

## 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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