Berkeley on the Meaning of General Terms[1]

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Abstract: I argue that for Berkeley the meaning of a general term is constituted by the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by that term. This reading faces two challenges. First, Berkeley argues that the meaning of sentences containing general terms is constituted by the one idea signified by the name in that sentence rather than by multiple ideas, implying that general terms are meaningful although they do not signify multiple ideas. Second, Berkeley writes that finite minds know the meaning of the biblical phrase 'good thing' even though that phrase fails to signify any ideas at all. Both challenges are met by deploying Berkeley's account of mediate perception.

George Berkeley notoriously rejects abstract ideas in the Introduction to his *Principles*.[2] Abstract ideas are an "abuse of language" and a chief source of philosophical error (IN 6; W2: 122). Berkeley replaces abstract ideas with his own theory of general terms. As he notes in the *Manuscript Introduction*, "a word becomes general by being made the sign, not of a general idea but, of many particular ideas" (MI 17; W2: 127). General terms indifferently signify multiple particular ideas (MI 32; IN 11; W2: 135).

Yet when he turns to analyze sentences like 'Socrates is a man', Berkeley suggests that the meaning of such sentences is constituted by a single idea—in this case, the idea of Socrates (MI 17/IN 11/W2: 127; MI 34/IN 19/W2: 136]). It seems that the particular ideas indifferently signified by 'man' play no role in constituting the meaning of the general term in that sentence or in the meaning of the sentence as a whole. To make matters worse, when discussing a biblical passage about heavenly rewards, Berkeley says that the general term 'good thing' does not signify any ideas in finite minds at all. Yet Berkeley insists that this general term is meaningful, suggesting that for Berkeley some meaningful general terms are idea-less.[3] It therefore seems (despite what Berkeley says elsewhere) that the meaning of a general term and the meaning of a sentence containing a general term are *not* constituted by indifferently signifying multiple ideas.[4]

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[2] References are to *The Works of George Berkeley* [W], ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–57). Abbreviations: NB=Notebooks, NTV=*An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, IN= Introduction to *Principles of Human Knowledge*, PHK= *Principles of Human Knowledge*, and TVV=*Theory of Vision Vindicated.* References to Berkeley's *Manuscript Introduction* (MI) to the *Principles* are to section numbers in Bertil Belfrage's diplomatic edition (Oxford: Doxa, 1987), followed by the page numbers in the Luce–Jessop edition. Also: John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (E), ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), cited by book, chapter, and section.

[3] I borrow this phrase from Kenneth Williford, "Berkeley's Theory of Operative Language in the *Manuscript Introduction*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003), 272.

[4] Defenders of this interpretation include Kenneth Williford and Roomet Jakapi, "Berkeley's Theory of Meaning in *Alciphron* VII," 17 (2009), 99–118; John Russell Roberts, "Berkeley on

I argue that this tension is merely apparent, and that Berkeley's considered view is that the meaning of a general term is constituted by the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by that term. The apparent tension in Berkeley's texts emerges from two challenges confronting Berkeley's theory of general terms. One challenge is to explain how a hearer can know the meaning of the speaker's words if the ideas signified by those words are private, and so imperceptible to the hearer. Another challenge is to explain how 'good thing' is meaningful despite failing to signify ideas in finite minds. As I read Berkeley, he meets both challenges by applying his own distinction between immediate and mediate perception to his indifferent signification theory of general terms. In the challenging cases just described, the hearer mediately perceives ideas signified by a general term even if that term fails to signify any of the hearer's ideas.

1. Indifferent Signification

According to Locke, the abstract idea of a triangle is composed of determinables, which can be exemplified in a variety of ways by particular determinate features (E IV.vii.9; cf. IN 12; W2: 129). Among those determinable features are lines and angles, which are exemplified by particular lines of various lengths and particular angles of various degrees, respectively. Particular ideas of triangles exemplify the abstract idea of a triangle by exhibiting determinate features exemplifying the abstract idea's determinable features. Berkeley presents three arguments against Locke's theory of abstract ideas.

First, Berkeley thinks that the mind cannot perceive ideas with undetermined features. Such features are imperceptible by definition. But even if the mind could perceive an idea with imperceptible features, that idea couldn't resemble any particular idea with determinate features (PHK 8). Berkeley seems to think that a particular idea exemplifies an abstract idea only if determinate features of the former resemble determinable features of the latter. Since a perceived determinate feature cannot resemble an 'invisible' undetermined feature, there's no sense in which any particular idea of a triangle could resemble the abstract idea of a triangle. Thus, no particular idea of a triangle could exemplify the abstract idea of a triangle.

Second, the abstract idea of a triangle must resemble *all* of the particular ideas that exemplify its determinable features. Resemblance is a symmetric relation: If x resembles y, then y resembles x. Therefore, if a particular idea resembles an abstract idea, then that abstract idea also resembles that particular idea. Consequently, an abstract idea resembles each of the particular ideas that exemplify it. But there's no guarantee that those particular ideas resemble each other. If those particulars do *not* resemble each other (as Locke says in the passage cited above), then the corresponding abstract idea must have contradictory features. But the mind cannot perceive an idea that is 'contradictory' and 'inconsistent' (see MI 20–21; IN 9–10; W2: 129–30).

Language," in *The Bloomsbury Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Richard Brook and Bertil Belfrage (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), 421–35; and Kenneth Pearce, *Language and the Structure of Berkeley's World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

Third, Berkeley thinks that "an impossibility cannot be conceiv'd" and that God cannot make contradictions actual (MI 14: W2: 125).[5] The implication is that God can create anything that does not include a contradiction; and that finite minds are capable of perceiving (or conceiving) anything that does not include a contradiction. But God cannot make an object that is not fully determinate, or which has contradictory features. Thus, not only is it impossible for such an object to exist; but finite minds are incapable of perceiving or conceiving of such things.

As mentioned above, Berkeley replaces abstract ideas with his own indifferent signification theory of general terms. But Berkeley also seems to say that the meaning of sentences containing general terms is constituted by the one idea signified by the name in that sentence rather than by multiple ideas. The implication is that the general term in that sentence is meaningful although it does not signify multiple ideas. Consider an extended passage where Berkeley analyzes the meaning of the sentence 'Melampus is an animal'. Berkeley writes that the meaning of that sentence is constituted by *one* idea:

> I perceive it evidently in my self that upon laying aside all thought of the words 'Melampus is an animal' I have remaining in my mind *one naked and bare idea viz that particular one to which I give the name 'Melampus'.* (MI 34; W2: 136, my emphasis; punctuation modernized)

Berkeley writes in this passage that the same particular idea of Melampus is signified by both the subject and predicate of that sentence. In that case, it seems that the meaning of that sentence is constituted by one particular idea of Melampus without the help of the other particular ideas indifferently signified by 'animal'. Assuming that the meaning of a sentence is composed of the meanings of its constituent terms, Berkeley's analysis suggests that the meaning of 'animal' when used in that sentence is not constituted by any of the other particular ideas indifferently signified by that term.

Immediately after this passage, Berkeley rehearses reasoning used to show "how men might first have come to think there was [an abstract] general idea of animal" (MI 35; IN 19; W2: 136). That reasoning takes the form of a dilemma. On one horn of the dilemma, suppose that 'animal' signifies the same idea signified by 'Melampus'. In that case, the sentence is a tautology. But 'Melampus is an animal' is clearly not a tautology because it is informative. On the other horn of the dilemma, suppose that 'animal' signifies the idea of some particular animal other than Melampus. In that case, the sentence is contradictory (e.g., 'Melampus is Fido', where Fido is not Melampus). But the sentence is not contradictory. We are supposed to conclude from this dilemma that 'animal' cannot signify any particular idea at all in 'Melampus is an animal', and that therefore it must signify an abstract idea. Berkeley writes, "In like manner we may be able with a little attention to discover how [abstract] general ideas of all sorts might at first have stolen

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[5] I suspect that Berkeley's point is that God cannot manifest contradictions, since that's what would be required in order for God to make a contradiction actual. For discussion, see Kenneth Winkler, "Berkeley and the Doctrine of Signs," in *Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 143; and Pearce, *Language and Structure*, 26).

into the thoughts of men" (MI 35; IN 19; W2: 137). One might worry that such reasoning applies to Berkeley's claim that the meaning of 'Melampus is an animal' is constituted by the particular idea of Melampus. For Berkeley seems to say that 'animal' signifies that idea exclusively, in which case the sentence is a tautology. One might also take this dilemma as evidence that for Berkeley the meaning of 'animal' is not constituted by signifying ideas, but is constituted in some other way.[6]

To see how Berkeley addresses these worries, consider another passage exactly similar to the Melampus passage. There, Berkeley analyzes the sentence, 'Socrates is a man':

> when I say the word 'Socrates' is a proper particular name, and the word 'Man' an appellative or general name, I mean no more than this, viz that the one is peculiar & appropriated to one particular person, the other common to a great many particular persons, each whereof has an equal right to be called by the name 'Man'. (MI 17; IN 11; W2: 127—punctuation modernized)

Taken together, the 'Socrates' and 'Melampus' passages suggest the following analysis. General terms indifferently signify multiple particular ideas. The particular idea for which the name 'Melampus' stands is also one of the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by the general word 'animal'. Thus, the same idea is signified in different ways by different words in that sentence. That's why Berkeley says that the meaning of 'Melampus is an animal' is constituted by a single idea.

But although 'animal' signifies the idea of Melampus in that sentence, the meaning of 'animal' is not constituted by that idea *functioning as a particular idea.* Rather, the meaning of 'animal' in that sentence is constituted by the particular idea of Melampus *functioning as a general idea.* Berkeley says that a particular idea "becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (IN 12; W2: 128). He thinks that one idea can represent others either by resemblance or by suggestion (cf. NTV 9, TVV 39 quoted below). When one idea represents others through suggestion, the result is mediate perception. The difference between perceiving the idea of Melampus functioning as a particular idea in the subject position and perceiving the very same idea functioning as a general idea in the predicate position is exactly the same as the difference between seeing particular light and colors and seeing distance by means of those light and colors. In both cases, the latter encodes information not included in the former.

As I read Berkeley, 'animal' indifferently signifies the particular idea of Melampus in that sentence. That particular idea functions as a general idea in the predicate position by representing the other particular ideas indifferently signified by 'animal'. Those other ideas are mediately perceived by means of the immediately perceived idea of Melampus. Collectively, they constitute the meaning of 'animal'. Berkeley writes that, "there is in truth an homonymy or diversity of significations in every name whatsoever except only the proper names" (MI 31; IN 18; W2:135). That diversity of significations is mediately perceived by means of a particular idea functioning as a general idea. But when the

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[6] For a defense of this reading, see Pearce, *Language and Structure*, 33–36.

particular idea of Melampus is uniquely signified by a name, it does not represent any other particular ideas.

Berkeley's distinction between the idea of Melampus functioning as a particular idea when signified by a name, and the same idea functioning as a general idea when signified by a general term, allows him to avoid the dilemma discussed earlier. The sentence 'Melampus is an animal' is informative because 'Melampus' and 'animal' have distinct meanings—one particular idea for 'Melampus'; and that same particular idea representing multiple other particular ideas for 'animal'. Although the particular idea of Melampus is immediately perceived in that sentence, when that idea functions as a general idea it becomes the means by which other particular ideas signified by 'animal' are mediately perceived. Berkeley thereby avoids the result that 'Melampus is an animal' is a tautology. That sentence also avoids being contradictory because the same idea that is uniquely signified by 'Melampus' also functions as a general idea when indifferently signified by 'animal'. Although the idea of Melampus functioning as a general idea represents ideas of Fido, Sparky, Lucky, etc., the result is not that the sentence 'Melampus is an animal' is synonymous with 'Melampus is Fido' or 'Melampus is Sparky'. Since those latter sentences contain only names, and not general terms, their meaning is constituted by *two* distinct particular ideas, both of which are functioning exclusively as particular ideas. And since there is no idea in 'Melampus is Fido' that functions as a general idea, that sentence cannot be synonymous with 'Melampus is an animal' in Berkeley's view. A similar analysis applies to 'Socrates is a man'.

2. The Problem of Communication

The dilemma just described, and that Berkeley rejects, is not the only argument for the indispensability of abstract ideas that he must confront. Locke argues that abstract ideas are necessary in order to solve an epistemic problem about language and other minds. Ideas are private and cannot be perceived by other minds. In that case, how can one person make her ideas known to another? (See *Essay* III.ii.1). Locke argues that language solves this problem by allowing one mind to indirectly perceive ideas in other minds. This indirect perception begins with a directly perceived "sensible mark" or utterance produced by the speaker. That utterance signifies exactly one of the speaker's ideas (E III.ii.2).

Locke then claims that in addition to immediately signifying an idea in the mind of the speaker, her word 'secretly' signifies an idea in the mind of the hearer. The immediate and secret significations of a word are "precisely the same" idea in each mind—that is, exactly similar ideas (E III.ii.4). Let's call this Locke's resemblance condition. When the resemblance condition is satisfied, the hearer has good reason to believe that the content of the speaker's thought is one idea rather than another, or none at all. That's because the secret signification of a word is an internal representation of the speaker's idea in the hearer's mind. Thus, a hearer can indirectly perceive a speaker's thought by directly perceiving her utterance and its secret signification (a resembling idea) in the hearer's mind. Evidence that a discourse satisfies the resemblance condition includes the transmission of knowledge and the ability to coordinate action through language. One can

hardly learn from another if teacher and learner "speak different languages," as Locke puts it (E III.ii.4). Likewise, a team effort is unlikely to succeed if teammates fail to communicate.

Locke also thinks that a word must immediately signify exactly one idea in the speaker's mind, and secretly signify exactly one idea in the hearer's mind. Let's call this Locke's uniqueness condition (see E III.i.2, III.ii.2–4).[7] Locke argues that if the uniqueness and resemblance aren't satisfied, various 'abuses' of language result (E III.x). These include using words without meaning, and using words ambiguously or equivocally.

A special problem emerges for a general term like 'animal'. Even if the uniqueness condition is satisfied, there's no guarantee that particular ideas in different minds signified by the same general term will resemble each other. Suppose that Maya's particular idea of an animal is of a scorpion; and that Grace's particular idea is of a hawk. In that case, Grace does not know what Maya's word 'animal' means. There is no internal representation of Maya's idea in Grace's mind because her particular idea does not resemble Maya's particular idea. Locke concludes that uniqueness and resemblance require that Maya and Grace each have exactly one abstract idea signified by the general term 'animal'; and that their abstract ideas resemble one another in determinable features (E III.iii).

Berkeley agrees with Locke that ideas are private and "cannot of themselves be brought into the view another." He also agrees that "discourse & communication" solve this problem by "[instituting] sounds to be the signs of [the speaker's] ideas" as well as ideas "raised in the mind of the hearer" (MI 19; W2: 128). Yet Berkeley's insistence that abstract ideas are psychologically impossible entails that Locke's uniqueness condition cannot apply to general terms.

But Berkeley's indifferent signification theory raises the question of resemblance between sets of particular ideas in different minds. There's no guarantee that the particular ideas in one mind that are indifferently signified by a general term exactly resemble the particular ideas indifferently signified by that same term in another mind. Suppose that the set of particular ideas in Maya's mind indifferently signified by 'triangle' includes only equilateral and right triangles, but that Grace's set includes only scalene and obtuse triangles. In that case, Grace lacks an internal representation of Maya's set of particular ideas. Grace cannot indirectly perceive Maya's ideas, and will not know what Maya's word 'triangle' means.

As I read Berkeley, he addresses this concern by rejecting Locke's resemblance condition. As mentioned earlier, Berkeley claims that one idea can represent another either by resemblance or by suggestion. One of Berkeley's examples of mediate perception involves knowing the private or "invisible" emotions of other minds by means of immediately perceived ideas (NTV 9). He goes on to argue that suggestion or signification is the mechanism through which ideas, emotions, and states of other minds are mediately perceived by means of an immediately perceived idea.

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[7] Berkeley rejects Locke's uniqueness condition at IN 18; W2: 134–35.

Importantly, Berkeley claims that mediate visual perception occurs between ideas that cannot resemble each other. Colors do not resemble textures (NTV 103). Yet, visual sensations signify tangible ideas "for no other reason, than barely because they have been observed to accompany them" (NTV 65). In a later work, Berkeley expands his explanation of how one idea comes to signify or suggest another:

> Ideas which are observed to be connected with other ideas come to be considered as signs, by means whereof things not actually perceived by sense are signified or suggested to the imagination.... in general, all signs suggest the things signified, there being no idea which may not offer to the mind another idea which hath been frequently joined with it. In certain cases a sign may suggest its correlate as an image [i.e., through resemblance], in others as an effect, in others as a cause. But where there is no such relation of similitude or causality, nor any necessary connection whatsoever, two things, by their mere coexistence, or two ideas, merely by being perceived together, may suggest or signify one the other, their connexion being all the while arbitrary; for it is the connexion only, as such, that causeth this effect [i.e., that one idea signifies the other]. (TVV 39)

Berkeley lists several ways in which 'frequently joined' perceptions can signify each other. These are resemblance, cause and effect, and simply being perceived together. I claim that for Berkeley, the association of two perceptions as cause and effect explains mediate perception of ideas in other minds by means of perceptions in one's own mind. Such mediate perception occurs even when the relevant perceptions in different minds do not resemble one another.

To see why, consider Locke's claim that the transmission of knowledge is evidence that a discourse satisfies the resemblance condition. Berkeley agrees that transmission of knowledge is evidence of speaker meaning, despite rejecting abstract ideas (see IN 15–16, 21; W2: 33–35, 38). Suppose that Maya is teaching Grace geometry. Maya's demonstrations are operations on her own particular ideas of triangles (see IN 12, 16; W2: 31–35). As a result of her lessons, Grace comes to have particular ideas of triangles. Grace's particular ideas are indifferently signified by the word 'triangle', as are Maya's particular ideas. But none of Grace's ideas exactly resembles any of Maya's ideas of triangles. Nevertheless, Grace's ideas are effects of Maya's ideas. Of course, Berkeley doesn't mean that one idea has the power to produce another. Nor does he mean that one idea determines or necessitates the other. Berkeley simply means that one idea is regularly succeeded by another in a law–like way, and so they are associated as cause and effect (cf. PHK 32, 62, 64). That association is sufficient for one perception to suggest the other. But perceptions associated as cause and effect needn't resemble each other. Consequently, Grace's ideas can suggest Maya's ideas, and vice-versa, without Grace's ideas resembling Maya's ideas.

3. Idea-less General Terms

Berkeley explains the meaning of general terms without resorting to abstract ideas in part by rejecting Locke's uniqueness and resemblance conditions. But there is another

challenge confronting Berkeley's theory of general terms. That challenge prompted Berkeley to reject Locke's theory of meaning between 1707 and 1708.[8]

In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley disparages "those philosophers" like Locke, "[who] tell us every pertinent word hath an idea which never fails to accompany it where tis rightly understood" (MI 44; W2:140).[9] But in his earlier *Notebooks* (NB 378, 696) and a paper presented in 1707,[10] Berkeley adopts Locke's theory. Berkeley changed his mind when confronted with a theological challenge. As Berkeley puts it in the *Manuscript Introduction*:

> We are told that the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him are such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive. What man will pretend to say these words of the inspir'd writer are empty and insignificant? And yet who is there that can say they bring into his mind clear and determinate ideas of the good things in store for them that love God? (MI 36; W2: 137; see also IN 20; W2: 37)

Locke's theory implies that the biblical passage Berkeley references is meaningless, since the words 'good thing' do not signify ideas in the reader's mind. Whereas Locke has a way out of this difficulty—Locke can claim that the passage signifies abstract rather than particular ideas—Berkeley's rejection of abstract ideas makes this passage problematic for him (as discussed below, Berkeley thinks that even God cannot have abstract ideas). Nevertheless, Berkeley insists that the passage is meaningful, although he concedes that the words 'good thing' do not signify *any* particular ideas in the reader's mind.

Several commentators have concluded from this passage and others that Berkeley has a theory of operative meaning.[11] On those readings, operative meaning is not constituted by ideas. Rather, operative meaning is constituted by the actions, passions, emotions, or dispositions raised in the hearer by an utterance. An evaluation of those readings is beyond the scope of this essay. For present purposes, I do not deny that Berkeley has a theory of operative meaning. However, I claim that operative meaning does not constitute the meaning of general terms for Berkeley.

Consider an extended passage in the *Manuscript Introduction* where Berkeley rehearses the process by which the term 'good thing' accomplishes its operative ends without signifying particular ideas in the reader's mind. Berkeley begins by noting that in ordinary circumstances the word 'reward' signifies, "an idea of the particular good thing proposed for a reward," such as payment for one's labor. That idea is perceived together with a disposition to fulfill "those conditions on which [the reward] is to be obtained" and

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[8] See Bertil Belfrage, "The clash on semantics in Berkeley's Notebook A," *Hermathena* 139 (1985), 117–26; and Berrtil Belfrage, "Berkeley's Theory of Emotive Meaning (1708)," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986), 643–49.

[9] See also *Alciphron* VII.2; W3: 287–88.

[10] "Of Infinites," W4: 235–36.

[11] See Williford, "Operative Language"; Roberts, "Berkeley on Language"; and Pearce, *Language and Structure*, Ch. 1–2 for overviews of such readings.

a desire to please whomever promises that reward (MI 37; W2: 137). Since the word, the idea of a specific payment, the disposition, and the desire to please are all perceived together,[12] Berkeley's account of how one perception becomes a sign for another implies that any of those perceptions can signify any of the others.

Berkeley thinks that the same process occurs in the case of 'good thing' as used in biblical passages to refer to inconceivable rewards. He says:

> Thus there having grown up in his mind a customary connexion between the hearing that proposition and being dispos'd to obey… the injunctions that accompany it, methinks it might be made use of, tho' not to introduce into his mind any idea marked by those words 'good thing' yet to incite in him a willingness to perform that which is requir'd of him. (MI 37; W2: 138)

Returning to the example discussed above, suppose that your employer has a particular idea of a payment for your labor in her mind, but you lack any such idea (perhaps because she hasn't told you how much you will be paid). Nevertheless, you perceive the word 'reward' together with your disposition and your desire. That word becomes a sign for those other perceptions without signifying any idea in your mind. Likewise, your perceptions of your own disposition and desire may suggest your employer's idea of your payment. In that case, you have an internal mental representation of the meaning of your employer's utterance, although your perception is not an idea and does not resemble your employer's idea. As a result, you understand the meaning of your employer's utterance despite lacking an idea in your own mind signified by that utterance or resembling the speaker's idea.

Berkeley thinks that the same happens with 'good thing' as used in biblical passages. The reader perceives the phrase 'good thing' together with their dispositions, emotions, desires, or other perceptions. That phrase becomes a sign for those perceptions without signifying any idea in the reader's mind. Berkeley concludes, "general names are often used in the propriety of language without the speaker designing them for marks of ideas of his own which he would have them raise in the understanding of the hearer" (MI 37; W2: 138). The utterance 'good thing' needn't signify an idea in the reader's mind in order for her to understand its meaning.

One might object that the problem of mental privacy presents a special challenge for my reading of Berkeley. In the case where an employer has a particular idea of a payment but the worker does not, the worker cannot perceive the employer's idea of a particular payment. Consequently, although the employer's idea and the worker's disposition are both signified by the word 'reward', the worker does not perceive all of these things together. Without being perceived together, there's no mechanism through which the worker's disposition can become a sign for the employer's idea. In that case, the worker's

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[12] Strictly speaking, Berkeley thinks that finite minds cannot have ideas of desires and dispositions, insofar as the latter are mental activities (PHK 25, 27). But Berkeley does think that finite minds can have notions of these activities (PHK 89). Since notions are perceived, an idea of a payment and notions of a desire and a disposition can be perceived together.

disposition cannot become an internal representation of the employer's idea. The result seems to be that the worker doesn't know what the employer means by 'reward'.

Similarly, suppose that the meaning of the phrase 'good thing' is constituted by divine ideas, and that none of the finite minds reading that phrase has ideas signified by it. Even if that phrase produces cheer and fervor in the reader's mind that the reader can perceive, it seems that the reader's cheer and fervor cannot become a sign for the divine ideas signified by 'good thing' because the reader never perceives her cheer and fervor together with divine ideas. In that case, the reader's fervor cannot become an internal representation of the divine ideas that constitute the meaning of that phrase. Consequently, the reader doesn't know what the biblical phrase 'good thing' means. But Berkeley insists that phrase is both meaningful and understood by the reader.

In reply, recall that for Berkeley being perceived together is not the only way for one idea to become a sign for another. Berkeley also says that ideas can signify each other if they are associated as cause and effect. The ideas that are associated as cause and effect needn't be perceived by the same mind. The employer's idea of a particular payment is associated as the cause of the worker's disposition. The worker's disposition signifies the employer's idea because it is the effect of that idea. Consequently, the worker mediately perceives the employer's idea of a particular payment by means of immediately perceiving her own disposition. The worker's disposition thereby functions as an internal representation of the employer's idea, allowing the worker to grasp the employer's meaning.

As I read Berkeley, a similar analysis applies to 'good thing'. Roomet Jakapi argues that for Berkeley, biblical passages are indirect divine speech mediated through 'inspired' human writers; and that Berkeley thinks that God does not speak nonsense.[13] This explains why Berkeley insists that 'good thing' is meaningful. But Berkeley also claims that even God cannot have abstract ideas since it is impossible, "that such a power [of forming abstract ideas] should be in the most perfect and exalted understanding" (MI 11; W2: 124–25). The implication is that God has particular ideas of heavenly rewards, although finite minds cannot perceive similar ideas. Since 'good thing' is a general term, Berkeley's theory of general terms suggests that it indifferently signifies multiple particular divine ideas of heavenly rewards. The challenge is to explain how finite minds can know the meaning of that general term despite being incapable of perceiving the divine ideas signified by it.

That explanation is implied by Berkeley's example of an employer promising payment to a worker, combined with his principle that perceptions can signify each other if they are associated as cause and effect. Finite minds cannot perceive the multiple particular divine

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[13] See Roomet Jakapi, "Emotive Meaning and Christian Mysteries in Berkeley's *Alciphron*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10 (2002), 401–411; Roomet Jakapi, "Faith, Truth, Revelation and Meaning in Berkeley's Defense of the Christian Religion (in *Alciphron*)," *Modern Schoolman* 80 (2002), 23–34; and Roomet Jakapi, "Christian Mysteries and Berkeley's Alleged Non-Cognitivism," in *Reexamining Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 188–98.

ideas indifferently signified by 'good thing', just as the worker cannot perceive the employer's idea of a particular payment signified by 'reward'. Nevertheless, the divine ideas signified by 'good thing' cause in finite minds "a chearfulness and zeal and perseverance in well doing" (MI 37; W2: 138). Just as the worker's disposition signifies the employer's idea because it is the effect of that idea, a finite mind's fervor signifies divine ideas of good things because the former is the effect of the latter. Thus, a finite mind's fervor suggests divine ideas to that finite mind, just as the worker's disposition suggests the employer's idea of a particular payment to the worker. For this reason, an inspired writer needn't seek to "mark out to our understandings the ideas of those particular things our faculties never attain'd to." The writer need only use 'good thing' "to incite in [the reader] a willingness to perform that which is requir'd of him" (MI 37; W2: 138). The reader mediately perceives the meaning of 'good thing' by means of immediately perceived effects incited by those ideas, without immediately perceiving the particular divine ideas indifferently signified by that term.

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