., that relations are reducible to mental acts), I have argued that likeness relations can be reduced to mental acts *of comparing*. Next, I have shown that the textual evidence is inconclusive when it comes to the question of whether we should attribute to Berkeley the view that only ideas can be compared. Rather, some of the entries in the *Notebooks* support the idea that Berkeley endorses the view that ideas can only be compared to ideas. As I showed in closing, attributing this latter view to Berkeley (a) is consistent with the way he argues in PHK 8, (b) does not conflict with his dualism or theological commitments, and (c) still allows us to reconstruct an argument for the LP—and does so, crucially, by not restricting likeness to ideas.<sup>17</sup>

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## Review

David Berman. *The Essential Berkeley and Neo-Berkeley*.  
 London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022. xiv + 201 pages.  
 ISBN: 978-1350214743

Although Berkeley's name is in the title, and there is discussion of some of Berkeley's philosophy, this book is not intended to be a contribution to scholarship on George Berkeley. Rather, as Berman makes clear, half the book is a rehearsal of Berkeley's thought as interpreted by Berman; and the other half develops Berman's own views. Let's call these Part 1 and Part 2, respectively. The thesis of Part 1 is that Berkeley is a dualist. But Berman is quick to note that the dualism at issue is not substance dualism between mind and matter, but rather what Berman calls epistemic or perceptual dualism between minds and ideas. Berman thinks that Berkeley's "dualism" presents Berkeley with a unique problem of how the self is known. The thesis of Part 2 is difficult to parse because it emerges from several psychological and anthropological theses that Berman asserts. Yet Berman's goal is to show that Berkeley's philosophy, stripped of its theological commitments and combined with Berman's psychological and anthropological theses, has the resources to explain knowledge of the self—but not for everyone. I shall try to explain.

Berkeley's core philosophical insight, according to Berman, "is not his immaterialism or idealism, as is usually thought" (ix), but instead is "the truth of dualism, that there are two kinds of basic beings (13). This is dualism because minds and ideas "are fundamental yet entirely different, and so irreducible to one another." There is a problem with what Berman clearly thinks is a radically new thesis about Berkeley. First, we don't typically think of dualism as contrasting an independent existence and a dependent existence. Rather, dualism contrasts different kinds of independent existences. Consider the analogical question for matter. Is extension a different kind of being than matter? It seems not. Rather, extension seems to be a way in which matter exists, or a quality that matter has. Similarly, ideas seem to be perceptions that minds have. That doesn't sound like there are different kinds of independent beings. It sounds more like there is one kind of independent being and one kind of dependent being. Otherwise, Descartes is also an epistemic dualist (about matter as well as about minds); so is Hobbes (but only about matter).

If what Berman means is that (1) minds and ideas are interdependent beings, and (2) since nothing else exists for Berkeley, there are no independent beings, then he may have some textual support for that reading. Berkeley thinks that minds are essentially perceptive beings—that is, they exist only as perceivers. In that case, it seems like minds exist only in virtue of having ideas. But this seems like another form of substance dualism, since it is about what exists and the manner of its existence rather than our knowledge. It also sidesteps Berkeley's commitment to the independent existence of a deity. Lastly, it overlooks the principle, suggested by Berkeley in PHK 2, that there are

several asymmetries between the existence of a mind and the existence of its ideas. My mind can exist without this or that idea, but not vice-versa. My mind perceives ideas, but not vice-versa. My mind operates on its ideas, but not vice-versa. If we take these points into account, this option begins to look like it suffers the same problems as those discussed above. Finally, those commentators who focus on Berkeley's immaterialism or idealism would surely also say that for Berkeley only minds and ideas exist, and minds need ideas to perceive or to act on. Thus, while eye-catching, Berman's description of Berkeley as a dualist doesn't do much to illuminate Berkeley's thought.

Berman considers an objection to his reading of Berkeley as an epistemic dualist (which objection is presented as an "unclarity" in Berkeley's texts). That objection is Berkeley's mention of a third category of objects that "are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind." Berman is surprised by this, saying:

Yet while Berkeley seems to be saying that these are objects, it is not clear how they can be objects without breaking down the key division he makes between passive objects and active minds. For the operations of the mind seem to be active and go with the mind not with the objects the mind perceives. (16-17)

The obvious answer to this confusion is that mental operations are ways in which minds actively exist; and ideas are ways in which minds passively exist. But that answer would disturb Berman's catchy packaging of Berkeley as an epistemic dualist. Notions also answer what Berman takes to be "THE question" (18) of Berkeley scholarship: understanding how we know minds. Berman thinks Berkeley doesn't know precisely what to say to this question. Berkeley himself is clear on this, albeit in the 1734 edition of PHK, in *Alciphron*, and gestured at in the *Third Dialogue* of 1713. Here is Berkeley in 1734:

We comprehend our own existence by inward feeling or reflexion, and that of other spirits by reason. We may be said to have some knowledge or notion of our own minds, of spirits and active beings, whereof in a strict sense we have not ideas. (PHK 89)

Berman's question for Berkeley is: "Do I know I am a mind directly or immediately in experience, or indirectly by inferring it from the objects I perceive or experience and/or produce?" (18). Again, Berkeley seems to have already answered this question in 1713:

*Phil.* I own I have properly no idea, either of God or any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert, as our ideas are. I do nevertheless know that I, who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist as certainly as I know my ideas exist. Farther, I know what I mean by the terms *I* and *myself*; and I know this immediately or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound.... Ideas are things inactive, and perceived. And Spirits a sort of beings altogether different from them.... I have, therefore, though not an inactive idea, yet in myself some sort of an active thinking image of the Deity. And, though I perceive Him not by sense, yet I have a notion of Him, or know Him by reflexion and reasoning. *My own mind and my own ideas I have an immediate knowledge of* [emphasis added]; and, by the help of these, do

mediately apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas. (DHP 231–32)

If this passage is to be believed, Berkeley thinks he knows his own mind and his own ideas immediately; and that he knows his own mind not by means of ideas “properly” or strictly speaking, but “in a large sense,” which Berkeley terms a “notion.” (A note to scholars: Berman provides no citations for passages that he quotes from Berkeley’s *Three Dialogues*, but only the passages themselves.)

Berman recognizes the relevance of Berkeley’s notions in getting at the question with which Berman is occupied. It is a fact of Berkeley scholarship, rarely discussed outside of conference dinners, that far too little work has been done on Berkeley’s notions despite their importance to understanding Berkeley’s philosophical system. The reason for the comparatively small amount of commentary on notions is the range and complexity of textual and philosophical difficulties they present. Few attempt to untangle them. That’s why James Hill’s recent book-length treatment of the subject is of considerable interest to commentators. Yet Berman’s discussion of Hill’s book is a scant three paragraphs. Readers looking for an informative summary of the contours of Hill’s reading will be disappointed. Nevertheless, Berman manages to make two more extraordinary claims. First that notions are not experienced for Berkeley. That is, they are not perceived either by sense, imagination, memory or reflection—despite Berkeley’s claim in the passages quoted above that notions are perceived through reflection—though not “as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound.” Berman’s second claim is that notions are timeless or “always there” without “a beginning and end” (63). This is so despite being notions being perceptions in finite minds. How can my notion of my own mind exist timelessly if my own mind does not? Sadly, Berman does not provide textual evidence in support of this reading.

Part 2 addresses how Neo-Berkeley—that is, Berman—thinks we know our own minds. The thought, as I understand Berman, is that we typically assume that perception is irreflexive. The perceiver does not perceive itself in the act of perception. Nor does the perceiver perceive the act of perceiving. In perception, the perceiver only perceives the object of perception. Berman defends his view that, similar to Leibniz’s doctrine of apperception, perception is reflexive. The mind perceives itself perceiving at the same time that it perceives the object of that perception. Berman situates this against Hume’s phenomenalist skepticism about the self, which claims that we lack any impressions of the self. Berman concludes that there are two kinds of humans: those who have reflexive perceptions and those who don’t. One wonders whether there is a threat of an infinite regress here. Am I aware, aware that I’m aware, aware that I’m aware that I’m aware, and so on *ad infinitum*? It is also unclear whether Berman’s thesis is an empirical claim about human psychology, or human anthropology. What is clear is that it is not a philosophical claim; and that the distinction between two types of humans is poorly supported.

Berman calls these two types dualist humans and monist humans. If you’re worried that dualism and monism are contradictory theories, Berman says not to worry. They are contrary, not contradictory. Thus, while one human cannot be of both types, both types of

humans can coexist. Furthermore, Berman argues that some human minds (those that immediately perceive themselves) can immediately perceive other human minds. He describes this as “dualistic intimacy.” How do we immediately perceive another mind? By loving another person, telepathy, emotions, friendship, rapport, etc. But it is not clear that I immediately perceive the mind that I love, or the mind of my friend, rather than mediate perceive that mind through our longstanding linguistic interactions. I shall not comment on telepathy.

In addition to dualist and monist humans, there are two other categories of humans for Berman. First, there are those who think sight gives us immediate acquaintance with the external world and touch gives us immediate acquaintance with internal states such as pleasure and pain. Let’s call these type-1 humans. Second, there are those who think touch gives us immediate acquaintance with the external world and sight gives us immediate acquaintance with internal states like pleasure and pain. Let’s call these type-2 humans. The idea is that for type-2 humans, if we only had sight and lacked touch, we would not be acquainted with the external world; and vice-versa for type-1 humans. Berman finds evidence of these two categories of humans in the writings of Locke, Berkeley, Russell, and others. Russell and Abbott are type-1 humans. They think that although none of the senses brings us into direct contact with the world, sight is responsible for the belief that we are in direct contact with the external world. Locke and Berkeley are type-2 humans. They think that touch brings us into direct contact with the external world, but sight does not. Yet it is unclear whether Berman is making psychological or epistemic claims, since he slips between saying that touch or sight brings us into contact with the external world; and saying that touch or sight provides basic non-inferential justification for our belief that there is an external world. The psychological claim would warrant the claim that there are two kinds of humans (but only if supported by a large cache of empirical research). The epistemic claim does not. It only shows that philosophers disagree over the source of epistemic justification for perceptual beliefs.

These categories prompt Berman to produce a Hobbiton–like spectrum of “valley–folk,” “hill–folk,” and “summit–folk.” The idea is that there need not be clear distinctions between type-1 and type-2 humans (which categories Berman genders as ‘he’ and ‘she’ respectively). According to Berman, the type-2 human subconsciously projects her (Berman’s gendering) visual images on to her tactile sensations, “making her believe that she is touching something solid and experiencing a material object” (166). Berman tells us that this claim is supported by empirical research, but that research itself is neither cited nor discussed in any detail. In contrast to the female who projects her visual imagery onto tactile sensations, the male is unable to cast such projections; and thus understands his tactile sensations for what they truly are: sensations rather than direct contacts with external objects. These gendered extremes suffer from a form of synesthesia, according to Berman. Between those extremes are a spectrum of valley–folk. And of course, one could be a dualist male, a dualist female, a monist male, a monist female, or a dualist or monist valley–folk.

It is truly unclear to me where all of this is going, and what it has to do with Berkeley. I suspect that Berman's motivations are revealed in his discussion of *Siris*. He thinks Berkeley scholars have unduly ignored that work or failed to appreciate it properly. But Berman's understanding seems to be more literary than philosophical as it is focused on thematic similarities between *Siris* and Plato's Allegory of The Cave. One does not find philosophical theories, or arguments, or analysis here. Instead, one finds a description of a religious experience of ascending into "the intelligible realm" and touching "THE truth" (98) through a form of meditation. Presumably, this is the treatment for the synesthesia discussed above. Elsewhere, Berman suggests that we humans are eternal "gods" or "demi-gods" (137). I suppose that the lesson is that we can achieve divinity and eternal life through meditative treatment of our synesthesia, use of telepathy, friendship and rapport, etc. If that is the lesson, it is sadly lost on me.

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## Review

James Hill. *The Notions of George Berkeley: Self, Substance, Unity and Power*.  
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Hill's book *The Notions of George Berkeley* is an exemplary work in Berkeley scholarship. It provides an admirably lucid, rich and original interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy, addressing a variety of puzzles that have been frustrating commentators for decades. One of its main contributions lies in developing a coherent account of Berkeley's philosophy of mind (most notably, his model of self-consciousness) in light of his oft-dismissed theory of notions. But it does more than merely shed light on one of the still underappreciated areas of the positive side of Berkeley's thought. Through utilizing Berkeley's doctrine of notion, it also allows us to reconsider some of the fundamental aspects of his philosophy, from perception and conceptual thought to ethics and theology, as well as his general philosophical outlook and place in the early modern canon. Moreover, it compellingly defends the continuity of Berkeley's philosophical development, showing how the apparently idiosyncratic approach of his late *Siris* is anticipated in the theory of notions from his middle period, which, in turn, is already anticipated in his earliest works. In what follows, I give an admittedly selective, subjective and uneven summary of each chapter of the book, and raise some critical remarks and questions both along the way and in a couple of summarizing paragraphs at the end.

Chapters 1 and 2 lay the foundations. Though not a classical introduction with methodology or literature review, Chapter 1 introduces some of the main themes, claims and interpretative frameworks of the book. It foreshadows the criticism of the standard empiricist reading of Berkeley as fundamentally one-sided; and it emphasizes his metaphysical dualism between spirits and ideas, alongside the corresponding epistemological dualism between our notions of our souls and their operations, on the one hand, and our perceptual knowledge of sensory ideas, on the other. The chapter ends with delineating Berkeley's overall position (dubbed in Renaissance terms "coincidence of opposites") which he arrives at by combining innatist or rationalist insights about the realm of notions with empiricism about ideas, transcending our usual historiographical categories.

Chapter 2 provides a helpful, if inevitably schematic, summary of Berkeley's most important predecessors' views on self-knowledge. Descartes famously proposed a perceptual—or as we might call it, introspective—model. Hobbes and Malebranche both denied, though for different reasons, that we can gain immediate knowledge of our souls. Locke endorsed elements of both views: while being skeptical about our knowledge of the nature of spiritual substances, he elaborated on the introspective model by cashing it out in terms of an "inner sense" (as opposed to Descartes' intellectual perception).



Chapter 3 presents Berkeley's alternative picture. Hill first points to the reasons why Berkeley, like Hobbes or Malebranche, rejected that we have an idea of our souls. A natural place to start is PHK 27, which among many other passages emphasizes the heterogeneity between minds and ideas. Though Hill does not make this step really explicit, the fundamental metaphysical difference entails that ideas are just not the right medium to give us knowledge about the intrinsic nature of our souls. In fact, Berkeley regards self-perception as a logical impossibility, likened to seeing a sound or grasping a round square (PHK 136). Moreover, dissimilarity does not seem to be the only problem. Any putative idea of a self, construed as an object of a mental representation, creates a split between the subject and object of the act, which in the unique case of self-knowledge should coincide.

Hill focuses on two differences between minds and ideas. The first is well-known: spirits are totally active, whereas ideas are totally passive. As Hill explains, activity refers to causal power, the source of the change or motion we observe in the world. But since we do not perceive the activity itself in our ideas, we can conclude that ideas are completely passive. Hill does not clarify how this follows. Isn't Berkeley simply mistaking an absence of evidence for evidence of an absence? Or is it his commitment to the transparency of our ideas that justifies making this step? On the other side of the same coin, it is also glossed over whether Berkeley is more justified to derive our notion of causal power from our experiences of volitional activity. The interpretation of self-knowledge Hill later advances seems to help Berkeley out at this point: our own notions of causal power are not gained from perceiving that our volitions are constantly followed by some effects, but the causal power itself is somehow self-revealing in the very operations of our will.

But rather than discussing these issues, Hill mentions a less familiar distinction between spirits and ideas: spirits are simple or indivisible, whereas ideas are complex. On Hill's reading, in PHK I 7, Berkeley dismissed all simple ideas as abstractions. As the next step, Hill distances himself from the "relative interpretations" which get Berkeley's project wrong on a fundamental level by associating him with the skeptical position of his predecessors that we cannot know the soul immediately, only via the effects it produces. Instead, Berkeley had room for direct awareness which applies to the self and its operations in a non-perceptual, indeed non-representational, way. Agreeing with Winkler (and a couple of other interpreters), Hill argues that for Berkeley, knowing our mental acts lies in performing them, as opposed to, as the introspective model holds, turning towards them. It is not only that self-knowledge requires or stems from our mental operations, but it is constituted by them. Self-knowledge is thus knowing through doing.

While it may sound a little bit sketchy, this view avoids the problems besetting the introspective model, such as the infinite regress it seems to lead to, or, in Ryle's famous words, the absurdity of trying to catch one's own shadow. In fact, one might wonder if it is too good to be true. As Hill himself raises the question, does this view count as an account of self-reflection at all? Doesn't it do away with the cognitive part completely, reducing self-knowledge to the very actions we perform? The allusion to Ryle also pushes the reader into this direction. But Hill appeals to Berkeley's master argument to

show that we can forget about ourselves as the agents of our mental operations, and, accordingly, there is room for self-reflective attention even in terms of this model. I wonder if it is indeed compatible with the view that self-knowledge consists in nothing else but “the enjoyment of our mental activities.” On the other hand, if we need some attention to realize that we are performing these acts, and this extra attention is essential to self-knowledge, Berkeley’s view is perhaps not so different from those accounts in the period according to which self-consciousness is (to use Arnauld’s term, “virtually” or implicitly) inherent in every, first-order, mental act.

Chapter 4 discusses the relationship between Berkeley’s theory of notions, underlying his account of self-knowledge, and innatism or rationalism (which Hill, apparently, uses interchangeably). Hill proposes that Berkeley’s doctrine of notions have an expanding scope, incorporating more and more non-empirical aspects of his philosophy, from the self and its operations through relations and Platonic concepts such as unity or beauty.

A brief but helpful discussion of the history of the term “notion” paves the way for exploring Berkeley’s innatism implied by his endorsement of notions. On the traditional, empiricist, reading, it appears rather surprising that Berkeley never rejects innatism. Indeed, as Hill is keen to emphasize, in passages such as NB 649, Berkeley explicitly endorses some form of innatism. As expected, Hill distinguishes between a crude and refined version of innatism: between what we might call an “actualist” and a “dispositionalist” version. Because of the well-known ambiguities in Descartes’ views, Hill calls upon Leibniz’s “refined” innatism to illuminate Berkeley’s position. Accordingly, Berkeley does not hold that we have all our notions actually and consciously present in us *ab initio*. Rather, it takes time and reflection on our mental activities to grasp them. As an interesting, though not really elaborated, implication, it shows (again) that the Berkeleyan mind is not fully transparent: we might completely know what is and what is not included in a particular idea we actually perceive, and even be fully aware of all our ideas at a given time, but our notions and our mental operations can escape our attention.

But doesn’t the appeal to some sort of experience make Berkeley an empiricist, after all? As Hill replies, by the same reasoning, we should reclassify Leibniz as an empiricist, and we can basically throw our hands up. I wonder if that’s the appropriate reaction to the empiricist/rationalist distinction. Hill’s way to lower our hands is to restrict empiricism to gaining our concepts from sensory or quasi-sensory mechanisms, such as Locke’s inner sense model of reflection. In such a case, Leibniz and Descartes are not empiricists but innatists or rationalists, because they think we acquire our concepts in purely intellectual ways, even if these intellectual acts depend on self-reflective experiences, indeed ones of (intellectual) introspection.

A different way to approach the issue of experience would have been to appeal to a helpful analogy Hill mentions in the last chapter: both digging up a coin and forging it require some activity but they are of fundamentally different sorts. So, analogously, if the content itself is not derived but only discovered through the experience of the mental activity, a dispositional innatist is perhaps more clearly distinguished from a concept

empiricist where the content itself is derived solely from the experience. But Berkeley is less clear in this respect—at least when it comes to notions such as that of God and causal power, with their contents apparently deriving from experiencing our own mental activities.

In any event, Hill mentions further peculiarities of Berkeley's innatism: in contrast to "standard" rationalists, for Berkeley, notions do not concern physical concepts, such as space or extension. More importantly, for him, the experience required in realizing the "spiritual" notions is, nonetheless, sensory, as it necessarily involves grasping ideas and, hence, cannot happen in some isolated intellectual sphere. It is only when we operate on our sensory ideas that we can acquire notions of ourselves and concepts, such as God and causal power, that we derive from performing these acts. All in all, the picture that emerges from Hill's analysis is that Berkeley stands in some categorically different camp on its own—so much so, one wonders how much we actually gain by calling (rather cautiously or tentatively as Hill does) Berkeley's theory of notions an innatist or rationalist doctrine.

Among the diverse areas of Berkeley's thought where his doctrine of notion has interesting implications, Hill first turns to the nature of perception in Chapter 5. On his interpretation, perception cannot be a fully passive process as it is one of the mental operations we have notions of and part of the essentially and indivisibly active self. This, of course, is a well-known puzzle with many more or less convincing attempts to defend the consistency of Berkeley's different claims about the passivity or activity of perception. Hill's attempt is among the best.

He first presents Berkeley's argument for the passivity of perception from the first dialogue of DHP (195–97). Berkeley rejects head-on what Hill helpfully labels as the two-component view of perception, according to which the mental act of perceiving is distinct from its object. If the two were separate, we might think that the object is not necessarily related to the mind and might exist mind-independently after all. Passivity is also crucial for Berkeley's proof of a divine cause of our perceptions, and I would add more generally, for his fundamental attempt to maintain our anti-skeptical trust in our senses and the "reality" of the world around us. Hill nonetheless tries to establish a development in Berkeley's thought, leaning towards a more active characterization of the mind (including apparently its perceptual activities) in the later stages of his career. Hill also hints at the first dialogue passage being *ad hominem* and, more importantly, registers the fact that, even in his early works, Berkeley contradicts his own much richer understanding of mental activity and volition which includes such sustained cognitive phenomena as acquiescence or attention required by every act of perception. But Hill focuses most on the problem of unification of sensory input in perception, arguing that (as it will be a recurrent theme in the book) even early on Berkeley thought that unity lies in our minds' constructive activity. Hence, when we combine and unify the multitude of ideas into stable objects of experience, we are doing something in perception. And this realization made Berkeley change his mind in his middle period, ditching the view that perception is essentially passive.

Whether, in Hill's reading, Berkeley thought through all the ramifications this move has for his overall philosophy or not is unclear to me. While Hill helpfully shows that mental activity should be seen as a broader category for both early and late Berkeley than the conscious volition he rejects as a component of sense perception, his concept of perception is equally ambiguous between a stricter and much richer conception. And only the latter seems to include such mental activity as the unification of our ideas into objects. To put it bluntly, Hill's reading ignores the distinction between immediate and mediate perception. In defending his Kantian interpretation, Hill points to the implicit mental activity involved in spatial perception, such as the way we see the distance of objects through an intermodal mechanism. But it is natural to think that none of this happens on the immediate level, the level of the mere sensory input of color and light. Hill, by contrast, argues that these bare inputs are never the objects of our experiences in an isolated manner since, for instance, we always perceive color and light at some distance. While this seems to be true on a psychological level, Berkeley never questions that color and light are primary at least in the logical sense, as they are what allow us to associate other sensations and hence the (tangible) distance with the objects we see. The same can be said about the synthesis of object perception. We first have to be able to receive (in a regular manner) the disparate ideas of some smell and taste and so on *immediately* in order to be able to unite them, and perceive the cherry as a unified bundle of ideas *mediately*.

Of course, if Hill is right and Berkeley is more Kantian on this point, he manages to distance Berkeley from the standard empiricist reading pretty radically as a thinker who already questioned the "myth of the given" in perception. Moreover, he seems to distance Berkeley from the empiricist camp further in terms of emphasizing the importance of unconscious mental activities in Berkeley's philosophy of perception. But I wonder if playing down the passivity of perception somewhat weakens one of the main claims of Hill's book. One of the biggest problems with the introspective theory of self-knowledge is that it is modeled on the passivity of how we perceive sensory ideas. But if outward perception is also active in some deep sense, then it appears to be less clear why Berkeley was against this view so radically. Also, his clear-cut epistemological dualism (between passively received ideas, on the one hand, and actively cognized notions, on the other) gets a bit blurry. All in all, Berkeley's commitment to the passivity of perception still presents a difficult puzzle to solve.

Chapter 6 discusses Berkeley's "conceptual dynamism," partly motivated by the Kantian reading of Berkeley's theory of perception, partly by the aim of drawing out the implications of his theory of notions. As is well known, Berkeley attacks abstraction as a way to account for conceptual thought. With regard to the first type of abstracting, Hill claims, again, that Berkeley rejected simple ideas as unconceivable abstractions. From this Hill concludes that Berkeley discarded a foundational element of Locke's concept-empiricism which allows us to analyze complex perceptions in terms of simple ideas and recombine them later in imagination. While this interpretation has a textual basis and is defended by other scholars such as Winkler, I am still not sure if Berkeley really wanted to push this line to this extent. For instance, Berkeley's understanding of (creative) imagination seems to rest on our ability to re-combine the simplest constituents of our

sense perception. Maybe his simple ideas are not the Lockean qualities of color and shape—which, as *both* realized, are inseparable in thought as well as in reality—but colored patches of light, as well as sounds, smells, etc. Berkeley’s attack on the second type of abstraction concerns how ideas become general by removing their determinate properties. Hill is not concerned with the details of this debate. Rather, he helpfully distinguishes between concept formation and possession. It is important because other views—from Descartes’ innatism to Locke’s empiricist theory of abstraction—agree that the former requires a mental operation. But for Descartes and Locke, possessing a concept no longer consists in a mental activity, with our intrinsically general or indeterminate ideas just standing passively in front of the mind’s eyes.

For Berkeley, by contrast, conceptual thought is a continuous mental activity: that is, to possess a concept is doing something to an idea. Again, as his related theory of self-knowledge, it might sound a bit Rylean. As Hill will explicitly say later, for Berkeley as well as Ryle, having concepts lies in a know-how as opposed to a know-what. He also adds that Berkeley can be regarded as a pragmatist, who thinks that in possessing a concept, there is no need for any knowledge apart from engaging in a rule-governed activity. But, as Hill adds, this activity is an irreducible *mental* operation, which is hardly the conclusion Ryle or his followers wanted to draw. Also, it seems to me, in Berkeley’s view, possessing a concept still requires some cognitive relation even if it is more than that. In fact, as Hill notes, the concepts we are talking about here, such as the concept of a triangle, have a perceptual or sensory content.

Relatedly, it is a bit unclear to me if, on Hill’s reading of Berkeley, concept possession lies merely in a disposition or competence, or the actual exercise of a skill. The terminology of “ability,” “skill,” “mastering a technique,” or even “competent use,” as well as the analogy with Ryle, suggests the former. But it is mostly spelled out in terms of actually performing mental operations. And what does competence mean here? Do I only have a concept of a triangle if I (am able to) use my corresponding idea in the way others do? If so, then concept possession is somehow even a social enterprise, and dependent on our common use of language. But, as Hill clarifies, for Berkeley, language only plays a secondary role in fixing and facilitating the application of concepts, with their generality being constituted solely by what happens in the individual mind. This seems to further distance Berkeley from some potential implications of a Rylean or Wittgensteinian reading.

In any event, it soon turns out that these sensory concepts are dependent on notions, most specifically, our cognitions of our own mental activities establishing relations between ideas. As such, Berkeley’s later expansion of notions to concepts such as unity or power seems not to come as a great surprise. But in my view, to build on the quibbles I mentioned with regard to Chapter 5, this discussion just underscores the huge gulf between how Berkeley approaches conceptual thought and sense perception, construing the former as a representational state (i.e., a state where the content of the act is partially determined by our minds), while regarding our immediate perceptions where we do nothing like that. Indeed, Hill later explicitly claims (arguably going further than before) that perceptual content is penetrated by a network of relations established by mental

activities and shot through with the judgments of the mind in a Kantian manner. Nonetheless, it seems convincing that for Berkeley, conceptual thought—being grounded on our ability to selectively attend to features of an idea that are deemed relevant to the given mental act of representation—is more active or dynamic than for his contemporaries.

Chapters 7 and 8 show how Berkeley's theory of notions gains even further significance in the later works. Despite his unwillingness to define goodness in absolute or abstract terms, for Berkeley, ethics is still important though largely implicit. Chapter 8 gives a helpful summary of the development of Berkeley's ethical thinking, culminating in the *Siris*'s account of ethics in terms of notions. It is commendable, again, that Hill looks beyond the usual texts, such as the *Passive Obedience* and *Alciphron*, and attempts to produce a coherent, unified interpretation of Berkeley's scattered ethical remarks.

One important, if unexpected, line is that ethics is not a purely theoretical enterprise for Berkeley, as we cannot have passive representations of ethical concepts, but it lies in an active comprehension of moral categories. This also explains the *Alciphron* criticism of moral sense theory, which is presented as analogous to his rejection of Locke's inner sense model of self-knowledge. Perhaps it is fair to say that Berkeley's view shows some similarities with virtue ethics insofar as moral goodness is tied to the right "operative persuasion of mind." As Hill helpfully points out, it is important that we have appropriate feelings such as tenderness towards others, but sentiments play only a secondary role in ethics. It is, rather, the virtues these emotions stem from that make an act good. Hill spends some time criticizing a "notable line of interpretation," the utilitarian reading of Berkeley's ethics. One issue he raises is that a rule-utilitarian interpretation fails to account for Berkeley's strict attachment to the moral law in *Passive Obedience*. He also interprets Berkeley's appeal to "well-being" in terms different from how standard utilitarians (e.g., Bentham) would do. For Berkeley, well-being is not worldly pleasure (contrasted with pain) but refers to and includes our eternal, other-worldly, interests.

Perhaps, in order to gain an even more rounded interpretation, Hill could have addressed the psychological egoism, and (some sort of) hedonism of Berkeley's early comments more directly. The discussion of Berkeley's analogy between Newton's universal attractionism and benevolence as a uniting instinct of human behavior is interesting. It points out that goodness or benevolence (just like gravitation) is not simply a matter of perception but actually pulls us together, creating communities and societal bonds. In *Siris*, Berkeley develops this analogy further by putting special emphasis on the intrinsic unity of our minds. On Hill's interesting reading, goodness in the social sphere consists in our mind's activity to extend or confer its own unity to other things, uniting with other minds and forming communities and societies.

Chapter 8 explains Berkeley's related concepts of unity and God, through the lens of his theory of notions. As for the former, Berkeley is opposed to the Lockean view that we perceive unity as a primary quality of external objects, a simple idea accompanying all our experiences. Berkeley rejects this view as an illegitimate abstraction. Unity is always relative to the things considered and depends on the concepts under which they are

considered. In Hill's terms, the Berkeleyan world of perceptions is not parceled into units intrinsically, but unity is the product, or rather the process, of our minds' unifying activity. Hill only talks about sensation as the putative source of our idea of unity, but as PHK 13 shows, Berkeley was aware that, in Locke's view, reflection should also convey the idea of unity to us. But we can second guess Hill's reply: it would be only another misguided appeal to introspection, since even when it comes to our own ideas, we do not perceive any intrinsic unity in them. Not only do we not have a simple (abstract) idea of unity, but no idea is intrinsically single or unified.

Again, I am not sure this was Berkeley's intention in the early works, and he might not have wanted to deny that we can reflect on a single idea, the feeling of warmth, say, without experiencing any complexity or division within it. Of course, and this is Berkeley's point, unity is not out there on its own, and the unity of the objects we (mediately) perceive, such as of an apple, depends on our abilities to consider different bundles of ideas as unified objects. In any event, it is again instructive to realize the continuity in Berkeley's philosophy, tied together by his active, non-representational approach to unity from the *Notebooks* through the *Siris*. In the later stage, unity is not even considered as the product of the mind but, being subsumed under the scope of notions, is reduced to the mental activity of unification itself. Hill then rejects Frege's objection that such a view makes numbers a purely subjective matter, leading to an untenable psychologism about mathematics. In his response, Hill points out that for Berkeley, unity does exist objectively in our spirit's intrinsic simplicity which, while not perceived as such in introspection, allows us to apply unity and numbers to sensible things and hence count apples and so on.

This unity of the self is just a reflection of the divine unity. Our concept of God is the last topic Hill discusses in the book. In a compelling analysis, he compares Berkeley's three-step process from DHP with Locke's (empiricist) constructivism. An important similarity to Locke is that it requires the mental activity of heightening our powers and reducing our imperfections, with no innate idea of God sitting in our souls as some pre-given content. It is not even just like digging up a roman coin in one's garden; rather, it needs to be forged from our inner resources. But there is a similarly huge difference to Locke's account, which can be traced back to the *Notebooks*: God as an essentially simple being cannot be represented in a complex idea. Locke was, of course, aware of this difficulty as an instance of our limited access to the real essences of finite things or souls, let alone God's nature. As Hill rightly emphasizes, Berkeley opposed this sort of skepticism both generally with regard to real essences and God in particular. Berkeley believed we have a more intimate (if "extremely inadequate") knowledge of God than Locke's admittedly highly relative and complex idea.

Hill then compares Berkeley's account to Descartes' refined innatism about God. Despite similarities, Berkeley's view of God is importantly different not only because, unlike the Cartesian view, it does not rest on a perceptual model of experiencing our own thinking abilities as the basis of our (amplified) notion of God. Moreover, as Hill points out, Descartes starts from an innate idea of infinity, while for Berkeley, our notion of God starts from an awareness of our finite selves. But this point could have been generalized

more: Berkeley seems to reject (in a rather empiricist move) Descartes' *a priori* approach to God (as for instance is attested in his dismissal of all-perfection theology in NB 845). Hill ends with a crucial question about the role of the pure intellect in Berkeley's philosophy and, unlike the Cartesians, restricts its scope to the spiritual, theological and moral spheres. Even so, it can only be a modified form of pure intellect, as the Cartesian pure intellect does not seem to sit easily with his non-perceptual account of self-knowledge. Accordingly, Hill ends on a rather cautious note to the effect that the "pure intellect" of other thinkers is the closest to what Berkeley's theory of notions is getting at.

Since it is a wonderfully rich and original account touching on many puzzling theoretical and interpretive issues in Berkeley's philosophy, there are a variety of interesting, if controversial, claims to pick out. I already mentioned a couple of my concerns with Hill's reading of Berkeley's innatism or his allegedly Kantian theory of perception. I only want to emphasize my comments on the overall classificatory scheme that emerges from the discussion. As he himself acknowledges, Hill is restricting "empiricism" to a sensory-based view, which is already a questionable move. But once the experience of one's own mental operations is accepted as an empirical source, and innatism is construed in dispositional terms (as Hill prefers to do), the distinction becomes so much harder to draw between opposing camps of early modern epistemology. Simply put, given such qualifications, I am inclined to think that it is not only Berkeley who should be more open to "rationalism" but "traditional empiricists" like Locke or Hume, too. In other words, while rightly emphasizing Berkeley's originality and the impossibility of forcing him in either the empiricist or rationalist camp, Hill inadvertently reinforces a dichotomy that was never clear-cut in the first place.

This approach, I suspect, partially comes from taking the *Siris*, and its own historiography, seriously, which is the last feature of the book I want to comment on. Focusing on this later work is refreshing but is not without its own methodological pitfalls. For one, not unlike the *Notebooks*, rather than explicitly endorsing views as his own, Berkeley often merely reports the views of Neoplatonic authors in the *Siris*. Moreover, doesn't regarding it as the culmination of Berkeley's thought just make the reverse mistake of those who completely dismiss it as a late aberration, incompatible with the early works? Overall, Hill does a great job in avoiding both these extremes, giving a balanced and careful reading which establishes some fundamental continuity, but not complete identity, in Berkeley's whole *oeuvre*. Accordingly, despite the quibbles or rather just questions I mentioned earlier, it is hard not to be sympathetic to the project with its bold attempt to give a highly systematic and original account of Berkeley's philosophy of mind, perception, conceptual thought and many related issues. Hill's book is an important work that challenges many deep-seated interpretations of Berkeley.

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## Review

*The Oxford Handbook of Berkeley*, ed. Samuel C. Rickless  
New York: Oxford University Press, 2022. xix + 708 pages.  
ISBN: 978-0190873418

This handbook kindles the most substantive ebullience of Berkeley scholarship ever. With finesse, editor Samuel Rickless has compiled 34 chapters with 33 authors, offering a cornucopia of delights over 700 pages. This outnumbers *the Cambridge Companion to Berkeley* (2005, 470 pp) and *the Bloomsbury Companion to Berkeley* (2017, 536 pp). Despite the length, the handbook is well trimmed and tailored to the needs of beginners and specialists alike. After the first two introductory chapters, the handbook is divided into four parts: “Metaphysics” regarding interpretations such as anti-abstractionism and idealism (Chapters 3–11), “Epistemology” including mathematics and chemistry (Chapters 12–17), “Value Theory” in sociologically practical aspects (Chapters 18–20), and “Forebears, Contemporaries, and Successors” from Descartes to Shepherd (Chapters 21–34), and ends with a rich index. The elaborate chapters will impress the reader with a riot of colors. What follows is my Berkeleian wish to be appreciative of each chapter.

In Ch. 1 “Introduction,” Rickless sets out an overall initiative from “a historically informed analytic perspective” (7). In this *basso continuo*, the subsequent chapters analyze Berkeley’s historical arguments (in premise-conclusion form) together with validation and verification. In this key (17), Daniel Flage (Ch. 2 “The Life and Times of George Berkeley”) tersely and systematically encapsulates the Bishop’s intellectual background, including the justification and fund-raising for his pragmatic but quashed Bermuda project to create an Anglican college to train the sons of Native Americans and planters (11–12).<sup>1</sup> Flage’s diagrams of what he calls (a) the model of Locke, Arnauld and Nicole to “separate” abstract ideas and (b) “the Cartesian model of selective attention” (that does not separate abstract ideas but indicates universal or general terms) are noteworthy in illustrating the Bishop’s critical stance toward the former model in the logic textbook tradition on abstraction (19–20).

On Berkeley’s “Metaphysics,” it is important to start off with his arguments about abstract ideas and abstraction—Berkeleyan *basso ostinato*. Martha Bolton (Ch. 3 “Berkeley on Abstract Ideas and Idealism”) spells out how his objection to the doctrine of abstract ideas anticipates the idealist conclusion that sensible things are both conceivable “mind-dependent particulars” and “bearers of signification” (31). She points out that Berkeley distinguishes ideas (perceived things) from the unperceived but rational and spiritual “notions” that identify causation and support ideas. As James Hill (Ch. 4 “Berkeley on Ideas and Notions”) notes, Berkeleyan notions are “relations” between ideas, as well as the divine and creaturely spiritual “substances,” “causes,” or “powers”

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<sup>1</sup> Although it diverges from Flage’s narrative, we can still lament how this account ignores Berkeley’s actual life and missionary zeal in enslaving black people (since he owned and baptized slaves in America). See Tom Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), Ch. 7; and Takaharu Oda, a review of Jones’ biography, *Eighteenth-Century Ireland* 37 (2022): 202–205.

that identify active operations of mind and weave a historical narrative between rationalism and empiricism (58–61). In Ch. 5 (“Berkeley’s Arguments for Idealism”), Benjamin Hill draws on Rickless, Thomas Lennon, and George Pappas, to distinguish between Berkeley’s supposed “limited idealism” (PHK 1–6) and his “total idealism” (PHK 7–24)—where the latter (containing the likeness principle and master argument) is linked to immaterialism (the doctrine of the impossibility of material substance).

Georges Dicker (Ch. 6 “Berkeley on Objections to Idealism”) explains why he thinks several of Berkeley’s objections—such as his claim that existence depends on constant perception—fail, ultimately because the assumption of the existence of an infinite mind (God) to perceive them continuously (DHP 212) generates a vicious circle (90–92). According to Dicker, the Bishop’s ultimate garbled response is probably due to his unflinching resistance to materialism. In Ch. 7 “Berkeley on Materialism and Immaterialism,” Melissa Frankel examines how Berkeley’s immaterialism is extrapolated in opposition to seven doctrinal claims by materialists such as Locke, Descartes, and Cartesians like Malebranche (109). She suggests that Berkeley sees little justification for philosophical materialism itself (a moot point in his immaterialist discourse), considering how the materialist fails to provide proof of the existence of material objects and cannot overcome the appeal to simplicity made by immaterialism (123).

Not only does Berkeley’s metaphysics highlight the impossibility of matter, but contrapuntally his doctrine of mind seems even more resonant. As Genevieve Migely (Ch. 8 “Berkeley on Minds”) notes, ideas require minds and minds require ideas (137–38). That is, the infinite mind brings into being the natural world of “ideas of sense,” whereas finite minds bring forth “ideas of imagination” and *may* cause “ideas of sense” vis-à-vis finite bodily motion (PHK 146, DM 25). In Ch. 9 (“Berkeley on Qualities”), Richard Glauser suggests that, along with the immaterialist thesis that negates materialist metaphysics and the idealist thesis that sensible ideas exist, Berkeley deploys a third doctrine, namely, that *physical objects* exist. Glauser uses this insight to explain why Berkeley defuses the materialist distinction between primary and secondary (and tertiary) qualities so prevalent in the seventeenth-century metaphysics and the mechanistic natural philosophy of Galileo, Descartes, and Locke. Stephen Daniel (Ch. 10 “Berkeley on God”) argues that *a posteriori* arguments that focus on passivity, continuity, and divine language are insufficient proofs for the existence of God, because in such inductive or abductive arguments, God is not necessarily *infinitely* good, wise, or powerful. Instead, Daniel focuses on Berkeley’s *a priori* argument for divine existence based on “the bare existence of the sensible world” (DHP 212) and the pure possibility of an infinite mind (180–83).

On my view, the most baffling debate is found in Ch. 11 (“Berkeley’s Theory of Language”) on semantics and pragmatics. There Kenneth Pearce critically regiments three theories of meaning: (i) the (modified) ideational theory, in which words or signs stand for ideas abstracted in the speaker’s mind (Jonathan Bennett, Seth Bordner, et al.; Alc 7.2), (ii) the speaker’s intention theory, in which words stand for the speaker’s intention to effect something emotively in the hearer’s mind (primarily Kenneth Williford; MI 41), and (iii) the (later Wittgensteinian) use theory. According to the third

theory, meaningful words do not necessarily stand for ideas as long as they accord with *rules* between speaker and hearer without appealing to abstractions (the “meaning as use” view of Antony Flew and J. R. Roberts; MI 19, 37). Berkeley rejects the first theory because it is based on abstraction (PHKI 19) and the second because it is independent of language (Alc 7.14). I think a more pragmatically oriented construal is possible (cf. Alc 7.7), but Pearce settles on the third option pellucidly (204–208).

It is difficult to separate epistemology from metaphysics, for I take it that the former is the basis for the latter in Berkeley’s immaterialism. However, distinct segments in his “Epistemology” are featured in Part II. Concerning how to access a body of knowledge, Seth Bordner (Ch. 12 “Berkeley on Common Sense”) draws attention to Berkeley’s *sui generis* vindication of “common sense” (221–22; PHKI 1, DHK 244). Referring to Rickless’ analysis, Bordner distinguishes *de re* (“concerning a thing”) and *de dicto* (“concerning a dictum”) and ascribes the former to the vulgar’s commonly held beliefs or propositional attitudes (225–26; DHP 262). In Ch. 13 (“Berkeley’s Philosophy of Science”) Margaret Atherton outlines Berkeley’s life-long commitment to natural philosophy, even though from his *De motu* (1721) onwards, his interest in idealistic metaphysics withers (245). Nonetheless, the status of “mathematical hypotheses” (e.g., “force” and “gravity”; DM 17, 21) may still await a new pragmatist construal, because without instrumentalist readings of useful “fictions” that deflate truth-values, hypotheses are used to “discover true laws of motion” (247–48; DM 28).

The next two chapters relate to Berkeley’s theory of visual perception. In Ch. 14 (“Berkeley on Perception”) Keota Fields justifies a constructivist model of vision, according to which knowledge of the external world *need not* resemble external qualities but is constructed from mediate perceptions based on (visual) linguistic rules and regularities (273). This is rightly intended to refute the representationalist model of Berkeley’s precursors (e.g., Descartes, Locke, Arnauld, et al.), according to which external objects are represented or perceived in the mind. This is because, no matter how the doctrine of ideas may be deemed representationalist, what are visually perceived (primary qualities) are not genuinely driven by external stimuli (264). In contrast to this kind of constructivism, Robert Schwartz (Ch. 15 “Berkeley’s Theory of Vision”) converges on a construal compatible with (American) pragmatism in which there are no ideal conditions we can articulate about what is real or perceived as *veridical* (292–93). Perceptual veridicality is adjudicated by the “correlation” or connection of ideas, not “correspondence” to reality through sensations (*Siris* 305); and things are perceived as ideas with veridicality without conjoining the macro (“naked eye”) and microscopic levels (NTV 85). Though Schwartz’s pragmatic interpretation is impressive, his invocation of C. S. Peirce’s association of pragmatism (294) awaits further analysis.

In Ch. 16 (“Berkeley on Mathematics”) Douglas Jesseph enriches the Bishop’s anti-abstractionist approach to mathematical studies, zooming in on arithmetic and algebra as implying nominalism and (perhaps) anticipating formalism, the Newtonian calculus of fluxions, and most significantly geometry. In particular, the (Hilbertian) formalist construal (i.e., what matters is manipulating symbols in gamified rules without referring to meanings, 311) may invite further investigation into arithmetic and algebra. In Ch. 17

(“Berkeley on Chemistry”), Luc Peterschmitt severs an arguable relation between Berkeley’s chemical explanation and his justification of the medical virtues of tar-water. While Berkeley’s chemical and mechanistic explanation is explored in his late work *Siris*, his *Alciphron* is rightly considered in terms of the tactical contrast between the freethinker Lysicles’s discourse on chemistry and Berkeley’s argument against Lysicles’s materialist doctrine of the soul (326–27). The contrast between “chemical hypotheses” (*Siris* 239)—that is, suppositions resting on Boerhaave’s conception of chemistry—and Newtonian “mathematical hypotheses” (*Siris* 234, DM) is informative, just as is the fact that attractions of particles in chemistry described by particular laws cannot be framed in terms of principles of universal attraction in mechanics (336–41).

Part III (“Value Theory”) concerns Berkeley’s pragmatic insights into economics, politics, and theology. Light is first shed on his proposals for a reform to rescue the poor in eighteenth-century Ireland, no matter how scathingly he looked down on them for being lazy and idle (366–67; Q 382). Contrary to perfunctory remarks by renowned historian of economic thought, Joseph Schumpeter (349–50), Marc Hight and Geoffrey Lea (Ch. 18 “Berkeley on the Economics of Poverty”) reconstruct an engaging narrative and in-depth historiography about Berkeley’s thinking in political economy in terms of moral defects. Nancy Kendrick (Ch. 19 “Berkeley on Political Obligation”) describes Berkeley’s doctrine of passive obedience (i.e., non-resistance, non-violence 375–76; PO 2–3), first, as an objection to Locke’s theory of social contract supportive of political resistance, and second, as a model comparable to a doctrine of passive obedience embraced by the feminist Mary Astell (373).<sup>2</sup> And Timo Airaksinen (Ch. 20 “Berkeley’s Theology: The Promise of Infinite Eternal Happiness”) aptly gleans pragmatic points of view, such as human happiness in heaven, primarily from a set of Berkeley’s sermons after 1708 and independent of his philosophical doctrines (402).

Against the backdrop of both doctrinal and practical aspects of Berkeley’s life, the final 14 chapters (Part IV) focus on extrinsic correlations with his “Forebears, Contemporaries, and Successors.” Stefan Storrie (Ch. 21 “Berkeley and Irish Philosophy”) indicates how the Irish philosophical contribution to the early Enlightenment reveals how Berkeley and other Irish thinkers (e.g., John Toland, Peter Browne, William King, William Molyneux) were indebted to Locke’s cognitivism even while being critical and pragmatic (409–411, 415). In Ch. 22 Alan Nelson (“Berkeley and Descartes”) notes how Berkeley admired Descartes’ attack on Hobbes despite his not giving an *argument* for how the meditator cognizes the essence of matter (435). Patrick Connolly (Ch. 23 “Berkeley and Locke”) notes how, for Berkeley, Locke was “a Gyant” (NB 678) with whom Berkeley differed about abstraction, substance, and primary and secondary qualities.

In contrast to his textbook exposure to Descartes and Locke, the Bishop planned to meet Nicolas Malebranche in Paris in 1713 (CGB 108). Whether they actually met is unknown, but the Oratorian’s impact on the future bishop is no less significant. Sukjae Lee (Ch. 24 “Berkeley and Malebranche”) elucidates Berkeley’s critical engagement with

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<sup>2</sup> To grasp the full spectrum of Berkeley’s theology, we should not forget that prior to his consecration as bishop in 1734, he endorsed slavery in America (390) and (as part of his failed Bermuda scheme) planned to kidnap Native Americans and forcibly convert them to Christianity.

two of Malebranche's positions: (i) the doctrine of the "vision in God," according to which God enables one to see everything in the divine "intelligible extension," and (ii) occasionalism, registering the divine sole and genuine causal power (466–72). Monica Solomon (Ch. 25 "Berkeley and Newton") argues that Newton deserves the acclaim he receives in *De motu* (especially DM 58–62, 487–94) because of how Newton's thought experiments about absolute motion turn out to be primarily epistemological (or pragmatist on my view) when justifying relative motions in mechanics. Berkeley should thus not be characterized as a metaphysician taking a deflationary approach to the ontology of forces and space.

Newton's rival over the invention of calculus, Gottfried von Leibniz, by contrast, may be more comparable, since he and Berkeley commented on one another. Documenting Leibniz's scribbles in a copy of the Berkeley's *Principles* (1715), Stephen Puryear (Ch. 26 "Berkeley and Leibniz") fruitfully identifies three distinct sorts of concurrence between the two metaphysics: (i) subjective idealism (that only perceivers exist, and phenomena *or* ideas are within them), (ii) phenomenalism (that bodies *or* sensible things are reducible to what perceivers sense based on the ideality of their relations), and (iii) immaterialism (that bodies are real only if they are in the mind, so there is no reason to presume material substance), even though their treatments of the nature of reality differ.

Next, honing in on the dialogues of *Alciphron*, the following two chapters spotlight two taxing free-thinkers or irreligious moralists in the early eighteenth century, whom the Bishop labels "minute philosophers" in a Ciceronian way (Alc 1.10, 13; 524–25). The most neglected debaucher and yet ridiculed character, Lysicles, is supposed to voice Bernard Mandeville (1670–1733). Mikko Tolonen (Ch. 27 "Berkeley and Mandeville") captures an antagonistic, albeit asynchronous, engagement between Mandeville and Berkeley, rightly analyzing the latter's *ad hominem* argument (*Defence of Free Thinking in Mathematics* 13, 50; 527). On the other hand, the title character Alciphron combines the views of Mandeville (526) and Francis Hutcheson, whereas he is generally taken to voice another free-thinker, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury (Lord Ashley, 1671–1713). Shaftesbury also debauches the Christian moral sense behind his discourse aligned to the ancient (especially Stoic) traditions. Laurent Jaffro (Ch. 28 "Berkeley and Shaftesbury") discloses how that free-thinker's discourse goes astray from Berkeley's perspective—namely, in the voices of Euphranor and particularly Crito (Alc 3; 540). Jaffro draws a stark contrast on the classical ideal of *paideia* ("liberal education") between the Whig moralist Shaftesbury—who links Socratic education with Stoic asceticism—and the Tory Anglican Berkeley, "appropriating" the ideal for a God-given and God-driven religious conscience.

As Tom Stoneham (Ch. 29 "Berkeley and Collier") points out, the English parish priest Arthur Collier (1680–1732) independently develops themes that sound like Berkeley's but differ substantially regarding issues of minds, substance, inexistence, and predication (569–72). Similarly, Antonia LoLordo (Ch. 30 "Berkeley and Edwards") cites passages by the American Puritan preacher and theologian Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) that again resonate with Berkeleyan motifs but reveal no signs of influence.

Looking into Berkeley's "successors," it is first disputable to what degree David Hume (1711–1776) inherits the Bishop's immaterialism or anti-materialism. There is scant evidence that Hume was interested in Berkeley's natural and moral philosophy (596–97). But as Jennifer Marušić (Ch. 31 "Berkeley and Hume") argues, Berkeley's views about abstraction and anti-materialism, in fact, do affect Hume (even if Hume shies away from Berkeley's metaphysical arguments). Even though Berkeley argues that perceptions depend on their being perceived by minds (PHK 5), his anti-materialism nonetheless paves an *ironical* way for Hume to reject the material-immaterial distinction altogether (604–606). In the case of another Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid (1710–1796), there is plenty of textual evidence that he was swayed by Berkeley's philosophical tenets (e.g., common sense). Rebecca Copenhaver (Ch. 32 "Berkeley and Reid") argues that Berkeley's doctrine of cognition by "suggestion" converges methodologically with Reid's emphasis on perception (as a "suggestion relation" that regulates nature) in visually anticipating tangible figures (624–627).

There are, no doubt, other philosophers (e.g., James Beattie, Mary Whiton Calkins, May Sinclair, Hilda Oakeley) who could be discussed in this collection (8, 640). For example, Tim Jankowiak (Ch. 33 "Berkeley and Kant") turns to the idealism of Immanuel Kant (1721–1804) for a clearer understanding of Berkeley's "dogmatic" idealism (637–38, ft. 7). For Jankowiak, Kant's exposition of Berkeley's view that every experience is illusory, assumes the popular second-hand (and false) caricature of the Bishop in late eighteenth-century Germany (640–642; fn. 3–5). And Rickless' final chapter (Ch. 34 "Berkeley and Shepherd") on Lady Mary Shepherd (1777–1847) focuses on how her accounts of sensible objects as ideas and God as the cause of those ideas identify fallacies of equivocation, self-contradiction, and irrelevance in Berkeley's argument for idealism—even if he succeeds in defending the soundness of his idealism (660–66).

I should note that the Berkeley Library (named after the Bishop in 1978) in Trinity College Dublin was denamed in April 2023 because of his slave-holding status and odious remarks about others. Such cancel culture notwithstanding, it would be a ghastly fallacy if one inferred a judgment about him without reading his writings. That is why the 33 scholars in this volume have put us in a better position to appreciate Berkeley's oeuvre and contributions.

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## News and Announcements

### **2024 American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting: International Berkeley Society Session**

Astor Crown Plaza New Orleans French Quarter, 739 Canal Street  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
February 21–24, 2024

Author Meets Commentators:

Stephen H. Daniel, *George Berkeley and Early Modern Philosophy* (2021)

Comments by:

Keota Fields (U Massachusetts Dartmouth)

Julie Walsh (Wellesley C)

Alberto Luis López (National Autonomous U Mexico)

Todd DeRose (Ohio St U)

Organizer: [Patrick Connolly](#) (Johns Hopkins U)

### **Turbayne Essay Prize**

*The next deadline for submitting papers is **November 1, 2024**. Guidelines for submission may be found [here](#). Submitted papers should address some aspect of Berkeley's philosophy. Essays should be new and unpublished and should be written in English and not exceed 5,000 words in length. All references to Berkeley should be to Luce & Jessop, and an MLA or similar standard for notes should be followed. Submissions are blind reviewed and will be judged by members of a review board selected by the Department of Philosophy at the University of Rochester. The winner will be announced March 1, 2025 and will receive a prize of \$4,000. Copies of winning essays are to be sent to the George Berkeley Library Study Center located in Berkeley's home in Whitehall, Newport, RI.*

2023 Turbayne Prize Winner:

David Bartha, Humboldt University of Berlin, “‘Why Can't Animals Imagine?’ Berkeley on Imagination and the Animal–Human Divide”  
(in this issue of *Berkeley Studies*)

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