

## *The Bishop Berkeley Endowment*

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*A.* The shortest chapter in accounts of the history of philosophy in the eighteenth century is usually the one on George Berkeley. Often he is a slender strange interlude, a small philosopher in spite of his genius, like a low ridge slipped in between the high modern inventions of the great century of philosophy before him and the long run of modern thought that began three-quarters of a century after his most important work and ran continuously into our own day. Descartes, Leibniz and Locke behind him, Hume, Kant, and Hegel ahead, his doctrine of immaterialism seems like an island on a misty sky or a dream, a somewhat absurd deviation from the proper transit of progress in empiricism or, for the more metaphysically inclined, a halt in a procession through the vaulted cathedral of world-views and system-sized philosophy. It's a shard among systems. The number of books on the history of subjects he was concerned with that do not mention him quite staggers one. At the same time his aura of enclosure and of brevity attracts people, as islands do. His chief works are short, barely more than pamphlets. He is terse, plain, confident, and focused to an uncommon degree. Readers like these qualities because, in part, Berkeley's style induces them to a sense of mastery of his material. One feels one's interest is well cared for and one's attention well rewarded upon reading Berkeley at his best. He has the pointed manner of a vigorous advocate, like an attorney whom the members of a jury want to like.

Beside his style, his subject is a substantial cause of attraction. Berkeley butts heads with the reader from the very first. I can think of no other work of philosophy that begins immediately with a categorical denial of a concept virtually every reader holds as a basic part of his or view of the world. Berkeley not only throws this at the reader but proceeds without taking a breath to try to demolish every possible reason for believing otherwise. It does not matter whether one says that Berkeley is denying common sense or affirming it under different names, or whether his issue is one of language or of substance. Modern commentators on Berkeley have devoted tremendous efforts to discerning between these sorts of paired choices, but for the moment let it suffice to say that Berkeley upends a concept that most everyone believes in, the existence of matter. This contentiousness is unique, especially because the personality his prose reveals is otherwise simple and conventional, phenomenally intelligent yet frank and conversational. He is not an obvious exotic, like Nietzsche or Kierkegaard, or a pushy rebel, or a bore, nor does he hide his profundity in technical jargon. Socrates far more gently circled his prey before he pounced. Berkeley doesn't really attract attention to himself, but from the very first he rushes like a bull against the most basic common sense. Because of this confrontation, and in spite of it, readers who are interested in philosophical ideas are drawn to Berkeley.

The first impression of his philosophy is like that of a smooth, round, palm-sized pebble. It seems something one can hold, handle, and contain. Upon closer inspection, the matter turns out to be not so smooth and uniform as it first appeared to be. Berkeley himself found this out, because he spent the rest of his life as a philosopher coping with the brilliant idea he first laid down at the age of twenty-five. The course of this effort took him from being the sort of philosopher Locke called an "underlabourer," as Locke saw himself to be, inspecting the foundations of cognition, to becoming in his last work what we may name an "overlabourer": a philosopher clambering onto the heights of metaphysics, cosmic harmony, and eternal forms. Another way to look at this is to see in him, as one commentator has,<sup>1</sup> a combination of what Foucault named the Renaissance *episteme* and the classical *episteme*—that is, that Berkeley was situated between the great systems of cosmic harmony, established in the Renaissance and Baroque eras by men with deep learning, both pagan and Christian, and with profound

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Dancy, *Berkeley: an introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), pp. 122-3.

metaphysical imaginations, and the taxonomic drive from the Enlightenment onward to distinguish the concrete parts of reality in their working relationships to one another. I contend that we ought to see Berkeley not so much as having portions of both but as a philosopher who, having seen some of the most profound existential questions through to the limits of his person and of his age, tried to use the one and then the other to resolve his disturbing vision. Though he has been seen largely in the intricate labyrinth of epistemology, I suggest that Berkeley, whether underlabouring and overlabouring, when trying to reach forward past materialist empiricism and then again when having at last to fall back toward a macrocosmic vision, was fundamentally responding not to cognitive puzzles or linguistic traps but to a real and enduring question.

The core idea is presented in the first 33 paragraphs of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* in the first edition of 1710, the first work of philosophy Berkeley published.<sup>2</sup> This famous argument against the existence of matter is prefaced by groundwork and succeeded in the balance of the work by defense against objections; it is further closely linked to Berkeley's novel optical ideas presented in his sole preceding published work, and it was expanded, defended, and altered in the longer work that followed in three years; again, he trained this idea in the several works on Christian apologetics, physics, social thought, and cosmology that comprise the rest of his systematic work, as well as in sermons and letters throughout his life. The man was but one mind writing all his words so that every one of them must be connected, but that the 33 paragraphs with which part one of the *Principles* begins are the sun around which the rest revolves is true for Berkeley and for his influence on others. That text is his

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<sup>2</sup> In this essay I shall use the following abbreviation in citations from Berkeley's texts, followed by his section or paragraph numbers, except as noted below: "C" for the so-called *Philosophical Commentaries* (written in 1707-09 but first published in 1879 as *The Commonplace Book*), "V" for *New Theory of Vision* (1709), "P" for *Principles of Human Knowledge* (of which part one is the only published part, 1710) "Pi" for the "Introduction" to the *Principles*, "D" for *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), "M" for *De Motu* (1720), "G" for essays published in *The Guardian*, "A" for *Alciphron*, "Q" for *The Querist* (1735-1737), "O" for *On Passive Obedience*, and "S" for *Siris* (1744).

Berkeley did not provide section numbers for the *Dialogues*. Because citation by page varies with edition, I have invented the following system for citations: each pair of speeches is numbered from the beginning of each dialogue; thus 1.32 refers to the 32<sup>nd</sup> speech of Philonous and the 32<sup>nd</sup> speech of Hylas immediately following it. In the first and third dialogues, the first speaker is Philonous, in the second it is Hylas. Also citations are pairs of speeches except the finale of the third dialogue, which is Philonous alone.

Berkeley's papers for *The Guardian* are cited by their numbers as issues of that journal.

bottom, root, soul, nub, and kernel; it is his elixir, tincture, oil, essence, his philosopher's stone, his panacea, his *tar-water*.

I call this idea, the idea of the first 33 paragraphs of the *Principles*, his *endowment*. His struggle with it did indeed lead him to final speculations<sup>3</sup> that there could be panacea for disease. In so far as the theory embodied in this endowment was a response to a perennial issue of human existence, it may be said not only to have endowed Berkeley's intellectual career but also the course of subjectivist thought in the succeeding centuries. If, on the other hand, one examines this thought solely with the aim of analyzing its structure in terms of the history of science, and with the purpose of solving and dissolving the linguistic game it plays, it is then necessary to view Berkeley, and all the philosophers of traditional metaphysics and ontology when seen in this light, as mistaking what they were about. The analytic approach says: you think you have a genuine problem, but you actually have a superfluous and illusory hobby. Yet how is it that one cannot credit the people of other times, such mere humans as philosophers, with not recognizing human problems for what they are, just as mere humans do today? Dissolve our misunderstanding of their human problems, rather than look at these philosophers as if they so far misunderstood themselves as to tackle pseudo-problems rather than real ones. For example, there is not a single page in Hobbes' *Leviathan* that lacks exemplary and compelling relevance to public issues today—including what might casually be deemed anachronism, the infamous chapter 42 of the third part, a battering-ram of more than 100 pages against theocracy. Theocracy has not ceased to be a problem. Berkeley gives us a vigorous, narrowly focused 33-paragraph argument based upon contemporary discussions of perception and sensory qualities. The fact this strange argument is so agitating, so hard to look away from, is a clue to the profundity of the ulterior issue.

The argument against the existence of matter was the foundation of Berkeley's reputation. Rightly or wrongly, he was identified with this theory and the theory identified as bizarre and absurd, crank work and joke material of the first order. As study of his early reception has shown,<sup>4</sup> the first several reviews

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<sup>3</sup> In his *Siris*.

<sup>4</sup> Harry M. Bracken, *The early reception of Berkeley's immaterialism 1710-1733* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1963), p. 84.

rapidly froze Berkeley into this caricature. At the end of his life this image was expanded to include that of eccentric mystic by his *Siris*, his most popular work among readers and restauranters but his least popular among philosophers. In the early period, he became identified with anti-materialism, whether as caricature or as salable hypothesis. Berkeley expanded his views in print three years after their first appearance, but otherwise he discussed them only in private. In the period following these works he moved to London and became involved in social, literary, and ultimately public projects, for which he trod a careful path to avoid being trapped by mockery of his beliefs. Some of the jokes were friendly, and others were prejudices that crippled his career in the Church of England for a while. Also, Berkeley was sometimes suspected of Jacobite tendencies. When he came to America, Berkeley worked a careful neutral path between theological factions. He never visited Yale, nor went to Boston except upon coming to Massachusetts and leaving it, when he at last saw Harvard. The likely reason for this was that he did not wish to appear committed to one side or the other in the squabbles between the liberal wing of his church at Harvard and the conservative wing in New Haven. He lived in midway between the two, outside Newport, which he noted was distinguished for the variety of the religious faiths that peaceably lived together there.

The story of Berkeley's influence in America is well known, and recent study has shown yet greater reach to his incidental influence in early American art.<sup>5</sup> The most famous part is the property and money he gave to Yale College in its early decades: these produced the first endowed scholarship in America, as well as the first endowed library fund and the first endowed professorship.<sup>6</sup> He also gave books to Yale, as he did to Harvard. In this connection I ought to add, in what journalists call "full disclosure," that I benefitted from the Berkeley endowment in several of my connections with Yale. His connection with the culture of New England began by accident or mistake, due to his decision, for reasons not fully understood, to take his party not to Bermuda, where he planned to build a college,

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<sup>5</sup> See Richard Saunders, *John Smibert: Colonial America's First Portrait Painter* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1995), pp. 61ff., esp. pp. 67-69 (and on Berkeley and Smibert pp. 27 and 55-60, .

<sup>6</sup> these facts are recorded in various Yale sources, beginning with the interesting but neglected *The Two-Hundredth Birthday of Bishop George Berkeley, a discourse given at Yale College on the 12<sup>th</sup> of March 1885* (New York: Scribner's, 1885) by Noah Porter, then president of Yale, pp. 82-83.

but to Virginia and northward. Likewise, the Bishop Berkeley endowment in philosophy was in some sense accidental. He created a problematic that he could hardly see the consequences of. Other parts of it were being put into place in other corners of Europe and America by persons quite unknown to him. For myself, I find in Berkeley the singular beginning of a line of thought that has come to be the center problem of my view of ethics and philosophy. I cannot say how well my interpretation fits the many lights cast upon all Berkeley's work by other commentators and the questions that they raise, because I do not see the problem at the heart of his work in quite the same way as other commentators do, although most of the points upon which I dwell have struck others students as well. Therefore there are speculative elements in my remarks with regard to Berkeley's development—that is, elements I cannot prove by full study of his texts—and with regard to his influence in the history of philosophy after Berkeley, and with regard to my own work. The reader will therefore find speculative argument amidst historical claims in what follows.

**B.** The theory given such a troubled and eventful life by the young Berkeley, a “young philosophical dictator, confident, independent, scornful of mathematicians, skeptical of traditional philosophy,”<sup>7</sup> moves in two phases, critical in the first and constructive in the second.

Berkeley draws our attention to “the objects of knowledge.”<sup>8</sup> He calls these “ideas.”<sup>9</sup> Some say that by “ideas” he meant a supposedly standard eighteenth-century notion of images, and others say he meant the sensible impressions of perception. Berkeley's use of “idea” is motile even within the first few paragraphs of this argument and certainly throughout his works. I propose that we work backward, from specific theories of ideas to his initial simple statement that they are “objects of knowledge.” Thus they include thoughts and passions, even though he sometimes informally lists such notions as a separate entry,<sup>10</sup> because it is one of

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<sup>7</sup> John O. Wisdom, *The unconscious origin of Berkeley's philosophy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953), p. 39.

<sup>8</sup> P.1.

<sup>9</sup> P.2.

<sup>10</sup> P.3.

his chief principles that complex ideas we endogenously give rise to are metaphysically no different from ideas that we have of the simplest sense impressions. However, his handling of this seems to have changed in later years, but because he for the purposes of this initial argument ideas are the contents of our minds. Berkeley was keen enough to know that “passions” are not rigidly distinct from “pictures” nor any of these from “reasons” in the human mind, for it is one of his basic principles that names are insufficient to the complexities of reality. Not even children can “prate together of their sugar-plums and rattles” without confusing general qualities, categories, and names.<sup>11</sup> Everyone will admit, he says,<sup>12</sup> that ideas, in this sense, cannot exist outside of or apart from our minds, since they are the contents of our minds.

But can ideas be anything other than the contents of our minds? Berkeley says that they cannot: “their *being* is to be perceived or known.”<sup>13</sup> They do not represent other things; they just exist as known and we can know nothing other than as a content in our mind. Therefore no form of anything is knowable by us other than as our ideas. From this exclusion of anything other than the ideational, whether as part, form, or phase, Berkeley makes his famous case no substrate to our sensory impressions exists. We normally call this substrate by the name “matter”: Berkeley denied it, denied the existence of matter, so that here, in this brief word, is the terrific conflict he engaged.

Consider for example a thick but opaque paper bag with a thick block of wood inside it. When we see and touch the paper bag (as well as hear it in motion and smell it and its contents) we gather all the sensibilia of the color, shape, size, density, orientation, sound, and smell, and taste if you wish, of the paper bag as shaped by the block of wood inside it. But as we have no sensory impression of the block of wood, we have no idea of the block of wood; and because we have no idea of it we have no knowledge of it. Furthermore, its existence is so completely epiphenomenal to our experience of the paper bag that it might as well not exist, nor might we rationally give a fig whether it exists or not. There is then no reason to think that it exists, unless and until it is pulled from the bag and presented to our

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<sup>11</sup> Pi.14.

<sup>12</sup> P.3.

<sup>13</sup> P.6.

sensorium. “In short, if there were external bodies, it is impossible we should ever come to know it; and if there were not we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now.”<sup>14</sup>

People commonly think of themselves and mankind as depending on reality. For example, beings with bodies like ours have to go under shelter when hail falls. When we want to effect an action in the external world, we depend on some parts of it having an equal and opposite reaction to other parts of it. Each person knows that he must contend with the actions of other persons and depend upon their characters both good and bad. In general we are inquirers into nature, attempting to enter into it by knowledge, from which we try to find some measure of control over reality or to accept our weaknesses by understanding the circumstances of its power. With some regularity persons come to think that the fact that they cannot have knowledge except as a subject means that the world exists for or within themselves in some virtuous way, from which extends a power from within over exteriority. Commonly we struggle to understand what is truly of our invention and what is not. We commonly confound this endeavor with another endeavor, that of trying to know what is true and what is false. These endeavors stem from the nature of dependency of the weaker on the stronger. Therefore one tends to put great store on the degrees to which reality is independent of our minds and to which it is dependent on our minds. Questions like these are raised as discontents and struggles when Berkeley says that reality is dependent on the mind. He is at pains to say that this does not mean we control reality or indeed that our common view of our struggle with nature is wrong. Both he and his commentators tend to see-saw between upending and affirming common sense in this regard. But in pointing out a sense in which reality is mind-dependent—this being that everything we think goes on “inside our heads”—Berkeley agitates a nervous response. Where does this stop, and what does it mean?

When he shows that reality is mind-dependent in an obvious and ordinary way, the question is moved, by other parts of our common and ordinary experience, to the meaning of the word “dependent.” The question becomes one of the force of this concept. If it meant that everything we think goes on inside our heads, there would be little in it to detain anyone. Berkeley made a more startling

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<sup>14</sup> P.20.

claim, for he argued that this situation we call dependence is necessary to existence. What is dependent on our minds does not exist at all without them. According to Berkeley's argument so far, being known to us is the necessary and sufficient condition of existence. Now, existence in this sense can be either ideal or real, as being known to us might or might not be the only condition of existence, in addition to be necessary and sufficient. It certainly is non-material, or immaterial, the word "matter" and the concept of a substrate that it represents being taken as a superfluity to existence. One must call the real that which the critical part of the endowment argument has left standing, the whole body of our ideation. As a practical matter, it can make little difference, as anyone can see, unless it were an utter absurdity. But it is not absurd to say that we are the subjects of all knowledge.

The significance of Berkeley's argument against abstract ideas becomes apparent here. He made this argument in the 25 paragraphs of the preface to the *Principles*, immediately preceding what I have called the endowment argument; and he made it in quite a different form in the brief treatise on vision with which he announced himself to the world. In the terms I have been using, Berkeley attacks as "abstract ideas" those concepts superfluous to the necessary and sufficient conditions of existence. Such concepts may be, and are, important in our ratiocinative struggle to organize experience and to predict its course. But Berkeley firmly argues that such concepts tell us nothing about the actual relationship of human beings and the universe. The necessity of our minds to existence, and the necessary dependence of existence on our minds, is worth our attention because it is a truth about our position in universe. Next to the value to be taken from understanding this truth, it matters little what one calls things or how one organizes them by names or laws, categories, faculties of understanding, or qualities. A great deal more can be said about how Berkeley views general ideas and their role in the enlargement and communication of knowledge.<sup>15</sup> But for fundamental philosophy they are distractions from a potent truth. This point is essential to Berkeley's philosophy.

Berkeley took his stand on the terms and logic of the world of philosophy he knew. He begins as an underlabourer, by slogging it out in terms of perception, substances, and qualities. In the *New Theory of Vision* he began at an even more

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<sup>15</sup> Pi.15-20.

basic level of physical science. But he clearly insists that what is at stake is not the reader's power of "forming ideas in your mind." Rather what is at stake is that the reader must understand his ineluctable and determinate subjection to his own place in the universe. For it is, he says, "a manifest repugnancy" to think that "you can conceive it possible the objects of your thought may exist without your mind."<sup>16</sup> In this passage he emphatically uses a second-person address to the reader: for *you*, for the human person, it is necessary to avoid "abstract ideas" because they distort your knowledge. Your knowledge has real effect upon you; things exist as being known by you; and therefore a distortion of your knowledge is a distortion of your relation to the universe. The fundamental problem with abstract ideas, in Berkeley's view, is that they are personally neutral. They proceed as if persons were not necessary to existence. History has shown that their impersonality of induction has been its strength and its weakness in terms of its role in human life. In this sense, Berkeley objects to abstract ideas insofar as they are morally neutral.

Were his objection strictly "scientific," were it merely and fully from inside of a theory of knowledge, Berkeley could not have proceeded to make his argument, because this argument is that persons, in their role as the subjects of cognition, are ineluctable from any valid concept of existence. Even had he avoided contradiction in this regard, there would lack a reason for Berkeley's discussion as it would be nothing but contending over terms. Why say: what everyone thinks is common sense is not common sense; this here, the opposite, is the common sense everyone holds to?

The place of Berkeley's religious belief in his philosophy, although always given a nod,<sup>17</sup> is inadequately esteemed. Usually religion in the early work is

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<sup>16</sup> P.23.

<sup>17</sup> For example, J. O. Urmson, *Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 63: "The notion of a very powerful mind that must be responsible for world-order is deeply embedded in Berkeley's views and it cannot be excised as a mere religious excrescence arbitrarily added by a future bishop." Urmson is quite right, yet discussion of this "embedded" notion has rarely strayed beyond regarding it as an "intuition" by Berkeley. This was the term used in 1919 by Benno Erdmann in an early article on the *Commentaries*. A statement from just two years before this writing goes little further by calling Berkeley's religious beliefs "fundamental or prior to his philosophical explanations of the meaning of the terms and propositions in question" in his work (Roomet Jakapi, "Christian Mysteries and Berkeley's alleged non-cognitivism," in Stephen Daniels, ed., *Reexamining Berkeley's Philosophy* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 192.). This also, while quite true, says very little, as "fundamental" and "prior" are different relationships, more like characterizations than explanations.

brought up in the context of the second, or constructive, part of the endowment argument, which concerns God. It appears often as a critical remark on the consequences of this belief for a sustainable construction of scientific knowledge within immaterialism.<sup>18</sup> Yet most of those who have written about Berkeley in the large wave of Berkeley studies over the last half-century have not placed a Christian belief into the philosophical structure. Usually, the endowment argument is seen as his objection to corpuscular or atomistic materialism, or to scepticism, or to deism, or to the “Nihilarians”<sup>19</sup>—a funnier and better name for nihilists, invented by Berkeley in his early notebooks.

These were among Berkeley’s targets, so these claims are true, so far as they go. But the goal of the critical phase of his argument is its constructive phase, his idea of God.<sup>20</sup> Note that Berkeley attacked matter both as the hard solid concrete thing we ordinarily understand it to be and as an abstractly conceptualized view of reality. Both its commonsense particularity and commonsense universality are under attack as modes of knowledge. What then was the fundamental purpose of this eccentric point of view? If he wished simply to attack materialism, he would have employed just one part of his anti-materialist argument. If he wished solely to attack scepticism as to knowledge of trans-empirical things, he would have used another part. His purpose was not to signify discontent, however thorough, with the course of epistemology or of rationalist science, any more than it was to wave the flag of religion, like a bad actor who signify but not show a feeling. He had a positive and constructive point to make. As to this, his deepest concern, George Berkeley has left us an *unequivocal* statement. Firstly, that

...the most adorable instance of the Divine Goodness and that which claims our utmost love and reverence is the deep and mysterious counsel of God for the salvation of mankind, without which all our other advantages must soon have ended in misery and death. What would it avail us, if our temporal concerns were provided for, our eternal welfare had been

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<sup>18</sup> C. D. Broad, *Berkeley’s Argument About Material Substance* (New York: Haskell House, 1975), is not incorrect in saying “If Berkeley were right, theoretical physics would be the psychology of God’s conative dispositions” (p. 20). Cf. Urmson, *op. cit.*, pp. 50 and 53: “Thus we find Berkeley giving a completely positivistic analytic science, while maintaining a theistic explanation at a metaphysical level.”

<sup>19</sup> C.372.

<sup>20</sup> P.26-33, also 75-84 and 146-156.

neglected; if while our bodies were cherished with the good things of this life, our souls had been left a prey to our own passions and vices and the necessary woes entailed upon them?

Secondly, that

The depraved condition of humane nature ever since the fall of our first parents is no secret...to us who are taught in Divine Authority that the understanding of man was obscure, his will perverse, and his passions irregular; in a word that our nature was debased and corrupted as having lost that rectitude and perfection, that purity and spotless innocence which it may be supposed to have had upon its coming new-made from the hands of its Creator.

And thirdly, that

...God from the beginning designed to select out of the corrupt mass of mankind a peculiar people to himself sanctified and distinguished.... This society of peculiar persons who in all ages preserved a knowledge of the true God...is called the church.<sup>21</sup>

These lines are from the last sermon Berkeley delivered in America, at King's Chapel in Boston, on September 12, 1731, while he awaited his ship's passage home to England, having left behind his house, Whitehall, in Rhode Island. He had spent the preceding years there in what seems to have been the most sustained and mature contemplative studies of his life. He was at that time neither young and fiery nor old and eccentric. He was detached from the place of his education, family, and society. He was no longer an academic and not yet a bishop. He had free time, because circumstances had stalled him on his way to the start of what would likely have been a life-long project, his college in Bermuda. We are told that he spent a lot of time in nature, at the shore or in the woods. We know that he collected books on philosophy, theology, and science. And he wrote his single longest work in this period. It is a work of Christian apologetics, the *Alciphron*.

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<sup>21</sup> John D. Wild, in his *George Berkeley* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1936) was the first to print texts and details of the two ms. versions of this sermon, pp. 505-520.

In these passages from the sermon, I have ellipsed a number of phrases describing or alluding to points of theology. It is not my purpose here to study Berkeley's Christianity, but I do not believe that the details of his apologetics will contradict my assertions. My object is his general philosophy and its implications for ontology and ethics. These passages from his sermon raise a number of further-flung questions within philosophy alone, such as the status of concepts we humanly invent to explain the universe and the issue of corruption and purity in our cognitive activity.<sup>22</sup>

These passages show that the chief aim of Berkeley's early concept of knowledge was our knowledge of God, toward the purpose of salvation.<sup>23</sup> He wanted to be sure that people knew how to know God, whilst knowing all the other sorts of things they must or do know. One is hard-pressed to think of any other ordained minister, outside of the medieval Catholic Church, who was a great philosopher, especially among Protestants, so that it is a natural matter for historians or analysts of philosophy to incompletely connect the purposes of Berkeley's religion to the his ideas of knowledge and of being. One is better advised to make his view of God the subject of the first chapter of a monograph on Berkeley rather than the subject of the fifth or sixth or final chapter. However it must be said that the standard approach from the low end toward the top is Berkeley's own, working up from sensation toward translunary things in the endowment argument of the *Principles*, in the whole work, in the expansive explanation of it he published as the *Three Dialogues*, and over the course of his career, moving from "underlabourer" to "overlabourer." This is the ordinary line of "the great chain of being." Nonetheless, this does not excuse modern commentators from treating his idea of God as detachable equipment, invented and shoved into place in order to make the jalopy run.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> I return to these issues in sections E and F.

<sup>23</sup> Berkeley developed his theology in the long apologetic work, *Alciphron*, that he wrote during his stay in New England. His changing views of metaphysics, language, and vision, which here and later in this essay I treat in their early form, were part of the development of his theology. The conjunction of these is discussed by David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 134-166 *et passim*.

<sup>24</sup> Luce, in *Dialectic of Immaterialism: An Account of the Making of Berkeley's Principles* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), pp. 189ff., also points to the mistake of viewing Berkeley's God as an artefact used to solve a problem rather than a "near and obvious truth," but his discussion is part of his effort to prove Berkeley a realist rather than an idealist. I don't think there's much point to that battle; but notwithstanding this, a realist obvious God seems to me to miss the profundity of Berkeley's idea of God as truth.

In light of these statements from the 1731 sermon, let us look at Berkeley's description of God in its simplest form, the first little dot, as it were, in the center of expanding circles of discussion throughout his works.

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.... the ideas imprinted on them (my senses) are not creatures of my will. There is therefore some *other* Will or Spirit that produces them.<sup>25</sup>

Everything that exists is the production of this other Will or Spirit. All our knowledge, too, is its production. It, which is God, is now necessary to existence, as well as our minds. But if existence is dependent on our mental cognition of it, then our knowing is dependent on God's production of our knowledge. In fact, Berkeley argues that what we know, and all that we know, is the knowledge God gives us. The dependence of reality on our mind is the product of God's will. The constitution of existence in being known means that the knower and the known are one reality, the parts of which intimately communicate. There is no reality atop which this sits. Amidst its diverse uses all knowledge has in common one thing: it is knowledge of God's productive work. As he indicates throughout the sermon, to the extent that our knowledge is clear of misconception, being neither "blurred [nor] defaced,"<sup>26</sup> it is knowledge of God. In this light we can see that the claim of Berkeley's constructive endowment argument is that all knowledge is thoroughly knowledge of God. All our knowing is the existence of ideas "the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author."<sup>27</sup> Knowledge is an "evident display"<sup>28</sup> of "real things", which are real because they have been "excited," or produced, or created, by God.<sup>29</sup>

The actual content of our knowledge is God. It may serve as evidence of God's power and his goodness. Nothing we know or have or do makes any sense,

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<sup>25</sup> P.29.

<sup>26</sup> Wild, *op. cit.*, p. 515.

<sup>27</sup> P.31.

<sup>28</sup> P.32.

<sup>29</sup> P.33.

or would be of any avail, if it were concerned with mere dead matter or dead abstractions. Its value lies in the one thing most valuable to us, for which God has provided in and through every single real thing. Thus, Berkeley's deepest claim in the beginning of his thought is that each and every one of our ideas is a truth from within "the deep and mysterious counsel" of God's work of creating these ideas us, and just for us, since without us they are as void as we are unsaved without them. All those who do see God in the simple full ordinary reality which we can readily know are among the "society of peculiar people" who have "a knowledge of the true God." Berkeley's purpose in clearing away those concepts that are neutral as to persons, such as material substrate and abstract relations, is to leave only that which comprehends created persons and the creator God in one creation.

There are a number of working parts of the endowment argument that I have not gone into, such as the principle of like knowing only what is like and the specific functions of divine mind in sustaining reality while human attention wanders. Berkeley had not only to construct a technical argument with these and other issues, but he also had a positive purpose, based on his religious belief, to prove that in everything we know we can know God, without the intervention of complex notions, without the mediation of chains of proof, and without thinking the work of spirit to be intangible or distant. Each person, being the knowing subject, has unfettered and unrestricted access to a full knowledge of God. This will lead us to looking at what questions this helped to unleash in philosophy as it slowly turned to face the human person as subject.

His concern was not only with the way science explained the world but also with the way religion in light of science must explain the world. We get a good example of what I suppose he considered the wrong way to explain God in an account of the stupidities of nineteenth-century classical schooling. Jean Vallès, in *The Child*, the first of his three memoirs, describes how he was taught about God at a school in a small French town around 1840. One day the families of the pupils are present at a display of philosophical argument:

The philosophy teacher—Monsieur Beliben: short, slight, with a pint-sized head, and a thready, vinegary voice.

He was very fond of proving the existence of God, but if anyone tried to interject a comment, even in support, he'd indicate that he objected to

being interrupted; he needed the whole table, just like a game of patience.

He proved the existence of God with little bits of wood and a few beans.

“Here we place a bean so! And there a match. Do you have a match, Madame Vingtras? And now I’ve set out man’s vices here and his virtues there, I come to the “Properties Of The Soul.”

Often at this stage people who weren’t in the know looked toward the door to see if anyone was coming in. Or they looked at his pocket to see if he was going to pull something out. The properties of the soul! This was the upper crust, real high-quality stuff. My mother was flattered.

“Here they come!”

In spite of ourselves we still kept turning our heads to welcome these distinguished people, but Beliben took you by your overcoat button and rapped impatiently on the table. Hang it all! Did they or didn’t they want to prove the existence of God?

“It’s all the same to me, what about you?” my uncle would say to the man sitting beside him, who replied “Shush!” and craned his neck for a better view.

My uncle nonchalantly put his hands in his pockets and gazed into space.

But the teacher with his God was keen to have my uncle on his side and brought him down to earth by playing on his vanity and appealing to his professional pride.

“You’re a joiner, Chadenas, and you know how, with the help of your calipers....”

We had to sit it out to the bitter end until finally the little man pushed back his chair, stretched out his hand, and pointed to one corner of the table: “That’s God THERE.”

We were still watching, with everyone crowding around to see the beans together in one corner, with the matches, the bits of cork, and various other bits and pieces of rubbish that he’d used for his demonstration of the SUPREME BEING.

Apparently all the virtues and vices and *properties of the soul* had finished up, in-ev-I-ta-bly, in the last heap. Every bean was present and correct. Therefore GOD EXISTS. QED.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Jean Vallès, trans. Douglas Parmèe, *The Child* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2005), pp. 29-30.

This is a comic example of traditional ontology-spiced metaphysics that Kant is meant to have done away with. Indeed he did, although its persistence is no surprise. Berkeley did away with it too, in an entirely different way. One can measure the distance he put between himself and it by this story. If the universe according to the Bishop is an inward reality, or if one must view it as a two-dimensional flatland, the transparent impenetrable wall encasing it is God. As Berkeley has it, our noses are smack flat up against God at all times.<sup>31</sup>

He accomplishes this by invalidating any kind of machinery operated by God in governing the universe. This means mathematical and physical laws, because he objects to hypostasizing what we call laws of nature as actual efficient entities or forces. He doesn't merely say that "sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind or spirit."<sup>32</sup> He does more than zero-out matter—and logic, mathematics, and the laws of nature along with it, although he returns these in fresh dress. He gives an actual content to the immaterial universe, a content devoid of levers, cranks, gears, and cams because it is spirit and not matter.

For instance, I never use an instrument to move my finger, because it is done by a volition.... How then can you suppose than an all-perfect Spirit, on whose will all things have an absolute and immediate dependence, should need an instrument in his operations, or, not needing it, make use of it?<sup>33</sup>

He does in fact call God's governance a "secret mechanism."<sup>34</sup> This means nothing other than that truth about existence which is that if anything is to exist it is "necessarily perceived by an infinite mind."<sup>35</sup> The "mechanism" is the "Mind (which) affects me at every moment with all the sensible impressions I receive."<sup>36</sup>

The only alternative to materialism that Berkeley thought possible was a non-material existence in which human beings are at all times affected by God and

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<sup>31</sup> Broad, *op. cit.*, p. 4, speaking as a sceptic has no word for this but "telepathy."

<sup>32</sup> D.2.16.

<sup>33</sup> D.2.40-41.

<sup>34</sup> D.2.14.

<sup>35</sup> D.2.18.

<sup>36</sup> D.2.22.

are in every thought and in every perception under his influence. Everything we experience presents him directly to us, right into the inside of our minds and hearts. In this manner Berkeley has stepped over traditional ontology and did so without the least grain of scepticism. This becomes clearer when we mark advance, as I have in the texts just quoted, from the core of the *Principles* to the their expansion in the *Dialogues*. He becomes more willing to reveal his ground affirmatively and has less need to combat on the pitch marked out by others. The correct understanding of his anti-materialist argument is not to be found in fitting around it the frames of idealism, realism, phenomenism, sensibilism, spiritism, or even “angelism.” It is found in his seeking a pure knowledge of God with which each person is at any moment enabled to be among the “society of peculiar persons” who know God. Later in this essay, I will return to the significance of the division between the “sanctified” and the “debased and corrupted.”<sup>37</sup>

At this point, Berkeley has seen straight through the challenge presented by materialism to the furthest point. He must completely dessicate it. There can be no second-class soul, no half-measure strutted out on the footing either of reason or of irreason, neither rationalist nor mystical. Once matter is flaked away, and once empirical observation is freed from rationalist explanation, humans are left alone with God. Their knowledge, and the minds that know their knowledge, and the spirits that run the minds are the will of God. Whether we are aware of it or not, the laws of nature and everything else we think are nothing but the “admirable connexion” or “secret mechanism,” by which existence is “excited,” “produced,” and sustained. Having seen the end to which mechanistic materialism will lead and the powerful reasoning force pulling it, Berkeley tried to overcome it by a quick trick. He thought of it very early and very quickly. Yet now Berkeley, in order to save men from a dead, abstract, and material universe, has brought man into indefeasible encounter with a power far more momentous than the laws of our reason, the greatest imaginable power, the Creation itself.

**C.** Berkeley arrived at the meeting of God and man in the peroration to the *Principles*, saying that everything we “anywise perceive by sense” is a “manifest token of Divinity...a sign or effect of the power of God.”<sup>38</sup> He devotes a

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<sup>37</sup> In sections F and G.

<sup>38</sup> P.148.

considerable effort to explaining the power of God as the Creator, always squaring his view with the account in Genesis. We are told by a prominent modern commentator that Berkeley's concept of the Creation "is little more than a bad joke,"<sup>39</sup> as if it were a doomed move at epistemological chess. But as for George Berkeley, he believed it. To his dying day he wore "lawn sleeves and gaiters," as his biographer puts it, with his Geneva bands—three of the chief accessories of Anglican clerical fashion. He is not known ever to have renounced his belief in his own interpretation of the Biblical account.

Notwithstanding these facts, his remarks on the idea of divine creation are rarely attended by anything but cynicism on the part of commentators who tend to bring them up strictly within the context of the question as to how objects, and the world in general, remain in existence when I do not perceive them or when no one perceives them. If all things exist as our ideas of them, do they blink in and out of existence as our attention wanders? This "gappiness" was the first objection Berkeley considered after the initial section of the *Principles*, taking it in on in many forms at many times. Well he should do so, because many children turn themselves into philosophers by asking some version of this question. At the initial level, Berkeley's explanation of the Creation is a tricky solution to the solipsism suggested by basic subjectivity. But he evidently is not searching for a solution to a puzzle. The question, he says, is not where one places real existence or by what means one contrives to organize reality. He causes his commentators no end of work by not bothering much with the distinctions they pursue in trying to define his notion of "real" existence. Berkeley's question, instead, is about "*absolute* existence"<sup>40</sup>: despite the gappiness, despite the crooked sticks in the water and any other illusion, and for all our most competent nomothetic invention, how do we describe that "which depends wholly on the will of the Creator"?<sup>41</sup> Berkeley affirms that the world continues in existence even when out of our perception because it exists in God. At times, he says that it exists because God perceives what we are not perceiving, and at times he says that it exists because God thinks what we are not perceiving. The same commentator who thinks Berkeley's view of creation is

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<sup>39</sup> George Pitcher, *Berkeley* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 171. Pitcher applies this phrase to one specific interpretation of Berkeley's meaning in this matter.

<sup>40</sup>D.3.22.

<sup>41</sup>P.147.

“a bad joke” is correct in saying that the distinction between these two was of secondary importance to Berkeley.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, whether passions and operations of thought are “ideas” and thereby are included in the God-sustained creation, or do have some existence outside of God, is a wholly secondary question. These are matters of relative existence,<sup>43</sup> dependent on our taxonomy of them. Existence itself, which sometimes Berkeley does and sometimes does not want to help us out by calling “absolute existence,”<sup>44</sup> is existence in the mind of God according to his unassisted will. It all looks different to us, because we do not have the mind of God, so that from our point of view this existence is the Creation. Relative to God, rather than relative to us, the attributes of eternity or absoluteness apply in ways we cannot directly know. We see God’s operations as cause and effect, like a hand from a cloud yanking a lever; but causality is just a sign, or token, of the divinely willed creation.<sup>45</sup> So Berkeley addresses the Creation not as an attempt to patch up common sense reality but as a different and troublesome part of our reality. It’s not God’s problem; it’s ours. Since it is not an ordinary operation like perceiving, thinking, or causation, there are serious consequences to understanding what the Creation is. Berkeley is not shabbily dissembling to compensate for insufficient analyticity. Rather, he is struggling to tame the most terrifying, troubling idea that came out of his own first glimpse of the subjectivity of thought.

For Berkeley, God’s sustaining of reality is the same thing as his creation of it. He refers to this sustenance of things on many occasions, especially to its regularity. God sustains the universe in precisely and unceasingly behaving according to our correct observations of it. His order is, happily, one by which we may successfully plan and act. God, Berkeley once muses, perhaps has some kind of “marks or notes” to go by, “as a musician is directed by the notes of music to produce that harmonious train of sound and composition which is called a tune.”<sup>46</sup> Anyone knows he is reaching here, and although it doesn’t get easier for him when he turns to directly describing the Creation itself he is wholly serious as to what he sets about discussing. In his early work he does this chiefly on three occasions:

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<sup>42</sup> Pitcher, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. George Pappas, *Berkeley’s Thought* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 112.

<sup>44</sup> G. A. Johnston, *The Development of Berkeley’s Philosophy* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), p. 187.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-210ff.

<sup>46</sup> P.71.

first, in the last third of the *Principles*, in a diffuse manner, covering relevant concepts such as time, space, and infinity;<sup>47</sup> second, shortly afterward, in one of a series of private letters to his close friend Lord Percival, in this period, dated 6 September, 1710, concisely answering a question posed by Lady Percival;<sup>48</sup> and third, most precisely and lengthily, as the last major topic of the final *Dialogue*,<sup>49</sup> where it is the grand solution to all that has gone before in the entire work.

I wish to make but one point from the many issues raised by these accounts, so I shall quote briefly. Here is the basic idea, first, from the Percival letter:

...the act of creation consists in God's willing that those things should become perceptible to other spirits which before were known only to Himself.<sup>50</sup>

And then from the Dialogues:

...the several parts of the world became gradually perceivable to finite spirits endowed with proper faculties, so that, whoever such were present, they were in truth perceived by them.<sup>51</sup>

...things, with regard to us, may properly be said to begin their existence, or to be created, when God decreed that they should become perceptible to intelligent creatures.<sup>52</sup>

(Although he always stays square with the seven days of Mosaic Genesis, Berkeley sometimes says that this was “gradual” and sometimes says that God “decreed” it, which implies a more punctual act.)

This picture of the Creation is very striking and at first very strange. From it

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<sup>47</sup> P.101ff, esp. 146-151.

<sup>48</sup> Quoted by Wild, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

<sup>49</sup> D.3.65-81.

<sup>50</sup> Wild, *loc. cit.*

<sup>51</sup> D.3.68.

<sup>52</sup> D.3.73.

I can imagine seven ways in which to describe the power of God exercised in willing the universe into existence:

1. By changing the potential into the actual.
2. By increasing the degree of perceptibility to us of actual things.
3. By increasing the degree of our sensitivity to the impressions made by actual things.
4. By a co-ordination of numbers 2 and 3, either alternately or simultaneously and either gradually or instantaneously.
5. By a *fiat* of his will having nothing to do with the mechanisms of numbers 1, 2, and 3, even though it might appear to us as such a mechanism.
6. By an act which we are entirely unable to describe, although we do make up sentences with the aim of describing it.
7. By God's power to invest the universe already absolutely and eternally existent in or for him with some portion of his existence that made it real relative to us.

I do not believe that we can decide which of these Berkeley most fully endorsed, and in any case his views certainly changed over the years. Number 1 seems to have been his earliest notion;<sup>53</sup> it is, however, a matter of mere names. The trouble with numbers 2 and 3 is that there is nothing on which to choose between the two, and in any case they describe our senses as absolutely existent in a way that Berkeley could not have meant. Number 4 is possible. Numbers 5 and 6 are possible simply because they describe as a mystery what is without doubt ultimately a mystery in anyone's view. I think number 7 the most useful, or perhaps the least unlikely, interpretation, for one reason: it most fully supervenes God's omnipotence on his being. In the midst of mystery, the one outstanding identifiable feature is divine omnipotence. Religious mystery cannot be mysterious without the activity of incomprehensibly great power.

The purpose of my exercise, beside trying to provoke thought about a fascinating idea very dear to Berkeley that is overlooked by most commentators, is to show that the most impressive fact in our cognition is, as Berkeley sees it, the omnipotence of God. God is of course omnipresent with his omni-benevolence,

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<sup>53</sup> C.293.

and he is omniscient too. Berkeley seems to have enjoyed sermonizing on the beauty of nature. But for all the world's delicacy, variety, and glory, the human mind finds at the end of its labors to understand nature one weird thing: "surplusage unimaginable."<sup>54</sup> Having evacuated the idea of laws of nature, Berkeley again and again points to God's benevolence in keeping nature predictable: God made a comprehensible world instead of an utterly chaotic one. Though things come in and out of existence relative to our perception of them, we are utterly passive; but where existence is contingent on God's knowledge, they are contingent on his power, something more active than the usual divine occupation of being "Infinitely Wise Good and Perfect."<sup>55</sup> God alone stands between existence and annihilation. He is dependable, but the contact between him and us must be primary if we are to be assured of immediate and unfailing verification of this. All that we know of one another or of things is secondary to the inner truth of all knowledge, that existence comes from God alone. Above and beyond everything, surplus to all understanding, is this one awful fact.

The fact that Berkeley is explaining the faith that assures him of the fidelity of God to both his peculiar people and to humanity at large should not persuade us that the existential question did not worry Berkeley. The matter is quite the opposite. Had it not worried him, he would not have addressed it in a manner triply supported by an epistemology, a metaphysics, and a theology. Its truth lies at an uncommon depth, and it seemed likely to be lost in the rationalist view of things. Berkeley says he is thereby "obliged to use ambages and ways of speech not common."<sup>56</sup> The word "ambage" refers to an indirect way of proceeding in sarcastic tone. Although a much older word in English, it was an insult around 1642. Whether or not it was the predecessor of "humbug" itself, sometimes called "mumbug" in Berkeley's day, it was used to the same effect. Berkeley would have known it from plays and farces.<sup>57</sup> He heard it or something like it said of him in the responses to his work. If one is thought a clown and a fool for one's thoughts,

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<sup>54</sup> D2.15.

<sup>55</sup> P.146.

<sup>56</sup> D.3.48.

<sup>57</sup> In truth, a derivation of humbug from ambage is not supported by the OED and onwards. The idea comes from John Camden Hotten's *Slang Dictionary* (London, Chatto and Windus, 1874), pp. 196-198, where the likeness of ambage to humbug is illustrated from contemporary verse and theater (including a use of "humbug" by Berkeley in the *Siris*).

one is brave to maintain that though they seem humbug to others important truths rest in them.

Berkeley seems to have seen the Creation as an infusion or filling up of a sphere with the reality of God himself. One might picture this as the contrary of one of the Orthodox views of Creation as *kenosis* (κενωσις), God's withdrawal or sundering of himself from a sphere in which the remainder is reality as we know it. The picture of Creation in Berkeley's endowment argument requires that God did not first make *prima materia* or any substance out of which he fashioned the universe nor did he create big pieces of it that he disposed together in correct order. It would seem consistent with Berkeley's ideas to say in this way that God did not use matter in the Creation. Instead, everything was made out of him, or from his substantial being. This then is not only not kenotic creation, it also is not the familiar creation *ex nihilo*. As far as I can make it out, Berkeley did not hold that the universe was created out of nothing but out of God, of God, because the ideas of which things consist are part of God's mind. He tries to explain how ideas eternal and natural are one and the same but different by calling the former "archetype" and the latter "ectype."<sup>58</sup> But for all the attention Berkeleyans have given to making this out as a substantial distinction, these are but words. They redundantly name the everlasting existence of ideas in the mind of God and the temporary existence of the same ideas in the natural world. Of philosophical concepts Berkeley added nothing by these words. He missed his mark: it must be the case under his principles that the contents of the Creation is not the "stupid, thoughtless"<sup>59</sup> nothing that is Matter, nor anything foreign to God. Rather, for a certainty all those "things obvious to the senses" must be mustered up from the real substance that is God.<sup>60</sup>

If one suspects another and greater reality lying beyond the reality we know, it must be differentiated in a manner other than that of our ordinary reality. To

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<sup>58</sup> D.3.73. Berkeley tries out these concepts in both early and late works.

<sup>59</sup> P.76; also, matter is "inert, senseless" at P.72.

<sup>60</sup> In early Christianity while the world was created out of nothing, that which was created out of God himself was Jesus. But Gregory of Nyssa uses the idea of the whole of Creation as being out of or from God, holding as well a quasi-Berkeleyan idealism. This interesting topic, along with the question of whether idealism existed in antiquity and the larger issues of divine creative action, is discussed in Richard Sorabji's *Time, The Creation and the Continuum: Theories in Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), pp. 287-294.

some, it is more orderly, in a manner approximated by mathematics, being permanent, regular, and full of constant stable creative relationships. To others, it is more unitary, closer to undifferentiated if not entirely so. Berkeley seems to sway between these alternatives: whatever is beyond the visible operates without the intricate pathways of causality manifest to us, yet some engine of reliable process is also part of the divine being. Something in God's benevolence protects us from his omnipotence. Yet because our need and knowledge is by necessity of God first and foremost, God's creative power underlies his other attributes. This real reality is incomprehensibly surplus to our little angle of view. A mechanistic, rational, atomic, and material world is either all that exists, or it is an illusion; and if it is an illusion, our body of knowledge is like a paper box containing nothing but the omnipotence of the creator of all illusion. The whole hulk of this world is a hollow hull but for the God in it. In many ways, this is not a soothing account of creation. That such certification of the comforts of his faith was the object of Berkeley's endeavors is testimony to the anxiety driving this line of thought. The philosophical and moral questions were a far greater problem to him than was ridicule.

Confrontation of subjectivity with omnipotence drove his later thinking and was to have profound consequences in modern thought. This sort of philosopher seems far from Berkeley the experimenter, who has been ably presented;<sup>61</sup> but in this side of him we are at any rate closer to an issue that drives us to philosophy. We may see it baldly presented in a strange connection to Berkeley from another direction. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who was intensely interested in idealism throughout his life, named his second son after Bishop Berkeley. Little Berkeley Coleridge died aged 9 months on February 11, 1799, while his father was in fact in Germany studying Kantian idealism and pointedly ignoring the needs of his wife and family. When his friends finally stopped sparing his studies and told him about the death of his baby, Coleridge wrote from Göttingen:

There are moments when I have such a power of Life within me, such a conceit of it, I mean—that I lay the Blame of my Child's Death to my absence—*not intellectually*; but I have a strange sort of sensation, as if while I

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<sup>61</sup> Berman

was present, none could die whom I intensely loved.<sup>62</sup>

Why else did Berkeley launch himself directly at our commonsense conviction of the subsistence of matter, other than to bring this commonsense to account before our fears? This is the reason he put himself into the ridiculous situation of publishing such “ambage” as denying matter along with affirming creation. The reply of commonsense was the first and last objection he encountered, from the thirty-fourth paragraph of the *Principles* onward in his philosophical work. He unveiled these fears and struggled to reconcile our ordinary world to them. This was the *aporia* his earliest thoughts were to be tested upon. Shifting from one trick to another to give the human person a solid standing before existential threat, he was not the proud possessor of a polished system. Instead, though completely Christian, he had the courage to be an incomplete philosopher.

*D.* Some readers will wonder why I present a “dark” Berkeley, a thinker moving around the idea of universal annihilation as a moon circles a cold planet, in place of one or the other of the more familiar pictures of him. The most traditional biographic character is that of an earnest, determined, and high-minded religious philosopher. This served to give him an image other than that of a crank. Accounts in our own day occasionally, and not very proficiently, see him as bearing the complex tradition of hermeticism, with its confident assertion of intellectual superiority and optimistic promotion of the divinity in us.<sup>63</sup> More often they are rather neutral, morally speaking. They try mainly to untangle what on earth can validly be explained by following Berkeley’s principle lines of thought, suggesting little as to why we should bother with it at all. Both the fanciful view and the analytical views still owe something, deep down, to the suspicion that Berkeley’s thoughts were the kind of thing thought by mad dogs and Englishmen caught out too long in the midday sun.

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<sup>62</sup> Richard Holmes, *Coleridge* (New York: Pantheon, 1989), 1.225.

<sup>63</sup> Notably Costica Bradatan’s *The Other Bishop Berkeley. An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006). Oddly, neither this book nor that of the author’s teacher (Branka Arsić, *The Passive Eye. Gaze & subjectivity in Berkeley (via Beckett)* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003) mentions John D. Wild’s *Berkeley*, which comes closest to the issues they are seeking to examine in Berkeley, and in fact comes closest to the truth of the matter, in my view. However, in the case of Arsić, it is hard to say anything at all because although the book is barely intelligible.

Nor do I raise our philosopher's dark side as a reflection of his temperament in life. Berkeley however does show tone and temper when he makes Philonous such a disagreeable conversationalist in the *Three Dialogues*. Philonous is not merely acerbic or sarcastic. He's angry, and he bullies Hylas. It leaves one wondering what it was like to be tutored by a senior scholar at Trinity Dublin in 1700. But the issue is not whether Berkeley was optimistic or pessimistic. He often exhibits anodyne cheer about the benefits of virtue. I do not psychologize him. This has been tried once, with infamous results.<sup>64</sup> Nor do I imagine that I know the genesis of his thought. Even with the singular evidence for his early thinking given by his notebooks, one still cannot perform any but a minor surgery on the progress of his cogitation, for our evidence is at all times restricted to that which Berkeley chose to write. I think that with any philosopher the question of what is "fundamental" or "first" with him or her is best rendered as an archaeology that moves not so much backward in time as by circling, as it were, through the core of a view of the world, concerning itself with how it must be that certain feelings and certain thoughts are reasonably co-ordinated and finally splayed out against the world they purport to describe, in order for the reader to understand and to test them. Thus I put this line of thought about the omnipotence of God in the middle of Berkeley not because it or any other religious belief was his original "intuition," or because it is "embedded" in him, but because to do so reveals what is coherent and worthwhile in his answers to great questions.

It is an unhappily limited procedure to describe his thought absent the full flow of the cosmic questions that concerned the world he lived in. Just as it has been throughout human history, the place of man in the universe was a passionate concern to the intellectuals of the two centuries Berkeley lived in, which were full of new learned academies and full also of fresh awe at physical forces hung together in perfect correspondence. This concern is not limned by the passage from Locke to Hume over the corpse of Berkeley. Mechanistic philosophy raised social and moral issues, just as technological progress raises the question of social and moral progress. The philosophical versions of these questions concerned the relation of the universe to man and the relation of man to the universe. Berkeley of course has been put into context many times, but his commentators seem largely to have

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<sup>64</sup> John O. Wisdom's *The unconscious origin of Berkeley's philosophy* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

overlooked significance of the question of the contingency of existence for him and for his impact on philosophy.

From the side of the view of created nature toward man, developments in logic and metaphysics continued and transformed the old question of the ground of existence. What is the sufficient reason of existence? As concrete and corpuscular existence are devoid of the necessity of ideal forms, the necessity of the existence of a natural world composed of such matter is even more obscure. One can hardly maintain that the material world is determined by God's will but that God's freedom to create is fettered by a necessity to create. The concepts of reason and unity by which to understand cosmic harmony were among the centerpieces of post-Cartesian philosophy, of Leibniz above all, obviously, with some roots in Renaissance cosmology. However, the progress of empirical knowledge continued expansively to free reality from the burdens necessitated by our opinion of ourselves. Whether in adoration of God's freedom or in admiration of the intricacy of nature, the created universe started to seem less dependent on anything other than force of habit. The two centuries Berkeley was in the middle of were as rich as can be with philosophers and theologians who sought the divine motive from one angle or another. Adam asks God directly about this in *Paradise Lost*:

...No need that Thou  
Should propagate, already infinite,....  
Thou in Thy secrecy although alone,  
Best with Thyself accompanied, seek'st not  
Social communication....<sup>65</sup>

Would God not be full enough without the created universe, and would not creation be full enough without us?<sup>66</sup> What need has the eternal of the temporal, or reason of the irrational? Why shouldn't things just stop and disappear? It's hardly pessimistic of Berkeley to wonder about these matters or odd of us to think of Berkeley as doing so. It's much odder to avoid thinking of these questions when considering his philosophy.

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<sup>65</sup> *Paradise Lost* 8.419-420 and 427-429.

<sup>66</sup> The plenitude of creation is the theme of chapter five of the classic study by Arthur Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), pp. 144-182.

The same basic question wore a different guise when seen from the side of man's view of created nature. Our irrationality shone ever brighter when the age of reason illuminated nature, and there were always plenty of people to point out our unreasonableness, mediocrity, and savagery. Berkeley has a place early in the line of critics of modern rationalism, though it is but little noticed. Isaiah Berlin himself, in his *Three Critics of the Enlightenment*, suggested that Berkeley was one of the sources among philosophers of the Romantic preference for the imagination over reason. By viewing causality among things as signs of divine presence rather than as the condition of natural effects according to *a priori* categories of reason, he denied the sufficiency of empiricism to penetrate the divine expression or symbology in created nature. This ancient idea, Berlin argues, passing through Berkeley

...is one of the streams that fed those romantic philosophers who saw reality not as dead matter obeying unalterable laws but as a self-generating process, a thrusting-forward of the living will—blind and unconscious in Schelling and Schopenhauer and Bergson, progressively attaining to greater and greater self-consciousness in the metaphysical systems of Hegel and Marx...<sup>67</sup>

But we have no need to go as far as Berlin's favorite, Hamann, at the other end of the eighteenth century, and beyond, or to go to Continental *philosophes*, vitalists, or reactionaries. We can look right next door to Berkeley for someone to unsettle the formerly firm fix on the nature of man, his friend Jonathan Swift.

While Swift did not use his dim opinions of mankind to contemplate its annihilation by the Creator, both Berkeley and he were thinking about the diminished place of man amidst nature. They both studied the same traditional doctrine of logic that yielded the standard justification for exalting man as a rational animal.<sup>68</sup> This was Porphyry's *Isagoge*, which indeed was studied not only

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<sup>67</sup> Isaiah Berlin, ed. H. Hardy, *Three Critics of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), pp. 190 n.1, 285, 297, and 319.

<sup>68</sup> The first detailed study of Swift's reaction in *Gulliver's Travels* to the school logics of his day was by R. S. Crane, "Houyhnhms, Yahoos, and History of Ideas," in J. A. Mazzeo ed., *Reason and Imagination. Studies in the History of Ideas 1600-1800* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), pp. 231-254, esp. pp. 245ff.

at by Swift and Berkeley at Trinity College in Dublin but by most university students in Europe for centuries. Swift made famous his hatred of the pedantic philosophical teaching texts in which this logic was taught. The centerpiece was “Porphyry’s tree,” an *arbor consanguinitatis* atop which sat man: a substance, subdivision bodily, subdivision animal, subdivision feeling, subdivision rational. I suggest that Berkeley rejected this kind of classical humanism, just as he rejected mechanistic materialism. For if reason is merely a way of arranging names, then it will not distinguish men from such other substances as angels and such other animal bodies as, say, a race of horses called Houyhnhms, nor will it serve as a method for calculating truth. He might well have wondered how can one substance be both angels and animals if only words differentiate them. If the idea of substance as substrate to other qualities has no function, it has therefore no meaning; and if man along with all creation can be neither rigidly distinct from God nor utterly identical to God, all of which is plain common sense, then man too therefore has no meaning such that he should or must, necessarily, either exist—or cease to exist. Reason might look like the highest and finest twig on Porphyry’s tree, but actually it is the trunk of the tree. Without it, the rest goes to smash.

Berkeley’s concept of omnipotence as the constant possibility of an utter suspension of all existence is perhaps the most perfect definition of it ever given. It forces one to take a keen personal interest in the matter. By comparison, other definitions, such as Aquinas’s first cause and pure act<sup>69</sup> or Holkot’s power to enact anything non-contradictory,<sup>70</sup> grab us as much as soap suds slipping out of a smooth bowl. Berkeley instead puts us in a prison: if his reasoning is true, each and every one of us exists entirely as a function of the existence of another being at a wholly different level of existence. Is this what it means for there to be a God, or to believe in God? If so, this reveals a scene behind the curtain of quotidian presumption in which our mind, being a function of God’s, is pinned down by the deity’s panoptic eye and must always look at its source. Our existence appears to be a kind of enslavement that never allows a glance to stray elsewhere. In the *Alciphron*, the product of the most reflective period of his life, during which the New England theology of Jonathan Edwards faced him on one side, from the west,

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<sup>69</sup> Q. v., Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (New York: Random House, 1955), pp. 368-372

<sup>70</sup> Q. v., <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/holkot>.

of which his material bequest of monetary endowment might have been some species of acknowledgment, he strays to a degree close to the savage theodicy of Joseph de Maistre.<sup>71</sup> It looked to him then, as it had when he was young, that modern natural philosophy wanted to “undermine morality and unhinge civilized life.”<sup>72</sup> But he backed away from this vision of human slavery caged within capital punishment every time he came close to it: in his life, during the potato famine when it hit his bishopric, by identifying himself with those who suffered,<sup>73</sup> as also in philosophy, where every time he is in danger of losing human existence amidst divine omnipotence, he tries to soften it. He has constantly to erase the difference between the divine and the human, and then to soften the relationship exposed by the erasure; and yet he must erase it. Berkeley wanted to erase a line between God and man that would be fatal to our knowledge of God and of salvation, and that did mortally wound much of traditional religious belief then and now. But after erasure of the line the task of curing the unhindered subjection of our existence to omnipotence brought forth the difficult philosophical choices among which he wavered in the rest of his work. In this regard, his *aporia* was a model of that of Western philosophy in the succeeding three centuries.

It was John Daniel Wild who came closest to understanding this in 1936.<sup>74</sup> I imagine he was able to see this because of his positions as phenomenologist and as American pragmatist. He argued that Berkeley was faced with either solipsism or faith. In the framework of his metaphysics, each pushed him toward the other. My view, however, is rather different from his. Having rejected rationalism as any source of knowledge of God, his line of thought pushed him between a universe in which man was either lost in God and a universe in which man was independent of God. Neither position gave humankind a firm and certain ground on which to exist. Berkeley tried Platonic ideas, and archetypes, a concept of “notions,” “active imagination,” spirits and other devices, to describe the proper quantities of identity and difference, a proper mix of intimacy and freedom, between God and man. In the early works, he uses what are called “continuity” and “independence” arguments for the divine sustaining function, described by many commentators, to

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<sup>71</sup> He heads in this direction in the early work as well, e.g. P.153.

<sup>72</sup> Cited by Bradatan, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

<sup>73</sup> A. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley Bishop of Cloyne* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1949), pp. 198-199 *et passim*.

<sup>74</sup> Wild, *op. cit.*, pp. 38-44, 163-185 *et passim*.

try to harmonize two differing approaches that don't quite match and yet don't quite conflict. The trouble with such analyses is that they don't really explain the deep difficulty of Berkeley's "embedded" God, for this God is embedded not just in a system but in an intimate relation with humankind.<sup>75</sup> A full explanation requires the idea of the Creation and an appreciation of human fear. In his last work, the *Siris*, he turned altogether to non-empiricism—the great harmonies of macrocosm and microcosm wrought by mystics and many humanists, what Foucault called the Renaissance *episteme*---for relief. This is a pattern that continues among thinking people to this day.

Henri Bergson said that Berkeley's concept of matter was that of "une mince pellicule transparente situé entre l'homme et Dieu."<sup>76</sup> He said that the *pellicule* disappeared upon inspection, over and over again. As one draws close to it, that is, close to understanding what it is, it evanesces. This transformation into transparency might be a bridge to God or a vision of him in the context of neo-Platonism or of other forms of religious mysticism, but by 1710, in Berkeley's early work, it was a perilous vulnerability. As when we watch cinema that we are deeply involved in, our ideational world is the universe in the film, a plastic in the hand of the film-maker. The danger already appeared in Berkeley's account of vision: unless we have an understanding of what it means to move in space, we cannot measure, or control, or evaluate, the world from our spot as cognitive subjects. Even when the tissue of matter thinned to insubstantiality, even when mechanism is revealed as magic, the human subject is entirely disempowered, whether he turns from God or wholly binds himself to God. We cannot stand between ourselves and the dominant power, because to do so we'd have to be both one wall of the box as well as the hero who braces it apart from the other wall of the box, pushing outward against both as they ceaselessly move toward meeting.

In this situation, Berkeley eventually made his choice. It became evident in

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<sup>75</sup> Jonathan Dancy, in his excellent book, *op. cit.*, does often describe the closeness of man to God in Berkeley and its consequences: e.g., that God is not an invention required by logic but a being we are in such intimate contact with that all our ideas are God's (p. 50), that God's authorship of everything means that none of our actions is real apart from him (pp. 139-140), and that Berkeley's thought makes it as difficult to conceive of one's own mind, or self, as it is to conceive of that of others (pp.142-143).

<sup>76</sup> In *Revue de la Métaphysique et de la Morale*, vol. 19 (1911), as cited by Wild, *op. cit.*, p. 37, n. 92. It is a passage from Bergson sometimes mentioned in Berkeley studies but never correctly cited. Wild, by the way, in my opinion, completely misunderstands it.

the *Siris*, but much earlier, in his proposed design for his college in Bermuda<sup>77</sup> we find a circle, rather than anything like town streets and plaza, with the college building at the center and houses in other buildings ringing it in radii of decreasing importance.<sup>78</sup> The contrast with Jefferson's academical village in Virginia is striking: Jefferson has no church at all; buildings flow from the Rotunda outward to great distance and also laterally to great distance; although there is clear hierarchy, it is not conventionally ordered, and there are many asymmetries.<sup>79</sup> We can see not only Berkeley's own submission to the authority of his church but a power structure clearly owing more to hermetic ideas than to rationalist ones.

However, in the endowment period itself we can see the troubling divided road clearly in an image of Berkeley's own. The *aporia* is as indirectly expressed as ever, but he is still at the point at which he is facing it and has not yet adopted anything to save himself from it. This will be found in one of the most famous passages in Berkeley, the very last paragraph of the last work of his early period. Philonous addresses Hylas:

You see, Hylas, the water of yonder fountain, how it is forced upwards, in a round column, to a certain height, at which it breaks and falls back to the basin from whence it rose, its ascent as well as descent proceeding from the same uniform principle or law of gravitation. Just so, the same principles which, at first view, lead to skepticism, pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense.<sup>80</sup>

The way in which the same things appear sometimes one way and sometimes another is an important implication of Berkeley's thought, that I will shortly address. For now, observe that this fountain is the center of attention. In the famous woodcut accompanying it, the two scholars are turned toward it. Like Berkeley's academical circus in Bermuda, it's a panoptic prison. The focus on it is like the focus of a slave upon a master. It is a source of knowledge, and therefore of

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<sup>77</sup> Ref

<sup>78</sup> Luce, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

<sup>79</sup> See J. Cocola, *The Ideological Spaces of the Academical Village*:... (<http://faculty.virginia.edu/villagespaces/essay>), among many other sources.

<sup>80</sup> D.3.91.

being; the spring of existence, it both comforts us who depend on it and frightens us, as eyes flutter between visions of annihilating scepticism and of knowledge of a benevolent ruler.

In the *Three Dialogues*, Philonous takes his name from Greek as the “lover of mind,” and Hylas takes his name from the Greek for matter, *hulé* (ὕλη). This is well known. But Hylas is also a mythological personage.<sup>81</sup> He figures as the “squire” or “minion” (ὀπάων) of Hercules, who raised him after killing his father. When Hercules was with Jason and the crew of the Argo in Mysia, as he was busy upending a giant tree with his bare hands to replace his broken oar, Hylas went to collect water for the crew from a sacred spring called Pegae. The water nymph Dryope found him so tenderly beautiful that she engulfed him in order to keep him, drowned, as her lover. Hercules was told that Hylas was taken by bandits or by wild animals and, never knowing whether Hylas became beloved or eaten, after his own angry effort to rescue him, returned to his labors but commanded the Mysians to call Hylas’s name and search for him while they sacrificed to his memory once a year.

Just as his friends never knew whether Hylas’s fate at the fountain was death or transformed life, so also Berkeley’s Hylas, under direction of the domineering Philonous, stares at shifting and puzzling truth, not knowing if he must therein disappear or submit to undying love.

**E.** I regard Berkeley’s failure to solve this dilemma as one of his greatest strengths as a philosopher. The solutions lying far ahead of his time as well as of our own, it was genius to see where things tended. Matter was slipping away because natural science required abstract conceptions that were replicating at increasing pace, just as they do today, ever faster and ever more abstract, so that even physical labor becomes in part an extension of design concepts. The surplus that might be called matter was far more like spirit than it was like what used to be called matter. This, like his denial of the existence of time, was a highly Platonic

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<sup>81</sup> His story is told by Apollonius of Rhodes, *Argonautica* 1.1207-1272, and as a love story by Theocritus, *Idylls* 13. An encyclopedic account will be found in Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, 150a-f.

element in Berkeley, foreshadowed in Plotinus<sup>82</sup> and elsewhere in any sphere of thought touched by Plato, though it seems at the same time to be more and more the revealed truth of physics. Yet along the way there must be some reckoning with objects because humans reckon with objects. The ultimate subject here is humankind itself, to which its own deployment of the objects of the world, and its own projection upon them, poses deep philosophical challenges. Berkeley saw that matter must be either spirit or just a word, but in failing to dispatch the mistake of sceptical worldliness that ignited his thinking from the first, impatient as he was to put the *finis* to it, he did leave the germs of two answers, or rather openings, which writers pursued in the succeeding two centuries. I will discuss these in this and the succeeding section.

John Stuart Mill, and others, I believe, called the *Principles* the first psychological treatise. From the post-Humean point of view it does stand to begin the cohabitation of philosophy and psychology in the nineteenth century which, issuing in a messy controversy in the time of Freud and Dilthey, some regard as a calamity and others more lately are returning to favor as “experimental philosophy.”<sup>83</sup> A century before Berkeley, however, theological and natural questions relating to the human person were put together, named “*animae logica*,” and were separated from the study of the body as one study called “*psychologia*,” being along with “*somatologia*” the two parts of “*anthropologia*.” These were the neologisms of Otto Casman, who in this way invented the word “*psychologia*”, using it as the title of a book in 1604 and as a section heading in another book the next year.<sup>84</sup> But we do not find Berkeley trying to understand the connections of body and soul, in the ways to which Casman was heir, or to pin down the soul apart from the body, as the Cartesian tradition undertook to do shortly after such last Renaissance scientists as Casman. Nor do we find Berkeley analyzing the

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<sup>82</sup> Sorabji, *loc. cit.*

<sup>83</sup> Anthony Appiah’s *Experiments in Ethics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) is an attempt at rehabilitation.

<sup>84</sup> These were Casman’s *Psychologia Anthropologica* (Hamburg, Wilhelm Anton, 1604) and his *Nucleus mysteriorum naturae* (Hamburg, Frobenianus 1605). On the usage, see the *OED* 8.1552; H. Schuling, *Bibliographie der psychologischen Literatur der 16. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1967); and V. P. Gumposch, *Die philosophische und theologische literatur der Deutschen von 1400 bis auf unsere tage* (Regensburg: G. J. Manz, 1851). Casman was a pupil of Rudolph Goclenius, who also wrote on a similar combination of theological and physical questions. (The word *psychologia* is alternatively attributed to a prelection by Melanchthon and to some passage in a work by J. T. Freigius in 1575.)

passions as Hume was to do. What he did was quite different from each of these. He looked at what it meant for an object to exist in a spirit. He looked at this connection, held between objects but not material things such as we ordinarily conceive of, and spirit, but not soul such as we ordinarily conceive it.

Consider what it means to acquaint one's self with an object for the first time. For example, suppose one were to think about moving to a city one has never been to. This is far removed from an example of simple perception: a city is a complex, not a simple object; to move to a place to live there is likewise to gather a kind of knowledge with many layers. One first imagines the city in terms of cities he or she has known. In Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*, the unfortunate Tony Last tries to do this in the most difficult and complicated way: he improbably decides to find a lost city, a city cut off for five centuries from everything else. As this naive explorer searches through the Amazonian jungle to find the place, he dreams of it in terms of the only house he ever lived in:

He had a clear picture of it in his mind. It was Gothic in character, all vanes and pinnacles, gargoyles, battlements, groining and tracery, pavilions and terraces...pennons and banners floating on the sweet breeze, everything luminous and translucent; a coral citadel crowning a green hill top sewn with daisies, among groves and streams; a tapestry landscape filled with heraldic and fabulous animals and symmetrical, disproportionate blossom.... Carpet and canopy, tapestry and velvet, portcullis and bastion, water fowl on the moat and kingcups along its margin, peacocks trailing their finery across the lawns; high overhead in a sky of sapphire and swansdown silver bells chiming in a turret of alabaster.<sup>85</sup>

Unhappily, Tony Last didn't find this or any city. One begins with what one already knows. Then he or she visits the new city, and then visits again and again, for a few days or for a long stay. Its plan, its form, its dossier settles with each moment spent walking about or working in the strange city, and upon reflection as well. Gradually one makes a new picture of it. And if one then moves there, all of that acquaintance is just the foundation: moving through its streets, its houses, its districts, the lives of its citizens, seeing the mountains or river or ocean nearby,

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<sup>85</sup> E. Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* (New York, Little Brown and Company, 1962), pp. 223-224.

watching the seasons pass, there grows the thing actual according to one's feelings and ideas, and the city becomes part of an actual life.

Human knowledge is more like this than it is like a single and simple perception. In fact, first knowledge of anything happens at most only once. It is a rare thing, if it happens at all, because memory is necessary to all knowledge. "Cognition" is a vicious concept among some philosophers, who borrowed it from scientists in order to make of it a pretense that there exists an observable knowledge wiped clean of memory or conceptually separable *in toto* from memory. That we must know already know something in order to know anything further is of course one of the oldest foundations of philosophy, posed as a paradox by Plato in the *Meno* and resolved by him through the doctrine of *anamnesis*, which is in turn connected to great parts of the spiritual and intellectual heritage of humankind. In his work on vision, I think that Berkeley suggested that knowledge comes from presence among the things known. It is kinesthetic rather than abstract. In his theory of vision Berkeley is certain that any perception "must not be entirely new but have something in it old and already perceived by me."<sup>86</sup> In the endowment argument Berkeley, having situated abstract ideas as linked heaps of particulars already received into knowledge,<sup>87</sup> declares that

I say it is granted on all hands...that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though there were no bodies existing without resembling them.<sup>88</sup>

"Without" here mean something like "outside of our own minds," not "lacking resemblance." Each piece of knowledge exists indefeasibly in the context of all the rest of our knowledge, which is fully conceivable as a system of connections standing alone inward to ourselves. As is so often the case, John Daniel Wild came closest among commentators to recognizing this by citing a passage from Berkeley's notebooks to maintain that for Berkeley all real knowledge is knowledge of the "co-existence" of ideas, that is, of such connections as we mentally make

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<sup>86</sup> V.128; cf D.1.233.

<sup>87</sup> Pi.15.

<sup>88</sup> P.18.

among ideas.<sup>89</sup> It is as impossible to imagine knowledge without memory as it is to conceive eternity without a creation, though we cannot conceive a beginning, or an end to time, whereas we must conceive of knowledge in company with memory.

So if we turn our attention back from the gaps of inexistence of things unperceived to the chunks of their existence when perceived, I suggest that we can see in the mist something like the concept that things have history. This is of course a metaphorical way of speaking: we say this painting or this house has a history, but we mean by this at least that we have a linked series of public and private memories of the thing, whatever else we might mean as to the kind of existence the object has in time. Berkeley seems to be at the very beginning of a concern with what it means us to have a personal history in which the objects of the world play a role in our personalities. For although the brain is an integument in which perceptions become thoughts and feelings, it still is to us an inward world quite other in essence than objects or things. If existence is in this room and non-existence is in the next room, the wall between them is paper-thin: it seems nothing but this weightless and intangible something built of objects that used to be or are somewhere else.

How often must I repeat that I know or am conscious of my own being, and that *I myself* am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, wills, and operates about ideas....

Philonous's impatience betrays consciousness of his inadequacy to get a real grasp on this point, which turned monumental in the hands of Kant, Schopenhauer, and Wittgenstein. It had yet greater reach than the core of metaphysics: Berkeley was not in a position to think of the study of material culture, or of a multi-referential structuralism, or of psycho-dynamic functions. But he does establish subjectivity precisely because for all his vigor of purpose he in the end is not at a position of certainty as Descartes thought himself to be, on an unbreakable keel, like that made by Athena for the Argo, from which he could penetrate all the sciences; rather, Berkeley stops, and pauses, and circles around the open area ahead, into which the theories of the human sciences, with the chain of reactions to each, spills forward.

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<sup>89</sup> Wild, *op. cit.*, p. 31, cites this passage from C.752: "Knowledge, or certainty, or perceptions of agreement of ideas—as to identity & diversity, & real existence, vanisheth; of relation becometh merely nominal; of coexistence, remaineth."

It is a large part of the burden of Berkeley's theory of vision to direct our attention to the fact that each person has just one neural system, even though it works through paired eyes and paired ears. It wouldn't matter if there were a hundred of each organ of perception, for Berkeley subjects all scaling, whether of size or intensity, to co-ordinating by God, which we mentally see as "analogy and uniformness," though it is no more than the God's goodness to us. We must take care, he says, not to think of our analogical understanding as reality itself but rather to situate greater and greater "largeness of comprehension" as the instrument by which we haptically and intellectually co-exist with the universe.<sup>90</sup> This might be a clue as to one of his reasons for giving the greatest privilege among the senses to tactility: the skin, the largest organ, is present in every event in which we experience the agreeable unity of things. Our skin moves to all points of the compass at each of our motions. It would not matter if we had only one eye or one single organ of perception altogether; each single *homo sapiens* is a kind of Cyclops, one something we call a person.

Berkeley's knowing person often seems much more like *Dasein* than it does the man-machine of his century.<sup>91</sup> It foreshadows the train of thought leading to phenomenology. Jacques Derrida claimed that the eidetic reduction "rests on a figure of touch, on a haptic basis,"<sup>92</sup> devoting one of his most formidable works to this matter.

In truth I never stop thinking of him (Berkeley) when writing about touch....  
*An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* (is) in a *prephenomenological*  
 style: an *already* phenomenological style, already with a certain reduction,  
 and still *at the threshold* of this reduction....<sup>93</sup>

In thinking about Berkeley's interest in touch one must also consider the significance of the hand as authority, the warrant and medium of documented

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<sup>90</sup> P.105, 106, and 109.

<sup>91</sup> E.g., P.98.

<sup>92</sup> J. Derrida, tr. R. Bowlby, *Paper Machine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 144.

<sup>93</sup> J. Derrida, tr. C. Irizzary, *On Touching—Jan-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 98.

memory, which Derrida frequently examined.<sup>94</sup>

The “striking similarities” of Husserl to Berkeley on the larger ground of idealist philosophy have been recognized, even if Berkeley did not clearly see the problems of subjectivity that he had not gotten out of.<sup>95</sup> For his part, Husserl read Berkeley in the standard way, as a timid or incomplete Hume; but for this reason, that what was hinted at by Berkeley “appears with unveiled sharpness and clearness in Hume,” he says that his objections to Berkeley must “more severely hit” Hume.<sup>96</sup> I argue the contrary, that Berkeley is less hit by these objections not because he was less penetrating well than Hume but because he did not make quite the same mistake that Hume made. He did not only not go as far in one direction, he actually points to a different direction, the direction to which Husserl went, very roughly speaking.<sup>97</sup> However, Husserl’s view of Berkeley centers on a particular point. That point is the account of “representation” that ran Descartes to Locke to Kant and beyond as the explanation of how we group sense impressions together so as to form mental concepts. This is the “foundationalist” tradition to which phenomenology, pragmatism, existentialism, and Rorty-ism, along with a great deal else, was opposed in different ways. For the purpose of this discussion, it can be roughly described in this way, as the position that the truly important thing about the way we group, or generalize, our sense impressions is that it can produce abstract ideas that correctly explain the world. “Representation” thus means abstractions of empirical knowledge, validated by the rules of logic and verified by the scientific method: this is the finest and final fruit of our cognition, the essential way we learn truth. Schopenhauer, the supreme idealist in his theory of knowledge, held representation to be a kind of delusion on account of its entire subjectivity, and he therefore credits Berkeley as intimating the truth he believed Kant completed but that none beside himself had understood in Kant: that representation is subjective and particular rather than an account of the world in

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<sup>94</sup> See J. Derrida, “The Word Processor,” in *Paper Machine*, pp. 19-32.

<sup>95</sup> See the discussion by Herman Philipse, “Transcendental Idealism,” in ed. B. Smith and D. W. Smith, *The Cambridge Companion to Husserl* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 285-287.

<sup>96</sup> E. Husserl, trans. J. N. Findlay, *Logical Investigations* (London, Routledge, 1970) 1.4.27-31 and 1.5.32 (vol. 2, pp. 393-405).

<sup>97</sup> Recent “speculative realists” rely on the same limited view of Berkeley, e. g. L. Braver, *A Thing of This World* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2007), pp. 48ff.; and J. Ladyman et al., *Everything Must Go* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 227.

itself.<sup>98</sup> Husserl's aim, like Schopenhauer's, is not to correct historians of philosophy on the subject of Berkeley, the "inspired Bishop of Cloyne."<sup>99</sup> Abstraction is a superficial part of the way in which we associate ideas, which hides the real form of consciousness animating human life.<sup>100</sup> Seeing Berkeley as correct but limited, Husserl valued what Berkeley called the suggestion of one individual item, or of one perception, or of one idea, by another as a step along the road toward the idea of intentionality.<sup>101</sup>

In place of matter as substrate Berkeley offered matter as "congeries" of ideas: collections or association of them that represent. On the empirical side, this has become the inquiries about "binding" or "features integration" in neuroscience, and it commands a great deal of attention by philosophers under such names as "concretion" or "identification." It was Locke indeed who first posed it as a question about perceptual consciousness, and Berkeley was without doubt engaged by reading Locke. Students of Berkeley extensively consider his philosophy from this point of view.<sup>102</sup> I shall not argue here whether or not looking at Berkeley's congeries from this point of view leads anywhere or not, although I do not think it does. What I wish to suggest is that there is another context into which Berkeley's representations and congeries might be viewed. It is not phenomenology, although I have discussed it a bit both as a matter of history of ideas and because it does bring us closer to what I have in mind. In his own day, these notions in Berkeley can be understood in terms of the development of descriptive cataloguing. Cataloguing, the accurate facial description of objects, grew in the eighteenth century in close connection with the history of scientific theory. Across the historical disciplines, a great deal of attention is rightly being paid taxonomy and classification in the eighteenth century, the "classical episteme" of Foucault, and particularly among book historians, whose interest naturally includes the nature,

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<sup>98</sup> A. Schopenhauer, tr. E. Payne, *Parerga and Paralipomena* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 3.2.28 (vol. 2, p. 37).

<sup>99</sup> Husserl, *op. cit.*, 1.3.18 (vol. 2, pp. 374-375)

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.4.25 (vol. 2, p. 390).

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.5.32 (vol. 2, pp. 402-403).

<sup>102</sup> One unusual and illuminating discussion is by Austen Clark, "Some Logical Features of Feature Integration," in W. Backhaus ed., *Neuronal Coding of Perceptual Systems* (New Jersey: World Scientific Publishers, 2001), pp 3-20 (posted by the author at <http://selfpace.uconn.edu/paper/fiall.htm>).

style, functions, reception, use, distribution, and prevalence of published catalogues of every kind of artificial and natural object. Looking at Berkeley in this way will be fruitful, but I wish to suggest something further.

My own position is that the entire domain of material culture studies has its best theoretical basis in some form of immaterialism. I believe it ought to be a certain form of immaterialism, but I leave to this side for the present purpose. Let us say of idealism very broadly conceived that it is necessary for the full growth of our ideas of the history of objects, of understanding our projections upon them, and ultimately of what it means to have for human beings to have a history in the world, which is what comes of objects having a history in us. The object, whether it is a work of fine art or a useful item, came to be at a particular time and place among particular people for particular purposes. Of natural things it must be said that our knowledge of them, in verbal texts and in material employment, also has such determinations. All of these, held together in the mind's eye and each linked to an infinity of other such congeries, are the glow of human life in the finite dimension. When Berkeley separated out the moments in which things exist for us from the moments in which they seem not to because we are unaware of them, he set the some of the first foundations for both the historical and spiritual studies of humankind from the point of finitude to which we now are heir.

If the root of the existence of objects is in the knowing subject, the human person, the root must at some point hit certain nerves. Hitting the nerve might well be the reason that certain philosophers sought how to sink in the nerve, but in any case it need have been no surprise that the nerve is the moral nerve, its bite, its order, its guilt. Levinas said that "Berkeley found in the very qualities of objects the hold they offered to the I..."<sup>103</sup>—an extremely keen and meaningful observation, which he then connects to the basis of phenomenology in much the same perspective used by Derrida, as quoted above, who learned so very much from Levinas; but it is necessary to notice that locating the "hold" of objects on the ego must raise a phalanx of emotional and psycho-dynamic aspects, other than the claims of phenomenological investigation. If it means anything at all for objects to have a history in us, or for us to have inner lives, the anchorage must strongly hold

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<sup>103</sup> E. Levinas, tr. A. Lingis, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (Pittsburg: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 44.

indeed. Marx famously saw in every exchange of a commodity a moment of moral responsibility bearing a weight of guilt. Nietzsche made this apparent, in the second essay of *The Genealogy of Morals*, where the deep history of the subject reveals the origins of guilt, “bad conscience,” and *ressentiment*, from which much of the analysis of power relations grew and then entered into cultural studies. Even of this there is a slim preview in Berkeley’s early work.<sup>104</sup> Spirit is in opposition to matter because matter is unthinking; knowledge by spirit leads to God, and knowledge by matter leads to error, unbelief, and wrong. These words pass a few steps behind Berkeley to conventional theology, but he does seem to have had the sense that there is something corrupting about matter and its history and that a purer life is lost by too much truck in corporeality. So here are more things seeded by the endowment argument: the intense intersection of psychology and cultural anthropology.

Of course Berkeley did not have the words or the concepts for this. His own idea of time was a form of rejection, in a highly Platonic manner, but narrow. Nor did he know that seven months after he published the *Principles*, in December of 1710, an obscure jurist in Naples published his theory of knowledge, as revolutionary as Berkeley’s of the same year, and the first of his revolutionary challenges to our understanding of human history and culture. This was Giambattista Vico’s *De Antiquissima Italorum Sapientia....* (Naples, Felix Musca, 1710).<sup>105</sup> Vico’s work lay in wait, like many of Berkeley’s ideas, until its influence began to ramify more than a century later.

Berkeley did not begin to think, as Vico did think, that man was the fabricator of his own history, but he did see the human person as expert in the knowledge of living a human life. That is the power of the unitary neural system, the Cyclopean self: it is not a collector-funnel of rays of sensibilia from a mysterious surround but is rather a craftsman trained at living, with a sense of the intangible but evident, or the intangible but obscured that becomes evident even if it never is tangible. Consider for example the SS. General Slocum, the steamship that burned in the East River, by the Bronx shore, in 1905, on which more the 1,300

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<sup>104</sup> I believe this idea can be distantly seen in P.73.

<sup>105</sup> For the date of Vico’s publication, see B. Croce, *Bibliografia Vichiana* (Naples: Ricardi, 1947-1948) 1.15-17; for that of Berkeley’s, see Luce, *Life*, pp. 46-47.

people died—the greatest disaster in New York City until 2001. It was 236 feet long, and had three levels, and had 26 paddles to each wheel, and displaced 1,200 tons, and was a hunk of two different kinds of wood but nevertheless just a hunk of wood. Before its final disaster it had five near-disasters, each of which would have killed many hundreds; the salvaged bits were used to build a barge, which also sank. It was an “unlucky ship”—this is what it was *known as*, yet it was just a hunk of wood, in which no spirit of tragedy could inhere. But to one who knew sea craft, to a seaman, its unluckiness was an evident property. Of course, as I say, it was not fated, nor was its history to be found inside its material constituents. No one who knew it was a bad ship knew this because he or she had a special faculty of knowing such things, not intuition nor natural knowledge. If you were around ships and shipping in New York in 1900, you knew this because your knowledge was intensely mediated by a long tradition of craft and special experience. Whether what one knows in this way is a good thing or a bad thing about the object of knowledge, such as an approving moral judgment or a presentiment of fear, for example, the knowledge existed as the history of the object, held together by each, and shared among several of them, as one knower through one single, Cyclopean, mind’s eye. Berkeley was perhaps the first to try to propose an account of knowledge capable of retaining what might be lost in a strictly rationalist view of cognition while at the same time giving full authority to the power of empirical observation.

*F.* This, as I said, is just the germ of a non-rationalist approach to knowledge. It faces the formidable power of the empirical method to explain and control the world. The problems of reconciliation and combat between these two, in all their forms and combinations of our quick rich world culture, continues, since we now have to consider whether our science today, especially neuroscience and evolutionary biology, has matched the extremely complicated and subtle forms of judgment that organic life employs. It will not do to explain apple as a combination of red and round or table as a mix of square and wooden, to put the matter farcically, because we now can scientifically explain much of their actual sophisticated pathways of association of ideas. I shall not carry my own thoughts in this area further for the present purpose, but you might not be surprised to read that there is another germ of a succession of courses of philosophical thought in

Berkeley, beside the concept of the history of objects. This second concerns language and perspective.

One of Berkeley's statement on the basic unit of rational knowledge, the word, is remarkable for the vivid image in which he presents a profound idea:

...the reason why ideas are formed into machines, that is artificial and regular combinations, is the same with that for combining letters into words.... By this means abundance of information is conveyed unto us.<sup>106</sup>

Johnston glosses this nicely: "God creates certain organisms and constructs certain machines" as we combine letters & words. The relationships of words are clear in sentences; the relationships of things, in the context of the organs of God's active being.<sup>107</sup> Like the laws of nature, words are arbitrary conventions designed for our information. This can correctly be viewed as Berkeley's version of the ancient view of the world as a book, closely related to the idea of nature as the mirror of God. To this our philosopher has added the concepts of conventionality and convenience, by which causality is replaced by signifying.<sup>108</sup> This statement is Berkeley's challenge to "the questionable privilege we moderns have granted to univocity," in the words of Karsten Harries.<sup>109</sup> Whether Berkeley made this challenge in the name of medieval spiritual significance or in the name of something novel will never be clear and is never the point. It seems that both were mixed in his mind, and that he did in the end, in the iatrochemistry, of the *Siris*, having tried to find a new way forward, fall back on traditional concepts, ever trying to shake a new nut out of the shells.

Berkeley conducted a subversion of the concept of matter partly by means of this view of language. Matter as a useful term gets approval and disapproval by turns in his early works. It is almost a tangible thing, then it dissolves away. To use Bergson's metaphor, it is the thinnest film that becomes invisible if not essentially

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<sup>106</sup> P.65.

<sup>107</sup> Johnston, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-24.

<sup>108</sup> Bradatan, *op. cit.*, pp. 60-77, an able review of the *liber mundi* and *speculum naturae* traditions as they apply to Berkeley, along with a positive recognition, made by few others, of the "crucial shift" made in this remark by Berkeley.

<sup>109</sup> K. Harries, *The Ethical Function of Architecture* (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1998). P. 132.

dispersed when we close in on it. He renders the word “matter” fungible. This is how he can claim to defend common sense while saying something outlandish to it. At one moment he proves common sense and common sense proves him. At the next moment neither approves of the other, and Berkeley therefore addresses himself to the “erudite” rather than to the “vulgar.” Now, Berkeley does not change, but he flips his reader’s expectations at right angles.

A similar revolution of the reader’s perspective will be found in Pierre-Joseph Proudhon’s “proof” that property—that is real property and fiscal profit—cannot exist, in *What is Property?* Proudhon argues at length that the elements in an economic system, such as labor and raw materials, are finite, and therefore that the words we sprinkle over them don’t add or subtract anything from the reality. “Property is the right of increase...without labor.” But nothing can be produced out of nothing, and therefore each case of property is nothing but a re-arrangement of elements already present, for we are not like gods who can create something literally and actually new.<sup>110</sup> Property therefore is impossible. Nothing changes but our intention.<sup>111</sup> A long argument, mathematical and moral, surrounds this conclusion, at the beginning of which it is interesting to note that Proudhon describes himself as an opponent of the ideas of Reid and Kant.<sup>112</sup>

We must employ both precision and imprecision in our ambiguous world. We require judgments far too complicated to be sorted into mere univocity and equivocity in both personal and impersonal matters, for the natural world now seems to show itself having labyrinths that tax philosophers of science as much as human behavior taxes moral philosophers. Over and over again Berkeley stresses that words are inadequate to the complexity of reality. This did not begin with him, but he makes an original point about it. By subjecting one of the most obvious predicates of existence to this treatment, Berkeley suggests a method of thinking about our experiences in the order in which they come to us rather than according to the order we habitually put upon them. Such disruption stimulates the nomination of different organizing principles of experience, and of many of

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<sup>110</sup> P.-J. Proudhon, tr. D. Kelley and B. Smith, *What is Property?* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 120.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

these; but in particular Berkeley, like Proudhon, shows the difficulties in fixing each order upon experience while our minds are in perpetual transit to other points of view, whether older or newer. It is not at all overly imaginative to think of his anti-materialism in terms of what we now call de-familiarization: a term, first used in a corner of literary theory, that can stand for the numerous ways in which we re-position elements of experience. The Impressionist painters were among the first to use this as a revolutionary principle. An empirically reductive account of something can do this as well. It was a famous reformation of understanding, from the Enlightenment onward.<sup>113</sup> Conceptual art today can use the same function of placing words at odds with sense perception. Its core is re-working the material of time and of history. Thus if one finds the trace of an old stream in a built-up city, the great bulk of the structure over it may be seen in a different order from its foundation. If one turns the corner in an old city to find its cathedral suddenly massed over everything built around it through the centuries, the cathedral then is a real part of the actual world of experience, though it had not been seen a moment before. When brought to consciousness, like the hidden stream, it returns into existence with all its history across the time from its last appearance deposited into the new moment of experience. Life requires us to think again at each of the gaps that fall inevitably open behind reason. We have come to find new kinds of meaning where older meanings seem no longer to obtain, or to obtain in their accustomed strength. Toward this kind of thinking Berkeley endowed a potent advance. Thomas Hobbes witnessed the most intolerable dissolutions of order, and often had little good to say of the power of words, because they convinced only those who were willing, but nonetheless he believed in the oath, which could prevent brutal chaos because people will stand by their words and will also accept words as warrant for coercion. In every way he could think of he tried to screw down the lid of received order upon our wayward will. Where Hobbes saw dissolved and states, Berkeley saw dissolving ideas. With respect to the power of words to anchor understanding, Berkeley saw that univocity, though successful in rationalist science, would spawn nihilism, failing radically unfamiliar adaptations. He could not, of course, see ahead to these, but the endowment argument for the non-existence of matter helped to initiate a long succession of change.

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<sup>113</sup> Carlo Ginsburg has a wonderful essay on the history and reach of this concept, "Making It Strange: the prehistory of a literary device," in *Wooden Eyes* (New York: Columbia University Press), pp. 1-24.

Berkeley's was an age of anamorphic images, of clever machinery to scramble images for entertainment, and of mediating imagery so as to add to our empirical knowledge as well.<sup>114</sup> His *Theory of Vision* ought to be seen in the wide angle of this movement, in which prostheses for sensation revolutionized art and science. This is not exactly an unknown subject, but Berkeley has rarely been brought into it despite his having written the treatise that is fairly said to have "started...the immaterialization of knowledge."<sup>115</sup> The ground on which this stood was objects—physical images of all kinds of things that the advancing productive and distributive markets from the fifteenth century onward put into people's hands, in each case enriching the material and spiritual culture pictured by the images and to which people attached the images. Soon enough non-pictorial, functional objects began to represent or even "picture" imagery. In religion as well, the splintered perspective allowed for more private images, as against the dominance of public ones, and thereby for the extension of private devotion. When, in the Renaissance, the authority of the truth of imagery, symbolized by the image of Jesus on Veronica's sudarium, began to separate from its material substrate, truth as well lifted off from the simple sensuous into an ever more intricate reality of image and text—text as image, image as text.<sup>116</sup> In time, reproductive technology altered the ontology of original and copy because it altered the relations of persons and objects. The Creation of all things was innumerably re-created in us. By Berkeley's day standardized perspective first began to come apart and be replaced by numerous valid perspectives flowing from a different view of interiority.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> On anamorphosis, see Francis Terpak, "Objects and Contents," in B. Stafford and F. Terpak, ed., *Devices of Wonder: From the World in a Box to Images on a Screen* (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2001), pp. 235-247

<sup>115</sup> This is the statement of Barbara Stafford, the outstanding scholar in the early history of visual culture, in chapter two, "The Visualization of Knowledge from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism," of her *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998), p. 26; however, her reference to Berkeley's texts, n. 29, is incorrect in form, so that the passages she has in mind are not easily traceable; and she has nowhere, to my knowledge, expanded on this idea, although she does refer to Berkeley a couple times in her later book, *Echo Objects*, which presents an approach from the arts to the neuroscience of "binding."

<sup>116</sup> This full story is laid out by H. Belting, tr. E. Jephcott, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image Before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), chapters 19 and 20 (pp. 409-490).

<sup>117</sup> The replacement of standardized optics with new ideas in art drawn from advanced mathematics, psychology, and biology is described by Martin Kemp in *The Science of Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), Part II, "Machine and Mind," pp. 165-258.

**G.** Anamorphosis is flip-flop reality. The image exists as two truths— the clue and the answer, the puzzle and the solution, or the hidden and the revealed— between which the viewer prosthetically toggles. In Berkeley’s view the ordinary world can reveal a secret. Hermeticism always was, in part, a response to the de-souled world that the senses seem to find. Perhaps this is a reason Berkeley turned to the hermetic tradition in his last work, and perhaps one might discern the old view of optics as magic in his first book presaging his final fall-back on iatrochemistry and older forms of immanence in his last book. When our words, such as “matter,” no longer seem to tell the truth, people search for truths of hermetically hidden in, by, beyond, or behind them. This project is ancient and unending. In this and other manners, philosophers often seem to fight a rear-guard action on behalf of the human stain against disenchantment. Certainly, this is one of the impulses that moved George Berkeley. In his early works he made his attempt from within the boundaries of philosophy after Descartes, or from within its principle terms as he found them in John Locke. But his difficult outcome was that this attempt from within these terms was to reject them. In the endowment argument, he was a kind of chrysalis. To read it is to see Berkeley stretching the embryonic sac of rationalist empiricism, tearing it from its inside with baby fingers and feet. Kant took on a similar battle in defense of human freedom and the moral law. He brought to it a titanic steamworks of advanced and interlocked concepts. Lacking this, Berkeley was bolder and more raw. He did not paint over the crack in the world by calling the soul regulative rather than constitutive, as Kant did. Schopenhauer considered these notions, as well as the rest of Kant’s rationalist psychology and moral philosophy, a ridiculous fake. In light of the existential question at the bottom of this, a portion of modern philosophy would have to say that Berkeley’s was the clearer view. Like Schopenhauer and like John Dewey, Berkeley maintained that he dealt with the real and practical particulars rather than with abstract fictions. The rational and the empirical might be the key to what God wants us to know about reality, like the viewing device that straightens the anamorphic image: the little machine given us by God because it is necessary to our survival is just a toy from the divine point of infinite view.

In an earlier time, infinity offered a certain comfort. Our limits and defects were then cured by God, as when Nicholas of Cusa said that all points of view are relative because they float anywhere and everywhere within the infinite circle of the

divine being who is everywhere. Berkeley counsels us to rely upon God, too, but he suggests a newer reason to be worried. Infinity becomes threatening, just as when we see ourselves as tiny and vulnerable specks amidst infinite cosmic expanse. The size of nature or the universe was not Berkeley's specific concern, but in him something has shifted or opened up. The knowing subject—we ourselves—now stands on its own two feet. He detected weakness in reason, our mightiest engine. In the centuries after Berkeley<sup>118</sup> Western philosophy chiefly took two different approaches to finitude, one conjoined with empiricism and rationalism and the other at odds with them. Berkeley took neither approach. He did not reject them, either. We should say that he did not conceive of them although he was in immediate contact with the dilemma to which they responded.

The endowment argument declares that finite man is in the company of an infinite being by making two points: first, that matter cannot be the organizing principle of reality; and second, that God must be such an organizing principle. The second is part of the first. For Berkeley's argument is not an ontological argument for God's existence, by which the lesser necessitates conviction in the existence of the greater. He argues not that one thing must exist but that another cannot exist. God's existence is co-ordinate with the non-existence of matter. These two are yoked. God is part of the system of the world constituted by ideas. He denies that the system of the world is constituted by representation and the represented. Berkeley in the end can wholly dispense with the apparatus of faculties and qualities, because these are imbricated in representation, whereas ideas are about something other than representation. In this respect, his argument is successful: issues of the relation of representation and the represented are not relevant to what he describes. In the place of matter directly perceived or known by representation Berkeley described a psychic or spiritual world.

His argument, not standing or falling on questions of representation, succeeds on a wholly different account. Ideas, as he conceives them, concern signifying rather than representing. He says that we have only "the power of imagining," that is, of receiving and making images, which are signs and symbols. All signs are both signifier and signified. Each pointing to another, there is no absolute bifurcation within a sign or among signs. Signs point to themselves and

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<sup>118</sup> M. Foucault, tr. R. Nigri, *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology* (Los Angeles: Semiotexte, 2008).

away from themselves: this is part of their enduring perplexity to our minds. Berkeley describes this as the world of our relative and subjective organizations, or congeries, of ideas. We do not, in his view, have the power of directly knowing existence or causality. These are real, but they are not at issue in fathoming the ideational world. That world merely points to real existence, real causality, and even real power, which he views as known only to God. On our part we just patch together some information that God signals to us. With or without God, this conception of the world as signs rather than as representation showed a new direction that psychology and the human sciences took in succeeding centuries, with many difficult struggles.

However, the peculiar nature of signs presented Berkeley with a problem he did not solve, or perhaps it is better to say that his philosophy gave him a view of a problem before which he trembled to choose a path. Signs are neither object nor actions. Instead, they are a kind of process. Berkeley's ideas are in motion though they have no motive power of their own. People produce ideas, and people receive them from God and from others. But according to Berkeley they cannot have the power to cause, they are effects solely, so that our ideas are effects; and yet we make and employ these ideas, thrashing around to understand what God is telling us. Just as each sign signifies and is the signified, so we receive ideas and make them. Ideas, as signs, are interchanges, plastic and temporary. We get ideas by an motion of ours toward them, a movement in space in order to touch the world. Yet there is no space, and there is no movement, in the strict sense of externality. What there is, instead, might be called gesture. We do not so much move as make signs, by means of ideas. We gesture with our ideas, and God gestures to us. All the power might be God's, but Berkeley has to conceive of something for humans since we are the medium in which ideas exist. Signs travel within this medium. It is within our ideational structures that they signify and are signified. Instead of faculties of the mind and qualities of matter, we give and take gestures. Instead of external existents and the beat of cause upon effect, we have a medium in which these realities are known to us by gesture.

The notion of a Cyclopean unitary consciousness is a delicate and difficult analysis, because Berkeley absolutely requires the medium—that is, us—to be totally dependent upon God, and yet something takes place within us that must be connected to our volition if we have any at all. In each idea, or sign or gesture, we

present our understanding of things and we try to know God's understanding. These two processes happen simultaneously, incessantly, and instantaneously in each act of the human being, upon any valid understanding of it according to Berkeley's principles. Without a notion of what this medium, the human person, is or must be, the argument that God sustained the world rather than impoverished it had to be pressed hard by Berkeley. He faced the difficulty of reconciling the requirement that we have some strength in order to process ideas and that God's strength is absolute. He argued his spiritual conviction. Yet he was so powerfully describing man's double nature that he can be said to have opened a new view of one side of it. Then Berkeley stopped right at the foot of the field to which this pointed: the idea of personhood and the implications of personality. A number of commentators have noticed this, that the question of the person must be central to his project and that he never addressed it.<sup>119</sup> Perhaps the strangest thing he ever wrote is this line in his earliest notes, that he must remember

Carefully to omit defining of person, or making much mention of it.<sup>120</sup>

True to this resolution, he never did. This silence was his gift to philosophy; the fear in it was his endowment.

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<sup>119</sup> Urmson, Dancy, Johnston, Wild.

<sup>120</sup> C713.