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Berkeley

and the *Principles*
of *Human Knowledge*

Robert J. Fogelin

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Berkeley and the *Principles of Human Knowledge*

The *Principles of Human Knowledge* is Berkeley's most important philosophical work. Along with Locke and Hume, Berkeley is one of the classic British Empiricists of the eighteenth century and focal to the development of empiricist thought.

In this Routledge Philosophy GuideBook, Robert J.Fogelin offers a thorough commentary and analysis of the text of the *Principles of Human Knowledge* and guides the reader through the philosophical complexities of Berkeley's thought and its importance today.

Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge is essential reading for all students coming to Berkeley for the first time.

Robert J.Fogelin is Professor of Philosophy at Dartmouth College.



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Berkeley and the *Principles of
Human Knowledge*

■ Robert J. Fogelin



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For my son
John Fogelin

For immaterialism's a serious matter.

Lord Byron
Don Juan, Canto XVI

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Preface

This work had its origin in a graduate seminar the author taught in 1993 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The seminar was to begin with an examination of George Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* as background for a close reading of Book I of David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. As it turned out, the reading of the *Principles* captured the interests of the seminar, and Hume's *Treatise* was barely touched upon. This was due to the insistence of a group of superb students on getting to the very bottom of Berkeley's thought. Without their inspiration, it would never have occurred to me to write a work on Berkeley's idealism. I owe them a great debt of thanks.

Dartmouth College has supported my research through sabbaticals, a senior faculty fellowship, and research funds associated with the Sherman Fairchild Professorship in the Humanities.

I am also indebted to Tony Bruce, Tim Crane, Jonathan Wolff and Muna Khogali, who supported this work for publication by Routledge. I owe a great deal to Ian Tipton and an anonymous reviewer for their extensive and thoughtful comments on the original manuscript. Once more I must thank Jane Taylor and Florence Fogelin for their editorial help that has saved me from, among other things, solecism, pleonasm, oxymoron, zeugma, and catachresis.

Texts and citations

Texts cited in this work are taken from the complete *Works* of George Berkeley, edited by A.A.Luce and T.E.Jessop, by permission of Thomas Nelson and Sons, Ltd, London (1948–57).

Because Berkeley's writings are often broken down into short sections, wherever possible I have used citations to sections rather than pages. This will allow the reader to locate cited passages in various editions of Berkeley's writings. Since the great majority of references in this work are to Part I of George Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and since Part II of this work never appeared, citations are simply indicated by section numbers, i.e. (s). References to the introduction to that work are indicated by (Int s). References to *De Motu* are indicated by section numbers, i.e. (*De Motu* s). References to *Alciphron* are given by the dialogue number and section, i.e. (*Alciphron* d, s). References to *Philosophical Commentaries* are given by entry number, i.e. (*PC* e). References to John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are to book, chapter and section, i.e. (b, c, s). Since the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* are not broken down into short sections, citations are indicated by the title *Dialogues*, the number of the specific dialogue and, for more precision, the page reference to the second volume of the Luce/Jessop edition of Berkeley's works, i.e. (*Dialogues* d, p).

PART 1

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1

The context of Berkeley's philosophy

Berkeley's life and writings

George Berkeley (1685–1753) was born and educated in Ireland. At the age of twenty-four he began a remarkable period in which he published his *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709) and then the two works on which his philosophical reputation rests: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). He also published a book on physical theory, *De Motu* (1721), a work that illustrates his lifelong interest in scientific issues. Berkeley never abandoned philosophy, but other interests and obligations prevented him from dedicating himself fully to it. He became deeply involved in missionary efforts intended to found a college in Bermuda. When these efforts failed for lack of funding, he returned to England. In 1734 he was appointed Bishop of Cloyne. During the time when he was largely occupied with missionary and ecclesiastical matters, Berkeley was still able to publish works on a wide variety of topics. *Alciphron* (1732) is a long dialogue defending Anglican dogma against freethinkers, atheists, skeptics, materialists, and other “minute philosophers,” as he calls them. The *Analyst* (1734) raises important mathematical objections to Newton's theory of infinitesimals. *The Querist* (1735) offers reflections on economic matters, wholly written, remarkably enough, as a series of questions. *Siris* (1744) is a curious combination of reflections on metaphysical topics together with a defense of the powers of tar-water, an infusion made from pine tar. (Berkeley's advocacy of tar-water has led some writers to treat him as a quack when, in fact, he was simply touting a traditional nostrum whose lineage goes back to antiquity.) After his early efforts, Berkeley did not again produce a general statement of his philosophical position. However, he seems never to have abandoned this standpoint, and many of his later writings are specific applications of it.

The philosophical setting

John Locke, George Berkeley, and David Hume are often grouped under the heading of British Empiricists or, to separate them from later empiricists and to give them pride of place, Classic British Empiricists. This grouping is illuminating but, in some ways at least, misleading. It can be illuminating because there certainly is a natural line of

development starting with Locke, running through Berkeley and culminating in Hume. Sketched in broad strokes, the development looks like this: Locke, in opposition to the Rationalist philosophy that dominated seventeenth-century Continental philosophy, and much of British academic philosophy, rejected the doctrine of innate ideas and in its place presented a classic statement of empiricism. He then tried to show that the empiricist standpoint provides a suitable basis for our knowledge concerning the material world, the mental world, and the spiritual world. Berkeley, the story continues, showed that Locke's account of our knowledge and understanding of the material world is untenable and for this reason adopted an idealist position, that is, the theory that the only substance that exists is spiritual or mental substance. Hume, agreeing with Berkeley's criticism of Locke, went on to argue that we are no better placed to understand and have knowledge of the mental and spiritual world than we are to have knowledge of the material world. Thus the empiricist program, optimistically begun by Locke, ends in Hume's radical skepticism.

This historical or, as we might better call it, dialectical account of the relationship between these three philosophers is not wholly misguided, for something like this development did take place. What gets lost on this approach is, first, the complexity of this historical development, and second, the power and richness of each position taken on its own terms. The depth and originality of Berkeley's works suffers under this historical interpretation, as does Hume's. Recognizing that his own position might be viewed as a mere exploitation of the shortcomings found in Locke's system, Berkeley insists in the strongest terms that his position securely rests on independent grounds of its own. He offers extensive criticisms of Locke's position in an effort to eliminate a powerful and influential alternative to his own theory, but Berkeley never argues as follows: "One must choose between Locke's position and mine. Locke's position is untenable, so mine is correct." The difficulty with that line of argument is that it can be countered by the claim later made by Hume and others that both the Lockean and the Berkelean positions are untenable. The only way for Berkeley to counter a challenge of this kind is to provide satisfactory *positive* arguments in behalf of his philosophy. He saw this clearly and attempted to meet this demand. Bringing into prominence these positive aspects of Berkeley's philosophy is one of the central themes presented in this work.

That said, it remains a fact that understanding Berkeley's philosophy demands an understanding of the philosophical context in which it arose, and John Locke's writings were a central force in shaping this context. Berkeley saw Locke as an opponent, both with respect to the things he said on specific subjects, and also as the representative of a broadly held philosophical standpoint that Berkeley rejected. In many contexts it is not entirely clear whether Berkeley had Locke specifically in mind in formulating certain criticisms. Yet, as his informal writings indicate, Locke was a central figure in Berkeley's thought. He was also a figure whom Berkeley deeply respected, referring to him in one place as a "gyant."¹ It is important then to have at least a broad understanding of Locke's position in order to appreciate Berkeley's attempt to develop a radical alternative to it. With apologies for its oversimplification and its tendency to gloss over difficult interpretative questions, the following is an effort in that direction.

The Lockean framework

John Locke gives the following account of the circumstances that led him into a labyrinth of philosophical reflections. He was, he tells us, engaged in a discussion with five or six friends, presumably on moral and religious topics, when he came to a sudden realization:

After we had awhile puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts, that we took a wrong course; and that before we set ourselves upon enquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were, or were not, fitted to deal with.

(*Essay*, Epistle to the Reader)

Twenty years of reflecting and writing on these questions yielded his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. It appeared in 1690 and secured his lasting philosophical reputation.

In the *Essay*, Locke undertook “to inquire into the original, certainty, and extent of human knowledge, together with grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent.” In pursuing this program, Locke took over ideas from a wide variety of sources, adapting them to his purposes; thus, many of the items that are here included as parts of what I have called the Lockean framework are not distinctively Lockean in character. It is important, then, to remember that, in attacking components of what I have called the Lockean framework, Berkeley is often targeting views that were widely held, forming part of what was then called “received opinion” on certain matters. Furthermore, Berkeley sometimes attempted to distance himself from views that Locke would reject as well. Granting all this, it remains a fact that Locke's philosophy was a central—perhaps *the* central—object of Berkeley's criticism; thus, understanding Berkeley's philosophy demands at least a broad understanding of Locke's.

In outline, Locke's philosophical program involves three tasks:

[Firstly to] enquire into the original of these *ideas*, notions, or whatever you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind.

Secondly, [to] endeavour to shew what knowledge the understanding hath by those ideas; and the certainty, evidence, and extent of it.

Thirdly, [to] make some enquiry into the nature and grounds of faith, or opinion; whereby I mean that assent, which we give to any proposition as true, of whose truth yet we have no certain knowledge; and here we shall have occasion to examine the reasons and degrees of assent.

(I, i, 3)

Here we will concentrate on Locke's execution of the first two parts of this program.

The origin of ideas

In the seventeenth century it was broadly held that our minds become furnished with ideas in two fundamental ways: some are given to us by perception, others are innate, that is, in some manner implanted in us at birth. All other ideas must be constructed from ideas provided by these two sources. Innate ideas were considered the more important source of ideas on what Locke calls the "received," that is, dominant, opinion of the time. The doctrine of innate ideas had a long history stretching back to antiquity, but Locke's primary concern was with the central role this doctrine played in Descartes' philosophy and in the philosophy of other so-called Continental Rationalists who followed him. These rationalist thinkers considered innate ideas superior to ideas derived from perception in at least two respects: Innate ideas concern more profound matters than anything presented to us by the senses, and the judgments employing innate ideas possess a level of certainty that no empirical judgments can attain. The idea of God was often taken as an example of an innate idea; here, it seems, we have an idea that far exceeds anything we could acquire by experience, for nothing like an infinite being is encountered in experience. Not only was our knowledge of God derived from an innate idea, God was also taken to be the source of innate ideas, thus lending them the dignity of divine support. As Descartes put it, God "placed this idea in me to be, as it were, the mark of the craftsman stamped on his work" (Descartes, *Méditations on First Philosophy*, III). For the Continental Rationalist, the correct way of doing philosophy is to begin with "clear and distinct" innate ideas and then to construct a secure edifice of knowledge upon them. Ideas drawn from experience had their role as well, but an inferior role dependent for their usefulness on knowledge derived from God-given innate ideas.

Locke denied that there are any such things as innate ideas. He further denied that there are any innate principles that employ them. The first book of his *Essay* is dedicated to showing this. Locke's attack on innate ideas has the following curious feature: As most scholars agree, the arguments that Locke brought against the existence of innate ideas are quite feeble and easily answered. (It is generally thought that Leibniz succeeded in doing this in his *New Essays on Human Understanding*, a work written specifically in response to Locke's *Essay*.) For all that, Locke's attack on the doctrine of innate ideas was enormously influential. Part of the reason is, perhaps, that the rejection of innate ideas was intellectually liberating. With supposedly God-backed innate ideas pushed aside—and in effect this is what Locke did—the way is opened for fresh and independent thinking on a wide range of philosophical topics. As the following passage shows, Locke thought that the rejection of innate ideas could also have important political consequences.

When men have found some general propositions, that could not be doubted of as soon as understood, it was, I know, a short and easy way to conclude them

innate. This being once received, it eased the lazy from the pains of search, and stopped the enquiry of the doubtful concerning all that was once styled innate. And it was of no small advantage to those who affected to be masters and teachers, to make this the principle of principles, "that principles must not be questioned": For having once established this tenet, that there are innate principles, it put their followers upon a necessity of receiving some doctrines as such; which was to take them off from the use of their own reason and judgment, and put them on believing and taking them upon trust, without farther examination: In which posture of blind credulity, they might be more easily governed by, and made useful to, some sort of men, who had the skill and office to principle and guide them.

(I, iv, 24)

Having (to his satisfaction) eliminated the doctrine of innate ideas in the first book of the *Essay*, in the second book Locke initiates the long project of laying out his alternative to it—a project intended to establish that "men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions and may arrive at certainty without any such original notions or principles" (I, ii, 1). Locke referred to the procedure he would employ in his attempt to achieve this goal as "the historical, plain method." This "historical, plain method" is an attempt to give an account of how the mind, starting at birth with no ideas of any kind, is able to acquire the vast system of complex, subtle and often remote ideas found in human consciousness solely on the basis of constructions from ideas given in experience. He gives an outline of this program in this famous passage:

Let us then suppose the mind to be, as we say, white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas; how comes it to be furnished? Whence comes it by that vast store which the busy and boundless fancy of man has painted on it with an almost endless variety? Whence has it all the materials of reason and knowledge? To this I answer, in one word, from experience; in all that our knowledge is founded, and from that it ultimately derives itself. Our observation employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring.

(II, i, 2)

Here Locke is speaking about the origin of *ideas*. He is not yet concerned with the status of *principles* or *judgments* expressed by means of these ideas. In more modern language, he is initially concerned with *concepts* and not yet with the *propositions* in which concepts are employed. His claim, then, is that all concepts—or the content of all concepts—are ultimately derived from experience. Using this language, Locke is sometimes called a concept empiricist. He was not, however, a thoroughgoing empiricist with respect to the grounds needed to support judgments or propositions. For Locke

certain judgments can be known to be true on a priori grounds even though the concepts employed in the judgment must be derived from experience. Hume adopted the same position, as did many later empiricists, for example, the logical empiricists.

There seems to be an obvious objection to Locke's claim that all of our ideas are derived from experience. People have ideas of things that they have never experienced, for example, an idea of the Taj Mahal. They may even have ideas concerning things that no one has experienced, for example, a city with its streets paved with gold. Locke's careful wording anticipates this objection, for he tells us that all ideas are *ultimately* derived from experience. His claim is that the basic constituents of ideas—their simple components—are derived from experience. So Locke's concept empiricism comes to this: All complex ideas can be reduced to a system of simple ideas, and these simple ideas, without exception, are derived from experience.

With his methodology in place, Locke is now faced with the formidable task of showing how a wide range of complex ideas can be reduced to collections of simple ideas, all of which are derived from experience. Locke, no shirker, presented an extraordinary inventory of ideas, both simple and complex, that he claimed could be dealt with employing his "historical plain method." It includes an examination of the ideas of God, space and time, infinity, causality, substance, personal identity, liberty, and so on. In each case, he is presented with a double task. The first is to give what is now called a correct analysis of these concepts, that is, to show how ideas, if complex, are constructed out of simple ideas. The second is to show that the ideas so analyzed can be brought into the compass of his empiricist theory. How well he does in these efforts can only be settled on a case-by-case basis, something that cannot be undertaken here.

Locke's theory of perception

Since Locke holds that all of our ideas are ultimately derived from experience, a theory concerning the nature of perception must hold a central place in his system. Though Locke never uses the expression "representational realism," it is an expression commonly used as a label for his theory of perception. This, however, brings us into disputed territory, for a number of able commentators have argued that Locke was not a representational realist—at least as that position is commonly understood.

This presents a problem. It is important to understand his views concerning perception because this aspect of his theory is the target of sharp criticism by Berkeley and later by Hume. Locke's account of perception is, however, complex and in crucial places unclear—perhaps even muddled. It is because of this that his account of perception admits of a variety of interpretations with, perhaps, no decisive way of deciding which is most adequate. Here we will adopt the view that Locke held a theory of perception that was, broadly speaking, a version of representational realism. The details of Locke's theory are hard to nail down because, as J.L.Mackie has suggested, Locke seemed to have less interest in the topic than his subsequent critics did. Mackie puts it this way:

Reading the *Essay* as a whole, one certainly does not get the impression that the representative theory had anything like the importance for Locke himself that it had for his critics from Berkeley onwards. It was something that he took pretty much for granted, rather than something he was specifically concerned to put forward, develop, and defend.²

An added complication is that Berkeley was neither a sympathetic nor always an entirely accurate reader of Locke's writings. Therefore, in trying to get a sense of the theory that Berkeley took himself to be attacking, we are dealing with an unsympathetic, and perhaps not entirely accurate, presentation of a theory that presents difficult (perhaps unresolvable) interpretative problems of its own. Fortunately, Berkeley's criticisms were, for the most part, aimed at the broadest features of representational realism. We might call this the *protoversion* of this theory. This protoversion of representational realism may stylize and oversimplify the original, but it captures, I believe, one standard way of understanding this account of perception and also brings into prominence the features of the theory that Berkeley targeted for criticism.

The protoversion of representational realism has the following features:

1. Representational realism is in part a *realist* theory as opposed to a purely *idealist* theory. The world contains two sorts of finite substances: finite mental entities and finite material entities. (The infinite substance, God, is not our present concern.) Each of these finite substances has its characteristic features, sometimes taken to be essential, sometimes not. Mental substances are characterized by thought, feeling, belief, perception, and so forth. Material substances are characterized by solidity, extension, motion, number, and the like.
2. These two sorts of finite substances have the power to interact in various ways. For example, the mind has the power to affect the body through acts of will, and the body has the power to affect the mind through perception.
3. Of these mind/body interactions, perception is the one that concerns us here. In perception, an external material object gives rise to an idea in the mind via the mechanism of a sense organ. An object producing a visual image in our minds is a paradigm example of this kind of body/mind causal interaction. Representational realism is thus a version of a *causal theory of perception*.
4. Sometimes there is a similarity between the qualities of the external object and the features of the idea it gives rise to, sometimes not. Starting with a case where there is no similarity, although an external object can give rise to a painful sensation, there is nothing in the external object resembling the painful sensation it produces. In contrast, an object with a particular shape can give rise to an image in the mind with the same or at least a similar shape. To the extent that such resemblances exist between ideas in the mind and the external objects that give rise to them, we can say that representational realism is, to that extent, a *copy theory of perception*. Of course, not every idea in the mind is an accurate representation of the object that caused it through affecting our sense organs. Encounters with visual illusions are a fairly common experience. In a particular setting, lines of the same length may seem to be different in length, a straight

stick may appear to be bent, and so on. Some of our ideas can be good representations of the objects that cause them, some not so good.

5. There is, however, a more radical way in which our ideas can fail to represent objects correctly. Not only is it possible for our ideas to represent objects as having qualities that they in fact do not have, they may represent them as having qualities that they cannot possibly have. Here Locke invokes (he did not invent it) the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. First, a terminological point concerning this distinction. Some of Locke's predecessors defined secondary qualities as qualities that can exist only in the mind, whereas primary qualities, they held, can be features of things both in the mind and in external bodies. Sweetness is a standard example of a secondary quality. Sweetness, it was held, does not exist in the sugar itself, but is simply a sensation produced in us by sugar. Shape (or figure) is a standard example of a primary quality. Both the external object and the image it produces in us can have a particular shape. On this understanding of the distinction, secondary qualities can only exist in the mind; primary qualities can exist both in the mind and in external objects.

The above remarks indicate a standard way that the distinction between primary and secondary properties is understood; it is not, however, the way that Locke understands it. Locke describes the difference between primary and secondary qualities in these words:

The ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the ideas, produced in us by these secondary qualities, have no resemblance of them at all. There is nothing like our ideas existing in the bodies themselves. They are in the bodies, we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us: And what is sweet, blue, or warm in idea, is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts in the bodies themselves, which we call so.

(II, viii, 15)

So, using Locke's terminology, secondary qualities exist in bodies themselves, not solely in the mind. The difference for him is that primary qualities can produce ideas resembling them, whereas secondary qualities cannot. To suppose that sweetness resides in the sugar itself is on a par, to use Santayana's image, with thinking of whiskey reeling dead drunk in its bottle. If Locke is right, there is nothing like sweetness in the object itself, just as there is nothing like drunkenness in whiskey. To think otherwise is to confound the power to produce some effect with the effect itself.

We thus have two ways of understanding secondary qualities. On the first, perhaps historically more common, view, secondary qualities exist only in the mind and not in material objects. On the second, Lockean, view, secondary qualities do exist in material objects, but only as powers to produce ideas in the mind—ideas that do not resemble qualities in the object. As we shall see, Berkeley understands the distinction between primary and secondary qualities in the first rather than in the second (Lockean) sense.

Substance

Turning to Locke's discussion of substance, we encounter another case where he attempts to diminish (if not fully reject) a notion central to rationalist philosophy. Descartes, for example, held that there were three sorts of substance: an infinite substance (God) and two sorts of finite substances, minds and bodies. One of the central tasks for rationalist philosophers was to grasp the essential features of these substances so that they could be made objects of rational understanding. Locke dismisses this approach in largely the same spirit that he rejects the doctrine of innate ideas. Pursuing his "historical, plain method," Locke offers the following, largely deflationary, account of how the "idea" of substance emerges:

The mind being, as I have declared, furnished with a great number of the simple ideas, conveyed in by the senses, as they are found in exterior things, or by reflection on its own operations, takes notice also, that a certain number of these simple ideas go constantly together; which being presumed to belong to one thing, and words being suited to common apprehensions, and made use of for quick dispatch, are called, so united in one subject, by one name: Which, by inadvertency, we are apt afterward to talk of, and consider as one simple idea, which indeed is a complication of many ideas together; because, as I have said, not imagining how these simple ideas can subsist by themselves, we accustom ourselves to suppose some substratum wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result, which therefore we call substance.

(II, xxiii, 1)

This passage actually contains two ideas. The first is that the notion of substance arises due to an inadvertency. Noting that certain ideas commonly go together, we assign a single name to such a complex, and, because of this, we are inadvertently led into thinking that this single word refers to a simple idea. The second idea seems to concern a metaphysical craving. Since we cannot see how simple ideas can "subsist by themselves," we introduce a substrate to serve as their support. Locke is clearly dismissive of both. The first, as he indicates, is nothing more than a verbal confusion. The second—the metaphysical—response is rejected as devoid of explanatory power.

If any one will examine himself concerning his notion of pure substance in general, he will find he has no other idea of it at all, but only a supposition of he knows not what support of such qualities, which are capable of producing simple ideas in us; which qualities are commonly called accidents. If any one should be asked, what is the subject wherein colour or weight inheres, he would have nothing to say, but the solid extended parts: And if he were demanded, what is it that solidity and extension adhere in, he would not be in a much better

case than the Indian before-mentioned, who, saying that the world was supported by a great elephant, was asked what the elephant rested on; to which his answer was, a great tortoise. But being again pressed to know what gave support to the broad-backed tortoise, replied, something he knew not what. And thus here, as in all other cases where we use words without having clear and distinct ideas, we talk like children; who being questioned what such a thing is, which they know not, readily give this satisfactory answer, that it is some thing: Which in truth signifies no more, when so used either by children or men, but that they know not what; and that the thing they pretend to know and talk of, is what they have no distinct idea of at all, and so are perfectly ignorant of it, and in the dark.

(II, xxiii, 2)

We shall see that Berkeley, seemingly missing the point of passages of this kind, actually attacks Locke for being a champion of material substance. Locke had reservations about the explanatory value of the idea of substance across the board, whereas Berkeley, while rejecting the idea of a material substance, defends the notion of spiritual substance. There is an irony here, for Berkeley's notion of a spiritual substance seems to be subject to the same kinds of criticisms that Berkeley incorrectly brought against Locke's treatment of material substance.

Abstract ideas

It is not easy to clear Berkeley of the charge of being less than generous in presenting Locke's position concerning material substance. A similar charge can be made against Berkeley's discussion of Locke's views concerning abstract ideas. Locke opened his *Essay* with a sustained attack on the doctrine of *innate* ideas; in parallel fashion, Berkeley begins his *Principles of Human Knowledge* with an assault on the doctrine of *abstract* ideas. It is something of a mystery why Berkeley ascribed to Locke something close to the traditional view of abstract ideas when, in fact, Locke was attempting to produce an alternative to it. As we shall see, Locke's view, in its most careful statement, is strikingly similar to Berkeley's. Berkeley could have enlisted Locke as an ally in his campaign against abstract ideas. It is, perhaps, unfortunate that he did not do so.

One of Berkeley's central claims is that to be is to be a particular—that is, there are no such things as abstract entities, including abstract ideas. He further held that the doctrine of abstract ideas has been the source of endless confusion. Berkeley was not only an immaterialist, he was also a *nominalist*, or, as we might better put it, a *particularist*. To defend this position he had to provide adequate grounds for rejecting the opposing view of materialism and abstractionism. If along the way he sometimes burdens Locke with views he did not hold, that may be unfortunate but does not, by itself, detract from the force of the arguments themselves.

Knowledge

The second task that Locke set for himself in the *Essay* was “[to] endeavour to shew what knowledge the understanding hath...; and the certainty, evidence, and extent of it.” It was precisely with respect to these epistemological matters that Berkeley thought—and not without reason—that Locke’s philosophical position was most vulnerable to attack. Berkeley argued, and Hume followed him in this, that the Lockean account of perceptual knowledge led unavoidably to a radical skepticism concerning the nature and even the existence of an external material world.

Locke turns to the problem of knowledge in Book IV of the *Essay*. The opening sections of Book IV signal troubles to come.

1. Since the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, hath no other immediate object but its own ideas, which it alone does or can contemplate; it is evident, that our knowledge is only conversant about them.

(IV, i, 1)

2. Knowledge then seems to me to be nothing but the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy, of any of our ideas. In this alone it consists. Where this perception is, there is knowledge; and where it is not, there, though we may fancy, guess, or believe, yet we always come short of knowledge. For when we know that white is not black, what do we else but perceive that these two ideas do not agree? When we possess ourselves with the utmost security of the demonstration, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones, what do we more but perceive, that equality to two right ones does necessarily agree to, and is inseparable from the three angles of a triangle?

(IV, i, 2)

In these passages Locke seems to be writing a rationalist tract rather than developing an empiricist account of knowledge. Though he is a concept empiricist, he seems to be adopting a rationalist position concerning knowledge, namely, that knowledge is a matter of reflection upon ideas themselves. This impression is further supported by the second chapter of Book IV, where Locke examines the various degrees of our knowledge. *Intuitive knowledge* is knowledge of the highest degree:

The different clearness of our knowledge seems to me to lie in the different way of perception the mind has of the agreement or disagreement of any of its ideas. For if we will reflect on our own ways of thinking, we shall find, that sometimes the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of two ideas immediately by themselves, without the intervention of any other: And this, I think, we may call

intuitive knowledge.

(IV, ii, 1)

In a passage Descartes could have written, Locke tells us that “this part of knowledge is irresistible, and like bright sunshine forces itself immediately to be perceived, as soon as ever the mind turns its view that way; and leaves no room for hesitation, doubt, or examination, but the mind is presently filled with the clear light of it” (IV, ii, 1).

Demonstrative knowledge comes next.

Though wherever the mind perceives the agreement or disagreement of any of its ideas, there be certain knowledge: Yet it does not always happen, that the mind sees that agreement or disagreement which there is between them, even where it is discoverable...The reason why the mind cannot always perceive presently the agreement or disagreement of two ideas, is, because those ideas, concerning whose agreement or disagreement the inquiry is made, cannot by the mind be so put together as to show it. In this case [the mind] is fain, by the intervention of other ideas...to discover the agreement or disagreement which it searches; and this is that which we call reasoning.

(IV, ii, 2)

Knowledge of this kind, Locke tells us, “though it be certain, yet the evidence of it is not altogether so clear and bright, nor the assent so ready, as in intuitive knowledge” (IV, ii, 4). For Locke, knowledge strictly understood must fall into one of these two categories:

These two, viz. intuition and demonstration, are the degrees of our knowledge; whatever comes short of one of these, with what assurance soever embraced, is but faith, or opinion, but not knowledge, at least in all general truths.

(IV, ii, 14)

For Locke, then, all knowledge is a priori knowledge.

This a priorism may seem strange for a philosopher who is generally considered an empiricist, indeed, one of the founders of the empiricist movement. Perhaps, however, the issue here is merely terminological. Strictly speaking, only intuitive knowledge and demonstrative knowledge count as knowledge, but this does not rule out the possibility that other beliefs meet sufficiently high standards to count as knowledge in their own way. Locke suggests just this in the continuation of the passage just cited:

There is, indeed, another perception of the mind, employed about the particular existence of finite beings without us; which going beyond bare probability, and yet not reaching perfectly to either of the foregoing degrees of certainty, passes under the name of knowledge.

(IV, ii, 14)

Here Locke calls this *sensitive knowledge* and thus speaks of “three degrees of

knowledge, viz. intuitive, demonstrative, and sensitive: In each of which there are different degrees and ways of evidence and certainty."

When Locke first speaks of our sensitive knowledge, he rather breezily tosses off some quick argument in favor of the legitimacy of claims of this kind. Acknowledging that they do not reach the degree of certainty of intuitive knowledge and demonstrative knowledge, he does hold that their legitimacy is sufficiently high to protect them from the carping doubts of skeptics. Locke returns to this topic in the eleventh chapter of Book IV, where he offers a somewhat more systematic response to the skeptical challenge to our knowledge of material objects "without us," or, as it is sometimes put, our knowledge of the external world. Locke is perfectly clear about what the problem is: "The having the idea of any thing in our mind, no more proves the existence of that thing, than the picture of a man evidences his being in the world, or the visions of a dream make thereby a true history" (IV, xi, 1). That Locke states his problem in these terms shows that here at least he is committed to a strong version of a representationalist theory of perception.

Locke goes on to produce a tumble of intertwined arguments defending the legitimacy of sensitive knowledge against skeptical challenges. His opening move is this. Since, as he says, the *having* of an idea can prove nothing about the existence of that thing, it must be

the *actual receiving* of ideas from without, that gives us notice of the existence of other things, and makes us know that something doth exist at that time without us, which causes that idea in us, though perhaps we neither know nor consider how it does it.

(IV, xi, 2, emphasis added)

This is an important idea, for it suggests an argument of the following form: The best explanation for the manner in which certain ideas make their appearance in the mind is that they are caused by external objects that they resemble in important ways. This argument would have to be spelled out in detail, and it is not clear how successful it would be. Still, it is an interesting line of argument. Unfortunately, Locke almost seems to go out of his way to state it in a question-begging way, as in the following passage that occurs later in the same section:

Whilst I write this, I have, by the paper affecting my eyes, that idea produced in my mind, which whatever object causes, I call white; by which I know that that quality or accident (i.e. whose appearance before my eyes always causes that idea) doth really exist, and hath a being without me.

(IV, xi, 2)

Here Locke illicitly adopts the position of an observer of the relationship between certain external objects (the white paper and his eyes) and certain internal objects (the ideas he has of them). This, by the terms of the problem he set himself, is not a standpoint open to him, for, according to him, the *only* things we are aware of are our own ideas, thus we are never in a position to observe the relationship between ideas and the external objects

which supposedly give rise to them. Hume makes this point succinctly.

It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.³

Perhaps Locke did not have to formulate his argument in his question-begging manner, but he did, thereby giving Berkeley and Hume an easy target to attack.

This question-begging tendency continues in a series of “concurrent reasons” Locke offers for accepting the senses as being at least generally reliable sources of knowledge. Here are some further examples:

First, it is plain those perceptions are produced in us by exterior causes affecting our senses; because those that want the organs of any sense, never can have the ideas belonging to that sense produced in their minds. This is too evident to be doubted.

(IV, xi, 4)

Secondly, because sometimes I find, that I cannot avoid the having those ideas produced in my mind. For though when my eyes are shut, or windows fast, I can at pleasure recall to my mind the ideas of light, or the sun, which former sensations had lodged in my memory; so I can at pleasure lay by that idea, and take into my view that of the smell of a rose, or taste of sugar. But, if I turn my eyes at noon towards the sun, I cannot avoid the ideas, which the light, or sun, then produces in me.

(IV, xi, 5)

None of this would convince a skeptic that on Locke’s theory we can have reliable knowledge of the nature and existence of an external reality, for in each case reference is made to organs of sense which, as Locke constantly forgets, are themselves parts of the external world.

Locke’s fourth concurrent reason is interesting because it bears on a remarkable feature of Berkeley’s theory concerning the nature of objects of perception.

Fourthly, our senses in many cases bear witness to the truth of each other’s report, concerning the existence of sensible things without us. He that sees a fire, may, if he doubt whether it be any thing more than a bare fancy, feel it too; and be convinced by putting his hand in it.

(IV, xi, 7)

A less vivid but equally good example of the concurrence of the senses is the fact that we can come to know the shape of an object both through sight and through touch. This might serve as the basis for an inference to the existence of an independent entity that causes both. Berkeley, as we shall see, blocks this line of argument by making the radical move of denying that the same thing can ever be perceived by two different senses. When, for example, I both see and feel that something is round, I am, according to Berkeley, perceiving two utterly different objects. If that is right, no argument from the agreement of the senses can be correct.

Berkeley, as we shall see, takes full advantage of the skeptical problems seemingly inherent in representational realism in order to eliminate competitors to his own position. Yet, as noted earlier, he insists that his own position is not simply built on their ruins.

We can close by noting Locke's response to Descartes' so-called dream argument—an argument intended to cast skeptical doubt on all claims to perceptual knowledge. When dreaming we are often in a state of massive error concerning the world around us. We sometimes recognize that we are dreaming, but usually we do not. Therefore, at any time, what we take to be true perceptions of the world may instead be nothing more than dream fabrications. Thus we are never in a position to trust our senses. Here is Locke's response:

If any one say [that in dreaming] all these ideas may be produced in us without any external objects; he may please to dream that I make him this answer: 1. That it is no great matter, whether I remove his scruple or no: Where all is but dream, reasoning and arguments are of no use, truth and knowledge nothing. 2. That I believe he will allow a very manifest difference between dreaming of being in the fire, and being actually in it. But yet if he be resolved to appear so sceptical, as to maintain, that what I call being actually in the fire is nothing but a dream; and that we cannot thereby certainly know, that any such thing as fire actually exists without us: I answer, that we certainly finding that pleasure or pain follows upon the application of certain objects to us, whose existence we perceive, or dream that we perceive by our senses; this certainty is as great as our happiness or misery, beyond which we have no concernment to know or to be.

(IV, ii, 14)

This is all strangely out of focus. Locke seems to imagine someone asking him whether he (not Locke) can be sure that all is not a dream. Locke responds by telling this person that it doesn't matter if he is dreaming or not, for (i) if all is but a dream, then an answer will have no significance, for truth and knowledge are nothing, and (ii) if dreaming cannot be distinguished from being awake in terms of the pleasures and pains felt, then as far as our happiness and misery are concerned, again it makes no difference whether we are dreaming or not.

Things look very different when we adopt the first-person standpoint that Descartes had in mind. Suppose that all is a dream and, further, that Locke is right in saying that this entails that truth and knowledge are nothing. Since I cannot tell whether or not all is

but a dream, then for all I know, truth and knowledge *are* nothing. That is not a response to skepticism, it simply is skepticism. Locke's second response seems no more forceful. Let us suppose that the pain and pleasures encountered in dreaming are qualitatively and quantitatively no different from the pain and pleasures experienced when awake. (Ah, there's the rub.) If that is correct, then Locke may be right in saying that, as far as our contentment goes, it makes no difference whether we are dreaming or awake. It is hard to see, however, how this has any bearing on the skeptical challenge that Descartes raised.

It seems, then, that Locke's position concerning sensitive knowledge—either because of its inherent structure or because of Locke's way of presenting it—is a target of opportunity for skeptical attack. Other versions of representational realism seem similarly open to skeptical attack. Berkeley gleefully seized the opportunity. There is, however, a further reason for spelling out the supposed weak points of representational realism. Berkeley, in developing his own positive position as a replacement for representational realism, faces a series of parallel challenges. In particular, he too will have to produce a satisfactory argument establishing the existence of entities outside the mind or, better, outside *his* mind. Descartes' dream-argument seems to apply equally to a representationalist's position and to his. Does Berkeley do a better job in responding to such skeptical challenges? He prided himself on thinking that he did. Hume thought otherwise. Hume followed Berkeley in challenging the very intelligibility of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notion of material substance, but he went beyond Berkeley in challenging the intelligibility of the notion of substance in all its forms, including spiritual or mental substance, the concept central to Berkeley's philosophy. In assessing the strength of Berkeley's position we will have to decide whether it can stand up to Humean-style criticisms. The first task, however, is to give Berkeley's theory a clear, systematic and, as far as possible, sympathetic statement. What emerges in doing so is that Berkeley was the author of a philosophical theory of extraordinary richness and remarkable internal coherence.

PART 2
THE BASIC ARGUMENTS
OF BERKELEY'S
PRINCIPLES OF HUMAN
KNOWLEDGE

Chapter 2

The structure of the *Principles of Human Knowledge*

[T]here are only things perceiving, and things perceived.

Dialogues 3, p. 235

[E]very thing which exists is particular.

Dialogues 1, p. 192

According to Berkeley, to be or to exist in the most fundamental way is to be a perceiver; everything else that exists does so in virtue of being perceived by some perceiver. To put things vividly, a universe containing no perceivers would contain nothing at all or, better, would not be a universe at all. Notice that the claim that to be is to be a perceiver is fundamentally different from the claim, sometimes inaccurately attributed to Berkeley, that to be is to be perceived. This latter claim comes close to getting Berkeley's position upside-down. For Berkeley, the fundamental constituents of the universe—the entities with primary existence—are active beings who think, perceive, imagine, recall, and so on—beings he refers to in various places as spirits, souls or minds. All other things that exist do so only in the minds of perceivers.

Using his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) as the chief guide, this study is intended to show in a sympathetic way how Berkeley came to hold such an extraordinary view. For his part, Berkeley did not find his view extraordinary, for he not only held that it was true, he held that it actually squares with common sense. In fact, in various places, Berkeley makes a surprisingly strong case for the compatibility of his views with those of common sense. Even so, the thought that an object would simply go out of existence, if all sentient creatures (including God) simultaneously allowed their gazes and thoughts to wander elsewhere, seems utterly extravagant. Being assured that God can be relied upon to stay at His or Her post seems only to assign God a great deal of tedious work for no other purpose than to save a theory. But this, perhaps, is unfair. In any case, in offering a sympathetic account of Berkeley's position, it is not my intention to offer a defense in its behalf. I will, however, try to show that Berkeley's position is not, as often thought, the product of a series of ingenious but fallacious arguments. It is

rather the result of adopting and thinking through a particular standpoint that can seem natural and compelling when one is engaged in that special activity known as philosophizing.

The central interpretative claim of this study is that Berkeley's philosophical position is driven by two fundamental ontological commitments. The first concerns the status of the qualities that constitute objects we perceive and leads directly to his *idealism*; the second concerns the status of objects themselves and underwrites his *particularism* or, as it is sometimes called, his *nominalism*. This work is primarily an examination of the ways in which Berkeley thinks through and develops these joint commitments. A third component of Berkeley's position—certainly of great importance to him—is a strong commitment to *theism*. This third component, I will argue, neither adequately supports nor is adequately supported by Berkeley's commitments to idealism and particularism. Except for establishing these points and noting the weaknesses in his proofs for the existence of God, I will say relatively little about the distinctively theological aspects of Berkeley's position.

As we shall see, Berkeley relies heavily on appeals to intuition in developing his core doctrines. Unlike many contemporary writers on Berkeley, I propose to take this aspect of his position seriously, so let me say a few provisional things about such appeals.¹ Unfortunately, the term "intuition" and its cognates "intuitive," "intuitionism," etc., are used in a variety of ways, both inside philosophy and out. Outside of philosophy, the term "intuition" can suggest a mysterious, non-rational way of attaining truths. It is something one *feels in one's bones*, not in one's head. This is not how most philosophers, including Berkeley, employ this term. However, even within philosophy the term "intuition" is used in a variety of ways and can have various doctrines associated with it. We can get a sense of what a philosopher means by an intuition by noting what contrast he has in mind when employing this term. Traditionally, intuitive knowledge is contrasted with demonstrative knowledge. What is known intuitively is said to be known directly (or immediately) and not known in virtue of knowledge of other things. Traditionally, the axioms of geometry were accorded this status; for example, that the shortest distance between two points is a straight line is supposed to be something that reveals itself simply from reflecting on the content of this claim. It is in this sense that Berkeley employs the notion of intuition. For him, an intuition is something that emerges from a direct, intense, unprejudiced reflection on the content of experience. An example of a non-mathematical intuition of this kind might be this: reflecting on the colors red and green we recognize, as an intuitive certainty, that the same expanse cannot be simultaneously both entirely red and entirely green. By immersing ourselves in the very nature of these colors, we come to see that they exclude each other in this way. It is on the basis of this kind of intuitive reflection that Berkeley puts forward his fundamental claim that there are only things perceiving and things perceived.

One can respond to intuitive appeals in a variety of ways. There are at least four possibilities.

1. One may be generally skeptical concerning the ability of appeals to intuition to establish anything beyond mere trivialities, for example, that white is not black.

2. Upon careful reflection, we may come to agree with Berkeley, as A.A.Luce does, that it is intuitively evident that nothing can exist other than perceivers and the things they perceive.
3. Upon reflection we may come to deny that Berkeley's appeals to intuition have the force he claims them to have. With all the good will in the world, we may attempt to follow Berkeley's instructions only to discover that the world does not strike us as it strikes him. Under intuitive inspection, objects of perception may, for example, strike us as being brutishly foreign to anything mental.²
4. Upon reflection we may come to see the force of Berkeley's appeals to intuition without actually accepting them. What we discover is that it is possible to adopt a detached or distanced attitude toward the objects around us, and, when we do so in a thoroughgoing way, they may, in fact, *strike* us, as they struck Berkeley, as being utterly private mental entities. From this standpoint, this view may force itself upon us. Part of my evidence for this is that philosophers who adopt such a detached stance often report that their objects of perception are revealed to them in just this way. That most introductory philosophy students can be converted to this viewpoint simply by having them poke the corner of one eye gives further evidence of the ready availability of this standpoint. But granting the availability of this standpoint is not the same thing as endorsing it, giving it a privileged philosophical status, as many philosophers—including Berkeley—have done. This standpoint may, instead, be a seductive source of persistent philosophical illusions. I will discuss this last possibility in an epilogue at the close of this work. Here I am only saying that Berkeley's starting point is a perennial and common starting point for doing philosophy, and without an appreciation of its primitive appeal—its primitive tug—it is not possible to grasp the core of his position and, given that, not possible to appreciate Berkeley's genius in developing it.

Here a few words are in order about the treacherous word "idealism." Like the word "intuition," it has a variety of meanings inside and outside of philosophy. In the common way of speaking, idealists are people rigidly committed to high moral standards despite the inconvenience to themselves and, perhaps, to others. People are also called idealists if they are committed to Utopian goals that have little or no chance of success. Berkeley was, in fact, an idealist in both these ways,³ but idealism in these two senses is not something that will concern us here. When employed philosophically, the term "idealism" sometimes suggests the denial of such real things as tables, chairs, cruise ships and planets. Berkeley is sometimes incorrectly—indeed, ignorantly—taken to be an idealist in this sense. Samuel Johnson's attempt to refute Berkeley simply by kicking a stone is a notorious example of just this misunderstanding. Perhaps in fear of encouraging such a misreading of his position, many writers on Berkeley have avoided referring to him as an idealist at all, preferring to call him an *immaterialist* instead. For example, Luce's commentary on Berkeley's philosophy is entitled *Berkeley's Immaterialism*. In his eagerness to defend Berkeley against Samuel Johnson-style criticisms, Luce announces: "I take my courage in my two hands, and deny that Berkeley was an idealist" (25). Yet, in holding, as Berkeley does, that the only substance that exists is spiritual substance and in further holding that everything else that exists, exists only as an object for spiritual

substances, that is, minds, Berkeley commits himself to idealism in a perfectly straightforward sense of this term. It is in this sense of the term that I refer, without apology, to Berkeley's position as a form of idealism. It is, of course, perfectly correct to refer to Berkeley as an immaterialist, especially in contexts where his primary aim is to attack materialism. However, the negative label "immaterialism" does not distinguish Berkeley's position from a skepticism concerning substances of any kind. By bringing into prominence his positive commitments, calling Berkeley an idealist describes him better.

Turning to the second fundamental aspect of Berkeley's position, his commitment to particularism, it too is grounded in direct appeals to intuition. Particularism⁴ involves the rejection of all abstract objects including abstract ideas. Once more we are involved with terms that philosophers have used in a variety of ways, and it is not altogether easy to fix meanings in a non-controversial way. Sometimes being abstract stands in contrast with being concrete or, in some sense, being material. For example, Westminster Abbey is a concrete entity, whereas the number seven, if we grant that such an entity exists, is an abstract entity. At other times, being abstract stands in contrast with being particular, specific, or wholly determinate. Understood this way, a triangle taken abstractly would have no determinate size, whereas any particular triangle must have a determinate size, whether we can specify it or not. When Berkeley declares, as cited above, that to be is to be particular, he is rejecting abstraction in this second sense. A triangle of no determinate size is, for Berkeley, a wholly unintelligible notion. Those who think that they possess an idea of such a triangle will, according to Berkeley, need only attempt to form such an idea in order to convince themselves that they cannot do so.

Since we will not examine this aspect of Berkeley's philosophy in detail until Chapter 8, and since Berkeley relies on his rejection of abstract ideas throughout the exposition of own position, let me say something more about this important aspect of his philosophy. For Berkeley, to be is to be a particular (non-abstract) thing. The universe consists wholly of particular spirits perceiving particular perceptions. Berkeley's critique of abstractionism goes as deep as possible: he holds that ideas of particulars are the only *conceivable* kind of ideas. Thus, for Berkeley, the expression "abstract idea" when it stands in contrast with "particular idea" has no intelligible meaning. From this it follows that it is not even proper to *deny* their existence. Berkeley avoids this difficulty by examining various descriptions of abstract ideas—some-times taken from the writings of John Locke—and then tries to convince his readers that nothing could *possibly* satisfy such a description. If this is right, then abstractionists—as we might call them—are under the spell of thinking that certain things are intelligible which, in fact, are not. Here we might say that abstractionists suffer from illusions of intelligibility. Since abstractionism, in one form or another, has been a persistent theme in Western philosophy, rejecting it amounts to saying that much of Western philosophy has been beset by (or besotted with) such illusions. Philosophers have persistently talked nonsense without realizing it.

Berkeley dwells on the inadequacies of the doctrine of abstract ideas for at least two reasons. First, he believes, and repeatedly tells his reader, that there are certain truths of the greatest importance immediately available to anyone who examines the objects of his

thought and perception in an attentive and unprejudiced way. The chief prejudice that prevents us from doing this, according to Berkeley, is a commitment to the doctrine of abstract ideas, which distracts us from, or masks, truths that are otherwise readily available.

A second reason Berkeley dwells on the inadequacies of the doctrine of abstract ideas is that he thinks it can lead us to embrace metaphysical absurdities or, in disgust with the endless quibbling among competing metaphysical dogmas, to embrace no metaphysical views at all. Under the influence of the doctrine of abstract ideas, matters which should be plain and evident to any attentive thinker can be made to appear subtle, problematic and ultimately intractably perplexing. In his later work, *Alciphron*, Berkeley makes the point this way:

Be the science or subject what it will, whensoever men quit particulars for generalities, things concrete for abstractions, when they forsake practical views, and the useful purposes of knowledge, for barren speculation, considering means and instruments as ultimate ends, and labouring to obtain precise ideas, which they suppose indiscriminately annexed to all terms, they will be sure to embarrass themselves with difficulties and disputes.

(*Alciphron* 7, 15)

Just as Berkeley's positive program for establishing his idealism relies on direct appeals to intuition, his attack on the doctrine of abstract ideas does so as well. His standard strategy is to challenge his reader (or interlocutor in one of his dialogues) to pause, reflect and then say quite candidly whether he can form some abstract idea he claims to possess. Here, for example, is the portrayal of Alciphron's stunned discovery that he does not, as he had previously thought, possess an abstract idea of number:

Alciphron: Can it be so hard a matter to form a simple idea of number, the object of a most evident demonstrable science? Hold, let me see, if I cannot abstract the idea of number from the numeral names and characters, and all particular numerable things. Upon which Alciphron paused a while and then said: To confess the truth I do not find that I can.

(*Alciphron* 7, 5)

Passages of this kind—though not always this quaint—occur throughout Berkeley's writings.

Berkeley's basic strategy is to call upon his reader to consult his own experience, fully expecting that, with attentiveness, the reader will come to recognize Berkeley's intuitive claims as compelling. This is philosophy carried out within an internal, first-person perspective. Expressed from this perspective, here, in broad strokes, is how Berkeley assembles intuitions in his effort to establish the fundamental features of his position:

1. I am aware of only two sorts of entities: perceptions (or, more generally, ideas) which manifestly cannot exist unperceived (or exist uncomprehended) and a mind or spirit

which comprehends them.

2. Concerning entities of which I am not aware, they must be (a) perceptions, (b) spirits, or (c) entities other than perceptions or spirits.

(a) If they are perceptions, then, again, they cannot exist unperceived, for it is a manifest contradiction to suppose they could.

(b) If they are spirits, that, of course, presents no challenge to Berkeley's position.

(c) If these entities are neither perceptions nor spirits, we can have no conception of them and the hypothesis of their existence is "perfectly unintelligible" or wholly empty of content. (Those who think otherwise are suffering from delusions of intelligibility induced, almost certainly, by the doctrine of abstract ideas.)

Some important details aside, my claim is that this schema captures the *core* of Berkeley's defense of his idealism, and that every component in it—including the negative component 2(c)—is grounded in direct appeals to intuition.

In what follows, I will try to show that the interpretation just sketched is borne out by the text of Berkeley's *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*—hereafter referred to as the *Principles*. However, the opening parts of the *Principles*—the introduction and sections 1–33 of Part I—are highly compact and place rather strong demands on the reader. The introduction presents Berkeley's attack on Locke's account of abstraction and offers his own alternative to it. In the first thirty-three sections of Part I, Berkeley not only lays out and defends the main lines of his position, he attacks various alternatives to it, most notably, the Lockean version of what has come to be known as representational realism. All this is done in very few pages (in many editions of the *Principles*, less than twenty), with very little concern for the reader's reaction to doctrines that on first encounter must, after all, seem quite extraordinary. It is only when Berkeley turns to answering objections (sections 34–84) that the pace slackens enough for the arguments to be easily taken in.

Perhaps because he came to recognize the daunting character of the *Principles*, three years after its appearance Berkeley published a new version of his position in a work entitled *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713)—hereafter referred to as the *Dialogues*. This work not only employs a more relaxed—more reader-friendly—approach, the battle plan is also different. Though it remains of primary importance, the abstruse discussion of abstract ideas that opened the *Principles* is moved back in the *Dialogues* to a position where its role in refuting competing positions is much clearer. The compact exposition of Berkeley's own position that headed Part I of the *Principles* is replaced by the more leisurely dialogue format, which allows objections to be raised and answered from the start. In this way, one is slowly led into Berkeley's position from its most plausible aspects, for example, that warmth is not a mind-independent quality, to its most remarkable, for example, that the earth itself could not exist independently of a mind.

Granting the rhetorical advantages of the *Dialogues*, the *Principles* strikes me as the more solid work. In the *Dialogues*, one small intuition is piled on another until the entire edifice is built. In contrast, the *Principles* is driven by an initial, all-embracing intuition—

an apotheosis—concerning the world around us. “All the choirs of heaven and the furniture of the earth,” when attended to appropriately, are immediately revealed to us as being a system of entities whose qualities are completely mind-dependent. For Berkeley, this matter is completely settled by the seventh section of the first part of the *Principles*. Intoxicated with this intuition and armed with his critique of abstract ideas to smite his enemies, Berkeley lays out a theory of extraordinary internal coherence and conceptual richness. That development, as it appears in the *Principles*, is the subject of this book.

In giving prominence to Berkeley’s reliance on intuition in establishing the central features of his position, I have no desire to down-play or undervalue his skills as a dialectician. Berkeley is devastating in exhibiting the internal incoherence and skeptical consequences of competing positions, with John Locke’s *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as a main target of his attacks. In the *Principles*, however, Berkeley claims to have established his own position before offering his refutation of Locke’s. In this matter we will follow Berkeley’s order of presentation. Chapter 3 concerns Berkeley’s presentation of his own position. Berkeley’s criticisms of Locke’s position and others like it are treated in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 examines Berkeley’s account of real things and other spirits.

Berkeley not only shows remarkable subtlety and ingenuity in criticizing the positions of others; he is also adept in responding to objections to his own position. Berkeley’s responses to objections are considered in Chapters 6 through 8. Chapters 9 and 10 examine the advantages Berkeley claims his position has for science, mathematics, and philosophy.

I have chosen the *Principles* as the central source for expounding Berkeley’s views because it strikes me, as it has struck others, as being systematically more coherent than the *Dialogues*. I will, however, make considerable use of material drawn from the *Dialogues* in order to supplement or clarify problematic sections of the *Principles*. The *Dialogues* also contain some of Berkeley’s most famous passages that simply must be cited.

With three exceptions, the book is examined largely in the order that Berkeley presented it. First, following the lead of the *Dialogues*, I have postponed an examination of Berkeley’s attack on the doctrine of abstract ideas until after the main features of his position have been laid out. Second, because it is needed to complete the presentation of the positive aspects of his position, I have brought Berkeley’s attempted proof for the existence of God forward from the closing part of the *Principles*, examining it in the fifth chapter. Third, though Berkeley’s discussion of the supposed advantages his theory bestows on philosophy does not occur at the very end of the *Principles*, I have made it the topic of the concluding chapter.

Chapter 3

The intuitive basis of Berkeley's idealism

(1–7)

Consider and examine [real things], and then tell me if there be anything in them which can exist without the mind: or if you can conceive anything like them existing without the mind.

Dialogues 1, p. 206

In the opening sentence of Section 7 of Part I of the *Principles*, Berkeley declares:

From what has been said, it follows, there is not any other substance than *spirit*, or that which perceives.

Commenting on this passage, A.D.Smith remarks:

What is really striking about the sentence is that it occurs in section *seven* of the *Principles*... That is to say that...Berkeley feels that he is in a position to refute all alternatives to his form of idealism after just six short paragraphs!¹

(37)

Smith is right; it is striking that Berkeley is prepared to draw a strong idealist conclusion seemingly with so little preparation. To try to make sense of this, I will begin by looking closely at what Berkeley actually says in the previous six short paragraphs which, to his mind at least, establishes the fundamental principle of his philosophy.

It is clear that this conclusion is based on a strong commitment to the way of ideas—the view that the only objects of direct awareness are ideas or other mental entities. Saying that, however, simply raises another question: “What is the basis of Berkeley’s commitment to the way of ideas?” Since it was a philosophical commonplace in Berkeley’s time to treat the immediate objects of perception as ideas, there is nothing surprising in Berkeley’s adopting this standpoint as well. There are, however, a number of reasons for not letting the matter go at that. First, if the standard reasons for adopting the way of ideas were themselves faulty, then attributing them to Berkeley might serve to protect his reputation—showing, as it were, that he was no more confused than others—but would hardly serve to put his position in the most sympathetic light. Second and more

importantly, many of the standard arguments used in support of the way of ideas were not open to Berkeley because they rely, properly or not, on the existence of an independent material reality. The so-called arguments from science—that is, those that make reference to sense organs, the transmission theory of light, and so on—plainly presuppose the existence of material objects. Often enough, arguments from illusion, perspective, and so on, do so as well. Specifically, he would have to show that sense organs are themselves no more than combinations of ideas and not mind-independent entities. To do otherwise would be to base his theory on grounds incompatible with it.

There is another problem. A commitment to the way of ideas does not, by itself, entail idealism. On the standard representationalist view, although the immediate objects of perception are ideas, material objects also exist and stand in important causal relations to these immediate objects of perception. Locke presented one elaboration of this kind of theory; others did so as well. So there must be something beyond a commitment to the way of ideas that separates Berkeley's position from theirs. One suggestion is that Berkeley separates his position from that of the representational realist by pointing to epistemological—specifically, skeptical—difficulties in that position not found in his own. Berkeley does, in fact, cite such skeptical difficulties in his critiques of that theory, but, as already noted, he insists that his position is fully justified independently of these criticisms. There must, therefore, be some difference between Berkeley's commitment to the way of ideas and that of the representational realist. The central task is to find out exactly what this is.

What, then, does Berkeley actually say in these opening six sections that leads him to draw his strong idealist conclusion?² To answer that question, we should first ask another. What alternatives must he eliminate in order to establish this strong idealist conclusion? There are, it seems, three. The *first* is the view of the common person, that in perception we are, in normal cases at least, directly aware of mind-independent objects—that is, we are aware of objects that can and typically do continue to exist when not perceived. Since this common view was broadly rejected by philosophers of the time, Berkeley understandably does not spend much time on it. He does, however, address it directly. The *second* view is that of the representational realists, who hold, contrary to the common person, that the immediate objects of perception are sensations which, being mental entities, cannot exist unperceived. Beyond this, they hold that other entities exist that can exist unperceived and in certain respects have features that resemble the features of perceptions, and that in certain respects the features of these objects stand in causal relations to the features possessed by perceptions. This causal story can be told in a variety of ways. For Locke, the causal relationships between external material objects and perceptions, though complex, are quite direct; for an occasionalist like Malebranche, the causal chain loops through the deity. This representationalist theory—or family of theories—is the chief target of Berkeley's criticism. The *third* view that must be eliminated is nothing more than the seemingly barren possibility left over after representational realism (in all its variants) has been eliminated. This is the view that certain (perhaps indescribable) entities might exist that resemble neither spirits nor perceptions. Such entities, though not comprehensible by human beings, might still exist

and be intelligible to God. This third possibility may seem too empty of content to merit consideration, yet, as we shall see, Berkeley does, with some impatience, address it directly in his responses to objections. In order to provide a systematic basis for the strong conclusion stated in the opening sentence of Section 7, all three alternatives must be eliminated. A reasonable demand on any interpretation of the text is that it explain why Berkeley, at least to his own satisfaction, thought he had accomplished this, and done so with such dispatch.

We will see that Berkeley's grounds for committing himself to idealism involve a direct appeal to *intuitions* concerning the nature of things we encounter in experience. That the argument is intuitive explains two things: its brevity and, for Berkeley, its complete persuasiveness. Appeals to intuition sometimes involve stage directions—which Berkeley supplies a number of times. You are supposed to clear your mind of prejudices (particularly those that arise from the baleful influence of the doctrine of abstract ideas), attend to things carefully, and so on. That out of the way, the issue is supposed to be settled, if not immediately, at least in short order. Furthermore, because of their (supposed) immediacy and simplicity, appeals to intuition have generally been thought to trump all competing considerations—a point that Berkeley makes several times, sometimes when having trouble responding to a pressing objection.

Once we slow down and do not read through these opening sections as a mere preamble to Berkeley's rejection or, as a Hegelian might put it, his overcoming, of Lockean representational realism, the intuitive character of his reflections jumps from the page. What exactly does he say? Sections 1 and 2 present what Berkeley takes to be an exhaustive inventory of the contents of the mind. Section 1 begins with these words:

It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either *ideas* actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.

Thus Berkeley begins his defense of his idealism by presenting what he takes to be a complete catalogue of the *objects* of human knowledge. That this catalogue is complete is something he takes to be evident. Then, moving quickly, he lays claim to another evident truth of fundamental importance to the development of his position, namely, that things we encounter through perceiving are nothing more than collections of ideas:

[A] certain colour, taste, smell, figure, and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name *apple*. Other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things.

(1)

It is important to recognize the strength of this claim: Berkeley is saying that the nature of an object of perception is *fully* exhausted in its being a collection of ideas of various

qualities or properties. There is *nothing* more to an object of perception than this. Berkeley offers no argument in support of this central claim, seemingly taking it to be too obvious to demand justification.

In Section 2 Berkeley tells us that, “besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them, and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them.” This shows that we have, as Berkeley puts it, a *notion* of at least one sort of substance, namely, mental or spiritual substance.³

This brings us to Section 3, which is crucially important and demands careful reading:

That neither our thoughts, nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist *without* the mind, is what *everybody will allow*. And (to me) it seems no less evident that the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise [!] than *in* a mind perceiving them. I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this, by anyone that shall attend to *what is meant by the term exist*, when applied to sensible things. The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions. For as to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.

To get the proper sense of this passage, we must distinguish two claims, both of which Berkeley takes to be intuitive certainties:

1. The immediate *objects* of perception (being collections of sensations) cannot exist unperceived.
2. The *qualities* that characterize objects of perception cannot exist unperceived.

The first claim separates Berkeley's position from that of the vulgar, but does not separate Berkeley's position from that of the representational realists. They too hold that the immediate objects of perception are mental entities (collections of sensations) and, as such, cannot exist unperceived. What separates Berkeley's view from that of the representational realists is his further rejection of the claim that other entities exist that are not sensations (or any other sort of mental entities), and yet possess qualities that resemble those possessed by sensations. For the representational realist, a particular shape can be a quality of both an idea and of an external material counterpart. For Berkeley, it is an intuitive certainty that this cannot be true. This is the force of the second claim stated above.

The first question to ask about Section 3 is this: Which of the above claims is it intended—or primarily intended—to establish? If the first, then it is aimed at the vulgar view that, in perception, we are directly aware of mind-independent entities. Read that way, however, it seems altogether question-begging, simply taking it for granted that the direct objects of perception are sensations. Furthermore, as we shall see, the view of the vulgar is specifically examined in Section 4, with no indication given by Berkeley that he is repeating himself. More reasonably, the target of this passage must be a position in which it is granted that the direct objects of perception are sensations and in which some further, stronger point is being made.

The passage begins by citing three sorts of things that the common person and the philosopher alike agree cannot exist outside a mind: thoughts, passions, and ideas formed by the imagination. Berkeley then says that we can obtain an “intuitive knowledge” that the various sensations imprinted on the senses have the same status. The point of the passage, then, is to draw our attention to what Berkeley takes to be a fundamental similarity between feelings on the one hand and the qualities of objects of immediate perception on the other. Given our intuitive apprehension of the qualities that constitute pains, for example, we recognize at once that they could not exist otherwise than in a mind. Attending to a pain, it is evident that such a quality could not exist unfelt. Berkeley thinks that paying similar attention to sensations will yield the parallel disclosure that their qualities too cannot exist unperceived. Berkeley is not simply saying that direct objects of perception cannot exist unperceived, for in the closing sentence of Section 3 he says something much stronger: “Their *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.” That is, the being of sensible things is to be perceived because, first, the nature of sensible things is fully exhausted by its sensible qualities (1) and, second, the being of a sensible quality is to be perceived. This, I take it, is the point of the often-maligned passage:

There was an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch.

(3)

On the present reading, Berkeley is not trying to extract a strong philosophical conclusion from the mere possibility of a grammatical transformation. He is attempting to call our attention to what he takes to be an essential characteristic of an odor: an odor is the sort of thing that can only exist as the object of the sensory faculty of smelling. If Berkeley is right in these claims, then representational realism is not simply shown to be ungrounded or fraught with internal difficulties; it is actually shown to be conceptually incoherent. This is Berkeley's central criticism of representational realism, and though he employs additional criticisms, as he repeatedly tells his reader, he thinks he needs no other.

There is, however, something disturbing about Section 3. By treating the immediate objects of perception as sensations, he simply takes it for granted that the commonsense direct-realist account of perception is false. He rights this in Section 4, where he turns his attention to the common view “strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word sensible objects have an existence natural or real,

distinct from their being perceived by the understanding.” Against this he remarks:

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world; yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question, may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?

(4)

That is, if we reflect on the nature of objects that we encounter in experience (sensible objects), we will recognize their mind-dependent status. Given this recognition, we will then see that it is a contradiction to suppose that such an entity could exist unperceived.

In Section 5 Berkeley blames the doctrine of abstract ideas for addling people’s minds on these matters, and then, in Section 6, in summary, declares:

Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their *being (esse)* is to be perceived or known.

(5)

In this passage, as in Section 4, Berkeley is talking about ordinary objects—“houses, mountains, rivers”—things that make up the choir of heaven and the furniture of the earth. He asks us to examine the objects we perceive in the world around us and then claims that it is an intuitive truth that *these* things, given what they are revealed to be, could not exist unperceived. This move separates Berkeley’s position from the position of common people, but not from that of the representational realist. So Berkeley wants to say more. Reflecting on the objects he encounters in experience, he is not merely saying that *these things* could not exist unperceived, he is saying that *things of this sort*—things having *these sorts of qualities*—could not exist unperceived.

To sum up: We can say that Berkeley carries ideality at least one layer deeper than his representationalist opponents. To return to the root comparison, Berkeley is not simply saying that objects of perception, like pains, cannot exist outside the mind. He is saying something stronger. Just as nothing resembling a pain can exist otherwise than in a mind, nothing resembling an object of perception can have that status either. This is the insight that Berkeley expects any cooperative reader to attain.

If we accept this reading of the text, we are getting close to understanding why Berkeley thought he was in a position to pronounce his strong antimaterialist conclusion at the start of Section 7. But we are not quite there. Even if we grant Berkeley’s claim

that neither the things we encounter in the world nor anything like them can subsist outside a mind, he is still not in a position to draw the conclusion that there is not *any* substance other than spirit. The passages I have cited do not foreclose the third possibility mentioned above: that things might exist that resemble neither spiritual substances nor ideas in the mind of spiritual substances. Berkeley does not fully address this possibility until later in the *Principles*, where he takes it up as an objection and spends considerable time answering it (Sections 67–81). We do, however, find the following remark in Section 4, anticipating or, rather, announcing the conclusion of that later discussion:

[A]s to what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible.

(4)

This charge of unintelligibility, which is connected to his critique of abstract ideas, will play an important role in Berkeley's attacks on the views of philosophers; in fact, as the *Principles* unfolds, the argument from unintelligibility becomes progressively more central. Generally speaking, Berkeley holds that the claim that such ordinary objects as tables, chairs, and the like can exist unperceived is simply self-contradictory, whereas the claim made by philosophers for the existence of unperceived and unperceiving substance has no sense to it at all.

So we seem to have gotten where we wanted to get. Given the intuitive claims that Berkeley puts forward in the first six sections of Part I, we can see why he believes he is justified in thinking that the fundamental thesis of his idealist philosophy has been fully established. If we do not share these intuitions (or have a general distrust of appeals to intuition), then none of this will carry much weight, but at least we are in a position to see why Berkeley found them persuasive. Given the intuitive claims he accepts, his reasoning is perfectly straightforward:

1. At least one spiritual substance exists (2).
2. Objects of perception (sensible things) are collections of ideas (1).
3. Contrary to what the common people think, as collections of perceptions, objects of perception are not themselves independent substances because they cannot exist otherwise than by being perceived (4 and 6).
4. Contrary to what some philosophers think, given the essential mental character of sensible qualities, it is contradictory to suppose that like qualities could reside in a nonthinking substance (3).
5. The supposition that some other sort of substance exists having qualities entirely different from sensible qualities is "wholly unintelligible" and is thus a hypothesis empty of content (4).
6. "From what has been said, it follows that there is not any other substance than *spirit*, or that which perceives" (7).

Step 4 is the distinctive and key move in this argument. It brings out the full force of Berkeley's claim that the being of a perception is to be perceived. In what follows, I will

refer to step 4 as Berkeley's fundamental intuition; I will refer to the argument as a whole as Berkeley's fundamental argument. It will be important to keep in mind that Berkeley's fundamental intuition and the fundamental argument he bases on it concern the *ontological* status of the entities that constitute the world. Berkeley will also bring forward epistemological considerations in attacking other positions and in defending his own, and a considerable part of his philosophical reputation rests on this aspect of his philosophy. All the same, the core of his position rests on ontological, not epistemological, considerations.

Chapter 4

Refuting competing positions

(8–33)

Material substratum call you it? Pray, by which of your senses came you acquainted with that being?

Dialogues 1, p. 197

Is it not a great contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived?

Dialogues 1, p. 200

Having established to his own satisfaction that there is not any substance other than spirit, or that which perceives, Berkeley turns to refuting competing theories. Berkeley insists in a number of places that this is not necessary for establishing the truth of his position, because it is already totally secure. Perhaps he believes that eliminating competitors will help remove lingering reservations in the minds of those who have not yet attained the requisite level of intuitive insight. In any case, it is worth examining these attacks on alternative positions, for they are often quite deadly and also shed light on Berkeley's own position, which appears, after all, in extraordinarily compact form in the opening six sections of Part I. The chief target of Berkeley's criticism is representational realism, sometimes, though not always, as exemplified in the writings of Locke.

Berkeley's criticisms of this position fall into two main categories. The first category consists of elaborations and specific applications of the intuitive claim that the qualities that constitute a body are of a kind that can exist only in minds. The second set of criticisms consists of attempts to show *internal* difficulties with competing positions—that is, attempts to show that these theories are unsatisfactory even when taken on their own terms. Arguments of this kind were once commonly called *ad hominem* arguments—or *polite ad hominem*s, to distinguish them from mere attacks upon the person who propounds a position. For Berkeley, criticisms of the first sort are immediately decisive, for showing that a position is incompatible with an established truth establishes the falsehood of that position. Berkeley often argues in this way. He also produces a series of striking *ad hominem* arguments directed against representational

realism. An important part of Berkeley's reputation rests on just this aspect of his work, and such arguments contribute to the dialectical force of his work. Yet Berkeley did not assign a primary role to these ad hominem arguments. He saw that these arguments, however decisive they might be against representational realism, do not by themselves establish the truth of his own position. For this reason it was important for him to insist that these ad hominem arguments were not necessary in establishing his own position. Its backing, he thought, would remain decisive without them.

After the remarkable declaration of victory in the opening sentence of Section 7, Berkeley considers the possibility that certain sensible qualities such as color and figure might exist in an unperceiving thing. Because Berkeley thinks it has already been established by a direct appeal to intuition that all such things are "ideas perceived by sense," he dismisses this possibility out of hand:

Now for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing, is a manifest contradiction; *for to have an idea is all one as to perceive*: that therefore wherein colour, figure, and the like qualities exist, must perceive them; hence it is clear there can be no *unthinking* substance or *substratum* of those ideas.

(7, emphasis added)

Exactly why is it a manifest *contradiction* for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing? The answer is that a perception existing in an unperceiving thing would exist unperceived, and that, according to Berkeley, is a contradiction.

The next section is more interesting, for it supports the claim made in the previous chapter that Berkeley argues not only for the ideality of perceived qualities, but for their *essential* ideality. This comes out in his response to the suggestion that things *like* ideas might exist outside the mind even if ideas cannot:

But say you, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance. I *answer*, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. If we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas.

(8)

The view alluded to here is less sophisticated than that adopted by Locke and other representational realists in not taking into consideration the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Berkeley will, however, turn his attention to this distinction in the section that follows. What are we to make of the claim that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea"? This curious claim invites the response that, by the same reasoning, a portrait cannot resemble the person who sat for it because a portrait can be like nothing but a portrait. But the comparison is not apt. The qualities found in a portrait are not portrait-dependent; their existing at all does not essentially depend on their being parts of a portrait. In contrast, if Berkeley's basic argument is correct, the qualities of our

perceptions are essentially mental. By their very nature, they could not be instantiated in any way other than in an idea.

Berkeley next turns his attention to a central component of representational realism: the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Speaking of the defenders of this distinction, he tells us:

[T]hey will have our ideas of the primary qualities to be patterns or images of things which exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance which they call *matter*. By *matter* therefore we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure and motion, *do actually subsist*.

(9)

Later Berkeley will argue that those who defend this distinction cannot do so in a coherent way, but his first move is to remind his readers that the possibility that ideas of primary qualities can exist in objects unperceived has already been foreclosed:

But it is evident from what we have already shown, that extension, figure, and motion, are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. Hence it is plain, that the very notion of what is called matter, or corporeal substance, involves a contradiction in it.

(9)

It is important to see precisely where the contradiction lies. Berkeley is *not* arguing in the following way. Given our clear understanding of what a material substance is, it is evident that the notion itself involves a contradiction. This cannot be Berkeley's argument because he never concedes—indeed, he denies—that anyone can have a clear conception of material substance. This is an important point that will be developed more fully later on. Here Berkeley merely describes matter negatively as “an inert, senseless substance.” For a perception to exist in a senseless substance would mean it exists unsensed, and that is where the contradiction lies. (Incidentally, here “senseless” means “incapable of sensing” and not, as it sometimes means, “nonsensical.” Later Berkeley will argue that the notion of a material substance is nonsensical as well.)

In Section 10 Berkeley invokes intuition in a different way to yield what we can call his *inseparability* argument. This argument has the following general form: We recognize intuitively that things of type A are inseparably united with things of type B in the sense that we cannot so much as conceive of them existing independently. If it is further acknowledged that things of type A cannot exist otherwise than in a mind, then, as the reasoning goes, it must also be acknowledged that things of type B cannot exist otherwise than in a mind. This sets the stage for an *ad hominem* argument directed at those philosophers who hold that so-called secondary qualities are mind-dependent, but primary qualities are not.

It should be noted that this argument is limited in its scope, for it does not apply to those who do not hold that so-called secondary qualities are sensations existing in the

mind alone. The commonsense view is that such things as colors, sounds, and heat really do exist in external objects every bit as much as their shape and size do. Berkeley's inseparability argument does not apply to this commonsense view, but, of course, Berkeley thinks that it has already been adequately refuted. Furthermore, as stated, Berkeley's argument does not apply to Locke's account of secondary qualities either, for Locke held that secondary qualities *do* exist in objects, though only as powers to produce certain sensations in us. Berkeley would at least have to rephrase his argument if it is to apply to the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities.

They who assert that figure, motion, and the rest of the primary or original qualities, do exist without the mind, in unthinking substances, do at the same time acknowledge that colours, sounds, heat, cold, and such like secondary qualities, do not, which they tell us are sensations existing in the mind alone, that depend on and are occasioned by the different size, texture, and motion of the minute particles of matter. This they take for an undoubted truth, which they can demonstrate beyond all exception. Now if it be certain, that those original qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities, and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them, it plainly follows that they exist only in the mind.

(10)

As he does so often, Berkeley challenges his reader to perform the required mental act.

But I desire any one to reflect and try, whether he can by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body, without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved, but I must withal give it some colour or other sensible quality which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and no where else.

(10)

Here Berkeley's strategy is to use an intuition of the inseparability of primary qualities from secondary as the basis for transferring the mind-dependence attributed to secondary properties to primary properties as well. It should be remembered that, for Berkeley, this loop through secondary properties is not strictly speaking necessary. In the previous section, he has already argued that the mind-dependence of primary qualities should be evident to anyone who concentrates *directly* on them.¹

In Section 14 Berkeley offers a further ad hominem argument aimed at the doctrine of primary and secondary properties. This argument is intended to show that the reasons philosophers have offered to show that secondary qualities can exist only in a mind are equally serviceable for establishing the same conclusion concerning primary qualities. In particular, when the argument for the ideality of secondary qualities is made to rest on

perceptual variability, a parallel argument can be used to establish the ideality of primary qualities.

In the *Dialogues* Berkeley spends a great deal of time developing this line of criticism.² In the *Principles*, presumably because he thinks the ideality of primary qualities has already been established in the preceding sections, Berkeley polishes off this argument from the parallelism of primary and secondary qualities in a single paragraph. He first cites the standard example of a body feeling cold to one hand, yet warm to the other.³ Then, more exotically, he tells us:

[I]t is proved that sweetness is not really in the sapid thing, because, the thing remaining unaltered, the sweetness is changed into bitter, as in case of a fever or otherwise vitiated palate. Is it not as reasonable to say, that motion is not without the mind, since if the succession of ideas in the mind become swifter, the motion, it is acknowledged, shall appear slower without any alteration in any external object.

(14)

I am not sure I understand Berkeley's curious anticipation of slowmotion photography, but the point of the argument is clear: if the perceptual variability of secondary qualities shows that they lack a mind-independent status, then the perceptual variability of primary qualities should yield a similar conclusion concerning them. This is fair enough, for it is hard to see how the argument from perceptual variability, *if it works at all*, can be used selectively for secondary qualities and not for primary qualities. It is important, however, to notice just how circumspect Berkeley is in drawing a conclusion from this line of reasoning.

In short, let any one consider those arguments which are thought manifestly to prove that colours and tastes exist only in the mind, and he shall find they may with equal force be brought to prove the same thing of extension, figure, and motion. *Though it must be confessed, this method of arguing doth not so much prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, as that we do not know by sense which is the true extension or colour of the object.* But the arguments foregoing plainly show it to be impossible that any colour or extension at all, or other sensible quality whatsoever, should exist in an unthinking subject without the mind, or in truth, that there should be any such thing as an outward object.

(15, emphasis added)

Berkeley is quite right: the appeal to perceptual variability cannot by itself establish anything stronger than the conclusion that we are not in a position to determine *which* color or *what* extension an object genuinely possesses. Though strong enough for the purposes of an ad hominem argument, this conclusion is not strong enough to establish Berkeley's position because it leaves open the very possibility he is attempting to foreclose: that both color and extension could exist in an unthinking substance. So

Berkeley quickly adds that the “arguments foregoing plainly show [this] to be impossible.” By the arguments foregoing, I take it he means the discussion in Section 9 (and perhaps 10), where he applies his basic appeal to intuition *directly* to primary qualities. The ultimate source is, of course, the opening sections of Part I.

A further *ad hominem* argument appears in Section 18, where Berkeley raises the following epistemological challenge:

But though it were possible that solid, figured, moveable substances may exist without the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, yet how is it possible for us to know this?

(18)

This is the familiar problem of our knowledge of an external world, and Berkeley formulates it with brevity and skill. The problem arises for representational realism because, according to this theory, we are never directly aware of external objects, only of ideas that represent them. Given this, how can we determine whether these representations represent external objects correctly, and, more generally, how can we assure ourselves that our representations represent anything at all? The answer seems to be that we can do neither.

Berkeley, however, must move with considerable caution in formulating this criticism, for later he too will face the problem of “breaking out” of the circle of ideas, and it would be disastrous if the arguments he brings against representational realism applied equally against his own position. In line with this, it is worth noting two standard arguments that Berkeley does *not* employ. The first takes the following, now familiar, form: the inference from the character of our ideas of sense to the existence of external objects that resemble our ideas must be *causal* in character. But a causal relationship between internal and external events can be established only by observing various correlations between them. This, however, is something we are never in a position to do because we have no access to external events. Berkeley neither uses this argument nor, so far as I can tell, so much as alludes to it. Perhaps it did not occur to him. It is not unlikely, however, that he recognized that this criticism presents an equally difficult challenge to both the representational realist who believes that material objects exist outside one’s mind and to the idealist who believes that other spirits exist outside of one’s mind.

The second argument that Berkeley does not use, at least in a robust Cartesian way, is the so-called dream argument. Here is a sketch of one version of the argument: There is nothing concerning the vividness or internal coherence of certain dreams that allows us to recognize them as dreams; therefore, at any given time when we think we are awake, we may, in fact, be dreaming. What happens sometimes could be happening anytime or even always; therefore, for all we can possibly tell, we may at any time or even always be dreaming and thus in massive error concerning the nature of the world around us. Berkeley does not consider this strong Cartesian argument in the *Principles*. He does, however, note it more or less in passing in the *Dialogues*, where he dismisses it simply by denying that, in fact, dreams can possess the vividness and coherence appealed to in this version of the dream argument:

There is therefore no danger of confounding these [perceptions of sense] with the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused. And though they should happen to be never so lively and natural, yet by their not being connected, and of a piece with the preceding and subsequent transactions of our lives, they might easily be distinguished from realities.

(*Dialogues* 3, p. 235)

If this is the most Berkeley can say in response to the Cartesian dream argument, and if he cannot respond to the problems of the external world outlined above, then he is faced with epistemological problems of his own. How well he could deal with these problems is a matter I will consider later on.

Having noted two skeptical arguments concerning our knowledge of the external world that Berkeley does not employ—and perhaps does well to stay clear of—we can note the circumspect way he proceeds instead. He presents his argument in the form of a dilemma: the existence of external material objects must be established by an appeal either to sense or to reason. Clearly, the senses cannot assure us of the existence of external bodies, for they acquaint us with nothing more than sensations. Thus the existence of external material objects must be established, if it can be established at all, by some form of reasoning. Berkeley is now presented with the delicate task of producing an argument showing the impossibility of having knowledge of the existence of external *material* entities that does not, using the same pattern of reasoning, show the impossibility of having knowledge of the existence of *any* sorts of entities distinct from one's mind, including spirits, God among them. In an effort to do this, Berkeley begins by offering a subtly modulated version of the dream argument:

[I]t is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, frenzies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them. Hence it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas: since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always, in the same order we see them in at present, without their concurrence.

(18)

So far Berkeley has drawn no epistemological conclusion from the occurrence of dreams. In particular, no claim is made concerning the indistinguishability, on some occasions at least, of dreams and veridical experiences. He restricts himself to the claim that dreams show that the existence of material objects is not a necessary condition for having certain kinds of experience.

Yet even this version of the dream argument may still be dangerously too strong for Berkeley's purposes, for it invites the response that the existence of dreams shows that *nothing* external to the individual mind is needed to account for human experience. Though he does not address this problem directly, the text does, I think, provide a subtle

response to it. Even if it is granted that the existence of material objects is not a necessary condition for having certain kinds of experience, the materialist can still argue that, for a wide range of experiences, the supposition that they are caused by material objects provides the best explanation of their occurrence. To use contemporary language, the existence of unobserved material objects could be defended on the basis of an inference to the best explanation. In Section 19, Berkeley explicitly notes this maneuver and rejects it.

But though we might possibly have all our sensations without them, yet perhaps it may be thought *easier* to conceive and explain the *manner* of their production, by supposing external bodies in their likeness rather than otherwise; and so it might be at least probable there are such things as bodies that excite their ideas in our minds. But neither can this be said; for though we give the materialists their external bodies, they, by their own confession, are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced: since they own themselves unable to comprehend in what manner *body can act upon spirit*, or how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind. Hence it is evident, the production of ideas or sensations in our minds, can be no reason why we should suppose matter or corporeal substances, *since that is acknowledged to remain equally inexplicable with or without this supposition*.⁴

(19, emphasis added)

So Berkeley's argument comes down to this: the existence of material objects cannot be defended on the grounds that it supplies the best explanation of the source of at least some of the ideas we possess, because it can provide no intelligible explanation for this at all. Later, as we shall see, Berkeley offers what amounts to an inference to the best explanation in an attempt to show that spirits, besides his own spirit, must exist. This is how Berkeley avoids being hoisted with his own petard: the difference between Berkeley's appeal to the best explanation and the similar appeal employed by the materialists is that their appeal is to something unintelligible, whereas his, he believes, is not. So Berkeley's epistemological argument against materialism actually rests on a charge of unintelligibility—one aspect of his basic appeal to intuition already in place in the opening six sections of Part I of the *Principles*.

Commentators who think that Berkeley's idealism emerges out of and, in this way, rests on the internal inadequacies of representational realism tend to stress Berkeley's *ad hominem* attacks on this position. Berkeley, in contrast, goes to some lengths to warn his readers not to take his arguments in this way. I have already noted that Berkeley claims no positive support for his own system from his critique of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Here, after completing his epistemological *ad hominem* directed against the representational realists' account of perception, he pauses to note explicitly that the validity of his own position does not rely in any way on it.

I am afraid I have given cause to think me needlessly prolix in handling this subject. For to what purpose is it to dilate on that which may be demonstrated

with the utmost evidence in a line or two, to any one that is capable of the least reflection? It is but looking into your own thoughts, and so trying whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or figure, or motion, or colour, to exist without the mind, or unperceived.

(22)

The next section has attracted considerable attention because to some it seems to contain a perfectly awful logical blunder. In fact, it does not. The section is a response to a possible critic who claims that “there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them.” Berkeley responds:

I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose; it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; it doth not show that you can conceive it possible the objects of your thought may exist without the mind.

(23)

There seems nothing wrong with the argument so far. That one can attend to an object without explicitly noting or fully appreciating that one is attending to it does not show that the object can exist when not attended to. That is Berkeley’s point. Berkeley’s response has no tendency to show that objects *cannot* exist when not attended to. If he thought it did, there would be some justice in charging him with committing a crude fallacy of the following kind:

It is not possible to provide an example of a number that at no time appears as an example of a number.

Therefore:

It is impossible for a number to exist that at no time appears as an example of a number.

But Berkeley does not reason in this way. He simply draws the negative conclusion that your ability to attend to something without attending to your attending to it “doth not show that you can conceive it possible the objects of your thought may exist without the mind.”⁵

Having made this negative point, Berkeley goes on to say:

To make out this [i.e., objects of thought may exist without the mind], it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought-of, which

is a manifest repugnancy...A little attention will discover to any one the truth and evidence of what is here said, and make it unnecessary to insist on any other proofs against the existence of material substance.

(23)

This should not be read as a *conclusion* that Berkeley draws from the impossibility that we can conceive of something existing without conceiving it. It is simply a reminder of his basic intuitive argument which, for him, is already in place.⁶

For all that, what is a reference to his intuitive argument doing in the middle of this passage? This is not mysterious if we recall that the preceding section, Section 22, makes explicit reference to Berkeley's basic intuitive argument—reminding his reader of both its primacy and its self-sufficiency. The point is further enforced by noting that, in the section that follows, Berkeley again rests his antimaterialist claim on a direct appeal to intuition:

It is very obvious, upon the least inquiry into our own thoughts, to know whether it be possible for us to understand what is meant by the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves or without the mind. To me it is evident those words mark out either a direct contradiction, or else nothing at all. And to convince others of this, I know no readier or fairer way, than to entreat they would calmly attend to their own thoughts: and if by this attention the emptiness or repugnancy of those expressions does appear, surely nothing more is requisite for their conviction. It is on this therefore that I insist, to wit, that the absolute existence of unthinking things are words without a meaning, or which include a contradiction. This is what I repeat and inculcate, and earnestly recommend to the attentive thoughts of the reader.

(24)

Perhaps my constant references to Berkeley's direct appeals to intuition have begun to wear thin. They may even seem to diminish Berkeley's reputation by depriving him of the backhanded compliment of being the author of ingenious arguments for perfectly outrageous conclusions. However this may be, the text is clear in making appeals to intuition the basis of his idealist position. If this has not been generally recognized, it is not Berkeley's fault, for he did everything in his power to "repeat and inculcate, and earnestly recommend to the attentive thoughts of the reader," the force of such appeals.

Chapter 5

Real things and other spirits

(25–33, 145–56)

I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things.

Dialogues 3, p. 244

Men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God, because they believe the being of a God, whereas I, on the other side, immediately and necessarily conclude the being of God, because all sensible things must be perceived by him.

Dialogues 2, p. 212

Aside from the purely negative results examined in the previous chapter, at this stage in the development of his position Berkeley has shown, at least to his satisfaction, that we are directly aware of two (and only two) sorts of entities: our own minds and ideas existing in our own minds. He thinks he has also shown that the supposition that any other sorts of entities exist (that is, entities that are neither spirits nor ideas) is either selfcontradictory or empty of content. But we certainly think there is more to the world than this. In particular, our world seems to be richer in at least two respects than the world Berkeley has so far revealed to us. (1) We think we move through a world inhabited by *real* things, where mountains, trees, and streams count as instances of real things, in contrast to the *mere* ideas of real things. (2) We also think that the world contains minds or spirits other than our own—other persons certainly, and, for many, including Berkeley, God as well. But if we are aware of nothing more than our own minds and the ideas they contain, it seems that we never encounter trees as opposed to ideas of trees, and never encounter other spirits at all. Yet we have deeply entrenched beliefs in both the existence of real things and the existence of other minds. Berkeley wholeheartedly shares these beliefs. His task, then, is to justify these beliefs from his radically subjective starting point. I will call the first the problem of *real things*, the second the problem of *other spirits*.

Real things

Once we become convinced that the only things we directly encounter are ideas in our own minds, the problem of real things usually takes the form of trying to prove the existence of objects outside the mind that, at least in certain crucial respects, resemble some of our ideas. Crudely, when I perceive a tree, I have a tree-like sensation (existing in my mind) that is caused by a tree-like thing (not existing in any mind). The real tree is the mind-independent thing that exists “out there.” However, as we saw in the previous chapter, Berkeley thought that any such theory first of all is conceptually incoherent, and, even when taken on its own terms, faces insuperable epistemological difficulties. But even if Berkeley rejects the representational realist’s account of the distinction between *real things* and *mere ideas of real things*, he respects this distinction as marking an important difference in need of both explanation and justification. To put the matter somewhat paradoxically, although Berkeley holds that real things are *merely* collections of ideas in the sense that there is nothing ontologically more to them than this, he still thinks that a distinction can be drawn between ideas that we speak of dismissively as being *mere* ideas and those ideas that we do not speak of in this dismissive way. Thus, for Berkeley, the contrast between mere ideas and real things is not a contrast between ideas and entities that are not ideas; it is a contrast between different kinds of ideas. Here Berkeley adopts a strategy characteristic of later idealist philosophies: the distinction between the real and the imaginary is *internal* to the system of ideas. In fact, however, matters are not so simple, for in various places Berkeley’s account of real things seems to rely on the assumption of God’s existence, and if that is so, then his theory is not, strictly speaking, an internalist theory.

With some minor rearrangements, the text unfolds as follows. In Section 25 Berkeley tells us that “we perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear. There is therefore some cause of these ideas whereon they depend, and which produces and changes them.” Although, as he tells us, there is a natural inclination to think otherwise, the items in these sequences, being ideas, cannot be the causes of the things that succeed them. To support this claim, Berkeley again makes a direct appeal to intuition:

All our ideas, sensations, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive; there is nothing of power or agency included in them. So that one idea or object of thought cannot produce, or make any alteration in another. To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas.

(25)¹

But if the causal-relatedness does not lie in the relationships among the ideas themselves, then it must lie in the only alternative: some substance. Because there “is not any other

substance than spirit" (7), that substance must be some kind of spiritual substance (26). Because I sometimes exhibit power over ideas, perhaps I am responsible for the orderliness found among them (28). Yet, as Berkeley notes, this cannot be the full explanation of this orderliness, for many ideas are not governed by my mind:

But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will.

(29)

But if Berkeley is correct in saying the only entities that exist are spiritual substances and ideas in them, that ideas are causally inert, and that certain ideas are not produced by my will or spirit, then it follows that they must be produced by some other spirit. So he concludes: "There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them" (29).

What spirit must this be? Section 30 provides the answer and in the process offers Berkeley's account of real things:

The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its author.

The first thing that strikes one in reading this passage is the casualness with which Berkeley invokes something like the argument from design for God's existence. He repeats it with similar casualness in Sections 32 and 33. In these passages Berkeley alludes to crucial components of this familiar proof rather than stating it in full, perhaps on the assumption that his readers can fill out the argument themselves. He does not present anything approximating a full statement of this proof until the end of the *Principles*. I will examine this proof later in the chapter. The passage also offers Berkeley's response to the problem of real things. I will address this first.

Actually, when we examine the text just cited, we see that it is quite unclear precisely what Berkeley's account of real things is. In particular, it is not clear whether real things are being defined *internally*, as ideas having an appropriate level of "steadiness, order, and coherence," or *externally*, as ideas having God as their cause. The summary passage that opens Section 33 exhibits just this ambiguity:

The ideas imprinted on the senses by the author of nature are called real things: and those excited in the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly termed ideas, or images of things, which they copy and represent.

Here the first part of the passage suggests an *externalist* interpretation: Ideas are said to be ideas of real things in virtue of the nature of the entity outside the mind, namely God, that causes them. Under this interpretation, Berkeley's account of real things comes to something like this:

A combination of ideas constitutes a real thing rather than something imaginary if its appearance in our minds is the result of God's will rather than our own. (Although regularity, vividness, and constancy—appropriately combined—are not definitive of real things, they provide us with sure indicators that this combination of ideas has God as its cause.)

The second part of the passage cited from Section 33 suggests an *internalist* interpretation of real things: ideas are said to be real things in virtue of relations among the ideas themselves. Stated broadly, that view has the following form:

Regularity, vividness, and constancy—appropriately combined—are definitive of real, as opposed to imaginary, things. (Although having God as its cause is not definitive of a thing being real, regularity, vividness, and constancy—appropriately combined—are sure indicators that they are caused by God.)

These are strikingly different views. For example, if God does not exist, then, on the first view, there are no real objects, whereas this does not follow on the second view. This is worth noting, for it shows that if we adopt the second reading, Berkeley's account of real things is not held hostage to the adequacy of his proof of God's existence. Another difference between treating regularity, vividness, and constancy as indicators of reality (the first view) rather than definitive of it (the second) is that, on the first view, our knowledge *that* something is real would involve an inference concerning an entity that is not a possible object of experience, namely God, whereas, on the second view, it need not.

Which standpoint did Berkeley adopt? I am not sure the text supplies a definitive answer to this question. Committed as he was to God's existence, Berkeley probably had little motivation for clearly distinguishing these two views. But the views fall apart if Berkeley's theological commitments are rejected. So, taken one way—the internalist way—the plausibility of Berkeley's account of real things will depend crucially on his ability to use the notions of regularity, vividness, and constancy to provide an analysis of real as opposed to imaginary or chimerical things. He makes further efforts to do this in the answers he offers to objections, which start at Section 34. The examination of objections and responses is the subject of the following chapters, so I will set aside further consideration of Berkeley's "internalist" account of real things until then. The plausibility of the theistic/externalist account of real things will depend, in part at least, on the plausibility of Berkeley's attempted proof of God's existence. I will turn to this topic next.

God and other spirits

Although key components of a proof for the existence of God appear earlier in the *Principles*, Berkeley does not offer a fully developed demonstration of God's existence until its closing sections. Another important item missing from his system is the proof of the existence of other finite spirits—for example, his supposed readers. I will consider these two matters here in order to complete this account of the main features of Berkeley's position.

Given its importance to Berkeley's philosophy, his proposed proof of God's existence will seem surprisingly brief:

It is evident to every one, that those things which are called the works of nature, that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on, the wills of men. There is therefore some other spirit that causes them, since it is repugnant that they should subsist by themselves. [See Section 29.] But if we attentively consider the constant regularity, order, and concatenation of natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but, above all, the never enough admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals; I say if we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and import of the attributes, one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect, we shall clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid spirit, who works all in all, and by whom all things consist.

(146)

This is a peculiar passage. At first, it may look like a *standard* version of the argument from design, but, on closer reading, it seems to have a strangely hybrid form. Those who employ the argument from design begin by noting the high level of organization exhibited by the world, and conclude from this that only the existence of a deity can provide an adequate account of it. Ignoring details, the argument has the following general form:

The world we experience exhibits a high degree of order and purposive organization.

Only a deity of a certain kind could bring about such a high degree of order and purposive organization.

Therefore:

A deity of this kind must exist.

This style of proof is often referred to as an argument from analogy, but its structure is better indicated by calling it an *inference to the best explanation*.

In an inference to the best explanation, we accept something as true because it provides an adequate and the uniquely best explanation of some phenomenon. To cite a standard example, if someone finds a watch lying in the desert, he will not take seriously the hypothesis that it came into existence merely by chance; he will, instead, infer that it was produced by a watchmaker, since this is clearly the best explanation of how it came into existence. The argument from design instructs us to draw a parallel inference with respect to the purposive organization of the world that we encounter in experience.

The argument from design was popular in Berkeley's time and, in certain circles, remains popular today. It seems to be the most natural argument for God's existence. It is possible, then, that Berkeley saw no need to fill out the details of the argument in order to gain his reader's agreement. If so, he has left a great deal of the hard work undone. Both premises in the above argumentative sketch can be challenged. With respect to the first premise, Berkeley owes us an argument showing that the universe does in fact exhibit orders of perfection he claims it to have. The world can, after all, strike people differently. When asked what science revealed about the character of the deity, J.B.S. Haldane reportedly said that it showed that God had "an inordinate fondness for beetles." Some people quite sensibly find the world they encounter to be partially good, partially bad, and, through vast stretches, altogether indifferent. If we have independent grounds for believing in the existence of a being who combines perfection with inscrutability, then we might be able to reconcile ourselves to the disparity between the way the world appears and the way, as believers, we would expect it to appear. In that case, however, we would be assuming that the hand of God is at work in the world rather than inferring this from the phenomena themselves. It seems not unlikely that Berkeley is proceeding in just this manner, his theistic commitments shaping his view of the world rather than, as he would have it, the manifest features of perfection forcing themselves on it.

There is another problem as well. For the argument from design to be successful, it has to be shown that the theistic hypothesis is the *uniquely* best explanation of the order found in the world. There are other possibilities. Perhaps this order has arisen purely from chance or perhaps it has arisen from purely natural causes. Even if we grant that the cause of the order must be supernatural, a wide range of possibilities still remains open. The world may have been created by an indifferent deity, by a long-dead deity, by competing deities—one good, one evil—as the Manicheans held, by a committee of deities, and so on.² Berkeley makes no serious effort to exclude these competing hypotheses. In sum, if Berkeley is attempting to prove the existence of God using the argument from design, he has failed in two basic ways: he has not shown that the world exhibits the degree of order needed for the argument, and he has not shown that the theistic hypothesis is the uniquely adequate explanation of this order.

Perhaps, however, Berkeley is not really putting forward an argument from design, at least of the standard kind. There are, in fact, texts that suggest this. Berkeley asks us to immerse ourselves in "the surprising magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation" while at the same time

attending “to the meaning and import of the attributes, one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect,” whereupon an epiphany is supposed to take place. We come to see, as Berkeley puts it,

that *nothing can be more evident* to any one that is capable of the least reflection, *than the existence of God*, or a Spirit who is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations, which continually affect us, on whom we have an absolute and entire dependence, in short, *in whom we live, and move, and have our being*.

(149)

Then in Section 154 he tells us:

From what hath been said it will be manifest to any considering person, that it is merely for want of attention and comprehensiveness of mind, that there are any favourers of *atheism* or the *Manichean heresy* to be found.

These passages suggest that, for Berkeley, no complex causal argument is needed to establish the existence of a deity. In language reminiscent of his earlier appeals to intuitions, these passages suggest that proper attentiveness is all that is needed to make it manifest that God exists. Read this way, Berkeley’s proof does not invoke the glories of the universe as the basis for an inference to the best explanation, but, instead, calls our attention to “the surprising magnificence, beauty, ...perfection...and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of creation,” etc., as a way of setting the stage for an intuitive insight.³

There is, however, an important difference between Berkeley’s appeal to intuition in his attempt to establish the existence of God and his earlier appeals to intuition intended to establish the ideality of the furniture of the world, the inertness of ideas, and so on. In the latter two cases the appeal is internalist: we attend to ideas themselves and have an immediate insight into *their* nature. As Berkeley puts it: “Since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived” (25). With respect to God’s existence, we again reflect on the objects of our awareness, but this time our insight does not concern an entity every part of which exists *only* in our minds; instead, the entity in question, if it exists, exists wholly independently of our minds. This, then, is really a different use of intuition, for it is not based on the supposed transparency of ideas that grounded Berkeley’s previous appeals to intuition.

It seems, then, that there are two ways of understanding Berkeley’s effort to establish the existence of God. We can view it as an argument from design, that is, as a causal inference to the best explanation of the order claimed to exist in the universe, or we can view it as an appeal to an intuitive insight. Perhaps the text is a combination of both. Taken the first way, it is at least incomplete; taken the second way, it will hardly be persuasive for those who do not share Berkeley’s intuitive apotheosis.

As noted earlier, the problem of other spirits has a second side. Along with trying to prove the existence of an infinite spirit (God), Berkeley also undertakes to prove the

existence of other finite spirits, most notably, other human beings. He begins soberly enough:

From what hath been said, it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas, that inform me there are certain particular agents like myself, which accompany them, and concur in their production. Hence the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge of my ideas; but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs.

(145)

That is, we have good reason to believe in the existence of other finite spirits, for this hypothesis provides a reasonable explanation of certain (small-scale) regularities that we find in experience. We are not overwhelmed into believing this—as we are supposed to be overwhelmed into believing in the existence of God—but, on the evidence given, the belief is held to be reasonable. Here, at least, Berkeley is presenting a straightforward inference to the best explanation.

This aspect of Berkeley's position is fraught with difficulties. On Berkeley's theory, strictly speaking, no finite spirit could produce an idea in the mind of another finite spirit. When a person moves his own body through an act of will, this produces an alteration in that set of ideas that constitutes a particular real thing, namely, the person's *own* body. There is no way a person can generate ideas in the mind of another. Presumably, when one person waves a hand to attract the attention of another, God must intervene to place the appropriate idea of a hand waving in the mind of the other person. But a difficulty arises even with the first person's act of waving a hand, for it is quite unclear how a person is able to do even this much without God's assistance. There is, after all, a difference between imagining that one is waving a hand and actually waving it. Presumably, the difference will involve invoking God as the cause of ideas that constitute real wavings, leaving the agent only in charge of his imaginary wavings. However all this is sorted out, it is at least clear that a person's acts of will cannot alter the arrangement of ideas in the mind of another without considerable detailed assistance from God. Berkeley recognizes at least part of this problem and offers an extraordinary answer to it:

For it is evident that in affecting other persons, the will of man hath no other object than barely the motion of the limbs of his body; but that such a motion should be attended by, or excite any idea in the mind of another, depends wholly on the will of the Creator. He alone it is who, "upholding all things by the word of his power," maintains that intercourse between spirits, whereby they are able to perceive the existence of each other. And yet this pure and clear light, which enlightens every one, is itself invisible.

(147)

So, in the end, Berkeley simply becomes an *occasionalist* in dealing with the problem of the existence and accessibility of other finite spirits. Functioning rather like a cosmic Internet provider, all communication between finite creatures is done through God. The full weight of solving the problem of other finite spirits now shifts to Berkeley's demonstration of the existence of a particular sort of deity: one not only able, but willing, to undertake this task. That demonstration, as far as Berkeley has stated it, hardly seems impressive—at least for those not sharing in Berkeley's rapture.

If the criticisms in this chapter are accepted, it may seem that Berkeley's idealist philosophy has simply collapsed. That is not true. Idealism is a thesis concerning ultimate constituents of the universe. It holds that the universe has only two sorts of ultimate constituents: minds and ideas in minds. That thesis is compatible with all of the following theses:

1. God does not exist.
2. We cannot know whether God exists.
3. Other finite spirits do not exist.
4. We cannot know whether other finite spirits exist.

Idealism is even compatible with these two further theses:

5. Real objects (as opposed to mere ideas) do not exist.
6. We can never know whether real objects (as opposed to mere ideas) exist.

Here someone might interject, "If Berkeley's idealism leads to these results, isn't that refutation enough?" But I have not said that Berkeley's idealism *leads* to these results; I have simply said that the fundamental thesis of his idealism, namely, that the only things that exist are minds and ideas in them, is compatible with them. That said, it remains that Berkeley has not done what he set out to do: offer a satisfactory proof of the existence of God. It is, of course, possible that Berkeley's argument could be strengthened so that it would amount to a full proof of the kind of God needed for his philosophical purposes. But from what he has actually given us, Berkeley's arguments seem able to support the existence of only a very modest God indeed. In the closing pages of his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, Hume has Philo summarize the force of the argument from design in these words: "The cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence." If the argument from design can yield no stronger conclusion than this, then Berkeley has not established the existence of a deity of the kind needed to serve as the keystone of his full philosophical system.

To the extent that Berkeley's proof for the existence of a deity is weak, so too is his proof for the existence of other finite spirits, for that proof depends crucially on God's ability and willingness to make timely interventions connecting one person's thoughts with those of another. Finally, on what I have called an externalist interpretation of Berkeley's position, inadequacy in his proof of the existence of God compromises his account of real things as well. An internalist account of real things, which does not suffer from this liability, is the first topic discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Objections from common sense

(34–49)

After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied that his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, "I refute it *thus*."

Boswell, *Life of Samuel Johnson*

Having laid out the fundamental features of his idealist position, Berkeley dedicates Sections 34 to 84 to answering objections. This is a remarkable piece of philosophical writing, for Berkeley shows both integrity and ingenuity in putting his own position on the rack. I will divide these objections into three broad categories: objections from common sense, objections from science and, for want of a better name, last-ditch objections. I will consider the objections from common sense in this chapter, the objections from science in the next chapter, and the third kind of objection in Chapter 8 in the context of Berkeley's critique of abstract ideas.

On first encounter, the most natural reaction to Berkeley's theory is that it is perhaps clever but, from the standpoint of common life, completely loony. Yet Berkeley repeatedly insists that his philosophy squares with common sense, or at least preserves a sufficiently large portion of common sense not to be a threat to the conduct of daily life. But this seems disingenuous, for the claim that the things we call physical objects are nothing more than combinations of ideas seems to erase the standard line between what we take to be real and what we take to be mental. To be told that something is just in your head is a metaphorical way of being told that the thing in question does not really exist. This is the first objection Berkeley considers.

First then it will be objected that by the foregoing principles, all that is real and substantial in nature is banished out of the world: and instead thereof a chimerical scheme of ideas takes place. All things that exist, exist only in the mind, that is, they are purely notional.

(34)

In response, Berkeley assures his readers that the target of his attacks is not the views of common sense, but the views of certain philosophers. He makes the point this way:

I do not argue against the existence of any one thing that we can apprehend, either by sense or reflection. That the things I see with mine eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist, I make not the least question. The only thing whose existence we deny, is that which philosophers call matter or corporeal substance. And in doing of this, there is no damage done to the rest of mankind, who, I dare say, will never miss it.

(35)

The closing sentence has genuine force because the representational realist's material objects—objects wholly lacking in color, warmth, taste, and so forth—are surely alien to the commonsense view of the world.

Berkeley develops this point by contrasting two ways in which the notion of substance can be understood:

It will be urged that thus much at least is true, to wit, that we take away all corporeal substances. To this my answer is, that if the word substance be taken in the vulgar sense, for a combination of sensible qualities, such as extension, solidity, weight, and the like: this we cannot be accused of taking away. But if it be taken in a philosophic sense, for the support of accidents or qualities without the mind; then indeed I acknowledge that we take it away, if one may be said to take away that which never had any existence, not even in the imagination.

(37)

Speaking of physical things rather than corporeal substances, we can make Berkeley's point this way: If we ask an ordinary person to give examples of physical things, he would cite trees, mountains, and the like, perhaps contrasting them with shadows, mirages, and the like. If we understand physical things to be objects of this sort, then Berkeley claims not to be denying their existence. Again, it is only the existence of substance as understood by materialist philosophers—something the common man knows not of—that is being denied. So in denying the existence of corporeal substance, as materialist philosophers understand this notion, Berkeley is not denying the existence of ordinary physical objects. Samuel Johnson kicked the stone to no good purpose.

This is helpful, but does not reach the core of our natural reluctance to accept Berkeley's position. It is not what Berkeley denies that bothers us most deeply, but what he actually affirms, namely, that such things as trees and mountains are no more than

combinations of ideas. Berkeley has already discussed this topic in Sections 29, 30, and 33, but as we saw in the previous chapter, it is unclear precisely what position he adopts. In particular, it is not clear whether we should give Berkeley's account of real things an *externalist* reading, where it is a definitive characteristic of ideas that count as real things to have God as their cause, or whether, instead, to give it an *internalist* reading, where ideas count as real things just in case they exhibit such features as coherence, liveliness, independence of the will, and so on. The discussion in this part of the text is considerably clearer on this matter. I will quote the central passage in full:

Take here an abstract of what has been said. There are spiritual substances, minds, or human souls, which will or excite ideas in themselves at pleasure: but these are faint, weak, and unsteady in respect of others they perceive by sense, which being impressed upon them according to certain rules or laws of nature, speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than human spirits. *These latter are said to have more reality in them than the former: by which is meant that they are affecting, orderly, and distinct, and that they are not fictions of the mind perceiving them.* And in this sense, the sun that I see by day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is the idea of the former. In the sense here given of reality, it is evident that every vegetable, star, mineral, and in general each part of the mundane system, is as much a real being by our principles as by any other. Whether others mean any thing by the term reality different from what I do, I entreat them to look into their own thoughts and see.

(36, emphasis added)

In this passage at least, Berkeley clearly adopts what I have called an internalist rather than an externalist analysis of real things. To possess more reality is just to be more "affecting, orderly and distinct." If that is right, then treating real things as collections of ideas does not, in itself, compromise their reality. There is a further benefit, though one that would not particularly interest Berkeley: the account of real things would not depend on the existence of God. It would still be possible to argue that the character and behavior of real things "speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than human spirits," as Berkeley does in the passage just cited, but the account of real things would not depend on the success of such an argument.

In the past century we have learned that there are serious problems involved in developing satisfactory theories that somehow "construct" material objects from sensory impressions (certain so-called sense-data theories) or attempt to analyze statements about material objects in terms of statements about sensory impressions (certain so called phenomenalist theories). A persistent problem with theories of this kind is that they seem to assume, either overtly or surreptitiously, the existence of objects that the theory itself is supposed to "construct." This may be a problem for Berkeley as well. We can notice, for example, that in the passage just cited Berkeley speaks of things we "perceive by sense," thus suggesting things we perceive using *organs* of sense. Because organs of sense are themselves physical objects, it may seem that Berkeley has abandoned his position by

invoking them. This criticism is not correct—or at least not obviously correct. For Berkeley, sense organs would themselves be collections of ideas that meet the criteria for being real things. That these real things can play a central role in explaining the conditions under which we become acquainted with other real things is not something he is debarred from saying. On his approach, an account of the operations of organs of sense would not concern relationships between things that are ideas and things that are not; it would concern relationships between different sorts of ideas. That said, we might still have genuine reservations concerning whether Berkeley—or anyone—could carry out his program of reducing real things to ideas in a coherent and reasonably complete way. The current philosophical consensus seems to be no. But things change. Certainly, Berkeley shows little awareness of the extraordinary difficulties involved in bringing his project to completion, contenting himself with writing a broad promissory note.

In Section 37 Berkeley draws a distinction between a word (in particular the word “substance”) being used in the *vulgar* sense and its being used in a *philosophical* sense, assuring his readers that it is only in certain philosophers’ sense of the word “substance” that he is denying the existence of material substance. In this way he attempts to show that his denial of substance is not an affront to common sense. In Section 38 he invokes something like the same distinction but employs it in rather the reverse way. The objection he considers is this: “But, say you, it sounds very harsh to say we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas.” He replies:

I acknowledge it does so, the word idea not being used in common discourse to signify the several combinations of sensible qualities, which are called things: and it is certain that any expression which varies from the familiar use of language, will seem harsh and ridiculous. But this doth not concern the truth of the proposition, which in other words is no more than to say, we are fed and clothed with those things which we perceive immediately by our senses. The hardness or softness, the colour, taste, warmth, figure, and such like qualities, which combined together constitute the several sorts of victuals and apparel, have been shown to exist only in the mind that perceives them; and this is all that is meant by calling them ideas; which word, if it was as ordinarily used as thing, would sound no harsher nor more ridiculous than it. I am not for disputing about the propriety, but the truth of the expression. If therefore you agree with me that we eat, and drink, and are clad with the immediate objects of sense, which cannot exist unperceived or without the mind; I shall readily grant it is more proper or conformable to custom, that they should be called things rather than ideas.

(37)

That is, in his theoretical writing Berkeley uses the term “idea” rather than “thing” because speaking this way reinforces the point that the objects we encounter, for example in eating and drinking, “cannot exist unperceived or without the mind.” However odd this way of speaking may sound from the vulgar standpoint, where the terms “idea” and “thing” often stand in contrast, this is the correct way of speaking when doing

philosophy. There is, however, no need to speak in this way when philosophical matters are not at issue. As Berkeley remarks later, “we ought [still] to think with the learned, [but] speak with the vulgar” (51). So once more Berkeley denies that his claims run counter to the beliefs of the vulgar. But unlike in Section 37, where he says that he is not denying anything the vulgar would affirm because he is only denying something philosophical, here he claims not to be asserting anything that the vulgar will deny because his assertion is philosophical, and thus not a matter of concern to the vulgar.

The third objection Berkeley considers also expresses a complaint of common sense:

Thirdly, it will be objected that we see things actually without or at a distance from us, and which consequently do not exist in the mind, it being absurd that those things which are seen at the distance of several miles, should be as near to us as our own thoughts. In answer to this, I desire it may be considered, that in a dream we do oft perceive things as existing at a great distance off, and yet for all that, those things are acknowledged to have their existence only in the mind.

(42)

Berkeley—as he quaintly puts it later—is here concerned with the “outness” of some of our experiences (see Section 43). Put crudely, some of the things we experience have a transparent “outness” about them, an externality about them, that belies the claim that they exist only in the mind. Berkeley replies that this outness is encountered also in dreams, where it is acknowledged that the things experienced “have their existence only in the mind.”

A sign that Berkeley is finding the going difficult is that he pauses to remind his reader that the position he is defending has already been fully established in the opening sections of Part I of the *Principles*. This is precisely what happens in his response to the fourth objection, where he raises a particularly irksome difficulty we can call the annihilation problem. I will examine his response to it at some length.

Fourthly, it will be objected, that from the foregoing principles it follows, things are every moment annihilated and created anew. The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived: the trees therefore are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlour, no longer than while there is somebody by to perceive them. Upon shutting my eyes, all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and barely upon opening them it is again created.

(45)

Berkeley then continues:

In answer to all which, I refer the reader to what has been said in sect, iii., iv., &c., and desire he will consider whether he means any thing by the actual existence of an idea, distinct from its being perceived. For my part, after the nicest inquiry I could make, I am not able to discover that any thing else is meant by those words. And I once more entreat the reader to sound his own

thoughts, and not suffer himself to be imposed on by words. If he can conceive it possible either for his ideas or their archetypes to exist without being perceived, then I give up the cause: but if he cannot, he will acknowledge it is unreasonable for him to stand up in defence of he knows not what, and pretend to charge on me as an absurdity the not assenting to those propositions which at bottom have no meaning in them.

(45)

This is disconcerting, for this vigorous restatement of what I have called Berkeley's fundamental argument provides no answer *at all* to the objection he has raised. That fundamental argument was intended to establish the basic claim of Berkeley's idealism: the only things that exist are minds and ideas in them. That thesis actually supports the claim that an object would be annihilated if it were no longer perceived. On the face of it, there may seem to be no wiggle room here. What is Berkeley up to? I take it that he is first reminding his reader that the view that an object can continue to exist when unperceived has already been completely refuted, so the commonsense answer, "it just continues to exist unobserved," has been ruled out.

After a few more *ad hominem* flourishes, Berkeley offers his response to the annihilation problem in these words:

For though we hold, indeed, the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived, yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence, except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not. Wherever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatsoever. It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles, that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perception in them.

(48)

So when I perceive the table before me, that collection of ideas is resident in my mind. When I close my eyelids (and perhaps think of something else) then that collection of ideas is no longer resident in my mind. Has that collection of ideas then gone out of existence? No, according to Berkeley, for that collection of ideas may still be resident in some other mind. But suppose I am the only one present; does the collection of ideas that constitutes this table go out of existence then? No, for there is one mind observing all objects, namely, God's mind.

Even granting the existence of a God who would be concerned with such matters, this response may seem deeply unsatisfactory. If I am convinced that the table before me is a collection of ideas, presumably I will also believe that these ideas are my *own* ideas. That someone else's idea of the table persists when I close my eyes seems beside the point. What I want to know is whether *this* table-like thing before me continues to exist after I close my eyes. Ordinary people think yes, believing that the things they perceive do not depend for their existence on anyone perceiving them. The representational realist says

no, but holds that an unobserved material counterpart, which is the cause of this collection of ideas, may continue to exist. On the face of it, Berkeley's answer must be no as well. You (or God) may continue to have ideas *similar* to mine, but the idea I now have will have gone. In sum, Berkeley seems to be committed to holding that an object we are aware of does not continue to exist after we close our eyes, but at least one other object similar to it does. For Berkeley, this may be all we need. The trouble is that it seems to fall well short of what most people want.¹

The idea that this very table—that is, the entity that I am now aware of—will cease to exist when I close my eyes is one affront to common sense, but Berkeley's treatment of this topic carries with it an additional affront. Consider a case where two of us, as we think, are looking at the *same* table. When I close my eyes, the entity that I was perceiving goes out of existence. You, however, do not close your eyes, so the entity that you were and are still perceiving does not. It seems to follow from this that the entities we were previously aware of could not have been the same entity. Given the general capacity of people to close their eyes, it seems to follow that no two people are ever aware of the same entity. To use technical language, no two people can ever be aware of *numerically identical* entities; the most they can be aware of are distinct entities that are very similar. Berkeley does not discuss this issue in the *Principles*, but he does have Hylas raise it in the *Dialogues*. I will quote this important exchange at length. The bracketed numbers are added for ease of reference.

HYL. But the same idea which is in my mind, cannot be in yours, or in any other mind.

Doth it not therefore follow from your principles, that no two can see the same thing?

And is not this highly absurd?

PHIL. [1] If the term *same* be taken in the vulgar acceptance, it is certain (and not at all repugnant to the principles I maintain) that different persons may perceive the same thing; or the same thing or idea exist in different minds. Words are of arbitrary imposition; and since men are used to apply the word *same* where no distinction or variety is perceived, and I do not pretend to alter their perceptions, it follows, that as men have said before, several saw the same thing, so they may upon like occasions still continue to use the same phrase, without any deviation either from propriety of language, or the truth of things. [2] But if the term *same* be used in the acceptance of philosophers, who pretend to an abstracted notion of identity, then, according to their sundry definitions of this notion (for it is not yet agreed wherein that philosophic identity consists), it may or may not be possible for divers persons to perceive the same thing. But whether philosophers shall think fit to call a thing the same or no, is, I conceive, of small importance. Let us suppose several men together, all endued with the same faculties, and consequently affected in like sort by their senses, and who had yet never known the use of language; they would without question agree in their perceptions. Though perhaps, when they came to the use of speech, some regarding the uniformness of what was perceived, might call it the same thing; others especially regarding the diversity of persons who perceived, might choose the denomination of different things. But who sees not that all the dispute is about a word;

to wit, whether what is perceived by different persons, may yet have the term same applied to it? [3] Or suppose a house, whose walls or outward shell remaining unaltered, the chambers are all pulled down, and new ones built in their place; and that you should call this the same, and I should say it was not the same house: would we not for all this perfectly agree in our thoughts of the house, considered in itself? And would not all the difference consist in a sound? [4] If you should say, we differ in our notions; for that you superadded to your idea of the house the simple abstracted idea of identity, whereas I did not; I would tell you I know not what you mean by that abstracted idea of identity; and should desire you to look into your own thoughts, and be sure you understood yourself. Why so silent, Hylas? Are you not yet satisfied, men may dispute about identity and diversity, without any real difference in their thoughts and opinions, abstracted from names? [5] Take this further reflection with you: that whether matter be allowed to exist or no, the case is exactly the same as to the point in hand. For the materialists themselves acknowledge what we immediately perceive by our senses to be our own ideas. Your difficulty therefore, that no two see the same thing, makes equally against the materialists and me.

HYL. But they suppose an external archetype, to which referring their several ideas, they may truly be said to perceive the same thing.

PHIL. And (not to mention your having discovered those archetypes) so may you suppose an external archetype on my principles: external, I mean, to your own mind; though indeed it must be supposed to exist in that mind which comprehends all things; but then this serves all the ends of identity, as well as if it existed out of a mind. And I am sure you yourself will not say, it is less intelligible.

HYL. [6] You have indeed clearly satisfied me, either that there is no difficulty at bottom in this point; or if there be, that it makes equally against both opinions.

PHIL. But that which makes equally against two contradictory opinions, can be a proof against neither.

(Dialogues 3, p. 247)

Berkeley's response (using Philonous as his spokesman) again invokes the distinction between the vulgar and the philosophical use of an expression. This time—in the part I have labeled [1]—Berkeley claims that, in the vulgar sense of the expression “the same,” two people can perceive the same thing. Indeed, it has to be acknowledged that there is a common use of the expression “the same” where numerically distinct entities are referred to as being the same thing. There is nothing peculiar about the following conversation:

A. They serve a wonderful calamari sauce at Guido's.

B. They serve the same sauce at Marco's.

B is not suggesting that Guido's and Marco's sauces come from the same pot. It is in this sense of the expression “the same” that Berkeley freely acknowledges that two people can perceive the same thing. The difficulty with this response is that the vulgar also have

a firm grasp of the notion of numerical identity, even if they do not employ this technical expression. This is clear, for example, in the following conversation:

- A. Is that the same Christmas cactus that your mother kept in the sunroom, or is this one of your own?
 B. No, it is the same one. It's going to live forever.

This shows that the vulgar command the concept of numerical identity. When speaking of seeing (or otherwise perceiving) the same thing, they are employing the concept of the *same thing* in just this sense, even if in certain other contexts they are not. So, if Berkeley thinks that his theory is not an affront to the vulgar way of speaking (and thinking), he is just wrong.

The part of the passage I have labeled [2] suggests that the problem concerning two people perceiving the same thing has its roots in the misguided doctrines of certain philosophers—specifically, doctrines concerning abstract ideas. But before pressing this point, Berkeley attempts to dismiss the entire discussion of the distinction between sameness (in the sense of close similarity) and numerical identity as a mere verbal quibble. He asks us to consider several people all affected in like ways by their senses. They introduce the expression “same thing” into their language. With respect to the perception of a particular object, Berkeley tells us that “some regarding the uniformness of what was perceived, might call it the same thing; others especially regarding the diversity of persons who perceived, might choose the denomination of different things.” Berkeley seems to treat this as nothing more than a dispute concerning an arbitrary decision about how the word “same” is to be used. If that is what he is saying, then he has simply sidestepped the point at issue. Ordinary people believe that two different people can (and often do) perceive the selfsame thing. Berkeley denies this, and in doing so departs from the commonsense standpoint that he claims in a number of places not to disturb.

In [3] Berkeley slyly shifts the discussion of numerical identity to the problem of identity of an object undergoing change over time. This is sometimes called the problem of Theseus's ship. Suppose that, in the process of his long travels, every part of his ship has been replaced; is the ship in which he returns the same ship in which he originally set sail? Berkeley's variation is a building that has been wholly transformed except for its exterior walls. Berkeley suggests that, since no facts are at issue, this can be no more than a verbal dispute. This is quite a plausible suggestion, but it does not bear on the question at hand: the numerical identity of objects perceived by multiple perceivers. A similar remark holds for [4]. There Berkeley claims that the idea that identity over time is an abstract idea somehow superadded to the other features of the changing object. That sounds right too, but, once more, it is entirely beside the point at issue.

After these two irrelevant diversions in [3] and [4], in [5] Berkeley returns to the subject at hand by noting that the materialists, or more specifically the representational realists, face the same problem, for they too are committed to the view that no two people see the same thing. Hylas replies that beyond the immediate objects of perception, the

materialists appeal to archetypes of things immediately perceived. Berkeley responds that his position can make an appeal to archetypes as well: the ideas of things resident in the mind of God.

At [6] Hylas makes one of his strongest responses by remarking that, on this issue, Philonous has done nothing more than show that his position and that of the materialists stand or fall together. In response, Philonous produces a logical trick that fails: “that which makes equally against two contradictory opinions, can be a proof against neither.” The logical point is correct, for if two propositions are contradictory, then one of them must be true. It is therefore not possible for a sound argument to make equally against both. The flaw here is that Berkeley’s position and that of the representational realists are not formally contradictory: they may both be false in sharing some common false commitment.

It is clear, then, that Berkeley’s position affronts common sense in two fundamental ways. On his theory, the things people perceive cannot continue to exist when they close their eyes and, further, no two people can ever perceive the selfsame thing. Though he attempts to minimize the significance of these results, he never denies them. The question thus arises why he is able to treat these results with such equanimity. The answer will emerge as we come to appreciate the radical character of Berkeley’s position, in particular, his view that physical objects, properly understood, are nothing more than signs. This suggestion also seems to be an affront to commonsense, but we will wait to discuss it in its proper place in Chapter 10.

Chapter 7

Objections from science

(50–66)

In physics sense and experience which reach only to apparent effects hold sway...In first philosophy or metaphysics we are concerned with incorporeal things, with causes, truth, and the existence of things.

De Motu, 71

With the sixth objection, Berkeley turns to a series of challenges that scientists might raise against his position.

Sixthly, you will say there have been a great many things explained by matter and motion: take away these, and you destroy the whole corpuscular philosophy, and undermine those mechanical principles which have been applied with so much success to account for the phenomena.

(50)

This was an important objection for Berkeley to meet, for if his views were seen as being incompatible with achievements in the physical sciences—exemplified by the works of Newton—this would count as a strong, perhaps fatal, objection to them. Given the importance of the issue, his response is quite brief:

I answer, that there is not any one phenomenon explained on that supposition, which may not as well be explained without it, as might easily be made appear by an induction of particulars. To explain the phenomena, is all one as to show, why upon such and such occasions we are affected with such and such ideas.

(50)

Then after dismissing corporeal matter as an explainer of the origin of ideas—something not directly relevant to the present point—he makes the following important claim:

[T]hey who attempt to account for things, do it not by corporeal substance, but by figure, motion, and other qualities, which are in truth no more than mere ideas, and therefore cannot be the cause of any thing, as hath been already shown.

(50)

This is all too brief, but the central point seems to be this: Physical laws state regularities in terms of such qualities as figure, motion, and the like. But Berkeley has already argued that such qualities can have no existence otherwise than in a mind (Sections 9ff). If that is right, then physical laws simply state regularities among ideas, and all of the achievements of science can be incorporated into Berkeley's system without loss—indeed, without alteration. This does not mean that Berkeley is bound to agree with Newton concerning which scientific laws are correct. Berkeley can, and indeed does, make competing scientific claims of his own. Berkeley is simply saying that the correct laws in Newton's theory will be correct in his as well. The difference between Berkeley and Newton concerns the fundamental status of these laws.

For Berkeley, laws of nature are nothing more than regularities among ideas—regularities put there by spirits. This generates the following objection:

Seventhly, it will upon this be demanded whether it does not seem absurd to take away natural causes, and ascribe every thing to the immediate operation of spirits? We must no longer say upon these principles that fire heats, or water cools, but that a spirit heats, and so forth.

(51)

We should here recall that Berkeley has already claimed that it is an intuitive certainty that no idea can be the cause of any other. Thus, because such things as fire and water are collections of ideas, they can never properly be designated as causes. Yet, as Berkeley acknowledges, in pursuing the affairs of common life, this improper way of speaking usually causes no harm and, indeed, may even prove highly convenient. To illustrate this, Berkeley cites the Copernican system as a parallel case. If that system is correct, then it is false to say that the sun, as it appears above the morning horizon, is rising. What is happening instead, is that the earth is rotating downward in the direction of the sun. Nonetheless, even if it is strictly speaking false to say that the sun is rising, it is both natural and useful to speak this way. It is here that Berkeley tells us that we should "think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar," adding that "a little reflexion on what is here said will make it manifest, that the common use of language would receive no manner of alteration or disturbance from the admission of our tenets" (51).

In passing, for his purposes Berkeley might just as well have relativized truth to context and held that from the perspective of common sense it is true that the sun is rising, but it is false from an astronomical perspective. Indeed, in the section that follows he comes very close to saying something like this.

In the ordinary affairs of life, any phrases may be retained, so long as they excite in us proper sentiments, or dispositions to act in such a manner as is necessary for our well-being, how false soever they may be, if taken in a strict and speculative sense.

(52)

If, in this passage, Berkeley is committing himself to a distinction between the vulgar sense of words and their strict and speculative sense, then there need be no incompatibility between his views and the views of the vulgar. He would find this a welcome result, but, in fact, he seems to be making a narrower point:

[I]t is impossible, even in the most rigid philosophic reasonings, so far to alter the bent and genius of the tongue we speak, as never to give a handle for cavillers to pretend difficulties and inconsistencies. But a fair and ingenuous reader will collect the sense from the scope and tenor and connexion of a discourse, making allowances for those inaccurate modes of speech which use has made inevitable.

(52)

After interpolating discussions of other matters in objections eight and nine, Berkeley returns to the relationship between his philosophy and natural science in responding to the tenth objection:¹

Tenthly, it will be objected, that the notions we advance are inconsistent with several sound truths in philosophy and mathematics. For example, the motion of the earth is now universally admitted by astronomers, as a truth grounded on the clearest and most convincing reasons; but on the foregoing principles, there can be no such thing. For motion being only an idea, it follows that if it be not perceived, it exists not; but the motion of the earth is not perceived by sense.

(58)

Before examining Berkeley's response to this objection, it is worth examining a passage that occurs in Section 3:

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.

This passage seems to contain two different accounts of something existing when I—the use of the first person is essential here—do not perceive it. The first we can call the *subjunctive-conditional* account: to say that something exists even though I do not now perceive it amounts to saying that I *would* perceive it if I were situated in a certain way. The second we can call the *other-spirit* account: to say that something exists even though I do not now perceive it amounts to saying that some other spirit is perceiving it. Earlier,

in responding to the fourth objection, namely, that on his theory things are constantly being “annihilated and created anew,” Berkeley opted for the other-spirit account. Now, in dealing with the tenth objection, he seems to adopt the subjunctive-conditional account:

[F]or the question, whether the earth moves or no, amounts in reality to no more than this, to wit, whether we have reason to conclude from what hath been observed by astronomers, that if we were placed in such and such circumstances, and such or such a position and distance, both from the earth and sun, we should perceive the former to move among the choir of the planets, and appearing in all respects like one of them: and this, by the established rules of nature, which we have no reason to mistrust, is reasonably collected from the phenomena.

(58)

How are these two responses related? This is not an entirely easy question to answer, because Berkeley tends to shift back and forth between them as the occasion demands. One principle, however, is rock-bottom for Berkeley: nothing can exist unless it is a spirit or something actually perceived by a spirit, and however we interpret Berkeley’s reply to the tenth objection, it cannot go against this. There is, however, a way of understanding the subjunctive-conditional account that does not compromise this rock-bottom principle. To say how things appear from a particular standpoint is itself a statement of empirical fact. That from a standpoint outside the solar system the earth and its fellow planets would appear to be moving around the sun follows from certain scientific laws and observations. According to Berkeley, these laws (which present regularities among ideas) and observations (which report particular perceptions) are as available to him as they are to his materialist opponents. If that is right, speaking about how things would appear from standpoints we are not at present occupying causes no embarrassment for Berkeley.

Objection eleven raises a peculiar problem. Berkeley’s answer to it exhibits the radical character of his position. The problem is this:

In the eleventh place, it will be demanded to what purpose serves that curious organization of plants, and the admirable mechanism in the parts of animals? Might not vegetables grow, and shoot forth leaves and blossoms, and animals perform all their motions, as well without as with all that variety of internal parts so elegantly contrived and put together, which being ideas have nothing powerful or operative in them, nor have any necessary connexion with the effects ascribed to them? If it be a spirit that immediately produces every effect by a fiat, or act of his will, we must think all that is fine and artificial in the works, whether of man or nature, to be made in vain.

(60)

Berkeley goes on in this way at some length, ending by asking the following question:

In short it will be asked, how upon our principles any tolerable account can be given, or any final cause assigned of an innumerable multitude of bodies and machines framed with the most exquisite art, which in the common philosophy have very apposite uses assigned them, and serve to explain abundance of phenomena.

(60)

Again it is a sign that Berkeley finds an objection troubling that, before attempting to answer it directly, he reminds his reader that his position is already perfectly secure. Here he tells us that even if he were unable to respond to this objection in a fully satisfactory way, it “could be of small weight against the truth and certainty of those things which may be proved a priori, with the utmost evidence” (61). Here, I take it, he is invoking what I have called his fundamental argument presented in the opening six sections of Part I of the *Principles*. He then adds an ad hominem argument to the effect that those who think that God has created corporeal objects as intermediaries to produce ideas in us suffer from the same embarrassment, for “to what end God should take those round-about methods of effecting things by instruments and machines, which no one can deny might have been effected by the mere command of his will, without all that apparatus” (61).

Berkeley then adds yet another ad hominem argument:

[I]f we narrowly consider it, we shall find the objection may be retorted with greater force on those who hold the existence of those machines without the mind; for it has been made evident, that solidity, bulk, figure, motion, and the like, have no activity or efficacy in them, so as to be capable of producing any one effect in nature.

This passage provides the transition to his response to the following objection:

But to come nearer the difficulty, it must be observed, that though the fabrication of all those parts and organs be not absolutely necessary to the producing any effect, yet it is necessary to the producing of things in a constant, regular way, according to the laws of nature. There are certain general laws that run through the whole chain of natural effects: these are learned by the observation and study of nature, and are by men applied as well to the framing artificial things for the use and ornament of life, as to the explaining the various *phenomena*: which explication consists only in showing the conformity any particular phenomenon hath to the general laws of nature, or which is the same thing, in discovering the *uniformity* there is in the production of natural effects.

(62)

To spell this out a bit, setting aside miracles, God runs the world, that is, organizes sequences of ideas, in terms of relatively few simple laws—where laws are taken to be regularities or uniformities relating phenomena. The world that God creates is also wonderfully rich. But if the laws are simple and the world is rich, then the *mechanisms*

that both conform to these simple laws and generate complexity must themselves be complex. This, or something close to it, is what Berkeley seems to be maintaining.

Berkeley presses the eleventh objection further by asking for the point of God's joining ideas in uniform ways when, after all, the ideas themselves are causally inert. He puts the challenge this way:

But since one idea cannot be the cause of another, to what purpose is that connexion? and since those instruments, being barely inefficacious perceptions in the mind, are not subservient to the production of natural effects: it is demanded why they are made; or, in other words, what reason can be assigned why God ...would be at the expense (if one may so speak) of all the art and regularity to no purpose?

(64)

Berkeley responds in the following remarkable passage:

To all which my answer is, first, that the connexion of ideas does not imply the relation of cause and effect, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified*. The fire I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it. In like manner, the noise that I hear is not the effect of this or that motion or collision of the ambient bodies, but the sign thereof. Secondly, the reason why ideas are formed into machines, that is, artificial and regular combinations, is the same with that for combining letters into words. That a few original ideas may be made to signify a great number of effects and actions, it is necessary they be variously combined together: and to the end their use be permanent and universal, these combinations must be made by rule, and with wise contrivance.

(65)

The reference to *signs* and things *signified* gives this passage a contemporary ring and—as we shall see later—many of Berkeley's remarks about language anticipate, sometimes in striking detail, things said in the twentieth century, particularly by Wittgenstein.²

Berkeley's view, as expressed in Section 65, is that so-called real things are signs, or prognosticators. Notice that this is not simply the view that real things can be used as signs, as, for example, piles of rocks can be used to mark trails. Nor is it just the view that certain things can be taken as signs of things to come, as mounting clouds can be taken as signs of a coming storm. Berkeley's claim is that the objects we encounter in the world around us are nothing more than signs. Being signs from God constitutes their fundamental status, thus their significance lies outside of themselves. Thus God, as Berkeley pictures him, is able to produce ideas in the mind of his creatures without employing intermediate causal mechanisms.

Hence it is evident, that those things which, under the notion of a cause co-operating or concurring to the production of effects, are altogether inexplicable,

and run us into great absurdities, may be very naturally explained, and have a proper and obvious use assigned them, when they are considered only as marks or signs for our information.

(66)

Real things, as Berkeley portrays them, seem to be becoming less and less robust. As we have been told already, as collections of qualities that are themselves essentially mind-dependent, real things cannot exist otherwise than in the mind. As collections of ideas, real things are causally inert, thus the so-called causal laws that are commonly thought to obtain between real things are nothing more than regularities caused by God.³ We are now being told that these regularities introduced by the benign author of the universe serve only as signs or prognosticators by which we can govern our conduct. Perhaps the underlying sermon concerns the foolishness of immersing oneself in the things of this world in neglect of the significance that lies beyond them.

Given this account of things as signs or prognosticators, I think that we may now be in a position to understand why Berkeley, in his response to the fourth objection, felt no embarrassment in brushing aside the distinction between numerical identity and close similarity as a matter of “small importance.” Using modern terminology, as signs, individual objects are no more than tokens of certain types, and it is their status as types that gives them all the significance they have.⁴ It is the word of God that counts, not this or that expression of it.

Berkeley can now make the following general pronouncements about the proper way that the sciences should be pursued:

It is the searching after, and endeavouring to understand those signs (this language, if I may so call it) instituted by the author of nature, that ought to be the employment of the natural philosopher, and not the pretending to explain things by corporeal causes; which doctrine seems to have too much estranged the minds of men from that active principle, that supreme and wise spirit, “in whom we live, move, and have our being.”

(66)

Before turning in the next chapter to Berkeley's response to the twelfth objection, we must consider two further objections passed by in dealing with the objections that arise from science, namely, the eighth and ninth objections. The eighth objection is that Berkeley's position runs counter to the “universal concurrent assent of mankind” (54). The most obvious response to this is that universal concurrence is not a sure mark of truth because in the past there has been universal concurrence on matters that turned out to be false. Berkeley says this, but also makes a more interesting response.

[U]pon a narrow inquiry, it will not perhaps be found, so many as is imagined do really believe the existence of matter or things without the mind. Strictly speaking, to believe that which involves a contradiction, or has no meaning in it, is impossible: and whether the foregoing expressions are not of that sort, I refer

it to the impartial examination of the reader.

(54)

The second half of the second sentence refers to Berkeley's fundamental thesis that an object can exist unperceived involves either a contradiction or means nothing at all. But why, exactly, is it impossible to believe something that is a contradiction or is meaningless? Taking them in reverse order, if something is meaningless, then it does not provide a *content* to be believed, so it is not a belief at all. That sounds at least plausible, but does not seem to apply to selfcontradictory beliefs. We often know exactly what self-contradictory propositions mean. For example, they seem to appear quite intelligible in *reductio ad absurdum* proofs. Thus it seems wrong to treat them as either meaningless or contentless. Perhaps Berkeley has something like the following in mind: If a proposition is self-contradictory, it cannot be both fully understood and fully believed. In cases where someone seems to be assenting to a self-contradictory proposition, that person is either mistaken or befuddled about the object of his assent. But whatever Berkeley's reasons are for holding that we cannot believe something that is either contradictory or meaningless, his position has the following interesting consequence: a person may hold that he believes something when, in fact, it is not something anyone could possibly believe. Berkeley recognizes this implication, for he remarks at the close of the section:

This is not the only instance wherein men impose upon themselves, by imagining they believe those propositions they have often heard, though at bottom they have no meaning in them.

(54)

Such people suffer from what I have previously called illusions of intelligibility. I will discuss such illusions in detail in the next chapter.

The ninth objection is stated in Section 56, though it is not explicitly labeled as such.

But it is demanded, that we assign a cause of this prejudice, and account for its obtaining in the world. To this I answer, That men knowing they perceived several ideas, whereof they themselves were not the authors, as not being excited from within, nor depending on the operation of their wills, this made them maintain, those ideas or objects of perception had an existence independent of, and without the mind, without ever dreaming that a contradiction was involved in those words. But philosophers having plainly seen that the immediate objects of perception do not exist without the mind, they in some degree corrected the mistake of the vulgar, but at the same time run into another which seems no less absurd, to wit, that there are certain objects really existing without the mind, or having a subsistence distinct from being perceived, of which our ideas are only images or resemblances, imprinted by those objects on the mind. And this notion of the philosophers owes its origin to the same cause with the former, namely, their being conscious that they were not the authors of their own sensations, which they evidently knew were imprinted from without,

and which therefore must have some cause distinct from the minds on which they are imprinted.

(56)

Readers familiar with Hume's *Treatise* will recognize this as precisely the line that Hume adopts in the section entitled "Scepticism with Regard to the Senses." The fundamental idea in both places—though Hume develops it in more detail—is that philosophical errors can have a natural etiology. That is, under certain circumstances, people can be irresistibly drawn to certain false beliefs. For example, the common person in ordinary circumstances is naturally drawn to the belief that he is directly aware of mind-independent objects. A philosopher who recognizes that the immediate objects of perception cannot exist otherwise but in the mind is partially enlightened, but may still be drawn to the idea that something mind-independent must exist as the cause of these immediate perceptions. On Berkeley's account, the common person's view is self-contradictory. The philosopher's view is either self-contradictory or, worse, nonsensical.

Part of the problem, it seems, is that God has done his work of creation too well:

When we see things go on in the ordinary course, they do not excite in us any reflection; their order and concatenation, though it be an argument of the greatest wisdom, power, and goodness in their creator, is yet so constant and familiar to us, that we do not think them the immediate effects of a free spirit.

(57)

To remedy this defect on our part, God occasionally interrupts the lawlike progression of our ideas with a wake-up call in the form of a miracle. On such occasions "men," Berkeley tells us, "are ready to own the presence of a superior agent" (57).

In the third chapter we saw that Berkeley had a dual strategy for dealing with claims that entities could exist unperceived. Such views, he held, must be either self-contradictory or wholly unintelligible. If supposed entities are characterized by certain qualities, whether primary or secondary, then Berkeley thinks he has shown that it would be self-contradictory to suppose that such entities could exist unperceived. In the twelfth objection, Berkeley imagines someone trying to avoid this criticism by refusing to attribute any positive qualities at all to the unobserved entities. Berkeley's response to this *via negativa* is that it avoids self-contradiction at the price of falling into total unintelligibility. In making good this claim, Berkeley relies on his critique of abstract ideas. An examination of Berkeley's critique of abstract ideas, together with its application to the twelfth objection, is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 8

Abstract ideas and last-ditch objections

(Introduction 1–25; 67–84)

If we begin with generalities, and lay our foundation in abstract ideas, we shall find ourselves entangled and lost in a labyrinth of our own making.

Alciphron 7, 20

Berkeley's *Principles* begins with an introduction containing an extended attack on the doctrine that "the mind hath a power of framing abstract ideas or notions of things," which, he tells us, has played "a chief part in rendering speculation intricate and perplexed, and to have occasioned innumerable errors and difficulties in almost all parts of knowledge" (Int 6). I have postponed an examination of this rather abstruse topic until the main features of Berkeley's philosophical position have been presented. This is an appropriate place to examine Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas because it plays an important role in Berkeley's response to the twelfth objection, a matter put on hold in the previous chapter. It is also essential for understanding Berkeley's treatment of mathematics—the topic of the next chapter.

In various places Berkeley claims that opponents fail to recognize the correctness of his position because they are deluded into thinking that they can form abstract ideas when, in fact, they cannot. This claim can be made on a case-by-case basis, and Berkeley does just this when, in a particular context, he challenges opponents to pause and reflect and then candidly report whether they can form some particular abstract idea, say, of unity or of number. In a particular context there may be no need to do more than this. But this piecemeal approach pitches Berkeley's critique of abstract ideas at too low a level. He is not simply arguing that we do not possess this or that particular abstract idea; his claim is generic. According to him, it is not in our power to form any abstract ideas whatsoever. Because this general assault on abstract ideas provides a systematic backing for the particular targets that Berkeley attacks in Part I of the *Principles*, it is worthwhile to examine the introduction to see what this general attack amounts to.

There are further reasons for examining the introduction closely. Whatever its shortcomings, the doctrine of abstract ideas presents an account of how *general terms* function. This is important, for general terms are needed to formulate general statements, and general statements play an essential role in both science and common life. General

terms are also perplexing. Though there may even be problems here, it seems natural to suppose that the proper name “Fido” refers to a particular dog named “Fido.” If it is further held, as it generally was in the eighteenth century, that a word refers to a thing by way of an idea associated with it, then the reference to Fido is accomplished through the use of an idea of a particular dog, namely, the idea of the dog Fido. But what does the general term “dog” refer to? Certainly not any particular dog, because this misses the generality involved in talking about dogs as opposed to talking about this or that dog. In order to account for this difference, abstractionists, as Berkeley seems to understand them, maintain that a general term such as “dog” gains its generality through an association with the abstract idea of a dog. Roughly, in not being determinate in certain respects (say, size or color), an abstract idea can be used to refer to a plurality of varying particulars, thus yielding generality. In rejecting abstract ideas, Berkeley rejects this explanation of general terms as well. Berkeley, however, acknowledges the importance of general terms and general statements, so, in rejecting the abstractionist’s account of general terms, he owes us a satisfactory alternative to it. Berkeley is thus faced with two tasks: the first, to produce decisive reasons for rejecting the doctrine of abstract ideas, the second, to give a satisfactory account of general terms in place of the abstractionist account.

In the introduction, Berkeley begins his criticism of abstract ideas by illustrating the types of ideas that are supposedly generated through exercising the mental power of abstraction. The first concerns the mind’s ability to “frame to itself by abstraction the idea of [a] colour exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both colour and extension” (Int 7). The second concerns the supposed capacity to abstract what has been called a “determinable” distinct from any of its specific determinations. For example, presented with a variety of differing figures and magnitudes, the mind is supposed to be able to abstract a notion of something *common to all*, namely, extension. Berkeley cites colors to illustrate this point as well, for it is supposed that “the mind, by leaving out of the particular colours perceived by sense, that which distinguishes them one from another, and retaining that only which is common to all, makes an idea of colour in abstract, which is neither red, nor blue, nor white, nor any other determinate colour” (Int 8). The third concerns what Berkeley calls “compounded beings.”

[T]he mind having observed that Peter, James, and John resemble each other, in certain common agreements of shape and other qualities, leaves out of the complex or compounded idea it has of Peter, James, and any other particular man, that which is peculiar to each, retaining only what is common to all; and so makes an abstract idea wherein all the particulars equally partake, abstracting entirely from and cutting off all those circumstances and differences, which might determine it to any particular existence. And after this manner it is said we come by the abstract idea of man.

(Int 9)

Berkeley’s critique of the doctrine of abstract ideas can be stated in a single sentence: *Reflection shows that the mind does not possess the power to form ideas in any of the*

three ways indicated. In support of this, he simply asks his readers to attempt to do so, fully expecting that they—like various interlocutors in his dialogues—will, upon reflection, acknowledge that they are completely unable to do so.

One unfortunate feature of Berkeley's critique of abstract ideas is its tendency to rely on the naive notion that an abstract idea must be an indeterminate mental image or indeterminate mental picture. This comes out in Berkeley's gleeful attack on the following passage in which Locke discusses what he refers to as "the general idea of a triangle."

For example, does it not require some pains and skill to form the general idea of a triangle? (which is yet none of the most abstract, comprehensive, and difficult) for it must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once.

(4, 7, 9)

Berkeley responds:

If any man has the faculty of framing in his mind such an idea of a triangle as is here described, it is in vain to pretend to dispute him out of it, nor would I go about it. All I desire is, that the reader would fully and certainly inform himself whether he has such an idea or no. And this, methinks, can be no hard task for any one to perform. What more easy than for any one to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is here given of the general idea of a triangle, which is, *neither oblique, nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once?*

(Int 13)

Certainly, in the passage cited above, Locke is writing clumsily (or, perhaps, ironically), but, for all that, he is not saying that with "some pains and skill" we *could* form an idea (conception, image) of an entity satisfying the inconsistent set of features he has specified. Locke no more believes this than Berkeley does, and it is certainly uncharitable for Berkeley to suggest otherwise. In fact, on a sympathetic reading of Locke that J.L.Mackie has given, Locke's and Berkeley's views on general ideas seem very close.¹ More generally, Berkeley makes little effort to put the abstractionist position in its best light before bringing criticisms against it. Because of this, I will not pursue Berkeley's criticisms of abstractionism further; instead I will concentrate on Berkeley's attempt to replace the doctrine of abstract ideas (as he understands it) with a particularist theory of his own.

As noted, a standard reason for introducing abstract ideas is to give an account of generality (or universality). The core of Berkeley's alternative to abstractionism occurs in Section 15 of the introduction:

It is, I know, a point much insisted on, that all knowledge and demonstration are

about universal notions, to which I fully agree: but then it doth not appear to me that those notions are formed by abstraction in the manner premised; universality, so far as I can comprehend, not consisting in the absolute, positive nature or conception of any thing, but in the relation it bears to the particulars signified or represented by it: by virtue whereof it is that things, names, or notions, being in their own nature particular, are rendered universal. Thus when I demonstrate any proposition concerning triangles, it is to be supposed that I have in view the universal idea of a triangle; which ought not to be understood as if I could frame an idea of a triangle which was neither equilateral, nor scalenon, nor equicrural. But only that the particular triangle I consider, whether of this or that sort it matters not, doth equally stand for and represent all rectilinear triangles whatsoever, and is, in that sense, universal.

(Int 15)

This passage contains an important thesis: ideas are not universal in virtue of their representational content but, as we might now put it, in virtue of the way they are used representationally. On one occasion, an idea may be used to represent a particular individual, and in that case the word associated with it will be a proper name. But on another occasion, that same idea can be used as a representative of a class of other particular ideas, and the word associated with it may be a common noun. Thus, on Berkeley's account, the same idea can be used in reflecting on a specific triangle having a determinate shape, size, and so on, and in reflecting on triangles in general.

There is, as Berkeley himself notes, a difficulty with this account of universality. If we use, say, a right triangle as our representative triangle, then we may make the mistake of attributing to all triangles features special to right triangles. This problem will arise no matter what kind of triangle we use in our demonstration, for every sort of triangle has special features of its own. It seems, then, that whatever kind of triangle we choose to employ in our demonstration will contain special features not generalizable across all triangles. Berkeley deals with this problem in the following way:

[T]hough the idea I have in view whilst I make the demonstration, be, for instance, that of an isosceles rectangular triangle, whose sides are of a determinate length, I may nevertheless be certain it extends to all other rectilinear triangles, of what sort or bigness soever. And that, because neither the right angle, nor the equality, nor determinate length of the sides, are at all concerned in the demonstration. It is true, the diagram I have in view includes all these particulars, but then there is not the least mention made of them in the proof of the proposition.

(Int 16)

To this he adds:

And here it must be acknowledged, that a man may consider a figure merely as triangular, without attending to the particular qualities of the angles, or relations

of the sides. So far he may abstract: but this will never prove that he can frame an abstract general inconsistent idea of a triangle. In like manner we may consider Peter so far forth as man, or so far forth as animal, without framing the forementioned abstract idea, either of man or of animal, inasmuch as all that is perceived is not considered.

(Int 16)

If by abstraction we mean employing some idea without *attending to, considering*, or (as he might have better put it) *exploiting* certain specific features of that idea, then Berkeley has no complaint against abstraction. He rejects only the notion that an idea can be abstract in *content*. In content, all ideas are particular ideas.

In reading Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas, one is often struck by analogies with contemporary moves in the philosophy of language. For example, in explaining how language—or a misunderstanding of it—can give rise to the doctrine of abstract ideas, he remarks:

[I]t is thought that every name hath, or ought to have, one only precise and settled signification, which inclines men to think there are certain abstract, determinate ideas, which constitute the true and only immediate signification of each general name ...Whereas, in truth, there is no such thing as one precise and definite signification annexed to any general name, they all signifying indifferently a great number of particular ideas.

(Int 18)

In this passage Berkeley engages in semantic ascent; that is, rather than referring to a particular *idea* serving as a representative of other particular ideas, he speaks instead of a general *name* "signifying indifferently a great number of particular ideas." This sounds rather like Quine's notion that general terms have "divided reference."² There is a fundamental difference—Quine does not restrict the range of reference to particular *ideas*—yet, for all that, the two accounts of the way in which general terms function are strikingly similar. In the next chapter I will examine some striking similarities between the ways Berkeley and Wittgenstein attempt to avoid abstract entities in mathematics.

Before moving on to these mathematical topics, there is some unfinished work to be done. Why all this fuss over abstract ideas? Part of Berkeley's answer is that the traditional concern with abstract ideas has been idle because there are nonesuch. For Berkeley, however, the commitment to abstract ideas has not only been nonproductive, it has been an actual source of error. The root error, for Berkeley, is the thought that we can form, through the power of abstraction, the idea of something existing that is neither a perceiver nor a thing perceived. This error is exposed in Berkeley's response to the twelfth objection, to which we can now turn.

By the time Berkeley raises this objection, he assumes that it has been placed beyond doubt that entities possessing such features as extension and motion could not exist unperceived. He then imagines a materialist opponent, in desperation, trying to avoid this difficulty by propounding a purely negative definition of matter.

[I]f any man shall leave out of his idea of matter, the positive ideas of extension, figure, solidity, and motion, and say that he means only by that word an inert senseless substance, that exists without the mind, or unperceived, which is the occasion of our ideas, or at the presence whereof God is pleased to excite ideas in us: it doth not appear, but that matter taken in this sense may possibly exist.

(67)

Berkeley responds:

Let us examine a little the description that is here given us of matter. It neither acts, nor perceives, nor is perceived: for this is all that is meant by saying it is an inert, senseless, unknown substance; which is a definition entirely made up of negatives, excepting only the relative notion of its standing under or supporting: but then it must be observed, that it supports nothing at all; and how nearly this comes to the description of a nonentity, I desire may be considered.

(68)

Berkeley later repeats this rejoinder in these words:

[Y]ou may, if so it shall seem good, use the word matter in the same sense that other men use nothing, and so make those terms convertible in your style. For after all, this is what appears to me to be the result of that definition, the parts whereof when I consider with attention, either collectively, or separate from each other, I do not find that there is any kind of effect or impression made on my mind, different from what is excited by the term nothing.

(80)

In this last passage, Berkeley seems to be making a simple mistake, namely, confusing the claim that some expression means nothing (in the sense of having no meaning) with the very different claim that some expression has the same meaning as the word “nothing.” Perhaps, however, he is simply making a small joke. We can set this aside, however, for it is the first claim—that an expression has no meaning—that he is attempting to establish.

That Berkeley is arguing for the unintelligibility of a negatively defined notion of material substance comes out in a passage in which Berkeley imagines a defender of this view trying to provide content to this notion by invoking “the positive, abstract idea of quiddity, entity, or existence”:

You will reply perhaps, that in the foresaid definition is included, what doth sufficiently distinguish it from nothing, the positive, abstract idea of quiddity, entity, or existence. I own indeed, that those who pretend to the faculty of framing abstract general ideas, do talk as if they had such an idea, which is, say they, the most abstract and general notion of all, that is to me the most incomprehensible of all others...[H]ow ready soever I may be to acknowledge

the scantiness of my comprehension, with regard to the endless variety of spirits and ideas, that might possibly exist, yet for any one to pretend to a notion of entity or existence, abstracted from spirit and idea, from perceiving and being perceived, is, I suspect, a downright repugnancy and trifling with words.

(81)

It is a “downright repugnancy and trifling with words” because it is a hypothesis wholly empty of content.³

This completes Berkeley’s attempt to show that the very idea of an entity existing that is neither a perceiver nor a thing perceived must be either self-contradictory or nonsensical. Specifically, it provides his backing for the fifth premise of what I have called his fundamental argument. We can look at the argument again:

1. At least one spiritual substance exists (2).
2. Objects of perception (sensible things) are collections of ideas (1).
3. Contrary to what the common people think, as collections of perceptions, objects of perception are not themselves independent substances because they cannot exist otherwise than by being perceived (4 and 6).
4. Contrary to what some philosophers think, given the essential mental character of sensible qualities, it is contradictory to suppose that like qualities could reside in a nonthinking substance (3).
5. The supposition that some other sort of substance exists having qualities entirely different from sensible qualities is “wholly unintelligible” and is thus a hypothesis empty of content (4).
6. “From what has been said, it follows that there is not any other substance than *spirit*, or that which perceives” (7).

If we accept Berkeley’s fundamental intuition examined in the third chapter and combine it with the critique of abstract ideas examined in this chapter, it seems difficult to avoid accepting his argument. There is ample room, of course, for disagreement on both matters, yet, taken on its own terms, it is hard not to be impressed with the way in which Berkeley has shaped his idealism and his particularism into a coherent whole.

Chapter 9

Advantages to science and mathematics

(101–34)

If I mistake not, all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about signs as their immediate object.

Alciphron 7, 13

Speculative Math: as if a Man was all day making hard knots on purpose to untie them again.

PC 868

Having laid out the main features of his position and answered objections to it, Berkeley celebrates its advantages for three areas: philosophy, the sciences, and religion. I will not say anything further on Berkeley's treatment of religious topics, for they have already been examined in Chapter 5. Changing Berkeley's order, I will examine Berkeley's remarks on science and mathematics first, for they amount to an important extension of his theory. Berkeley's discussion of the supposed advantages his theory bestows on philosophy—in particular, its ability to avoid skepticism—is examined in the next chapter.

The natural sciences

Berkeley opens his discussion of natural science, which largely concerns physics and astronomy, with the claim that his philosophy protects it from skepticism. The skepticism he has in mind is not, however, a general skepticism about the external world, but what we might call *forever-hidden-mechanism* skepticism. He describes it in these words:

All that stock of arguments [skeptics] produce to depreciate our faculties, and make mankind appear ignorant and low, are drawn principally from this head, to

wit, that we are under an invincible blindness as to the true and real nature of things. This they exaggerate, and love to enlarge on. We are miserably bantered, say they, by our senses, and amused only with the outside and show of things. The real essence, the internal qualities, and constitution of even the meanest object, is hid from our view; something there is in every drop of water, every grain of sand, which it is beyond the power of human understanding to fathom or comprehend.

(101)

Berkeley offers a remarkable diagnosis of the source of skepticism of this kind:

One great inducement to our pronouncing ourselves ignorant of the nature of things, is the current opinion that every thing includes within itself the cause of its properties: or that there is in each object an inward essence, which is the source whence its discernible qualities flow, and whereon they depend. Some have pretended to account for appearances by occult qualities, but of late they are mostly resolved into mechanical causes, to wit, the figure, motion, weight, and such like qualities of insensible particles.

(102)

Here Berkeley brushes aside the occult-property account of the cause of the observable macrofeatures of objects as not worth considering, and concentrates instead on a fundamental doctrine of modern science: that the observable macrofeatures of objects are determined by their unobserved microfeatures. Thus, on the mechanistic (or corpuscular) approach he has chiefly in mind, the observed qualities of objects are said to depend on “the figure, motion, weight, and such like qualities of insensible particles” that constitute them. Because, however, these particles are insensible (that is, incapable of being sensed), their operations are wholly closed to us. Hence, skepticism.

In responding to this skeptical challenge, Berkeley invokes one of the basic tenets of his position: Microfeatures concerning figure, motion, and the like cannot be the cause of an object’s observable qualities because they cannot be the cause of anything at all. As he tells us, “in truth there is no other agent or efficient cause than spirit, it being evident that motion, as well as all other ideas, is perfectly inert” (102).

This response, even if accepted, does not completely settle the matter. Earlier we saw that Berkeley adopts the broadly instrumentalist view that laws of nature, though not expressive of causal relations, do express regularities that can be usefully employed to predict the manner in which phenomena succeed one another. Given this account of laws of nature, skeptics might reformulate their challenge in the following way: The regularities that underlie changes in an object’s observable features are regularities that concern the insensible particles that constitute it. Thus, in order to understand how observable objects behave, we must be conversant with these underlying regularities. Because, however, we are not privy to these underlying regularities, we will never be able to predict the behavior of the observable objects around us. As Hume later put it, “Our senses inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor

reason can ever inform us of those qualities, which fit it for the nourishment and support of a human body.”¹ Skepticism, it seems, has a foothold even in an instrumentalist (or antirealist) account of natural laws.

To my knowledge, Berkeley does not deal directly with this problem. Presumably, his answer would have to be something like this: Though there are no causal relations between objects, God has arranged things so that, generally speaking, the appearance of certain types of phenomena is a reliable indicator of phenomena to follow. Objects fall when released. Fire burns. These gross or broad regularities allow us to navigate successfully through the common world. But, as we have seen, if we examine the internal structures of various objects exhibiting regular patterns of behavior, we will discover that God has introduced finer regularities that, taken together, are predictors of the grosser regularities. More than this, as we saw in Berkeley’s response to objection eleven, God has exhibited his grandeur by producing exquisite contrivances based on relatively few regularities, thus allowing us to understand the complexities of the world using only relatively few basic laws. In this way God has created a world both providential for the ordinary person and an object of admiration for the learned.

For Berkeley, this conception of the laws of nature lays the basis for understanding the proper role of the natural sciences:

If therefore we consider the difference there is betwixt natural philosophers and other men, with regard to their knowledge of the phenomena, we shall find it consists, not in an exacter knowledge of the efficient cause that produces them, for that can be no other than the will of a spirit, but only in a greater largeness of comprehension, whereby analogies, harmonies, and agreements are discovered in the works of nature, and the particular effects explained, that is, reduced to general rules (see Sect. Ixii), which rules, grounded on the analogy and uniformness observed in the production of natural effects, are most agreeable, and sought after by the mind; for that they extend our prospect beyond what is present, and near to us, and enable us to make very probable conjectures, touching things that may have happened at very great distances of time and place, as well as to predict things to come; which sort of endeavour towards omniscience is much affected by the mind.

(105)

If Berkeley were an unrestrained enthusiast of science, which he is not, we could imagine him arguing that science pursued in this nondogmatic, nonmetaphysical way offers a prospect of unlimited advance. But instead of advocating such a grand reconciliation between religion and science, Berkeley reminds us of our intellectual limitations and tells us that “we should proceed warily in such things” (106). After making some cautionary remarks about the errors that arise when analogies are overextended, Berkeley issues a general warning against giving science too elevated a status. After offering (mistaken) counterexamples to the universal law of gravity (that the fixed stars are not attracted to each other and that plants grow upward) (106), Berkeley makes the following remark concerning the law of gravity:

There is nothing necessary or essential in the case, but it depends entirely on the will of the governing spirit, who causes certain bodies to cleave together, or tend towards each other, according to various laws, whilst he keeps others at a fixed distance; and to some he gives a quite contrary tendency to fly asunder, just as he sees convenient.

(106)

On this view, many of the things that we consider laws of nature are not strictly universal, but when used circumspectly are still often highly useful.

Berkeley summarizes his account of the natural sciences in a passage that exhibits his ambiguous attitude toward them:

First, it is plain philosophers amuse themselves in vain, when they inquire for any natural efficient cause distinct from a mind or spirit. Secondly, considering the whole creation is the workmanship of a wise and good agent, it should seem to become philosophers to employ their thoughts (contrary to what some hold) about the final causes of things...Thirdly, from what hath been premised no reason can be drawn, why the history of nature should not still be studied, and observations and experiments made, which, that they are of use to mankind, and enable us to draw any general conclusions, is not the result of any immutable habitudes, or relations between things themselves, but only of God's goodness and kindness to men in the administration of the world...Fourthly, by a diligent observation of the phenomena within our view, we may discover the general laws of nature, and from them deduce the other phenomena, I do not say demonstrate; for all deductions of that kind depend on a supposition that the Author of nature always operates uniformly, and in a constant observance of those rules we take for principles: which we cannot evidently know.

(107)

Berkeley first tells us that natural philosophy—or the history of nature—can tell us *nothing* about efficient causes and then says that, contrary to the view of newly emerging mechanistic science, there is no reason why final causes may not be offered as explanations. Both remarks diminish the standing of natural philosophy. On the other side, the third remark shows that Berkeley places no limitations on the study of natural philosophy in its efforts to discover general conclusions that are useful to mankind, but reminds the reader that laws that one discovers are grounded not in the “immutable habitudes” of things themselves, but in the exercise of God's beneficent powers.

The fourth remark is interesting, for in a curious way it anticipates Hume's skepticism concerning inductive reasoning. In scientific reasoning, through observation and experimentation, we uncover various uniformities in nature. We then project these uniformities onto future events in order to make predictions concerning them. Such reasoning depends, however, on the supposition that “the Author of nature always operates uniformly,” which is something, Berkeley tells us, we cannot know to be true.

That is, we can have no assurance that God *always* orders things uniformly. We can get the key move in Hume's famous skeptical challenge to inductive reasoning simply by dropping the reference to God and noting that the assumption that "nature always operates uniformly" is a needed premise for all inferences based on experience. Berkeley's claim is that we are not in a position to know that the world is wholly governed by a uniformitarian God—indeed, by acknowledging the existence of miracles, Berkeley is committed to the view that it is not.²

In his third remark, Berkeley acknowledges an important role for natural philosophy but brackets this remark with others intended to keep natural philosophy firmly in its proper place. Part of his reasoning may have been tactical, for he could hardly set himself wholly against the achievements of Newton without appearing anachronistic. In fact, he held that many of Newton's discoveries were of profound importance, so some accommodation with them was necessary. To this end he claims that whatever genuine discoveries natural philosophy has made can be incorporated, without loss, into his system as well. For him, it is only the *extra baggage* of corporeal substance and its attendant notions that must be rejected, and for him that is a matter of good riddance.

The transformation of Newtonian theory into his own system has another advantage as well: it demystifies the notion of universal gravitation—a concept central to Newtonian theory. Gravity seems to involve action at a distance, and that, on its face, seems deeply mysterious. This mystery does not affect the laws themselves, for they simply describe how objects move when they stand in certain relationships to one another, but to say that they move in this way *because* of the force of gravity seems to do nothing more than give a name to something we do not understand. The force of gravity, taken this way, seems to be nothing more than an *occult* quality, i.e. a quality that is in principle totally unobservable. In *De Motu* Berkeley makes this point in this way:

We perceive also in heavy bodies falling an accelerated motion towards the centre of the earth; and that is all the senses tell us. By reason, however, we infer that there is some cause or principle of these phenomena, and that is popularly called gravity. But since the cause of the fall of heavy bodies is unseen and unknown, gravity in that usage cannot properly be styled a sensible quality. It is, therefore, an occult quality. But what an occult quality is, or how any quality can act or do anything, we can scarcely conceive—indeed we cannot conceive. And so men would do better to let the occult quality go, and attend only to the sensible effects.

(5)

Here we seem to find yet another advantage that Berkeley's theory bestows on the natural sciences: It shows that the perplexities that surround the occult notion of gravitational force are merely misguided. More generally, we see that there is never a need for introducing occult qualities to explain regularities once it is recognized that these regularities come directly from the will of God.

As noted, the way seems to be open for a perfect marriage between natural philosophy and religion, for the world could be fully explicable in terms of God-introduced natural

regularities, with each new scientific discovery simultaneously advancing our knowledge and exhibiting God's goodness in providing us with such things to discover. But this is not an accommodation that Berkeley would wholeheartedly embrace, for marriages can lead to divorce. Taking science as an equal partner leaves open the possibility that the natural philosopher, though pious in religious beliefs, could pursue scientific research with no reference whatsoever to God. In time, this could lead the natural philosopher to forget about God altogether and come to think the universe fully explicable by science alone. Some four and a half centuries earlier, St Thomas Aquinas expressed just this worry by having an unidentified naturalistic philosopher raise the following objection:

[I]f a few causes fully account for some effect, one does not seek more. Now it seems that everything we observe in this world can be fully accounted for by other causes, without assuming a God. Thus natural effects are explained by natural causes, and contrived effects by human reasoning and will. There is therefore no need to suppose that God exists.³

In the so-called *Five Ways*, Thomas presents five examples of naturalistic explanations that remain incomplete without a further explanatory reference to God. In this manner, Thomas, while acknowledging the importance of natural philosophy, keeps it in its subservient place. Berkeley, though his position differs profoundly from Thomas's, adopts the same strategy in curbing the pretensions of science.

Berkeley not only speaks about natural philosophy at large; he also enters into detailed discussions on particular scientific topics. In his *New Theory of Vision* he offers an account of the moon illusion—the fact that the moon appears larger when near the horizon than when higher in the sky. It is largely empirical in character and, in fact, squares closely with contemporary scientific accounts of this phenomenon. More often, however, his challenges to prevailing theories are conceptual rather than empirical. His attack on Newton's doctrines of absolute time and absolute space is a case in point. For Berkeley, the notions of absolute space, absolute time, and absolute motion are all specimens of absurdities generated by the doctrine of abstract ideas. With respect to motion, he makes his point this way:

But notwithstanding what hath been said, it doth not appear to me, that there can be any motion other than relative: so that to conceive motion, there must be at least conceived two bodies, whereof the distance or position in regard to each other is varied. Hence if there was one only body in being, it could not possibly be moved. This seems evident, in that the idea I have of motion doth necessarily include relation.

(112)

That is, in order to have an idea of motion at all, we must have a conception of at least two particular things changing their positions relative one to another. That we can have a conception of motion without the attendant notion of particular things altering their relationships in this way is, for Berkeley, a patent absurdity.

Berkeley's commitment to a relative conception of motion may suggest an anticipation of Einstein's relativistic views. The similarity is, in fact, quite limited. Berkeley's view amounts only to this: To claim that some object A is in motion always involves a reference to some other object B relative to which A is moving. He does not, however, hold that we are free to choose which object to hold fixed. In fact, he denies this:

For to denominate a body moved, it is requisite, first, that it change its distance or situation with regard to some other body: and secondly, that the force or action occasioning that change be applied to it. If either of these be wanting, I do not think that agreeable to the sense of mankind, or the propriety of language, a body can be said to be in motion.

(115)

Einstein, however, rejected Berkeley's second condition for an object's being in motion by relativizing *force* to a frame of reference as well. This is one of the features of Einstein's theory of relativity that comes as a shock to our common understanding. Though I cannot think of anything in Berkeley's philosophy that would prevent him from accepting this further relativization, and a case might be made that by his own lights he should welcome it, instead he came out squarely against it. It is probably wrong, then, to make overly much of the connection between Berkeley's space/time relativity and Einstein's.

Mathematics

The attack on abstract ideas is a heavy weapon in Berkeley's arsenal, but, as we shall see, its use in the discussion of mathematics exacts a cost. This occurs in Berkeley's treatment of geometry, where his approach leads to the rejection of some fundamental theorems of classical mathematics, most strikingly, the Pythagoras' Theorem. We will, however, begin with Berkeley's treatment of arithmetic.

Arithmetic

There are certain words in our common language—not simply bits of philosophical jargon—that quite naturally suggest a reference to abstract particulars. Numerals are the most obvious examples. When we say, for example, that $5 + 7 = 12$, we seem to be talking about a relationship among the numbers 5, 7, and 12, where it seems hard to conceive of them as particular concrete entities. Numbers seem to be abstract entities on their face, and for this reason they represent a serious challenge to Berkeley's anti-abstractionism.

Earlier in the *Principles* Berkeley claims that “number is entirely a creature of the mind” (12). I take this as equivalent to the Fregean thesis—perhaps it should be called the

Berkeleyan thesis—that the number we assign to a collection of things depends on the concept we consider them under.⁴ To use Berkeley's example, we get a different answer to the question "How many?" depending on whether we are concerned with books, pages or lines. Even if the Fregean thesis is correct, this does not settle the question of the ontological status of numbers. Frege, for his part, took numbers to be abstract particulars. Berkeley would not.

Berkeley opens his discussion of numbers with these words:

Arithmetic hath been thought to have for its object abstract ideas of number. Of which to understand the properties and mutual habitudes is supposed no mean part of speculative knowledge. The opinion of the pure and intellectual nature of numbers in abstract, hath made them in esteem with those philosophers, who seem to have affected an uncommon fineness and elevation of thought. It hath set a price on the most trifling numerical speculations, which in practice are of no use, but serve only for amusement: and hath therefore so far infected the minds of some, that they have dreamt of mighty mysteries involved in numbers, and attempted the explication of natural things by them. But if we inquire into our own thoughts, and consider what hath been premised, we may perhaps entertain a low opinion of those high flights and abstractions, and look on all inquiries about numbers, only as so many *difficiles nugae*, so far as they are not subservient to practice, and promote the benefit of life.

(119)

The most important feature of this passage is the claim that in order to avoid endless nonsense and confusion, arithmetic must be made subservient to practices that promote the benefit of life. This suggests we set aside philosophical preconceptions and examine how numerals find useful employment in daily life. Instead of indulging in "speculative math," we should ask why we employ numerals at all and what precisely it is that we do with them.

To answer these questions, Berkeley offers a brief account of "arithmetic in its infancy, and observing what it was that originally put men on the study of that science, and to what scope they directed it."

[A]t first men, for ease of memory and help of computation, made use of counters, or in writing of single strokes, points, or the like, each whereof was made to signify a unit, that is, some one thing of whatever kind they had occasion to reckon. Afterwards they found out the more compendious ways, of making one character stand in place of several strokes, or points. And lastly, the notation of the Arabians or Indians came into use, wherein, by the repetition of a few characters or figures, and varying the signification of each figure according to the place it obtains, all numbers may be most aptly expressed.

(121)

At this point the text becomes uncharacteristically convoluted, and it is not altogether

clear how it should be interpreted.

[This] seems to have been done in imitation of language, so that an exact analogy is observed betwixt the notation by figures and names, the nine simple figures answering the nine first numeral names and places in the former, corresponding to denominations in the latter. And agreeably to those conditions of the simple and local value of figures, were contrived methods of finding from the given figures or marks of the parts, what figures, and how placed, are proper to denote the whole, or vice versa.

(121)

Here Berkeley seems to be making heavy going of the simple point that, just as the arrangement of names in a sentence is a determinant of the meaning of the sentence as a whole, so too the arrangement of figures in an Arabic notation is a determinant of the number signified. Perhaps Berkeley is saying more than this, but the conclusion it leads him to is clear enough and of great importance.

These signs being known, we can, by the operations of arithmetic, know the signs of any part of the particular sums signified by them; and thus computing in signs (because of the connexion established betwixt them and the distinct multitudes of things, whereof one is taken for a unit), we may be able rightly to sum up, divide, and proportion the things themselves that we intend to number.

(121)

That is, once a numerical notation has been introduced, we can make discoveries concerning the *things* that have been assigned a number simply through computations involving signs. Berkeley makes the point this way:

In arithmetic therefore we regard not the things but the signs, which nevertheless are not regarded for their own sake, but because they direct us how to act with relation to things, and dispose rightly of them.

(122)

He then draws the philosophical moral:

[I]t is evident from what hath been said, those things which pass for abstract truths and theorems concerning numbers are, in reality, conversant about no object distinct from particular numerable things, except only names and characters; which originally came to be considered on no other account but their being signs, or capable to represent aptly whatever particular things men had need to compute. Whence it follows, that to study them for their own sake would be just as wise, and to as good purpose, as if a man, neglecting the true use or original intention and subserviency of language, should spend his time in impertinent criticisms upon words, or reasonings and controversies purely

verbal.

(122)⁵

Geometry

We have seen that there are strong temptations to think that arithmetic propositions demand the existence of abstract ideas and, perhaps, abstract entities as well. The temptations may even be stronger with respect to geometric propositions. Although we can produce diagrams to illustrate arithmetic truths—say, twenty things arranged in rows and columns to illustrate that $5 \times 4 = 20$ —nothing seems to count as a diagram of a number itself. In contrast, we can produce diagrams of particular geometrical figures, pentagons, for example. In this way, geometrical entities exhibit a substantiality (a thingness) not immediately evident in arithmetic entities. At the same time, when we employ a diagram for geometric purposes, our results are supposed to apply to all figures of this kind. Abstract ideas and sometimes counterpart abstract entities have often been thought necessary to underwrite this move from the particular diagram we construct to the universal conclusions we draw when using it. Berkeley will have none of this.

We have already examined Berkeley's account of the way in which particular diagrams can acquire universal significance. For him, diagrams do not gain universal significance in virtue of their specific content, for the same diagram can be employed equally for particular or general reference. Whether the reference is particular or general depends on the way this content is exploited. For Berkeley, the employment of geometric diagrams is paradigmatic of the manner in which particular ideas can gain general significance without an appeal to abstract ideas or any other sort of abstract entity. The discussion beginning at Section 123 makes the complementary claim that the doctrine of abstract ideas actually impedes progress in geometry by entangling us in hopeless confusion.

The doctrine of abstract ideas can cause confusion in a variety of ways, but, for Berkeley, one of its most obnoxious offspring is the notion that a finite line can be infinitely divided. As he tells us:

And as this notion is the source from whence do spring all those amusing geometrical paradoxes, which have such a direct repugnancy to the plain common sense of mankind, and are admitted with so much reluctance into a mind not yet debauched by learning; so is it the principal occasion of all that nice and extreme subtlety, which renders the study of mathematics so difficult and tedious.

(123)

Berkeley's criticism of the doctrine of infinite divisibility takes only two sentences to formulate. Citing one of his fundamental theses, he first tells us that "nothing can be plainer to me, than that the extensions I have in view are no other than my own ideas." Then, appealing directly to intuition, he adds that "it is no less plain, that I cannot resolve any one of my ideas into an infinite number of other ideas, that is, that they are not

infinitely divisible.” The possibility that extension itself, as opposed to ideas of extension, might be infinitely divisible is dismissed out of hand on the now-familiar charge of unintelligibility: “If by finite extension be meant something distinct from a finite idea, I declare I do not know what that is, and so cannot affirm or deny any thing of it” (124).

Against these direct appeals to intuition, at least three things can be said in reply: first, though not imaginable, infinite divisibility is still intelligible; second, infinite divisibility is presupposed in the very foundations of mathematics; and third, rigorous demonstrations exist that establish beyond doubt the infinite divisibility of finite extensions. The first two challenges are discussed briefly, but suggestively, in the *Principles*. To see what Berkeley says with respect to the third challenge we have to go outside the text of the *Principles*.

Concerning the intelligibility of infinite divisibility, it is a recurring theme in Berkeley’s writing that philosophers can come to accept things that, in fact, they cannot even comprehend. Such absurdities are then handed down from one generation to another, gaining ever more dignity with time. As a result, Berkeley tells us, “there is no absurdity so gross, which by this means the mind of man may not be prepared to swallow” (124). This, however, only explains how nonsense gets transmitted; it does not explain how it originates. With respect to that matter, Berkeley makes the following, quite subtle, suggestion:

It hath been observed in another place, that the theorems and demonstrations in geometry are conversant about universal ideas. [Section 15, Introduction] Where it is explained in what sense this ought to be understood, to wit, that the particular lines and figures included in the diagram, are supposed to stand for innumerable others of different sizes: or in other words, the geometer considers them abstracting from their magnitude: which doth not imply that he forms an abstract idea, but only that he cares not what the particular magnitude is, whether great or small, but looks on that as a thing indifferent to the demonstration: hence it follows, that a line in the scheme, but an inch long, must be spoken of as though it contained ten thousand parts, since it is regarded not in itself, but as it is universal; and it is universal only in its signification, whereby it represents innumerable lines greater than itself, in which may be distinguished ten thousand parts or more, though there may not be above an inch in it. After this manner the properties of the lines signified are (by a very usual figure) transferred to the sign, and thence through mistake thought to appertain to it considered in its own nature.

Because there is no number of parts so great, but it is possible there may be a line containing more, the inch-line is said to contain parts more than any assignable number; which is true, not of the inch taken absolutely, but only for the things signified by it. But men not retaining that distinction in their thoughts, slide into a belief that the small particular line described on paper contains in itself parts innumerable.

(126, 127)

Though it does not improve on Berkeley's statement, we might put the matter this way: we come to think that a particular finite line is infinitely divisible because we misguidedly transpose its role as a sign having endlessly many applications into one of its material properties. The endless range of possible applications is misapprehended as an endlessness in parts. It is through this "crossing of pictures"—to use Wittgenstein's phrase⁶—that we come to think that the line actually before us is literally composed of infinitely many, mostly invisible, subcomponents.

In Section 131 Berkeley responds to the claim that, without infinite divisibility, "it will follow that the very foundations of geometry are destroyed: and those great men who have raised that science to so astonishing a height, have been all the while building a castle in the air." Berkeley's response anticipates the view adopted by various contrarians in mathematics who reject or severely limit the employment of infinitary procedures. It is granted that without infinite divisibility (and such related notions as infinitesimals), large portions of classical mathematics must be abandoned, but, in mitigation, it is claimed that all that is *useful* in mathematics can be preserved. As for the rest, it is said that we are better off without it. Berkeley puts it this way:

Whatever is useful in geometry and promotes the benefit of human life, doth still remain firm and unshaken on our principles. That science, considered as practical, will rather receive advantage than any prejudice from what hath been said. But to set this in a due light, may be the subject of a distinct inquiry. For the rest, though it should follow that some of the more intricate and subtle parts of speculative mathematics may be pared off without any prejudice to truth; yet I do not see what damage will be thence derived to mankind.

(131)

Notice that in this passage Berkeley recognizes that it has to be *shown* that all that is useful in mathematics can be preserved on his principles. For example, it must be shown that theorems we want to preserve that have previously been established using infinitesimals can be established without them:

If it be said that several theorems undoubtedly true, are discovered by methods in which infinitesimals are made use of, which could never have been, if their existence included a contradiction in it. I answer, that upon a thorough examination it will not be found, that in any instance it is necessary to make use of or conceive infinitesimal parts of finite lines, or even quantities less than the minimum sensible.

(132)

Establishing claims made in this passage would involve more than philosophical considerations. The mathematical goods would have to be delivered as well. Later in his career, Berkeley made serious efforts in this direction in a variety of places. These mathematical considerations are, however, beyond the scope of this study and to some extent beyond the ken of its author.⁷

The reference to minimum sensibles in the passage last cited raises an important question not discussed in the *Principles*. If a line, for example, is not infinitely divisible, then there must be some limit to the extent to which it can be divided. For Berkeley, this limit is the smallest extension we are capable of discerning. A finite line is thus composed of finitely many minimal sensibles—with vision, for example, finitely many minimal visibles.⁸ This, according to Berkeley, is something that can be established directly by inspection. Against this claim that finite lines are only finitely divisible there are, however, a number of well known proofs of infinite divisibility that seem completely compelling. Some employ various constructions intended to show that the points in lines of different lengths can be put into one-to-one correlation, something that would not be possible if lines were only finitely divisible. (On Berkeley's account, for line A to be larger than line B, line A would have to contain at least one more minimal sensible than line B.) Berkeley's blunt response is that such constructions are not possible because they involve notions that are unintelligible. In his *Philosophical Commentaries*, he nicely puts it in these words:

The Mathematicians think there are insensible lines, about these they harangue, these cut in a point, and all angles these are divisible ad infinitum. We Irish men can conceive no such lines.

(PC 393)

But Berkeley's doctrine of finite divisibility blocks more than proofs of infinite divisibility; it also deprives mathematicians of many standard geometric theorems, including, remarkably, Pythagoras' theorem. I do not think Berkeley notes this consequence of his position in his published writings, but he does draw this conclusion in his *Philosophical Commentaries*—a journal he kept to record his reflections—and there he seems to accept it without qualms.⁹

Early in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, Berkeley asks himself whether the incommensurability of the diagonal with the side of a square is consistent with his principles, that is, can the ratio between the diagonal of a square and one of its sides be expressed in terms of whole numbers? One of the famous theorems of classical geometry was that this was not possible. Two hundred thirty-six entries after raising this question, he rejects this classical theorem by flatly declaring that “the Diagonal is commensurable with the Side” (PC 264). This follows at once from his claim that all finite lines are made up of finitely many sensible minima, the number of such minima determining the length of the line. In his telegraphic style of the *Philosophical Commentaries*, Berkeley puts it this way:

Diagonal of a particular square commensurable with its side they both containing a certain number of M: V: [that is, minimum visibles].

(PC 258)

This conclusion leads to another that is more startling. Pythagoras' theorem tells us that the ratio of the side of a square to its diagonal is equal to the square root of two. But it is

known that the square root of two is irrational, from which it follows that the Pythagoric Theorem, as Berkeley calls it, is false. This is precisely the conclusion that Berkeley draws in entry 500 of the *Philosophical Commentaries*, though he reaches it in a somewhat indirect way:

One square cannot be the double of another. Hence the Pythagoric Theorem is false.

It is clear from a number of passages in the *Philosophical Commentaries* that Berkeley was not shy about embracing many views that flew in the face of received mathematical doctrine. We find him making remarks of the following kind:

It seems that all line can't be bisected in 2 equal parts. Mem: to examine how the Geometers prove the contrary.

(PC 276)

Though it may sound strange, if particular lines have only finitely many minimal parts, then only those containing an even number of such parts can be bisected exactly. Or again:

It seems all circles are not similar figures there not being the same proportion betwixt all circumferences & their diameters.

(PC 340)

That is, those things that we commonly call circles will not all be exactly similar in shape because of the constraints put on constructing figures from finitely many minimal visibles. For Berkeley, then, certain constructions that are taken for granted in classical mathematics are simply not possible. For example, if the sides of a square are constructed from finitely many minimal sensibles, then it will not be possible to construct a diagonal line that is not either a bit too long or a bit too short. Given this, proofs that appeal to incommensurability cannot be used to prove that extension is infinitely divisible, because the possibility of constructing lines, areas, and the like, of any assignable size and shape presupposes that infinite divisibility is possible, and thus cannot be used to prove it. Berkeley makes this point explicitly:

Mem. To Enquire most diligently Concerning the incommensurability of Diagonal & side. Whether it Does not go on the supposition of unit being divisible ad infinitum, i.e. of the extended thing spoken of being divisible ad infinitum & so the infinite [divisibility] deduc'd therefrom is a petitio principii.

(PC 263)

Is Berkeley then right in rejecting infinite divisibility? One view is that the question *Is extension infinitely divisible?* has a clear sense only when transformed into the question, *What kind of mathematics is needed to generate the best theory of physical reality?* As

matters now stand, the overwhelming (though not universal) opinion is that mathematics involving infinitesimals (hence infinite divisibility) best serves the purposes of modern physical science. That carries the implication that physical space is, after all, infinitely divisible. Still, this thesis about physical space cannot be established by the kind of a priori arguments that Berkeley rejects. It seems that Berkeley may well be wrong in denying that physical space is infinitely divisible, but he is surely right in denying that the thesis of infinite divisibility can be established using proofs of the kind traditionally employed. That Berkeley was correct on this matter is not generally recognized; indeed many of these so-called proofs remain in circulation in popular books on mathematics.

To return to the broader theme of this chapter, Berkeley thought that his position could enter into a mutually supportive relationship with natural philosophy and mathematics. He held that all that was correct in these disciplines could be incorporated without loss into his own system. On the other side, he held that his philosophy could be of service to these disciplines by ridding them of unintelligible notions that hindered genuine progress. His attack on the “occult” quality of gravitational force found in physics and his attack on infinite divisibility found in mathematics are two striking instances of this. Both attacks exhibit a strategy employed throughout Berkeley’s philosophical writings, that of showing us that we do not understand something we think we understand since the words we use refer to nothing intelligible.

Chapter 10

Advantages to philosophy

(85–100)

The supposition that things are distinct from Ideas takes away all real Truth, & consequently brings in Universal Scepticism, since all our knowledge & contemplation is confin'd barely to our own Ideas.

(PC 606)

The general advantage that Berkeley claims in behalf of his philosophy over those of his competitors is that his is true whereas their philosophies, to the extent that they disagree, are false or, perhaps, nonsensical. Beyond this general advantage, Berkeley also thinks that his position can provide straightforward answers to philosophical problems that have hitherto proved difficult nuts to crack. To show this, he begins his discussion of fundamental philosophical issues by considering three questions: “Whether corporeal substance can think? whether matter be infinitely divisible? and how it operates on spirit?” (85). Obviously, by banning material substance, the first and the third problem are resolved at once. Berkeley connects the notion of infinite divisibility with the abstract idea of an unperceived extended material substance, and, with that gone, only perceived extensions remain, which, according to Berkeley, are manifestly only finitely divisible.

However, for Berkeley, the main advantage of his position over its chief competitor, representational realism, is that it avoids the skeptical consequences inherent in that position. Having first made this charge in Section 18, Berkeley returns to it in Section 86.

[W]e have been led into very dangerous errors, by supposing a two-fold existence of the objects of sense, the one intelligible, or in the mind, the other real and without the mind: whereby unthinking things are thought to have a natural subsistence of their own, distinct from being perceived by spirits. This, which, if I mistake not, hath been shown to be a most groundless and absurd notion, is the very root of scepticism.

(86)

By denying the existence of material substance, Berkeley trivially avoids this problem as well and avoids the skepticism generated from this source.

So far so good, but it seems that Berkeley is saddled with a skeptical problem that

parallels the one he finds in representational realism. Specifically, both Berkeley and his representational-realist opponents are confronted with a problem we can call epistemic solipsism. Given that our immediate knowledge is restricted to the contents of our own minds, how can we attain knowledge of the existence and nature of anything else? Berkeley claims one advantage over his representational-realist opponents: they are involved in the hopeless task of trying to attain knowledge of something whose very specification is either self-contradictory or unintelligible. His own position, he thinks, does not suffer from this disability, for our own minds present us with an exemplar of a spiritual substance containing ideas. Thus the existence of other minds with ideas in them is, he thinks, at least an intelligible hypothesis.

But even if we grant for the moment that Berkeley's position enjoys the advantage of intelligibility over his representational-realist opponents, it is important to remember that Berkeley's attempts to prove the existence of other spirits was hardly free of difficulties. Both the attempted proof of the existence of God and the attempted proof of the existence of other finite spirits are, at the very least, in need of considerable strengthening. With respect to God's existence, Berkeley seems to rely on the fact that many of the philosophers he opposes also accept some version of the argument from design. Indeed, the argument from design has been a perennial favorite that continues to enjoy some support on the contemporary philosophical scene. So an assessment of this aspect of Berkeley's position will demand an independent assessment of the strength of this argument—something that cannot be undertaken here.¹

Descartes' so-called dream argument presents another skeptical challenge that applies both to Berkeley and to his representational-realist opponents.² The challenge is this: when sleeping, we are sometimes fully convinced that we are awake and that the events taking place in our dreams are actually taking place. Given this, how can we ever know that we are awake rather than sleeping? If we cannot determine this, how can we legitimately lay claim to knowledge of things external to our own minds?

To my knowledge, there is only one place in his published writings where Berkeley responds directly to this challenge. It appears in the following passage from the *Dialogues*:

PHIL. The ideas formed by the imagination are faint and indistinct; they have besides an entire dependence on the will. But the ideas perceived by sense, that is, real things, are more vivid and clear, and being imprinted on the mind by a spirit distinct from us, have not a like dependence on our will. There is therefore no danger of confounding these with the foregoing; and there is as little of confounding them with the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused. And though they should happen to be never so lively and natural, yet by their not being connected, and of a piece with the preceding and subsequent transactions of our lives, they might easily be distinguished from realities. In short, by whatever method you distinguish things from chimeras on your own scheme, the same, it is evident, will hold also upon mine. For it must be, I presume, by some perceived difference, and I am not for depriving you of any one thing that you perceive.

This response has two parts. Berkeley first claims, as others have claimed, that dreams possess characteristic marks that allow us to distinguish them from the experiences we have when awake. I will not go into this well-worked area in detail, but simply note two things: (i) At least some dreams possess the vividness and connectedness of experiences we have when awake, and (ii), more disturbingly, when dreaming, our cognitive faculties are sometimes seriously disenabled and the unconnectedness we recognize when we awaken does not bother us when asleep. Either point is, I think, sufficient for the skeptic's purposes.

His second response to the dream argument is another example of Berkeley's strategy of incorporating the views of his opponents. Berkeley claims that his own position can shadow any answer that the representational realist might give to the dream problem. That is, whatever the representational realist says in responding to the dream problem can be translated, with equal force, into the Berkeleyan system. If that is right, then an ability to deal with the dream problem cannot give an advantage to the representational realist over Berkeley. This, however, provides small comfort if, as it seems, the representational realist's response to the dream problem is itself no good. In fact, it seems that Berkeley and his representational-realist opponents are precisely on a par with respect to the problem of epistemic solipsism: they both fail to deal with it persuasively, and fail for essentially the same reasons.

If all this is correct, then Berkeley's claim to superiority over his opponents seems to come to this: in their talk about material objects existing unperceived outside one's mind, they talk nonsense, whereas in his talk about other perceivers or things perceived existing outside one's mind, he is not talking nonsense. In different words, as Berkeley sees it, the representational realist has no resources for avoiding *ontological* solipsism, whereas his position does not confront a similar problem. It is, however, far from clear that Berkeley enjoys any such advantage. Earlier Berkeley argues that it was the doctrine of abstract ideas that led philosophers to suppose that tables, trees, and the like could exist unperceived:

For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived?

(5)

To someone adopting an even more radical subjectivism than Berkeley, it would seem to take a similarly nice "strain of abstraction" to distinguish between being perceived and being perceived by *me*. That someone else could experience the very pain I am experiencing seems, on Berkeley's own way of looking at things, as unintelligible as supposing that this pain might exist with no one perceiving it at all. Recall Wittgenstein's comment in the *Philosophical Investigations*:

302. If one has to imagine someone else's pain on the model of one's own, this

is none too easy a thing to do: for I have to imagine pain which I *do not feel* on the model of the pain which I *do feel*.

Just as Berkeley went beyond the representational realists by holding that being apprehended by some mind is an essential feature of the qualities of the things we perceive, someone might go beyond Berkeley by holding that being perceived by *him* is an essential feature of the objects *he* perceives. We thus arrive at a position that can be called *ontological*, rather than merely epistemological, solipsism.

Having been tutored by Berkeley's writings, the ontological solipsist could argue in the following way: "The supposition that things other than my own ideas exist is either self-contradictory or wholly unintelligible. It is self-contradictory (or at least necessarily false) to suppose that something essentially mine could exist without being mine. Concerning the existence of something that is not mine and of which I am not aware, I cannot so much as form an idea what such a being might be like." I am not endorsing this argument on behalf of ontological solipsism; I simply do not know how Berkeley would respond to this attempt to hoist him with his own petard. From the ultrasubjective standpoint of the ontological solipsist, Berkeley's position enjoys *no* advantages over that of the representational realist concerning the existence and nature of things distinct from one's own mind.

This result neither shows that Berkeley's position is wrong, nor does it diminish Berkeley's brilliance in unfolding the implications of his original commitments. What it may show is that the way of ideas, when pursued in a wholly unrelenting manner, will lead us at last "to sit down in a forlorn scepticism" (Int 1)—an outcome wholly at odds with Berkeley's intentions.

PART 3

EPILOGUE

Epilogue

In the introduction, I expressed the intention of offering a sympathetic interpretation of Berkeley's position as it appears in the *Principles of Human Knowledge*. Given the conclusion of the previous chapter, this may now seem to have been disingenuous. It was not. One goal of this work is to clear Berkeley of the charge of being no more than an originator of ingenious sophistries. In opposition to this, I have tried to show that Berkeley's position is a deeply plotted work that flows coherently from a starting point that he makes every effort to explain clearly to his reader. Those who find Berkeley's works riddled with errors of one sort or another in all likelihood do so because they fail to appreciate the intuitive starting place that drives Berkeley's enterprise. This results in attributing to Berkeley bad arguments in behalf of his idealist position in contexts in which he thinks his idealist commitments have already been established beyond doubt. It is essential for understanding the development of the text to recognize that Berkeley thinks his fundamental idealist commitments were fully established by the opening sentence of Section 7 of Part I of the *Principles*.

Furthermore, in order to feel the force of Berkeley's position, it is important to appreciate the attraction of his starting points. The first is a commitment to the way of ideas: the doctrine that the immediate *objects* of perception exist only in the mind. The second—and this is Berkeley's innovation—is that the *qualities* of an immediate object of perception can exist nowhere except in a mind. Views of this kind are now in such bad repute that it is difficult to get some philosophers to take them seriously. It is, however, a fact that the way of ideas has exerted a profound influence on philosophizing over at least the past four centuries. Why is this? There is no simple answer. Part of the answer is tied to the rise of science, with its notion that perceiving something is the end product of a causal sequence starting with a distant object and terminating with an idea in the mind, something like this:

Distant object → Medium → Sense organ → Idea

Both seeing and hearing exhibit this pattern. This argument from science, as it is commonly called, can be backed by various other arguments, including those that rely on perceptual variability, illusion, and so on. Because arguments of this kind were broadly accepted by philosophers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Berkeley would have had little concern that his general commitment to the way of ideas would be challenged.

There is, however, another, more direct, way that one can become committed to the

way of ideas. It also has a long history. It is possible to adopt a distanced, detached standpoint that fills us with a sense of the subjectivity, the transience, the unreality, the lightness of the world we experience. This passage from David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* captures what I have in mind:

The colour, taste, figure, solidity, and other qualities, combined in a peach or melon, are conceived to form one thing; and that on account of their close relation, which makes them affect the thought in the same manner, as if perfectly uncompounded. But the mind rests not here. *Whenever it views the object in another light, it finds that all these qualities are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other.*¹

A bit later Hume explains what he means by viewing the object in *another light*.

It is natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together; and because custom has rendered it difficult to separate the ideas, they are apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd. *But philosophers, who abstract from the effects of custom, and compare the ideas of objects, immediately perceive the falsehood of these vulgar sentiments, and discover that there is no known connexion among objects.*²
(p. 222, emphasis added)

Before Hume, Berkeley held the same view concerning the disconnectedness (inertness) of objects of perception, and held it, as Hume did, as something one can perceive immediately.

When we view things, as Hume puts it, "in another light," we can also be struck by the subjectivity of the objects of perception. An extreme form of this attitude is captured in this remarkable passage from Tolstoy's *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*:

I imagined that besides myself nobody and nothing existed in the universe, that objects were not objects at all, but images which appeared only when I paid attention to them, and that as soon as I left off thinking of them, these images immediately disappeared...There were moments when, under the influence of this *idée fixe*, I reached such a state of insanity that I sometimes looked rapidly round to one side, hoping to catch emptiness (*néant*) unawares where I was not.³

In this passage Tolstoy portrays a commitment to ontological solipsism, not simply to epistemological solipsism. The young Tolstoy is not wracked with doubts concerning the existence of other beings; he is fully committed to the total absence of anything save himself.

To cite an example of a very different sort, here are G.E. Moore's instructions to his reader for "picking out" the sorts of things he means by sense-data:

I need only ask him to look at his own right hand. If he does this he will be able to pick out something...with regard to which he will see that it is, at first sight, a natural view to take that that thing is identical...with that part of its surface which he is actually seeing, but will also (on a little reflection) be able to see that it is doubtful whether it can be identical with the part of the surface of his hand in question. Things *of this sort* (in a certain respect) of which this thing is, which he sees in looking at his hand, and with regard to which he can understand how some philosophers have supposed it to *be* the part of the surface of his hand which he is seeing, while others have supposed that it can't be, are what I mean by "sense-data."⁴

Here again we are invited to assume a special perspective on an object we are perceiving, with the result that the *natural* view that we are perceiving the object itself, or at least its surface, becomes strangely dislocated. Moore, who was famously cautious in his commitments, does not say that the sense-data so picked out must be mental in character. He remains neutral concerning their ontological status. For many philosophers, however, this dislocation of the natural view seems to lead inevitably to the adoption of the way of ideas.

What are we to say about the capacity that at least some people have (or seem to have) to adopt such a detached standpoint? Following Wittgenstein, we should first try to understand it.

"But when I imagine something, or even actually *see* objects, I have *got* something which my neighbor has not." I understand you. You want to look about you and say: "At any rate only I have got THIS."...But what is the thing you are speaking of? It is true I said that I knew within myself what you meant. But that meant that I knew how one thinks to conceive this object, to see it, to make one's looking and pointing mean it. I know how one stares ahead and looks about one in this case and the rest. I think we can say: you are talking (if, for example, you are sitting in a room) of the "visual room."⁵

I have deleted the sentences in which Wittgenstein begins his effort to dispel the natural attractiveness of this way of viewing the world in order to bring into prominence his recognition that this standpoint can seem deeply attractive. The way of ideas is, we might say, a permanently tempting starting point for doing philosophy. When combined with other arguments, for example, the argument from science, it can become almost irresistible.

We can, however, acknowledge the primitive appeal of the way of ideas without endorsing it as the only proper starting point for doing philosophy. The task is to understand it, and to this end we can attempt a modest phenomenology of mind, recording stages of ontological commitment as they unfold. There seem to be three stages, or degrees, of subjective commitment.

1. The first is the view that the *immediate* objects of experience exist nowhere except in

minds. This does not entail that all objects are mind-dependent. Representational realism is a position of this kind.

2. The second view is that it is an essential feature of the qualities that constitute objects that they can exist nowhere except in *some* mind. This claim, together with the further claim that we have no conception of qualities that are not mind-dependent, yields Berkeley's position.
3. The third view is that it is an essential feature of the qualities that constitute objects that they can exist only in *my* mind. Someone who holds this position could defend it by shadowing Berkeley's strategies, now directing them against Berkeley's position itself. The argument would look like this: Saying that these things that are essentially mine could exist outside of my mind is self-contradictory. Saying that some other kind of entity might exist that is essentially different from those entities I perceive as mine is unintelligible. This yields ontological solipsism or, as we might call it, ontological loneliness. A defender of ontological solipsism, again mimicking Berkeley's procedures, could go on to raise epistemological objections to Berkeley's position. As we saw, Berkeley's attempts to provide convincing arguments for the existence of entities other than his own mind and ideas in it were not, at least as far as he developed them, particularly persuasive. If that is right, then the solipsist's epistemological attacks on Berkeley will be on a par with Berkeley's epistemological attacks on representational realism.

It seems, then, that both ontological solipsism and epistemological solipsism are the fated outcomes awaiting anyone who adopts the subjective standpoint in an unreserved way. Wittgenstein sees this with complete clarity and, for this reason, is not embarrassed about taking solipsism seriously. For Wittgenstein, the stakes are high in dealing with solipsism, precisely because of the profound forces of subjectivity that drive us toward it. It is not enough to use solipsism as the grounds for brushing aside any theory that leads to it. For Wittgenstein, nothing short of a complete reorientation in our ways of doing philosophy will allow us to deal with solipsism satisfactorily. What has come to be known, unfortunately I think, as the *private language argument*, is a complex and subtle attempt to expose the illusions that seem to force a radically subjective standpoint upon us.⁶

Berkeley did not present himself as a solipsist, but I do think that he recognized its force. Indeed, I think that he would embrace the idea that a providential God is our sole protection against solipsistic loneliness. But even if Berkeley was not a solipsist, his position taps the same sources that fuel the drive toward it. Understanding Berkeley demands understanding these sources, a matter, as Wittgenstein saw, where glibness has no place.

Notes

1 The context of Berkeley's philosophy

1 This marvelous passage, which Ian Tipton called to my attention, reads as follows:

I am no more to be reckon'd stronger than Locke than a pigmy should be reckon'd stronger than a Gyant because he could throw of the Molehill [which] lay upon him, & the Gyant could [only] shake or shove the Mountain that oppresed him.

(PC 678)

2 John Leslie Mackie, *Problems from Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976, p. 71.

3 David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, L.A.Selby-Bigge and P.H.Nidditch (eds), 3rd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 153.

2 The structure of the *Principles of Human Knowledge*

1 I claim no originality in assigning a central role to intuition in Berkeley's development of his position. A.A.Luce does the same in his *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1945. There are some important differences in our treatment of this topic. Luce largely accepts Berkeley's appeals to intuition at face value, whereas I, while trying to understand their force, in the end, do not. The status of Berkeley's reliance on intuition is considered in the Epilogue of this work. But even if I do not share Luce's commitments to Berkeley's intuitive claims, I follow him in assigning them a central place in the development of Berkeley's position.

2 As a case in point, consider Roquentin's reflections on his hand in Sartre's *Nausea*:

I see my hand spread out on the table...It is lying on its back. It shows me its fat belly. It looks like an animal turned upside down. The fingers are the paws. I amuse myself by moving them rapidly, like the claws of a crab which has fallen on its back. The crab is dead: the claws draw up and close over the belly of my hand.

(*Nausea*, trans. Lloyd Alexander, New York: New Directions Publishing Company, 1964, pp. 98–9)

- 3 Berkeley's essay, *Passive Obedience*, reveals him as an idealist of the first kind; his failed attempts to establish a properly Christian university in the New World exhibit his utopian idealism.
- 4 Because of his attack on abstract ideas, Berkeley is sometimes called a *nominalist*. In one sense of this term, this label is perfectly reasonable. Nominalism, however, is a complex philosophical position taking many forms. Sorting all this out—explaining the ways in which Berkeley's position is like some versions of nominalism and the ways in which it is not—would be a very complex matter. Here we shall simply refer to Berkeley as a particularist, for particularism is central to Berkeley's attack upon abstract ideas.

3 The intuitive basis of Berkeley's idealism

- 1 A.D.Smith, "Berkeley's central argument against material substance," in *Essays on Berkeley: A Tercentennial Celebration*, John Foster and Howard Robinson (eds), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 37–58.
- 2 Smith attempts to capture Berkeley's central argument in these words:

Material substance is defined...as that in which (at least) *sensible* qualities inhere...But it is a commonplace from Descartes and others that such objects of perception or thought are *ideas*. Hence, by definition material substance is that in which ideas inhere...But to have ideas is to perceive or think. Therefore the very notion of *material* substance as unthinking substance is incoherent.

(*ibid.*, pp. 38–9)

This suggests that Berkeley's central argument—the argument he thought sufficient to establish his strong immaterialist conclusion in the opening sentence of Section 7—was aimed at the philosopher's conception of *material substance*. The text does not support this reading. The argument that Smith cites as Berkeley's central argument does not appear in these opening six sections; instead, it appears after he

has made his immaterialist proclamation. In fact, the opening six sections make no reference to material or corporeal substance. Later, Berkeley would argue that it is incoherent to hold that an idea can exist in a material substance, but in the opening seven sections of the *Principles* he is making a different and, to my mind, more fundamental claim than this.

3 For reasons we will examine later, Berkeley does not say that we have an *idea* of mental or spiritual substance.

4 Refuting competing positions

1 In contrast to the *Principles*, the *Dialogues* starts out with an inseparability argument, with Philonous asking Hylas whether he can separate the pain of intense heat from the intense heat itself. When Hylas acknowledges that he cannot, Philonous gets him to concede, although grudgingly, that the heat must have the same mental status that the pain has.

2 See *Dialogues* 1, pp. 187ff.

3 This example comes from Locke: *Essay* 2, 8, 16.

4 In a charming aside, Berkeley calls this a very precarious opinion, “since it is to suppose, without any reason at all, that God has created innumerable beings that are entirely useless, and serve to no manner of purpose.” The remark is hardly appropriate at this stage because Berkeley has yet to prove God’s existence. It is, however, appropriate as an *ad hominem* move, since most of the philosophers he targets for criticism were also theists.

5 Christopher Peacocke makes the point this way:

The limited argument I have been offering for Berkeley’s conclusions gives no support to his or any other form of idealism. If it is impossible consistently to imagine an unperceived material object, all that follows is that the possibility of unperceived material objects cannot be established by an appeal to what can be imagined. It would have to be established by some other route. (Christopher Peacocke, “Imagination, experience, and possibility: a Berkelian view defended,” in *Essays on Berkeley: A Tercentennial Celebration*, John Foster and Howard Robinson (eds), Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, pp. 20–35)

6 Essentially the same reading can be given to the following passage in the *Dialogues* 1, p. 200:

PHIL. ...But (to pass by all that hath been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if

you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.

HYL. If it comes to that, the point will soon be decided. What more easy than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I do at this present time conceive them existing after that manner.

PHIL. How say you, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

HYL. No, that were a contradiction.

PHIL. Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived?

HYL. It is.

It is important to see that Philonous's opening remark concerns sensible qualities and sensible objects, that is, immediate objects of perception. He is then asking whether it is possible for such things to exist without the mind. It is Berkeley's basic intuitive claim that they cannot. Here, as in the *Principles*, Berkeley expresses his willingness to have the entire issue rest on this matter. In response, Hylas (the dunderhead) says that nothing could be easier than to conceive of such a thing (i.e. a sensible quality) existing unperceived, and then, *quite rightly*, is led into a dialectical trap. This dialectical maneuver cannot establish Berkeley's idealist thesis—something Peacocke was right to point out. The difficulty with this passage is that Berkeley is not sufficiently clear about the content of the claim that Philonous makes in formulating his challenge. To reach the ultimate result he wants, it would not be sufficient to hold that it is an intuitive truth that the objects of immediate perception cannot exist unperceived. He needs the stronger claim that it is an essential quality of things we perceive that their qualities could not exist otherwise than as objects of perception. In the present context, he is not, perhaps, sufficiently clear about this.

5 Real things and other spirits

- 1 The continuation of this passage contains an interesting variation on what, in Chapter 3, I called Berkeley's fundamental intuitive insight. It is worth citing in its entirety.

For since [our ideas] and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived. But whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflection, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them. A little

attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do any thing, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of any thing: neither can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from section viii. Whence it plainly follows that extension, figure, and motion, cannot be the cause of our sensations. To say, therefore, that these are the effects of powers resulting from the configuration, number, motion, and size of corpuscles, must certainly be false.

2 David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* contains a tour de force of objections of this kind.

3 The argument here is similar in some ways to the "irregular" form of argument that Hume puts into Cleanthes' mouth in Part III of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

Consider, anatomize the eye; survey its structure and contrivance; and tell me, from your own feeling, if the idea of a contriver does not immediately flow in upon you with a force like that of sensation.

It is not altogether implausible to think that this passage is modeled on Berkeley's own *irregular* proof.

6 Objections from common sense

1 One way that Berkeley might deal with this problem is to hold that in perceiving a real thing, what we are perceiving is an idea in God's mind—that is, for a period of time, we literally share one of God's ideas. Since, as omniscient, all ideas are eternally in God's mind, on this account, the things we perceive would continue to exist even after we cease perceiving them. Malbranche held a view along these lines, but there is no indication that Berkeley ever did. In fact, in one place where Berkeley is explicitly contrasting his views with those of Malbranche, what he says clearly implies that he rejects the notion that we can be aware of ideas in God's mind:

It is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas, and that no idea can exist unless it be in a mind. Nor is it less plain that these ideas or things by me perceived, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of my mind, since I know myself not to be their author, it being out of my power to determine at pleasure, what particular ideas I shall be affected with upon opening my eyes or ears. They must therefore exist in some other mind,

whose will it is they should be exhibited to me.

(*Dialogues 2*, pp. 214–15)

7 Objections from science

- 1 I have no idea why Berkeley organized his material in this way. I will return to the eighth and ninth objections after examining his responses to the tenth and eleventh objections.
- 2 It would also be useful to relate these remarks to their historical antecedents: the persistent idea, going back at least to Augustine, that the world itself is properly understood as God's text. This, however, is not a theme developed explicitly in the *Principles*.
- 3 Berkeley, unlike Hume (at least on one common reading of Hume), does not *define* causality as a kind of regularity. For Berkeley, causal efficacy is an actual power possessed by the wills of spiritual beings. Hume, for his part, could find nothing corresponding to such a power even with respect to the will. (See Section 4 of Hume's *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.)
- 4 Saying that the name "Locke" occurs sixty-nine times in Berkeley's published writings indicates that these writings contain sixty-nine tokens of that word. The word "Locke," then, is the type of which these sixty-nine occurrences are tokens.

8 Abstract ideas and last-ditch objections

- 1 John Leslie Mackie, *Problems from Locke*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976. See Chapter 4.
- 2 W.V. Quine, *Word and Object*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960, pp. 90–5.
- 3 A parallel discussion of this topic occurs toward the end of Dialogue II where Hylas presses this objection with some force.

9 Advantages to science and mathematics

1 David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, 3rd edn, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975, p. 32.

2 Hume puts it this way: “If there be any suspicion, that the course of nature may change, and that the past may be no rule for the future, all experience becomes useless, and can give rise to no inference or conclusion” (ibid., p. 36).

3 St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, London: Blackfriars, 1964, Ia, 2, 3.

4 Frege puts it this way:

If I give someone a stone with the words: Find the weight of this, I have given him precisely the object he is to investigate. But if I place a pile of playing cards in his hands with the words: Find the Number of these, this does not tell him whether I wish to know the number of cards, or of complete packs of cards, or even say of honour cards.

(Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, trans. J.L. Austin, New York: Philosophical Library, 1950, p. 28)

5 Much of Berkeley’s discussion of numbers and mathematics in general is strikingly similar to views expressed by Ludwig Wittgenstein. For references, see the author’s *Wittgenstein*, 2nd edn, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987, Chapter 14.

6 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd edn, Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, 1958, p. 191.

7 Later in his career, Berkeley also offered searching mathematical criticisms of the Newtonian formulation of the notion of infinitesimals. For an excellent discussion of Berkeley on mathematics, see Douglas M. Jesseph, *Berkeley’s Philosophy of Mathematics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993.

8 See, for example, Berkeley’s *New Theory of Vision*, Section 54.

9 I have discussed this matter in some detail elsewhere. Here I will present a simplified version of what I said there. See Robert J. Fogelin, “Hume and Berkeley on the Proofs of Infinite Divisibility,” *Philosophical Review* 97, January 1988:47–69.

10 Advantages to philosophy

- 1 As the discussion in Chapter 5 certainly indicates, I have very strong reservations concerning Berkeley's proof of God's existence.
- 2 Berkeley's response to the dream argument seems modeled on Locke's. See *Essay* 4, 2, 14.

Epilogue

- 1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd edn, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978, p. 221, emphasis added.
- 2 Ibid., p. 222, emphasis added.
- 3 Leo Tolstoy, *Childhood, Boyhood, and Youth*, trans. Louise and Aylmer Maude, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 196–7.
- 4 G.E. Moore, "A defence of common sense," *Philosophical Papers*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1959, p. 54.
- 5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe, 3rd edn, Oxford: Basil Blackwell and Mott, 1958, No. 398.
- 6 The phrase "private language argument" is unfortunate because it suggests that somewhere in Wittgenstein's writings we will find a set of premises intended to establish the conclusion that a private language is not possible. That cannot be right, because it presupposes that we have a coherent understanding of what a private language is and simply have good reasons for thinking that none exists. In fact, Wittgenstein is attempting to show that we have no clear comprehension of what such a language could be. Here there is a striking parallelism with Berkeley's treatment of material substances. He is not arguing that the notion of material substances makes perfectly good sense, but that there just aren't any—perhaps because God had no need for creating them. His deepest view is that the notion of a material substance is simply incoherent.

Further reading

Collections of Berkeley's central works are available in inexpensive editions from a number of publishers. Unfortunately, they have a tendency to go out of print or be out of stock, but with a little effort it should be possible to find a suitable text containing both Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge* and his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*.

Berkeley's position, perhaps because of its radical character, has been both interpreted and evaluated in very different ways. Since it did not seem appropriate in a work of this kind, I have not commented on various competing treatments of Berkeley's philosophy. The following works are representative examples of contrasting ways in which Berkeley's philosophy has been treated by several leading commentators.

Bennett, J.F. (1971) *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Dancy, J. (1987) *Berkeley: An Introduction*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Grayling, A.C. (1986) *Berkeley: The Central Arguments*, La Salle, IL: Open Court.

Luce, A.A. (1945) *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Pitcher, G. (1977) *Berkeley*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Winkler, K.P. (1989) *Berkeley: An Interpretation*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

The following are two useful collections of contemporary essays on Berkeley's philosophy. The second work contains an extensive bibliography of Berkeley scholarship. Foster, R.M. and Robinson, H. (eds) (1985) *Essays on Berkeley*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Sosa, E. (ed.) (1987) *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, Dordrecht: Reidel.

For a detailed treatment of Berkeley's philosophy of mathematics and its relationship to his general philosophy, see:

Jesseph, D.M. (1993) *Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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