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On George Berkeley's Alleged Letter to Browne: A Study in Unsound Rhetoric

Bertil Belfrage

Abstract: Luce once declared that his and Jessop's interpretation of Berkeley is "reflected in our edition of the *Works*." The appearance of a recent article by Stephen Daniel draws attention to two examples of the implications of this interpretive model of editing. One is Luce's and Jessop's rejection of *Alciphron* as a reliable source for Berkeley's philosophy, because (they claim) we have access to his true philosophy elsewhere (W 3: 7), and "it is idle to turn to *Alciphron* for Berkeleianism," for he does not rest his case there "on his own philosophy" (W 3: 13). The other is the "correction" of *Alciphron* by incorporating an anonymous letter to Peter Browne "as a supplement" to Berkeley's work—something that Daniel criticizes for circularity and lack of scholarly accuracy. The question arises as to whether *Alciphron* is the only example of a text in the *Works* that is biased in favor of the editors' private interpretation.

Stephen H. Daniel recently criticized a paper that had been generally accepted for more than forty years.¹ That paper (the *Article* hereafter) was published in 1969 by A. A. Luce and two of his students.² They saw George Berkeley as the author of a letter to Peter Browne (the *Letter* hereafter) that had been published anonymously in a journal in 1745.³ Their thesis was that it should be understood as a "supplement" to Berkeley's *Alciphron*, to be incorporated as a new "addition to the *corpus* of Berkeley's writings." They end: "Professor Jessop concurs" (381, 385).

The close connection between the *Article* and the Luce-Jessop edition of *Alciphron* in *The Works of George Berkeley*⁴ adds an extra dimension to Daniel's criticism of the *Article*, which he accuses of circularity and lack of scholarly accuracy. His analysis draws attention to the unbridgeable generation gap between an old authoritative way of editing, represented by Luce and Jessop, and the "New Bibliography" with rigorous standards of critical-text editing that was developed in the early 20th century in English studies and that Peter H. Nidditch applied to the editing of philosophical texts no more than six years after the *Article* was published.⁵

¹ Stephen H. Daniel, "Berkeley's Rejection of Divine Analogy," *Science et Esprit* 63 (2011), 149-61.

² Jean-Paul Pittion and David Berman, "A New Letter by Berkeley to Browne on Divine Analogy" with a "Note by A. A. Luce on the Contents and Style of the Letter," *Mind* 78 (1969), 375-92.

³ *A Literary Journal*, vol. 2, part 2 (1745), 153-67.

⁴ A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (eds.), *The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne* (9 vols.: London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948-1957); hereafter *W*.

⁵ See *The Bibliographical Society 1892-1942: Studies in Retrospect* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1945); Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Peter H. Nidditch's edition of John Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

Indeed, when Luce commented on his and Jessop's edition a few years before the *Article*, he frankly declared that "the interpretation, reached independently by Professor T. E. Jessop and myself . . . [is] reflected in our edition of the *Works*."⁶ Their edition of *Alciphron* is a good example of this interpretive model of editing. *Alciphron* did not fit in with what the editors regarded as Berkeley's "true" philosophy. Guided by their interpretation, they stated in their editorial introduction that "it is idle to turn to *Alciphron* for Berkeleianism" (W 3: 7). In their view, *Alciphron* was "left to students of philosophy—quite wrongly, because these have his philosophy elsewhere" (W 3: 13). In another volume they add, "Being a philosopher, he must, it is assumed, have had an ethical system, and his *Passive Obedience*, alongside with his *Alciphron*, has been examined to find it." But the editors could not "find anything sufficiently developed to be called a system" (W 6: 7). Thus, by reference to their conception of "Berkeleianism" and what they style "an ethical system," they went so far as to ask "students of philosophy" to ignore Berkeley's *Alciphron* (W 3: 13).

This is in line with Daniel's criticism of the *Article* for circularity. First they identify their own interpretation with Berkeley's "true" philosophy. Then, as *Alciphron* is not compatible with this, they conclude that because Berkeley does *not* "rest the case [in this book] . . . on his own philosophy," we can neglect it (W 3: 13, bracketed insertion mine).

Besides circular arguments, the unique feature of the *Article* is its frequent use of *ad hoc* hypotheses. Thus the authors found convincing evidence that Berkeley is *not* the author of the *Letter* and gave themselves the task of explaining away this unwanted evidence. Daniel highlights Luce's attempt at reversing unfavorable evidence to make the opposite point, as when Luce observes the *lack of stylistic similarities* (it "is not quite like anything Berkeley published") but takes this, as well as the *lack of doctrinal parallels* between *Alciphron* and the *Letter*, to support Berkeley's authorship. In Luce's own words:

Lastly, there are the *missing* parallels—a strong, though paradoxical, argument [. . .]. There is no parallel in that dialogue for: [Here follows the four main points of the *Letter*⁷ which are "missing" in *Alciphron* IV but should be included in this work according to the *Article*.]

This new letter, as Professor Jessop remarked to me, is not quite like anything Berkeley published; and as an addition to the *corpus* of Berkeley writings, it is all the more welcome on that account. (*Article* 385, emphasis original, bracketed comment mine).

⁶ A. A. Luce, *The Dialectic of Immaterialism. An Account of the Making of Berkeley's Principles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), 9. Bracketed insertion mine.

⁷ The four points which, if included in Berkeley's *Works*, would "save" *Alciphron* from being excluded from "true" Berkeleianism are summarized by Luce as follows: "There is no parallel in that dialogue [*Alciphron* IV] for: (1) the powerful *veracity* argument (p. 161), or for (2) the definition of wisdom in terms of means to an end, which is used *six* times in the letter, or for (3) the striking term 'divine, human wisdom', the focus of a masterly refutation of Browne's position (p. 162), or for (4) the challenge to 'explain one single power... independently of its effects, and by its true internal nature' (p. 166)." (Emphasis original, bracketed addition mine.)

Daniel's comment: "This is scholarship run amok"!

The contrast with modern editors and librarians is striking. They are trained to take a step back, looking at texts as *facts*, and use strict empirical methods, leaving matters of interpretation to the reader. When members of the old interpretive school of editors turn into apologists for a certain "true" interpretation of the text, basic methods in textual scholarship become foreign to the purpose.⁸ Consider for example the two *ad hoc* hypotheses by Luce that Daniel does not mention explicitly. They deserve a study of their own by experts in rhetoric.

Luce opens his note as follows:⁹

The letter has three parts—the introduction (pp. 153-154), the main argument (pp. 155-165), and the conclusion (pp. 165-167). Each several part has the strong and independent links with Berkeley's thought and phrasing, detailed below, and the whole is in Berkeley's best style at the height of his controversial powers.

In the introduction the author poses as a docile pupil, seeking instruction from Browne. When I first read it, I noticed a good deal in the Berkeley manner; but I could not believe that the words "I'll give up the hateful word *idea*", and "no sawcy idea of mine" came from Berkeley's pen. On reading further into *Browne* I soon saw that in the circumstances Berkeley just *had* to say those things. Browne accepted Locke's ideas of sense *con amore*; but he hit out passionately at ideas of reflection (e.g. *Proc.* pp. 68, 71, "a labyrinth of ideas, . . . this empty noise and gingling of ideas"). The "sawcy idea" is Berkeley's way of getting a bit of his own back. The phrase alludes to a passage in Browne's attack on *Alciphron*. *Alciphron*, Browne says in effect (D. A. p. 478), contains "a very little substantial food", but is "stuffed with forcemeats, and brimful of unwholesom and pernicious *sauces*" (*Article* 381, italics and ellipsis in original).

Besides such authoritative statements as "the whole is in Berkeley's best style" (which remains to be proved), there are two passages in the *Letter* that do not seem to be by Berkeley, "I'll give up the hateful word *idea*" and "no sawcy idea of mine." But, instead of examining texts known to be by Berkeley to determine how probable it is to find such

⁸ When Luce says (384), for example, "I had some doubts about 'pitch upon' (p. 155), till I found it in a letter of Berkeley's," he disregards basic criteria of relevance and frequency. As the *Letter* is a piece of seven pages, we could (in principle) divide all Berkeley's works into seven-page portions and decide exactly how frequent a certain term is relative to a seven-page text by Berkeley. But this "exactness" is delusive. A comparison between the vocabulary in the *Letter* and Berkeley's works should be evaluated against a considerable margin of error; and even if the frequency matches, it would be irrelevant to the authorship question, if all potential authors used this term as frequently as in this case. Therefore, we would have to identify a representative group of 18th century theologians, who have written about subjects dealt with in the *Letter*, before we could identify what terms are and are not relevant for including an author as a potential writer of the *Letter*. There are also other difficulties, such as the possibility of significant differences in style between different kinds of contexts, etc.

⁹ When Luce promises a comparison of the style of the *Letter* and of Berkeley's works "detailed below," he probably refers to his "list of verbal parallels" (384, n. 1). But, again, to evaluate stylistic resemblances and differences, we need a control group of potential authors to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant observations.

passages in a seven-page letter by him, Luce ignores Berkeley's texts completely.

In the first case he observes that Browne did not accept Locke's ideas of reflection, and that the author of the *Letter* was prepared to give up the term "idea" entirely. Then the conclusion is that Berkeley (who is not even mentioned in the premises) *had* to be the author of the *Letter*.

In the second case Luce found, *not* the adjective "sawcy" but the noun "sauces," *not* in a book by Berkeley but in one by Browne. Luce's idea is, so far as I can see, that Berkeley *might* have noted the noun "sauces" in Browne's 180-page comment on *Alciphron*, that he *might* have associated "sauces" with the adjective "sawcy," that he *might* have decided to use "sawcy," because he *might* have thought that Browne *might* have made the association from "sawcy" in the *Letter* to "sauces" in his comment on *Alciphron*, etc. Whatever chain of fanciful conjectures Luce had in mind, the conclusion is supposed to be that "Berkeley just *had* to say those things."

In both cases the conclusion is presented as being true without a shadow of doubt, although it appears out of the blue, without any logical connection with the premises. Jean-Paul Pittion and David Berman use a similar kind of rhetoric in their contribution to the *Article*.¹⁰

They base their argument on a passage quoted from a letter by Berkeley to Johnson dated 4th April 1734, where Berkeley maintains that he has taken "no public notice" of either Peter Browne or Andrew Baxter. They argue as follows:

The phrase "no public notice" [. . .]¹¹ cannot exclude our letter, because it was not made public. Berkeley is well known for not multiplying words unnecessarily. Therefore his qualification "public" seems to imply that he *did* take some *private* notice. And this could only be our letter. (378, emphasis original.)

It [the *Letter*] was written, though, before April 1734 because in Berkeley's letter to Johnson "no public notice," as we have already pointed out, implies that our letter was already written. It is likely, therefore, that it was written in 1733. (379, bracketed addition mine.)

Pittion and Berman claim to prove both *that* and *when* Berkeley wrote the *Letter*. Their unique method is to examine what message there might be concealed in the three terms "no public notice." Even if Berkeley did not take public notice of Browne and Baxter, he *might* have taken private notice of them. From the possibility that this *might* have

¹⁰ As I leave out matters of interpretation, I have nothing to say about the attempt by Pittion and Berman at identifying the group of potential authors and eliminating them one by one until only Berkeley is left (375-378). Daniel criticizes this part of the *Article* as a network of circular arguments ("this environment of enthusiasm") based on the "true" (Luce-Jessop) interpretation (159). According to Daniel, the author of the *Letter* is one John Jackson.

¹¹ The left out passage runs: "must mean that Berkeley's brief remark in *The Theory of Vision Vindicated* does not refer to the *Divine Analogy*. On the other hand it . . ."

happened, they conclude that “he *did* take some *private* notice” to Browne, thus begging the question (378, italics original).¹² And from the false assumption that “this could only be our letter” they draw the unsound conclusion that Berkeley wrote the *Letter*, and that he did so before 1734, in 1733 (378-79).¹³ If this were a sound line of argument, then Berkeley “must have” written a private letter in 1733 to Baxter as well, but they did not consider this option.

This dating serves the purpose of explaining away a difficulty in attributing the *Letter* to Berkeley, namely “the rather extensive use of the word ‘conception’ [in the *Letter*] (Berkeley usually preferring the term ‘notion’)” (379, bracketed addition mine). Nonetheless, assuming that Berkeley did write the *Letter* in 1733 he *might*, they speculate, have changed his vocabulary in this one year. As this was the year when Berkeley prepared *The Analyst*, the frequency of “conception” and “notion” *might* be the same in *The Analyst* as it is in the *Letter*—as should be the case if Berkeley did write the *Letter* in 1733. From the possibility that it *might* be so, they concluded that it *is* so. But they forgot to check the evidence,¹⁴ because it is *not* the case that “conception,” compared to “notion,” “is profusely used” in both *The Analyst* and the *Letter* (379). They are distributed as follows:¹⁵

	The <i>Letter</i>	<i>The Analyst</i>
“Conception”	12 (60%)	5 (21%)
“Notion”	8 (40%)	19 (79%)

The false statement that “conception” and “notion” are distributed in a similar way in the *Letter* and *The Analyst* draws attention, once again, to two different approaches to editing.

Textual scholarship is primarily a descriptive assignment confined to presenting a historically correct basis for research work on a text and its author or authors, thus focusing exclusively on historical and textual facts. But when these authors act as editors in presenting *Alciphron* or introducing a new “addition to the *corpus* of Berkeley’s writings” (385), they rather act as apologists with the end in view to teach “true” Berkeleianism. This made them ignore plain textual facts (as in the conception/notion

¹² What “seems to” imply the wanted conclusion on the one page (378) does imply it on the next (379).

¹³ Daniel expresses the same criticism in slightly different terms. He adds correctly that this (“that spurious dating strategy,” as he calls it) is not the way we date documents in historical research (159-60).

¹⁴ On page 379, they add a footnote saying, “See *Analyst*, especially sections 41 and 93-94.” What “especially” means is hard to understand, particularly as “conception” appears only once in section 41 and “notion” not at all. 100% “conception” would not support the thesis of a similarity in vocabulary. And as there are only 50 sections in *The Analyst*, apparently the reference to “sections 93-94” is really to pp. 93-94.

¹⁵ *The Analyst* consists of 50 numbered sections in which there are 5 mentions of “conception” and 15 references to “notion,” followed by 67 queries with 4 mentions of “notion” and no mentions of “conception.”

case) or ask others to ignore texts incompatible with the “true” interpretation (as in *W* 3: 7, 13).

I am talking about *scholarly* editions. There are also *other* kinds of editions, intended to deepen the reader’s acquaintance with different aspects of the text. In *these* kinds of editions, the interpretive aspect is valuable and important. Scholarly editions “only” serve the purpose of providing readers with reliable, unbiased texts—which is a very different task.

It would be interesting if experts in rhetoric would investigate by what “logic” the arguments of the *Article* receive their persuasive power. Even without such an examination of the Luce–Jessop or the Pittion–Berman rhetoric, Stephen Daniel’s criticism of the *Article* raises the pressing question, is the destructive presentation of *Alciphron* in the *Works* an isolated case or just the tip of the iceberg?¹⁶

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¹⁶ I wish to express my gratitude to John Rogers for valuable comments.

Anne Berkeley's *Contrast*: A Note

Stefan Gordon Storrie

Abstract: This essay provides some historical background for, and considers the philosophical importance of, the collection of Anne Berkeley's (George Berkeley's wife) letters to Adam Gordon. The primary philosophical significance of the letters is her arguments against the so-called "free thinkers." She discusses the philosophical view and the behavior of five prominent free-thinkers: Shaftesbury, Bolingbroke, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Hume. Her discussion of Shaftesbury is particularly illuminating and can be read as a commentary on *Alciphron* III.13-14. Because the work of the other four were published mainly after the Bishop's death, the letters also show Anne's independent lifelong interest in matters theological, philosophical, and moral.

I. The *Contrast*

It is a little known fact that there is a book spanning two volumes whose main author is George Berkeley's wife, Anne. The full title of the work is *The contrast; or, an antidote against the pernicious principles disseminated in the letters of the late Earl of Chesterfield; Being The Correspondence of an eminent Person, deceased, with the Editor, during a Course of Years. To which are added anniversary addresses from a father to his son. By the Rev. Sir Adam Gordon, Bart. M. A. Rector of Hinxworth, Herts.* It was published in London in 1791. To my knowledge the existence of the book has not been noted by any Berkeley scholar. This is surprising, as use have been made of both Anne's unpublished correspondence with William Samuel Johnson (Stratford)¹ and her fairly trivial notes in the Chapman MS.²

In the *Contrast* Anne discusses the free-thinkers that Berkeley attacked in his essays in the *Guardian* (1713) and in *Alciphron* (1732). Of particular interest to Berkeley scholars is Anne's discussion of Shaftesbury in her 12th letter. There she gives a kind of commentary on *Alciphron* III.13-14, which will be considered below. By discussing other free-thinkers whose work appeared after the Bishop's death, the *Contrast* also shows Anne's strong independent interest in theological and philosophical matters.

The work consists of four parts: (1) a *Preface* by the editor and publisher of the book, Adam Gordon (I, 4-14); (2) the most comprehensive part of the work, 41 letters all written by Anne Berkeley to Adam Gordon (I, 15-271, II, 3-90); (3) the *Anniversary Addresses from a father to his son, on his birthday* by Adam Gordon (II, 91-199); and (4) *Six letters to a Lady of Quality* by the historian and Christian mystic, Nathaniel Hooke (II, 200-259).³ The letters and the addresses have the common theme of the piousness of the authors and the Christian educational tone in which it aims to guide the young

¹ As I refer to two different Samuel Johnson's, I will disambiguate between them by referring to their place of birth.

² A. A. Luce *The Life of George Berkeley* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1949), 111; and I. C. Tipton and E. J. Furlong, "Mrs George Berkeley and her washing machine," *Hermathena* 101 (1965), 38-47.

³ Presumably Anne gave him the manuscript. In a letter to Johnson (Stratford) from 21 June 1770, she refers to Hooke's *Letter to a Lady*, saying that Hooke gave her the manuscript for it. See *The Yale University Library Gazette* 8 (1933), 34.

recipients. The letters of Philip Stanhope, the Earl of Chesterfield, to which the *Contrast* is offered as reply or “contrast,” are the famous *Letters to his son* published in 1774. Criticized early on for their lack of religious zeal, Gordon described them as “subtle poison” (I.9) and “superficial and licentious maxims” (10). Samuel Johnson (Lichfield) expressed his view in harsher terms, claiming that they taught “the morals of a whore and the manners of a dancing master.”⁴

The editor and recipient of Anne’s letter was Rev. Sir Adam Gordon, Bart., M.A. (1745?-1817), an Anglican clergyman, rector of Hinxworth and later rector of West Tilbury.⁵ In the preface Adam Gordon offers a short sketch of Anne, though “for reasons immaterial to be mentioned, her name at present must be suppressed” (I: 5). It sheds great light on her character and I will therefore quote a sizable portion of it here:

The original writer of these letters was a lady of elevated rank, and the most brilliant, and general accomplishments; allied to one of the finest geniuses of his day (who was no less eminent for *every virtue*,⁶ than sound and universal learning). She could not fail of improving the talents, with which nature had endowed her to shine as an ornament to her sex. To the strenuous friend, the most pleasing companion, and the benevolent patroness of indigence and merit, she united the exalted and qualifying virtues of the humble and pious Christian. She was remarkable for never starting serious subjects abruptly, or unreasonably; yet none of her discourse was without a tincture of the *one thing needful*: and she possessed the rare talent of introducing these subjects in such a pleasing manner, blended with such variety of entertaining and valuable anecdote, that the whole company seemed interested in her leading the conversation: her eloquence was so flowing, and at the same time so rapid, assisted by a retentive and copious memory, replete with happy allusion, and the most pertinent quotation, that she never tired her audience — I have often seen the most gay, and those little qualified (through a worldly education) to relish the truths she recommended, so penetrated by her reasoning, and so captivated by the sweetness and vivacity of her manner, as to listen with profound attention and to feel regret when she concluded her friendly admonitions. — In short, sterling sense, improved ability, just politeness, universal benevolence, and great Christian progress, combined to grace the character of this amiable and excellent woman. (I: 5-7)

⁴ Ed. G. B. Hill and L. F. Powell, *Boswell’s Life of Johnson* (6 vols.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 1: 266.

⁵ Gordon was instituted and installed as canon of the fifth prebend of Bristol in 1797. J. M. Horn, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857. Vol. VIII, Bristol, Gloucester, Oxford and Peterborough Dioceses*, 1996, 29. His obituary is in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* 87 (1817), 556-67. He is the author of two books: *Discourses on Several Subjects: Being the Substance of Some Select Homilies of the Church of England, Rendered in a modern Style, and Fitted for the General Use, and Christian Instruction of the Community at Large, In Two Volumes* (London: John Stockdale, 1795), and *A Collection of Sermons on Several Subjects and Occasions, Particularly on the Festivals and Fasts of the Church of England* (London: John Stockdale, 1796). The former lists Bishop Berkeley’s son as a subscriber.

⁶ A reference to Alexander Pope’s Epilogue to the *Satires*, Dialogue II, line 72: “To Berkeley ev’ry virtue under heav’n.”

II. Anne's Letters

The published letters from Anne Berkeley to Gordon are not dated. Gordon states that the correspondence was more extensive than the published letters in the *Contrast*, "many of the original letters necessary to fill up the order of time, having been unfortunately lost, from the casualties attending a variety of situations" (I: 10). We can therefore expect some significant gaps in time between letters. Gordon states that he became acquainted with Anne Berkeley when he was 15 years old (I: 8). In her first letter Anne makes reference to Gordon's forthcoming confirmation (I: 15), which suggests that the letters began shortly after they met. In other words the correspondence started approximately 1764 when Anne was in her sixties.

I will not offer a commentary on all or most of Anne's letters. The majority of them concern moral and religious education with anecdotes about young men losing their health, wealth and soul by not practicing the teachings of Christianity. She also writes about her time in France as a youth (I: 84). But some letters touch on arguments for the truth of Christianity and, connected to this, arguments against the teaching and character of a host of "free-thinkers." Starting on letter no. 2 she draws extensively on Charles Leslie's *A short and easy method with the deists; wherein the certainty of the Christian religion is demonstrated by Infallible Proof, from Four Rules, which are incompatible to any Imposture that ever yet has been, or can possibly be* (1694). This work is concerned to show that the miracles recounted in the Old and New Testament are historical facts, and this is her main line of reasoning against the free-thinkers.

Of most significance for Berkeley scholarship is Anne's letter no. 12, on the views of free-thinkers. She claims that these opinions at least partly come from discussions she had with her husband:

as I have had frequently an opportunity, few can boast, of hearing the *true* character of most of the infidel authors of my time, from a very eminent person who was acquainted with some of the most celebrated of these profane wits, and with all their works, I do not know that I can do any thing more advantageous for you, than to transcribe some anecdotes relating to a few of the most famous men of this stamp. (I: 110-11)

Anne goes on to discuss a number of such "profane wits." Here I will consider two of them: Henry St John, first Viscount Bolingbroke ("Lord B-") and Anthony Ashley Cooper, third Earl of Shaftesbury (Lord "S-y"). Other thinkers she puts in this category are Voltaire, "that arch-enemy of sacred history" (I: 121) and, with some qualification, Rousseau and Hume (I: 258-59). The latter two are discussed in reference to Rousseau's *Julia*, a book Anne gives a detailed criticism of in letter no. 30. Warning Gordon about "authors but a little removed from Atheism" (I: 258), she remarks,

I am no longer at a loss why Hume patronized him [Rousseau]; he was as a refiner to recommend by the attraction of beautiful colour, that same work which Hume attempted in a more downright and disgusting manner. But as the old proverb says,

as two of a trade, and especially *such* a trade, can never agree, the pride of R- could not bear favours conferred by Hume his inferior. (I: 259)

On her view Bolingbroke “is the chief of their [free-thinkers] writers in our language” (I: 111). Bolingbroke’s philosophical writings were published posthumously in 1754.⁷ After its publication it was received as an important work and Anne accurately shows the general estimate of its importance at the time (though its fame did not last). As the works were published after Bishop Berkeley’s death, he presumably knew little of them. But it seems he was acquainted with Bolingbroke and certainly knew of him through their mutual friends Swift and Pope.⁸ Anne claims that some of Bolingbroke’s arguments in fact work in promoting a sound Christian system. In this way “my Lord’s [Bolingbroke’s] *head* was Christian” (I: 112). She refers Gordon to a book that systematically attempts to show this feature of Bolingbroke’s writings, presumably John Leland’s *A View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (2 vols.; London, 1754-55). She also mentions Bolingbroke’s criticism of the Old Testament and his attack on revelation and states that Leslie’s works contains the proper antidote (I: 112). This shows that Anne was up to date on the major philosophical and religious disputes of the time, at least those concerning free-thinking. Further, Anne dwells significantly on Bolingbroke’s behavior and his painful last years.⁹

Lord B- was also a vicious man, and none such can be a Christian; for unless you deny yourself you cannot be Christ’s disciple. Now this nobleman would not deny himself, and therefore he sometimes denied Christ, though the force of reason rendered it impossible that he could support his error; and by not denying himself, he suffered tortures which equalled those the primitive Christians bore, without their hopes to sweeten them. He lived some time during the latter part of his days in the most wretched state, from the consequence of a dissolute course of life. Thus we may observe the folly and infatuation of those counted among the wisest of the sons of men. This celebrated genius lived a great while in agonies, and it is said his end was truly shocking: but every day furnishes such examples; the martyrs to Satan infinitely exceed those who die to God. All abandoned debauchees choose him for their master whose ways are death, and refuse him whose gift is *eternal* life. (I: 112-13)

While Bolingbroke’s debaucheries were well known, Anne might have been better informed than most through anecdotes from her husband.¹⁰

Next Anne turns to Shaftesbury who the Bishop had severely criticized in *Alciphron* III and the *New Theory of Vision Vindicated*, sections 3-5.

⁷ Bolingbroke, *The Philosophical Works of the late Right Honorable Henry St. John, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke* (5 vols.; London: David Mallet, 1754).

⁸ Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley*, 106, 232.

⁹ Bolingbroke was in extreme physical pain due to a vicious cancer growth that started on his cheekbone and rapidly spread. See H. T. Dickinson, *Bolingbroke* (London: Constable, 1970), 295.

¹⁰ For the common perception of Bolingbroke’s as a “man of pleasure,” see Dickinson, *Bolingbroke*, 5-7.

The next right honourable infidel is Lord S-y, a man far inferior to the former in intellects, knowledge, or merit as an author. You must excuse this assertion, which in *me*, I own, sounds very pedantic and presuming; but I am only an echo of one of the best judges, perhaps, this or any former age has produced: it is the opinion of the distinguished personage before alluded to, who for the present must remain nameless.—You must know, that the *vices* of this author were also of a different kind from those of the other Peer: they were confined to *pride* and *conceit*, *peevishness*, *passion*, narrow mindedness, and violent prejudice against those who opposed him.¹¹ *His* vices were those of the spiritual part, the other's those of the animal conjointly, but either will damn both man and angels - Lucifer fell by pride, and Adam by a desire to know by experience the good and evil of this world. (I: 114-15)

Anne claims that she is recounting this opinion of Shaftesbury as an “echo of one of the best judges, perhaps, this or any former age has produced,” and surely she has her husband in mind here. She begins by paraphrasing a line from *Alciphron* concerning Shaftesbury's use of Ancient authorities.¹² She then moves to her own opinions by contrasting Shaftesbury's method of ridicule with Leslie's method for establishing the truth of revealed religion:¹³

Lord S- was, comparatively with the former person [Lord Bolingbroke], a superficial writer; he was a vain, angry, party man, who stole fine brilliant sentiments from the ancient philosophers, and patched them together with shreds of modern infidelity. Such are his works, wherein he gives *ridicule* as the test of *truth*; and wisely concludes, that had the Jews acted such plays in *derision*, as Roman Catholics do in *honour* of Christianity, they would have rendered racks and other torments useless, in extirpating our blessed religion in its birth. this (without one word of truth in it, for Christianity was not, nor *could* be extirpated, being the work of God) is the most plausible thing I can recollect from his sayings on this subject in all his rhapsody, in which he only *hints* and *winks* a reputation down; serving religion as ladies too often do each other's character, when they have nothing really bad to say. And certainly the forgeries and superstition of Roman Catholics bid fairer to bring Christianity into disrepute, than any thing else in the world can possibly effect. But his Lordship most unfortunately forgot, that the primitive Christians died for facts which were *recent*, and had been performed *before their eyes*. - A farce, for example, which in Bethany had represented the resurrection of Lazarus - or at Nain, the resurrection of the

¹¹ Compare the Bishop's assessment of Shaftesbury's vices in Alc. III.13, W 3: 132, “Cratylus [Shaftesbury], a man prejudiced against the Christian religion, of a crazy constitution, of a rank above most men's ambition, and a fortune equal to his rank, had little capacity for sensual vices, or temptation to dishonest ones.”

¹² “But he who shall borrow this splendid patch from the Stoics, and hope to make a figure by inserting it in a piece of modern composition, seasoned with the wit and notion of these times, will indeed make a figure, but perhaps it may not be in the eyes of a wise man the figure he intended.” Alc., III.14, W 3: 136.

¹³ Shaftesbury, *A Letter concerning Enthusiasm, Characteristics of men, manners, opinions, times, with a collection of letters*. By the Right Honorable Antony Earl of Shaftesbury, 3 volumes, (Basil, 1790), vol.1, 8ff. For the Bishop's criticism of ridicule as a test of truth see Alc. III.15 and VI.32, W 3: 137, 284.

widow's son, would *not* have supplanted the use of racks and torments in those towns. The persons who had seen these mighty works of God would not have slackened in their faith through my Lord's supposed infallible device. Had there been no *truth* in the report of these facts, his project would have been a good one, but as they were real, and had been just performed in *public*, before men's eyes, the populace would never have borne such miracles to be profaned - it never could have been attempted. Mr. Leslie's four unanswerable marks are much more to be relied on than Lord S-y's single test.

I scarce remember any thing in his fine affected books, but what are too flimsy to be worth your attention. He sets himself forth as a benign being, filled with that love which Christianity alone inspires, and which no one can have but from the *author* of Christianity, who is love itself. But it is very easy for a gentleman with a pen and ink in his hand to describe himself in the most lovely colours, as a lady who painted might draw a picture of herself, beautiful as Helen. It is certain that in *life*, he was very unlike his own picture, which I could prove to you by many well authenticated anecdotes that would convince you abundantly how different his disposition was from a generous love of truth and universal philanthropy; but there is no necessity for them here. (I. 115-18)

One wishes that Anne would have told Gordon about these "well authenticated anecdotes" and again one wonders what her husband knew about such stories and to what extent that shaped his opinion of Shaftesbury.

From these quotations we see that Anne shared the central moral and religious concerns of the day with her husband and that after his death she kept up to date on his opponent's views. She shared the Bishop's dislike for free-thinkers and had some knowledge of both the free-thinkers' and their opponents arguments. It seems almost certain that during their twenty five years together they must have discussed this and related issues extensively, exchanging ideas and arguments. It seems to me that if we could learn more about Anne, then more could also be learnt about George Berkeley's philosophical and personal development. Most of her letters that are known today are from after the Bishop's death. It would be particularly useful if we could learn more about her views while George was still alive.¹⁴

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¹⁴ I would like to thank David Berman for helpful comments on an early version of this paper.

Review

Scott Breuninger. *Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. xi + 243 pp. ISBN: 978-0-230-10280-4

Berkeley's Moral and Social Considerations Vindicated

Despite some interest in the moral and social views of George Berkeley, few books have been published exclusively on such topics. Scott Breuninger's *Recovering Bishop Berkeley: Virtue and Society in the Anglo-Irish Context* is a rare example of a monograph in English that deals with Berkeley's discussions of practical philosophy.¹ Breuninger's study draws on a distinction between Berkeley the well-known philosopher and the neglected and forgotten bishop. The author assigns Berkeley's moral and social views to the latter persona and suggests that "although his social and political writings may not have placed him among the upper tier of social theorists during this time, his engagement with these figures allows Berkeley to be seen as a "representative figure, a perceptive critic who gave voice to and popularized a number of important ideas during a crucial moment in the formation of modern society" (12).

Recovering Bishop Berkeley is a historical study. As Breuninger claims, it recovers the neglected historical context that has often been omitted in discussions about the philosophical problems broached by Berkeley (5). Influenced by the techniques of contextual intellectual history—represented by Q. Skinner, J. Dunn and J. G. A. Pocock—Breuninger aims at restoring the proper balance in Berkeley studies. For him, this implies recovering "the Bishop Berkeley known to his peers by contextually examining his works that relate to Irish social, moral, and economic problems" (2). Within 243 pages, the author takes up the difficult task of referring to a wide range of Berkeley's works and an impressive list of secondary sources. The study combines a new look at old problems with a panorama of recent interpretations of the moral and social aspects of Berkeley's philosophy.

It is important to emphasize that Breuninger's analysis of Berkeley's social and moral ideas aims to erase the stigma of the "middle empiricist" philosopher. To do that, Breuninger shows Berkeley as a man not only of his particular time but also one of his particular place: Ireland. And so he asserts that Berkeley's "engagement with questions of human nature, political economy, and sociability was central to his goals for improving Ireland and thus marks a crucial part of his contributions to the Irish Enlightenment" (4). According to Breuninger, recognizing the Irish context of Berkeley's

¹ Other monographs considering Berkeley's moral and social philosophy include Paul J. Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970); and Stephen R. L. Clark, *Money, Obedience, and Affection: Essays on Berkeley's Moral and Political Thought* (New York: Garland, 1989).

views deserves special attention because it is crucial for understanding his arguments on social and moral matters (7).

The main thesis of the study is that Berkeley was an Irish and cosmopolitan patriot. This characterization is based on two ideas (viz., virtue and society) that express the moral and social aspect of Berkeley's patriotism and permeate his thinking about the moral and social problems of his times. However, depending on the particular stage in the development of Berkeley's thought, they take different forms. This is shown in the nine chronologically ordered and richly footnoted chapters of the book. Chapters 2–5 refer to Berkeley's presence in the Irish debates concerning religion and politics, and Chapters 6–8 are focused on Berkeley's ideas connected with the New World and later with Ireland.

In Breuninger's view, the issue of Irish patriotism engaged the whole of Ireland, independent of political, religious, and cultural divisions. This is important to keep in mind, especially when discussing Berkeley's alleged Jacobitism. Breuninger recalls, *inter alia*, David Berman's suggestion of Berkeley's double stand on Jacobitism—that is, the supportive one in *Passive Obedience* (1712) and the opposing one in the *Advice to the Tories Who Have Taken the Oaths* (1715). However, his own interpretation rests upon the assumption that the events of the Glorious Revolution were not part of Berkeley's immediate history (16). Breuninger tries to persuade the reader to treat *Passive Obedience* “less as a Tory political pamphlet and more as an exercise in political theory, admittedly one of a conservative bent” (33-34). In attempting to show Berkeley as a coherent thinker, Breuninger notices that Berkeley admits an exception to passive obedience to the sovereign in cases where the sovereign is insane or where the supreme power is undermined by craft or violence. That argument allows Breuninger to claim that “while this may seem to be only a small exception, it shows that Berkeley was willing to entertain the idea that sovereigns need not be obeyed at all times: especially Catholic monarchs who sought to upend the political order of Ireland” (31). This may also be seen as an argument for not considering *Passive Obedience* as a Jacobite pamphlet.

As Breuninger suggests, the practical part of Berkeley's Irish patriotism involved his general attempts to ameliorate the problems of the whole of Ireland, including the morality of its people as well as the economic condition of the state. Berkeley's interest in the latter was expressed, for example, in his *Essay Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*, the dialogues of *Alciphron*, and late in *The Querist*. He supported the idea of a balance between luxury and poverty, and believed in the human ability to oppose the determinist vision of the cyclical view of national prosperity. Focusing on the importance of work and the industry of people, he rejected mercantilist ideas of the welfare of a state. He represented the trend of contemporary thinking on ameliorating British social conditions by arguing for the restoration of public spirit, morality, popular virtue, and the healing power of religion (84-85). His arguments in the *Guardian* essays against the *Discourse of Free-thinking* by Anthony Collins were directed against the dangers of relying on freethinking and natural religion alone. Breuninger suggests that, unlike the philosophical polemics by Peter Browne and Edward Synge written against John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* for an educated audience, Berkeley's discussions are aimed at a popular readership.

As Breuninger claims, in addition to the defense of religion and virtue in society, Berkeley proposed a “cosmopolitan vision of ‘improvement’ that drew upon Stoic principles” (69). The cosmopolitan perspective present in his works published after 1712 parallels his Irish patriotism. When Berkeley moved to cosmopolitan London in 1713 he “turned his eyes from the traditions of political theory within a nation and towards the more general issues facing humans across different societies” (34). Breuninger does not present his definition of cosmopolitanism *expressis verbis*. Nonetheless, it seems to refer to a broader perspective of the whole human race and care for its well-being. As such, Berkeley’s cosmopolitanism touches neither the questions of international law nor those of a transnational society (as found, e.g., in the works of Grotius and Pufendorf). Instead, Berkeley’s interests focus on the situation in Ireland and Britain and the human race generally.

An additional aspect of Berkeley’s cosmopolitanism may be seen in his optimistic Bermuda project. Breuninger points to the historical context of Berkeley’s plan (i.e., the contemporary writings of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts founded by Thomas Bray in 1701) as well as the classic belief of the migration of empire and learning (the notion of *translatio imperii* or *studii*) popular at the time in Britain (96). Referring to Berkeley’s poem “America or the Muse’s Refuge” and its popular and contested final stanza, Breuninger considers the interesting question of the possible millennialistic and eschatological interpretations of Berkeley’s plan. Regarding this, he presents the reader with a range of different interpretations.²

For Breuninger, the source of Berkeley’s patriotism and cosmopolitanism—the key concepts of the book—lies in Stoicism. This is consistent with a recent interpretive trend.³ As Breuninger describes it, Berkeley builds his moral and social theory on the Stoic concept of *oikeiôsis*, which means an individual’s development in becoming a part of a society (45). Especially in his works written after 1712, Berkeley connects the Stoic *oikeiôsis* not with self-preservation but with our motivation to social life, “a divine imperative for individuals to recognize their connections to others and elevate their own minds, which in turn would lead to the moral uplift of the human race” (39). Together with the religious sentiment, this concept is the core idea of the Berkeley’s *Guardian* essay #126, titled by Luce “The Bond of Society.” In Breuninger’s opinion, this is a seminal work in which Newtonian language is used to express Ciceronian ideas and the parallel between the natural and moral world—something crucial in Berkeley’s social and

² For example, David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); Ernest Lee Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation: The Idea of America’s Millennial Role* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975); Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006); Harry Bracken, “Bishop Berkeley’s Messianism,” in *Millenarism and Messianism in English Literature and Thought*, ed. R. H. Popkin (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 65-80;

³ See, for example, Stephen Daniel, “Berkeley’s Stoic Notion of Spiritual Substance,” in *New Interpretations of Berkeley’s Thought*, ed. Stephen Daniel (Amherst, MA: Humanity Books, 2008), 203-30; and idem, “Stoicism in Berkeley’s Philosophy,” in *Berkeley’s Lasting Legacy: 300 Years Later*, ed. Timo Airaksinen and Bertil Belfrage (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2011), 121-34.

moral thought. In this respect Breuninger shares the point of view of David E. Leary, who like the American historian and sociologist Harry Elmer Barnes, regarded the work as one of the most suggestive essays in the whole history of social philosophy.”⁴

Breuninger’s picture of Berkeley seems to imply that he was a thinker whose moral and social ideas were consistently developed throughout his life. On the one hand, nothing seems controversial in the general claim that the good of the human race *per se*, as much as that of the Irish people, were constant aims of Berkeley both as a scholar and as a bishop. On the other hand, when details are taken into consideration, problems arise. For example, Breuninger’s emphasis on the category of social appetite and benevolence—which is implicit (in his opinion) in Berkeley’s Essay #126—seems to ignore the duty of acting according to set rules (something insisted upon in *Passive Obedience*). Indeed, in *Passive Obedience* paragraph 13, Berkeley criticizes the idea of acting according to benevolence as allowing oneself to succumb to illusory passions.

With its focus on historical context, Scott Breuninger’s study enables us to see Berkeley and his commitment to social stakes with the eyes of his contemporaries. The study allows several ways of reading Berkeley. Those who are interested in Berkeley’s moral and social philosophy will find it inspiring. Placing Berkeley’s works in a wide context which is simultaneously Irish and more general, the study paves the way for further comparative studies on Berkeley’s moral and social views at different times in his life. The book may be also regarded as revelatory for those whose interest lies generally in epistemological and metaphysical aspects of Berkeley’s thought. For example, in Breuninger’s study, the Molyneux problem—which David Berman calls “the root metaphor of Irish philosophy”—takes on added meaning, in that as “a staple of Irish philosophic and religious discourse,” it highlights the close connections between philosophy and theology in seventeenth and eighteenth century Ireland (57).⁵ Just as other Irish intellectuals (e.g., Peter Browne, Edward Synge) raise questions about the theological implications of the problem, so also does Berkeley. As Breuninger remarks, “If humans could not rely upon their perceptions of physical objects, what assurance could they have of metaphysical (or divine) ones?” (57).

Without doubt *Recovering Bishop Berkeley* is a must-read book for anybody interested in a comprehensive picture of Berkeley’s interests, their genesis as well as their contemporary significance. As such, the study is definitely an important item in the bibliography on Berkeley. Moreover, it may also turn out to be a revolutionary one. With its thorough and objective presentation of the social, moral and economic aspects of Berkeley’s thought, special focus on its Irish component, and new interpretations of controversial aspects of Berkeley’s philosophy, the study is thought provoking. Hopefully, it will discourage future discussions of Berkeley’s life and philosophy from beginning with the complaint that there has been less interest in his practical philosophy

⁴ See D. E. Leary, “Berkeley’s Social Theory: Context and Development,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 38 (1977), 635; and H. E. Barnes, ed., *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1948), 52.

⁵ Cf. David Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 125.

and the historical context than in his ideas in the fields of epistemology and metaphysics.⁶

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⁶ I would like to thank Professor Marc A. Hight and Professor Laurent Jaffro for their kind help in editing the English version of this review.

News and Announcements

International Berkeley Conference / Colloque international Berkeley

Berkeley on Moral and Social Philosophy
La philosophie morale et sociale de Berkeley

Université de Sherbrooke – Campus Longueuil Québec (near Montréal)
June 1-4, 2012 / 1-4 juin 2012

(Note change of dates from previous announcements)

George Berkeley (1685-1753) contributed to a wide range of academic disciplines; from philosophy to mathematics and empirical psychology; from theology to political economy and monetary policy. To celebrate the 300th anniversary of Berkeley's *Passive Obedience* (1712), we are now inviting distinguished scholars to discuss aspects of Berkeley's moral and social philosophy. The bilingual English/French conference, sponsored by the International Berkeley Society, will take place at the University of Sherbrooke, Longueuil, Canada. Anyone interested in participating in the conference should send an abstract before **January 1, 2012** to [Bertil Belfrage](#) (for Anglophone contributors) or [Sébastien Charles](#) (for Francophone contributors). Organizers: [Bertil Belfrage](#), [Sébastien Charles](#), and [David Raynor](#).

George Berkeley (1685-1753) s'est investi dans un large spectre d'activités académiques, allant de la philosophie aux mathématiques et à la psychologie empirique, de la théologie à l'économie politique et à la politique monétaire. Afin de célébrer le 300^{ème} anniversaire de la publication de *l'Obéissance passive* (1712), nous invitons dès à présent des spécialistes de Berkeley à s'intéresser à sa philosophie morale ou sociale dans le cadre d'un colloque bilingue (français-anglais) bénéficiant du soutien de l'International Berkeley Society qui se tiendra au campus Longueuil de l'Université de Sherbrooke. Tout chercheur souhaitant participer au colloque peut faire parvenir un résumé à [Bertil Belfrage](#) (intervenants anglophones) ou [Sébastien Charles](#) (intervenants francophones) avant **1 janvier 2012**. Organisateurs: [Bertil Belfrage](#), [Sébastien Charles](#), and [David Raynor](#). [Conference Website](#).

American Philosophical Association Eastern Division Meeting
International Berkeley Society Session
Marriott Wardman Park Hotel, Washington, DC
Tuesday, 27 December 2011, 17:15-19:15

Hugh Hunter (Toronto): "Berkeley and the Price of Tulips"

Kenneth L. Pearce (Southern California): "Divine Language, Unperceived Objects, and Berkeley's Response to Skepticism"

Luc Peterschmitt (Lille III): "Berkeley and Chemistry in the *Siris*: The Rebuilding of a Non-Existent Theory"

American Philosophical Association Central Division Meeting
International Berkeley Society Session
Palmer House Hilton, Chicago, IL
Saturday 18 February 2012

12:15-14:15 International Berkeley Society Session

Katia Saporiti (Zurich): "Berkeley's Concept of Time"

David Raynor (Ottawa): "Berkeley's Reticence about Divine Archetypes"

14:30-17:30 Author Meets Critics: Georges Dicker's *Berkeley's Idealism: A Critical Examination*

Critics: Margaret Atherton (Wisconsin–Milwaukee) and Samuel C. Rickless (UC San Diego)

Response: Georges Dicker (SUNY College at Brockport)

American Philosophical Association Pacific Division Meeting
Session on Berkeley
Westin Seattle Hotel
Wednesday 4 April 2012

16:00-8:00 Symposium: Berkeley

Stephen H. Daniel (Texas A&M): "Berkeley on God's Creation of Minds and Human Freedom"

Commentators: John Roberts (Florida State) and Tom Stoneham (York)

International Berkeley Conference
The 300th Anniversary of the Publication of
Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous

Collegium Maius, Jagiellonian University
Kraków, Poland
19-22 August 2013

Scholars from around the world will be meeting to discuss Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*. Abstracts should be submitted to one of the organizers, [Milowit Kuninski](#) (Jagiellonian) or [Bertil Belfrage](#) (Lund), no later than **29 February 2012**.

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