Peter West

Knowing me, Knowing you: Berkeley on Self-knowledge and Other Spirits

It is well-established (and explicit in the work itself) that one of Berkeley’s chief aims in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is to collapse the distinction between what we perceive and what exists (and, more broadly, between perception and existence).[[1]](#footnote-1) This distinction, Berkeley believes, is a product of irresponsible and pernicious abstract thought. Abstract thought, Berkeley maintains, strays too far from what is experienced, what is conceivable and, as he seeks to demonstrate throughout the *Principles* (and the *Three Dialogues*), what is possible.[[2]](#footnote-2) As he puts it in PHK §5, there is no better example of abstract thought than, “to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived”. As Berkeley sees it, the notion of the existence of matter, material substance, or material objects requires this distinction be upheld, and thus he argues that ‘materialism’ (the broad view on which material substance exists, either exclusively or as well as spiritual substance) ought to be rejected. Berkeley’s deflationary approach to our perception of the external world leads him to the famous claim that when it comes to “unthinking things” – the things (or as Berkeley puts it “ideas”) that make up the world around us – “Their *esse* is *percipi*” (PHK §3). For Berkeley, there is no distinction to be drawn between the existence of a thing and its being perceived. To enquire separately into (i) the existence or nature of things, and (ii) the manner in which we perceive them (as materialists do) is to follow an erroneous line of enquiry thrown up only by abstract thought.

My aim in this paper will be to demonstrate matters of ontology, perception, and immediate knowledge, for Berkeley, ought not to be enquired into separately – even in the cases of self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds.[[3]](#footnote-3) As I will demonstrate, identifying the nature of either the perceiver or the perceived is, for Berkeley, one and the same with determining what exists. I will focus on the nature of self-knowledge; knowledge of oneself as a spirit. Berkeley’s strict commitment to the view that it is impossible to have an idea of a spirit means that spirits cannot be *perceived* (PHK §27). In other words, a spirit (which is active) cannot be a passive object to an act of perception. However, I will demonstrate that Berkeley is nonetheless equipped with an account of self-knowledge – of both the existence and nature of one’s own spirit – which ought nonetheless to be understood in terms of perception(more broadly).

My reading of Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge is motivated by his claim that it is only by virtue of having immediate knowledge of the self – in other words, one’s *own* spirit – that we can gain knowledge of other spirits. Two claims, in particular, make it clear that (for Berkeley) self-knowledge is something we *use* in order to gain knowledge of other spirits. In the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley explains that;

My own mind and ideas I have an immediate knowledge of; and *by help of these*, do mediately apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas. (DHP 231-32 [my emphasis])

While in the *Principles* he claims that;

we know other spirits *by means of our own soul,* which is in that sense the image or idea of them (PHK §140 [my emphasis])

The first claim indicates that Berkeley thinks all spirits are alike (somehow or another); he argues that the immediate knowledge I have of myself as spirit is a tool used to gain knowledge of the existence of others. The second implies similarly that my own spirit is key to understanding what others are like. Together, these claims indicate that knowledge of both the existence and nature of other minds depends upon the immediate knowledge we have of our own mind. As such, Berkeley places a significant epistemological burden on his account of *self*-knowledge. In fact, his accounts of self-knowledge and knowledge of other spirits stand or fall together. Unless Berkeley can provide an adequate account of the former, he *de facto* (by his own principles) fails to provide an account of the latter.

In making this claim, Berkeley cannot mean to say that my own spirit is literally an “image or idea” of other spirits – this is ruled out by Berkeley’s strict epistemology (PHK §27). One of the central tenets of Berkeley’s immaterialist system is that there are two kinds of existent: those which exist by virtue of *being perceived* (ideas) and those which exist by virtue of *perceiving* (spirits). Berkeley maintains that since these two kinds of existent are entirely heterogenous, a passive idea could never represent an active spirit (PHK §142).[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, in the opening passage of the *Principles*, Berkeley suggests that we gain knowledge by means of our ideas (PHK §1). In what sense, then, can we gain knowledge of either our own or other spirits? If Berkeley does not have a clear story of how we gain self-knowledge, then (by his own reasoning) he is lacking a foundation on which to base his epistemology of other minds. What makes this concern particularly pressing (bearing in mind Berkeley’s theistic concerns)[[5]](#footnote-5) is the fact that, as Berkeley makes clear, this goes for not only other human minds but also the mind of God (PHK §147).[[6]](#footnote-6) My aim will be to show that Berkeley’s account is not undermined by such concerns and that he *is* equipped to provide an account of self-knowledge – which ought to be construed in terms of perception.

The structure of my argument is as follows. In the first section, I will emphasise the extent to which Berkeley moves away from what I characterise as a Cartesian account of the self and self-knowledge. In the second section, I will argue that Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge provides us with immediate knowledge (or, ‘immediate data’) that can plausibly be used in order to gain knowledge of other spirits. Finally, I will argue (contrary to Talia Mae Bettcher’s interpretation) that while Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge is not straightforwardly a matter of *what is perceived*, it is nonetheless grounded in perceptual activity.

L1 Berkeley’s Rejection of Cartesian Self-Knowledge

In this section, I will emphasise Berkeley’s move away from ‘abstract’ or ‘absolute’ conceptions of the self and *inferential* accounts of self-knowledge – particularly the Cartesian account.[[7]](#footnote-7) Above all, in order for Berkeley to assert that self-knowledge is the kind of knowledge that can be employed in gaining knowledge of other minds he must establish how the self, or one’s own spirit, can be an object of immediate knowledge at all.

Throughout this section, I will contrast Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge with an inferential account which I attribute to Descartes. In doing so, it might be argued, I have failed to acknowledge Descartes’ claim in the *Replies to the Second Set of Objections* that the ‘cogito’ is not an argument or inference but rather a “primary notion” (CSM 2: 100). Here Descartes writes:

When someone says ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind.

This, as Descartes points out, is necessary if he is to avoid positing there is a general principle at work – “Everything which thinks is, or exists” – from which the particular claim “I exist” is derived. Were such a general principle at work, Descartes could not consistently maintain that the ‘cogito’ is a first principle of knowledge (i.e. the “firm and immovable point” that he wants it to be (CSM 2:16)). In this way, Descartes establishes the certainty with which we know the existence of the self. What’s more, Descartes distances our knowledge of the *existence* of the self from our knowledge of *what that self is like*; once the ‘cogito’ is established he *then* goes on to examine what it is that ‘I’ refers to (CSM 2:19). As we will see, Berkeley does not acknowledge any such distinction. It will become clear that this is one of the key differences between a Cartesian and a Berkeleian account of the self.

Regardless of whether Descartes can plausibly argue that ‘I am thinking, therefore I am’ is prior to a more general principle, it is clear that some kind of inference is at work in his account of self-knowledge – of how we gain knowledge of ourselves as thinking things. The Cartesian account of self-knowledge is an inferential one – and Descartes’ claims (outlined above) should not deter us from accepting that. The way that Descartes’ *phrases* his self-knowledge claims indicates that there is a step from (i) knowledge of oneself as thinking, to (ii) knowledge of oneself *as oneself* (i.e. *a thinking thing*). Even if, for Descartes, these two kinds of knowledge are inseparable in the sense that once I know (i) I cannot help but know (ii), it becomes clear that knowledge of oneself as thinkingis necessary *before* one can have knowledge of oneself as a thinking thing (the latter ‘bootstraps’ on the former). If no such inference were required then Descartes’ use of the term “therefore”would be redundant (CSM 1:194-95, 1:127, 2:100). Thus, even if no argument or syllogism is required in order to reach the conclusion that ‘I exist’, I will take it that gaining knowledge of oneself does, for Descartes, involve a move from the existence of thought (or modes of thought) to the existence of thinker. This is at least consistent with Descartes’ claim that the mind comes to realise, “that it is impossible that [it] should think without existing” (CSM 2:100).[[8]](#footnote-8)

As far as Berkeley is concerned, what is straightforwardly clear is that self-knowledge is not be the same kind of immediate knowledge we have of our ideas; because spirit is neither the kind of thing that can be represented by ideas nor the kind of thing that can be perceived (Bettcher 2007, 41-42).[[9]](#footnote-9) In fact, as Berkeley makes clear in PHK §142, spirits and ideas are so unlike one another that when we use phrases like ‘they exist’ or ‘they are known’, the terms involved are used in totally different ways. As Kenneth Pearce puts it, “there are [for Berkeley] two distinct senses of ‘know’, and in one of these senses it is correct to say ‘spirits are known’ and in the other it is not” (Pearce 2017, 126).[[10]](#footnote-10) I cannot have ideational knowledge of my own spirit, but I can have a different (‘notional’) kind of knowledge of it (PHK §27, §142).[[11]](#footnote-11) So what exactly does this other kind of knowledge – immediate knowledge of the self – consist in? What does it mean to have non-ideational but immediate knowledge of oneself as a spirit?

If we grant that Descartes’ account is an inferential one, I take it as uncontroversial to draw a sharp distinction between the Cartesian account of self-knowledge and Berkeley’s own account. Although commentators disagree as to what Berkeley’s view on the nature of spirit and its relationship with the ideas it perceives is, it is clear he does not subscribe to an inferential account of self-knowledge.[[12]](#footnote-12) It will be helpful to emphasise the extent to which Berkeley breaks with the outlined Cartesian approach for the sake of identifying what is distinctive about his own account.

In the *Principles of Philosophy,* Descartes makes the claim, early on, that

it is a contradiction to suppose that what thinks does not, at the very same time when it is thinking, exist. Accordingly, this piece of knowledge – *I am thinking, therefore I exist* – is the first and most certain of all to occur to anyone who philosophizes in an orderly way (CSM 1: 195)

In this case, Descartes appears to inferfrom an implicit principle that ‘what is thinking must also exist’ that something (an “I”) exists in order to explain the fact that such thinking is taking place.[[13]](#footnote-13) Similarly, in the second meditation, we are told that;

after considering everything very thoroughly, I must finally conclude that this proposition, *I am, I exist,* is necessarily true whenever it is put forward by me or conceived in my mind (CSM 25:17)

Here, Descartes’ claim is that the very act of thinking provides demonstrative evidence of the existence of a thinking thing; from the fact that I am thinking I know, with certainty, that a thinker exists. While Descartes is explicit in claiming that I am *inseparable* from my thoughts and suggests I exist “as long as I am thinking” (CSM 2:18), the distinction between agent and action is nonetheless clear. In this way, Descartes posits the existence of both (i) thought and (ii) thinker; different modes of thought and the agent or subject who performs them – and distinguishes between the two. Consider, for example, the following claim;

The fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willingis so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer (CSM 2:19)

There is obviously an implicit distinction between the subject and its actions at work, detectable from the fact that ‘I’ is distinguishable from doubting, understanding, and willing. This is further corroborated by remarks in the *Principles* *of Philosophy* where, for example, Descartes writes; “thought alone belongs to *it* [my mind]” (CSM 1:195). Thought cannot, strictly, belong to itself so there must be some subject (my mind) to which it belongs. In metaphysical terms, this assumption is grounded in Descartes’ adoption of a substance-mode ontology; by identifying different modes of thought (ways of thinking) it is possible to infer the existence of that substance in which they inhere (my mind).[[14]](#footnote-14)

In fact, that Descartes is even able to ask the question, “What then am I?...What is that?” (CSM 2:19) demonstrates that the existence of the self can be known separately from its actions. Indeed, even though the existence of thought is key to inferring the existence of the mind (knowing that ‘*cogito ergo sum’*), Descartes’ view is that it is possible to gain knowledge of the self *before* getting clear on what type of thing it is (a thinking thing) or the types of actions it performs (such as doubting, understanding, willing).[[15]](#footnote-15)

Berkeley, on the other hand, insists that such an inference does not – and indeed could not – provide knowledge of anything beyond those mental operations (in Cartesian terms; those modes of thought). Berkeley rejects the claim that knowledge of the existence of the self is prior to knowledge of the *nature* of the self, just as he rejects that knowledge of the existence of sensible objects is distinct from knowledge of their nature (PHK §5). Like Descartes, he maintains that “the soul always thinks” (PHK §98).[[16]](#footnote-16) However, Berkeley goes further, explaining;

[Therefore] whoever shall go about to divide in his thoughts, or abstract the existence of a spirit from its cogitation, will, I believe, find it no easy task.

For Berkeley, there is nothing to be gained by attempting to understand the self as abstracted from those actions by which we come to know its existence. If the soul always thinks, then what knowledge can we possibly hope to have of it aside from its cogitation? (NB 652) He compares the situation to attempts to conceive of ‘extension’ or ‘motion’ in abstract. In both such cases, he argues, once we abstract away the qualities by which we come to know ‘extension’ and ‘motion’, there is nothing left for us to conceive of – and thus no further knowledge to be gained (PHK §99). To enquire into such things or to claim that our knowledge of their existence isdistinct from our knowledge of their particular qualities, he insists, is merely “*barren* speculation [my emphasis]” – to look for knowledge where there is none available (PHK §156; AMP 7.15).

The parallels between self-knowledge (knowledge of one’s own spirit) and attempts to gain knowledge of sensible things (knowledge of one’s ideas) in abstract are important. At the beginning of the *Principles,* where Berkeley is reacting to the “strangely prevailing [i.e. widespread] opinion” that sensible objects exist independently of the mind, he asks whether there can be

a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? …is it possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception? For my part I might as easily divide a thing from itself (PHK §§4-5).

The approach is clearly rhetorical and Berkeley’s is that when it comes to sensible objects *to exist is one and the same as to be perceived*; the one cannot be divided from the other. After all, a sensible (“unthinking”) thing’s *esse* is *percipi* (PHK §3). This is confirmed in PHK §17 where Berkeley provides us with a warning against attempts to conceive of existence in abstract: “The general idea of being appears to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all other”. As we saw previously, spirits and ideas are neither known nor exist in the same way; they are as categorically different as sounds and colours are to the senses (PHK §142). We could no more come across a sensible spirit than we could a square circle. Nonetheless, Berkeley’s remarks about what the existence of a spirit consists in make two things clear: (i) that existence (in a wider sense than just sensible existence) is always tied to perception, and (ii) that Berkeleian self-knowledge is not inferential.

This is supported by various remarks from entries in Berkeley’s *Notebooks*, where he is quite explicit about the relationship between existence and perception. In entry 646, he writes; “Existence not perceivable without perception or volition not distinguish’d therefrom.” As before, the claim is that once we abstract the existence of things from the acts of perceiving there is nothing left for us to perceive.[[17]](#footnote-17) That is, while ideas exist by virtue of *being perceived*, spirits exist by virtue of *perceiving*. This is likewise suggested by a further entry where Berkeley maintains that, “Existence is percipi or percipere...or velle i.e. agere"; to be is to be perceived, to perceive, or to will (or act) (NB429).[[18]](#footnote-18) To exist, therefore, is either to be passively perceived (to be an idea) or to actively perceive in one way or another (to be a spirit). This is confirmed in PHK §89, where Berkeley writes:

*Thing* or *being* is the most general name of all, it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing common but the name, to wit, *spirits* and *ideas*.

That is, to be a ‘thing’ or a ‘being – in other words, to exist – is to be either a spirit or an idea. These are the two kinds of ‘thing’ or ‘being’ in existence, and the terms ought not to be applied to anything above and beyond them.

Although ‘exist’ means different things when applied to spirits and ideas, it can nonetheless, in both cases, be ultimately cashed out in terms of *perception.* In the *Principles*, Berkeley explains that, “spirit is one simple, undivided, active being” and later describes it as, “that which acts…that active principle of motion and change of ideas” (PHK §27). He explains that ‘understanding’ is what we call the spirit when it perceives, and that ‘will’ is what we call it when it either produces ideas or “operates about them.” Furthermore, he argues that it is not possible, even conceptually, to distinguish these ‘ways of perceiving’ from the perceiver (that is, an individual spirit) itself. In doing so he denies that, aside from the awareness we have of ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’, there is

a third idea of substance or being in general, with a relative notion of its supporting or being *the subject* of the aforesaid powers, which is signified by the name ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ (PHK §27 [my emphasis)[[19]](#footnote-19)

This is significant for my current purposes since it indicates that to enquire into what terms like ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ signify, aside from their operations, is, again, “barren speculation”. The view that we can gain knowledge of the ‘subject’, ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’ abstracted from its actions is “what some hold” but is refutable on the basis of both experience and the limits of our conceptual abilities,[[20]](#footnote-20) and thus ought to be rejected. Although this argument need not be read straightforwardly as a rejection of the Cartesian view, it is nonetheless sufficient to differentiate Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge from that position.[[21]](#footnote-21) Unlike Descartes, Berkeley quite clearly denies that we could *first* be certain that ‘I’ exist before *then* asking what ‘I am’? (CSM 2:19).

These metaphysical claims make it clear that the being, or existence, of a spirit consists in its perceptual activities; its *esse* is *percipere*. The epistemological ramifications of this view are that in order to gain knowledge of spirit, it is sufficient that we gain knowledge of those activities. Berkely re-iterates this view in the *Principles* when he attacks attempts to, “abstract the existence of a spirit from its cogitation” (PHK §98). As such, so long a self-knowledge is possible, it must consist in immediate knowledge of our perceptual *activities*.

L1 Self-Knowledge as Immediate Data

I previously stated that in order for self-knowledge to be used as a means for gaining knowledge of other spirits we must get clear on what it means to have immediate knowledge of “my own spirit”. Berkeley clearly states that “we know other spirits by means of our own soul” – so he *must* have an account of self-knowledge in order to form the basis of his wider epistemology of mind.[[22]](#footnote-22)

We’ve established that Berkeley does not see self-knowledge as something that can be abstracted from knowledge of one’s own perceptual activity. To know the self is to know the distinct features of the mind or the different ways in which it perceives (and since for a mind to exist just is for it to perceive: the different ways in which it exists). It is not possible to conceive of the self *in absolute*; that is, as separate from the *means by which we come to know it* (as the Cartesian would have us do). For Berkeley, we can no more come to know our own mind beyond our perceptual activities, than we can come to know a sensible object abstracted from its sensible qualities. In order to understand this view, it is important to bear in mind that Berkeley does *not* see ideas as operations of the mind; they are distinct and passive entities that are *acted upon* (i.e. perceived) by the spirit as it is called ‘will’ and ‘understanding’ (PHK §27). If self-knowledge is reducible to knowledge of our perceptual acts, then it is reducible to knowledge of *what it is like* to perceive certain ideas (and not reducible to the ideas themselves, for the reasons outlined above).

In order to *use* the knowledge we have of our own spirit as a step towards knowledge of other spirits, Berkeley must explain how self-knowledge provides us with what we might call ‘immediate data’.[[23]](#footnote-23) In other words, it must be the case that, in being aware of one’s self as a spirit, one gains immediate knowledge of the kind that can provide a step towards that which we do not (immediately) know. It must provide us with data we can use as a *sign* – or, as Berkeley puts it, an “image or idea” (DHP 231-32). What needs clarifying is the nature of the ‘data’ (Berkeley maintains) we are drawing on when we gain knowledge of other minds.

In the third *Dialogue*, Berkeley lays out the parallels between immediate knowledge of sensible things and immediate knowledge of spirit. Though they exist in categorically different ways, which means our knowledge of them is likewise categorically different, there nonetheless *are* parallels to be drawn. He writes:

I own I have properly no idea, either of God or any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert, as our ideas are [see PHK §142]. I do nevertheless know that I, who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist as certainly as I know my ideas exist (DHP 231)

This latter claim is especially important: our self-knowledge is *as certain* as knowledge of our ideas.[[24]](#footnote-24) This is significant in light of Berkeley’s claims about what it means to immediately perceive our ideas. For example, he maintains that, “I cannot be deceived in thinking I have an idea which I have not” (PI §22). I also cannot be mistaken as to their nature; as Hylas puts it, “I know them perfectly” (DHP 206).[[25]](#footnote-25) Berkeley also claims (this time via Philonous) that;

I know what I mean by the terms ‘I’ and ‘myself’; and I know this immediately, or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, colour, or a sound. (DHP 232)

Here Berkeley reiterates the claim that although I do not *perceive* whatever it is that is signified by the terms ‘I’ and ‘myself’, my knowledge thereof is no less immediate than the knowledge I have of my ideas. Again, this is an *un*-Cartesian move to make: no inference is required in order to gain knowledge of ideas and thus, in light of Berkeley’s parity claims, no inference ought to be required in order to gain self-knowledge. So what can self-knowledge, without inference, consist in?

In the domain of ideas (in cases of both sensation and introspection)[[26]](#footnote-26) immediate knowledge, for Berkeley, means immediate experience of determinate qualities, while mediate knowledge involves using this immediate knowledge – these ideas – as signs in order to make more general or universal claims about the world (PI §12). Ideas constitute ‘immediate data’ insofar as they are determinate in nature and are not known inferentially. The *esse* of ideas is *percipi*, while the *esse* of spirits is *percipere* (or *velle i.e. agere*). Thus, in either case, gaining immediate data ought to involve perception. Perception, for Berkeley, can be construed in two (non-abstract ways): in terms of either what is perceived (ideas) or acts of perceiving (which are attributed to spirits). Perceptual *data* can either take the form of perceived ideas (which provide us with knowledge about themselves) or else knowledge of the acts of perceiving (whatever form that might take).[[27]](#footnote-27) The question, then, is whether Berkeley provides an account of immediate perceptual *data* concerning the self. Of course, this perceptual data won’t take the form of ideas (i.e. things perceived), but perception (for Berkeley) provides us with knowledge of more than just what is perceived.

So what form does immediate perceptual data about the self take for Berkeley? My claim is that it is in outlining the difference between the spirit as it is called ‘willing’ and the spirit as it is called ‘understanding’ – i.e. the different *ways in which we perceive ideas* – that Berkeley gives an account of immediate data, and thus immediate knowledge, of the self. Knowledge of the self as spirit, for Berkeley, does not take the form of ideas but is constituted by the *experience* of perceiving those ideas in different ways. Those different *ways of perceiving*, Berkeley explains, are properly called ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. As it is affected by ideas, Berkeley tells us, the spirit is called ‘understanding’, while as it produces ideas or “operates about them”, it is called the ‘will’. We should note Berkeley’s insistence that these are two different terms *for the same thing*, a thinking, active principle which can perceive ideas in different ways.[[28]](#footnote-28)

These different perceptual activities are not grounded in a metaphysical or ontological distinction, but are rather different ways in which a single, individuated thing goes about perceiving (and, therefore, existing). Berkeley defines spirit as, “that active principle of motion and change in ideas”, “that which acts”, and as something that produces certain effects (PHK §27). Berkeley explains that we have notional (non-ideational) knowledge of soul or spirit insofar as, “we know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK §27). Berkeley makes it clear that even though we cannot have an idea of spirit, that does not preclude our *knowing* it.[[29]](#footnote-29) What does it mean to understand the meaning of the word spirit? It means understanding *what it does*. Since spirit is ‘an active principle insofar as it produces motion and change in ideas’, understanding what spirit does, in turn, requires perceiving ideas that are subject to that motion and change (PHK §138; DHP 232).[[30]](#footnote-30) And this is exactly what Berkeley thinks we do: we frequently perceive series’ of ideas that could only have been caused by the will of either a finite or infinite spirit (PHK §146-47). Some of those ideas are caused by our own spirit while some are not, and thus we learn to differentiate between what our own spirit does and does not do (§28-29).

What is it like to gain immediate knowledge of the ‘will’ and the ‘understanding’? And *how* do I gain such perceptual knowledge if it is not represented by my ideas? The answer lies in experience; though we do not have ideas that represent the activity of our spirit, we are nonetheless able to experience the spirit as it acts. There is, for Berkeley, a distinction between the phenomenology of being a *willing* agent and the phenomenology of being an *understanding* one; this is dependent on the nature of the ideas perceived. In other words, self-knowledge *requires* perceiving certain ideas but is not the same as perceiving those ideas. Rather, self-knowledge consists in perceiving those ideas in different ways (and *what that is like).*

In §§28-30 of the *Principles*, Berkeley gives a descriptive (phenomenological) account of the difference between ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. He does this by explaining what these two perceptual acts are like, as well as the kinds of ideas that are involved in these experiences. He writes:

I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy; and by the same power is obliterated, and makes way for another. This making or unmaking of ideas very properly denotes the mind active. Thus much is certain, and grounded on experience (PHK §28)

In this way, Berkeley explains that in those cases where we experience the voluntary nature of our ideas – cases where we have total control over our ideas – we ought to describe the spirit as ‘willing’ (Stoheham 2010, 497). The experience of ‘willing’, then, is one of being able to “excite ideas in my mind at pleasure”. Berkeley maintains that it is clear in such cases, where we can make or unmake our ideas voluntarily, that a particular perceptual activity is taking place. What’s more, Berkeley holds that it is immediately clear in such cases that something different is going on to when we experience sense perceptions, for the *contrast* between willing and understanding is immediately experienced. He writes:

But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts [as described above], I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will (PHK §29)[[31]](#footnote-31)

In this passage, Berkeley describes an instance in which the spirit is rightly called ‘understanding’; a case where the ideas I perceive are involuntary. I have no determination over the ideas I see, hear and so on. The experience of ‘understanding’ is one of perceiving ideas that “are not creatures of my will”. Again, Berkeley argues that our experience of perceiving these ideas will make immediately clear the distinction between the will and the understanding. This is not the kind of knowledge that requires reflection or inference; but is immediately given. Thus, the manner in which we perceive our ideas (and what that is like) constitutes a kind of immediate data. This data does not take the form of ideas (like my data concerning the sensible world) but the form of non-ideational knowledge of *what it is like* to perceive in different ways. Knowledge via ideas is knowledge of what something (else) is like *to me*, while knowledge of the mind is knowledge of what it is like *to be me*.

It is important to note that Berkeley thinks that willing can produce more than just ‘ideas of imagination’ in that, by means of volition, we can move our own limbs (and thereby produce a restricted set of ‘sensible ideas’). Beyond ideas of imagination, he explains, “the will of man has no other object than barely the motion of the limbs of his body” (PHK §147).[[32]](#footnote-32) Bodily movements, therefore, constitute a kind of idea of sense that isvoluntarily produced. So Berkeley maintains there are two distinctions in play here: (i) the distinction between voluntary and involuntary perception, and (ii) the distinction between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination. Both play some kind of role in our experience of the spirit as it is either willing or understanding. We experience *most* ideas of sense as involuntarily perceived (e.g. the sun in broad daylight), but some (e.g. the movements of my body) as voluntary. *Most* ideas of imagination are experienced as voluntarily perceived (e.g. memory, “compounding and dividing” ideas to form imaginary images; PI §10), but some are experienced as involuntary (e.g. “dreams, phrensies”; PHK §18). The latter of these cases (involuntary ideas of imagination) are the most problematic, and Berkeley presumably does not have them in mind when he claims that, “The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination” (PHK §30). One of these distinctions must generate our immediate awareness of the difference between ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. Since the distinction between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination does not (from the fact that ideas of sense are not exclusively involuntary), it must be the voluntary/involuntary distinction that does. After all, whether or not a possible hallucination turns out to be an idea of sense or an idea of imagination, it will not require reflection or inference to determine whether it was voluntary or involuntary. And indeed, that hallucinations are involuntarily perceived is what distinguishes them from imaginings or daydreams.[[33]](#footnote-33)

This reading of Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge as immediate experience of the ways in which we perceive ideas (voluntarily and involuntarily) has a number of strengths. Firstly, it is consistent with Berkeley’s metaphysical claims according to which there is no more to spirit than its actions. Consider, for example, the following claim from the *Notebooks*;

[the] substance of a spirit is that which acts, causes, wills, operates, or if you please (to avoid the quibble that may be made on the word *it*), to act, cause, will, operate [my emphasis] (NB 829).[[34]](#footnote-34)

Berkeley’s point is that the substanceof a spirit is not something *behind* mental acts, causes, volitions, and operations but is constituted by the *doing* of those very acts. It is for that reason that Berkeley is motivated to avoid positing a metaphysical subject (an “it”) behind the actions of causing, willing, operating and so on. Recall, for example, Descartes’ remark: “thought alone belongs to it [i.e. the mind]” (CSM 1:195). It is clear that Berkeley is distancing himself from such a position. For that reason, Stephen H. Daniel paraphrases Berkeley as such:

Understanding, willing, and spirit are thus not three things of which we just happen not to have ideas, for to say that would fall into the very abstractionist way of speaking about spiritual substance that Berkeley repeatedly rejects. In his eyes, just as there is no abstract material substance that underlies or supports sensible qualities, so there is no spiritual substance abstracted from willing or understanding. (2018, 661)

Daniel also takes treats Berkeley’s account of both minds and sensible things analogously: if there no abstract ‘it’ behind sensible qualities, why should there be an abstract ‘it’ behind perceptual acts? In sum, there are no abstract ‘its’ in Berkeley’s philosophy at all. Consider PHK §49 where Berkeley considers the nature of a ‘die’ and explicitly denies that ‘it’ is something in which certain qualities (its colour, cubic shape, etc.) inhere. Rather the die is constituted by those very properties.[[35]](#footnote-35) In both cases, Berkeley denies there is an ‘it’ to be known: to know a set of features (whether those be the sensible qualities of the die or the different operations of the mind) is to know the thing itself. The substance of the mind is its perceptual acts, just as the ‘substance’ of a die is its sensible qualities.

Secondly, this reading is consistent with Berkeley’s broader claim that existence is not to be conceived of separately from perception (NB 429). Berkeley explains how the doctrine of abstract ideas has had a pernicious effect on approaches to knowledge of spirit. He argues it has given thinkers cause to believe that

they could frame abstract notions of the powers and acts of the mind, and consider them prescinded, as well as from the mind or spirit it self as from their respective objects and effects. (PHK §143)

This provides further evidence that Berkeley thinks that to know a spirit is nothing more than to know its acts. A similar sentiment is also expressed when Berkeley argues

If therefore it is impossible that any degree of those powers [of the mind] should be represented in an idea, it is evident there can be no idea of spirit. (PHK §148, 1734 edition)

The principle at work here is clearly that *to know or represent the mind’s acts is one and the same as to know or represent the mind itself.*

Finally, on this reading Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge provides us with immediate data: the individuated, immediately discernible ways in which we perceive (willing and understanding). As such, we can now make more sense of the claim that it is by virtue of self-knowledge that we come to gain mediate knowledge of other spirits (DHP 231). *By virtue of its being a spirit*, I can say of another spirit; it must, at times, be ‘willing’ and, at others, ‘understanding’. Of course, I cannot necessarily make claims about *just what it is* another spirit is willing or understanding, but this is no more problematic than not being able to mediately apprehend the accidental features (e.g. colour, size) of a triangle I have not yet perceived. What’s more, I know exactly what is meant when I use these terms, even if it is in reference to another spiritual agent.

In the next section I will consider an objection to this reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge, in which two problematic claims are upheld. Firstly, that Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge is non-perceptual. Secondly, that Berkeley, in a strict sense, does not take the self to be an object of human knowledge. In particular, I will focus on Talia Mae Bettcher’s claim that Berkeleian self-knowledge is a kind of “*non-perceptual awareness”* (Bettcher 2007, 46).

L1 Self-knowledge as Perceptual Knowledge

Thus far, I have argued that according to Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge, we can gain immediate knowledge of our own spirit by means of our immediate experience of the will and the understanding. On my reading, to be immediately aware of the manner in which we perceive ideas (voluntarily or involuntarily) is enough to constitute immediate self-knowledge. This, in turn, I have argued, makes it clearer what our mediate knowledge of other spirits is constituted by. The type of objection to this view I will anticipate in this section is likely to be derived from the following remark:

But *besides* all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something that knows or perceives them, and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them. [my emphasis] (PHK §2)

In this passage, Berkeley seems to suggest that spirit, which “knows and perceives” ideas, is distinct from the kinds of things which can be objects of knowledge. This might suggest not only that spirits are not the kinds of things we can have ideas of, but that they are not the kinds of things we can have *any* immediate knowledge of. On this reading, it would presumably be more plausible to read Berkeley as holding that we have a notion of spirit *only* insofar as we, “understand the meaning of the word” (PHK §140). That is, I can infer the existenceof spirits, and thereby use the term ‘spirit’ as a placeholder for any knowledge I might have had thereof (were it possible to have such knowledge), but I can’t know any more about spirit than that.

Yet, in light of the account of both self-knowledge and knowledge of other spirits outlined so far it would be very surprising if this turned out to be Berkeley’s view. This much is acknowledged in Bettcher’s reading, when she writes:

Does Berkeley think ‘What I am myself’ and ‘that which I denote by “I”’ is unavailable to awareness? It seems hard to believe, especially when he then writes ‘…we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is the image or idea of them…’ (2007, 46)

So Bettcher, like me, is convinced that Berkeley must have an account of *knowledge* of oneself as spirit. But in contrast to my own presentation of Berkeley’s view Bettcher then claims we can avoid this concern if we see self-knowledge as a piece of “self-evident” information; something we, in effect, ‘get for free’ when we realise we are neither *nothing* nor an idea (or a collection of ideas). As she puts it, self-knowledge is a kind of “inward feeling” or, “immediate awareness that accompanies all our thinking (the ‘I’)”. In this way, Bettcher offers a reading in which the self (or spirit in general) is not strictly an object of knowledge and ought not to be understood in terms of perception. Admittedly, in some ways, Bettcher’s interpretation appears to be consistent with my own. For example, she argues that if Berkeley thinks that self-knowledge is the kind of awareness that can easily be confused for an idea, then it is most likely, “a kind of datum or inner feeling”. Likewise, she does not attribute to Berkeley an inferential account of the mind and its operations, where thought (or perception) is key to knowledge of a thinker (or perceiver) (2007, 47-48).

However, it should be clear by now that I do not accept Bettcher’s claim that Berkeleian self-knowledge is *non-perceptual.* The way that we become aware of ourselves *as ourselves,* on Bettcher’s reading, is by becoming conscious of the difference between (i) what is distinct from oneself (objects of understanding), and (ii) what is not. Bettcher places a great deal of emphasis on the *relationship* between perceivers and the perceived and maintains that for Berkeley it is by virtue of acknowledging this relationship that we realise the self-evidence of the existence of the *relata.* For that reason, the manner of perceiving and the variability of that which is perceived (i.e. our ideas) does not play a role in providing immediate data pertaining to the self. For self-knowledge, all that is required is knowledge of the relationship between perceivers and perceived things: “We know that spirit perceives ideas and once we know that we know all that we need to know” (Bettcher 2007, 51).

My initial concern with this reading is that since the *existence* of spirit is, for Berkeley, to be construed in terms of perception (NB 646), then there needs to be a good reason why *knowledge* of it is not. To suggest otherwise threatens to reduce self-knowledge to a kind of abstraction; an unnecessary attempt to distinguish a thing (in this case spirit) from the means by which we come to know it. Certainly, Berkeley gives us very clear reasons why one’s own spirit cannot be immediately *perceived*; because of the categorical dissimilarity between ideas (objects of perception) and spirits. But it seems to me that Bettcher takes an unnecessary step from (i) self-knowledge is not perceived, to (ii) self-knowledge is not *perceptual* (at all).[[36]](#footnote-36) And, indeed, by forcing a distinction between the way in which a spirit exists (*percipere*) and our knowledge thereof, Bettcher is in danger of contravening Berkeley’s advice not to, “abstract the existence of a spirit from its cogitation” – even if only conceptually (PHK §98). What’s more, later in the *Principles* Berkeley claims that spirits *can* be objects of knowledge: “To me it seems that ideas, spirits, and relations are all in their respective kinds the objects of human knowledge.” (PHK §89) This means that Bettcher’s interpretation of the ambiguity in §1 of the *Principles* ends up contradicting Berkeley’s more explicit claim later in that work.

Bettcher’s reading also gets us no closer to understanding how it is I use knowledge of my own spirit to gain mediate knowledge of other spirits. If self-knowledge is constituted merely by the self-evidence of the self as a subject in a perceiver-perceived thing relationship, it is hard to see how we could get any further than the inference that other spirits exist. But Berkeley wants to say more than this; his claim is that we know the *meaning* of the word ‘spirit’ – whether applied to myself or another agent. What’s more, in the case of God’s spirit, it is key to Berkeley’s metaphysics that we know more than just that he exists, but that we can make claims about his nature and compare him with ourselves. I previously emphasised the importance of self-knowledge and the key role it plays in gaining mediate knowledge of both infinite and other finite spirits. As such, it ought to be seen as a deficiency in any reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge if it leaves us unclear as to what other spirits are really like.

L1 Conclusion

I have argued that, for Berkeley, self-knowledge is immediate knowledge of the operations of one’s own spirit as it is perceiving, and that it is in our experience of willing and understanding ideas that we come to be immediately familiar with our self. The operations of willing and understanding provide us with an immediate account of the nature of our own spirit, and a model for what another spirit is ‘like’.

My concerns throughout this paper have been primarily epistemological rather than metaphysical. In light of Berkeley’s claims that self-knowledge is the means by which we come to gain knowledge of other spirits, my foremost concern has been to give an exposition of Berkeleian self-*knowledge*. Nonetheless, there are admittedly some metaphysical ramifications. In particular, my reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge as non-abstract implies that (for Berkeley) the mind itself is not something abstracted from its perceptual acts. In that sense, my reading indicates that Berkeley’s account of the self is non-Cartesian: there is no conceptual or ontological distinction between the self as mental substance and the acts (or operations) that substance engages in. As Stephen Daniel puts it; “for Berkeley, spirit is not *a* substance that just happens to will.” (2018, 664) But that need not render Berkeley’s account of spirit Humean or Spinozistic either: knowledge of oneself is *not* reducible to the ‘’bundle’ of ideas that one perceives.[[37]](#footnote-37) Self-knowledge, I have argued, consists in identifying the different ways that perception occurs and *what that is like.* My reading thus implies that the self is a set of perceptual *acts,* each of which has distinct phenomenological content. That phenomenological content is dependent on, but *not* reducible to, the ideas perceived. For Berkeley, experience is not only key to knowledge but a kind of knowledge in itself. Hence the experience *of perceiving* is also a kind of knowledge. It is for this reason that Berkeley claims that the objects of human knowledge are derived not only from sensation, imagination, and memory but also by “attending to the passions and operations of the mind” (PHK §1).

When Berkeley claims we know the “meaning of the word” ‘spirit’ or ‘mind’, he does not mean that the terms signify distinct ideas nor any kind of ‘abstracted’ or absolute knowledge (PHK §142; AMP 7.13). Rather, his view is that I know what the word ‘spirit’ means because I know what my own spirit is like. Sometimes, it voluntarily perceives either ideas of the imagination or, in a much more limited way, sensible ideas (those that make up the collection of ideas which constitute my body). When my spirit perceives in this way, it is called the ‘will’. At other times, my spirit involuntarily perceives ideas, such as the sun in broad daylight, my desk when I enter my study, or the sounds another human agent makes when they talk to me. In such cases, my spirit is called the ‘understanding’.

In this way, when I make the claim that another spirit exists (whether divine or human) I am doing more than just making an ontological claim, I am saying that it exists in a certain way. Once I have good evidence to believe that other spirits exist and that they are indeed spirits,[[38]](#footnote-38) I am able to make the further claim that they *will* and *understand.* This reading therefore allows for a more robust understanding of Berkeley’s claim that we have a ‘notion’ of spirit, “in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK §27).[[39]](#footnote-39)

Bibliography

Primary Sources:

NB = Berkeley, George. 1989. *Philosophical Commentaries* edited by George Hasson Thomas. Ohio: Garland.

MI = Berkeley, George. 1987. *George Berkeley’s Manuscript Introduction: An Editio Diplomatica.* Edited by Bertil Belfrage. Oxford: Doxa.

PHK = Berkeley, George. 2008 (1710). “A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge”. In *Philosophical Writings*, By George Berkeley, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, edited by Desmond M. Clarke, 67-149. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

PI = Introduction to PHK.

DHP = Berkeley. George. 2008 (1713). “Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous”. In *Philosophical Writings*, By George Berkeley, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy, edited by Desmond M. Clarke, 151-242. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

AMP = Berkeley, George. 2010. “Alciphron, or The Minute Philosopher” inJaffro, Laurent, Genevieve Brykman, and Claire Schwartz, eds. 2010. *Berkeley’s Alciphron: English text and essays in interpretation*. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag.

CSM = John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny (trans.). 1984-1991. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Citations are to volume followed by page number in that edition.

Secondary Sources:

Adams, Robert. 1973. “Berkeley’s ‘Notion’ of Spiritual Substance.” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 55: 47-69.

Bennett, Jonathan. 2001. *Learning from Six Philosophers: Volume 2*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

Bettcher, Talia Mae. 2007. *Berkeley's* *Philosophy of Spirit: Consciousness, Ontology and the Elusive Subject*.London: Continuum.

Bolton, Martha Brandt. 1987. “Berkeley’s Objection to Abstract Ideas and Unconceived Objects”. In *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, edited by Ernest Sosa, 61-81.Boston: Springer.

Cummins, Phillip D.. 1963. “Perceptual Relativity and Ideas in the Mind.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 24 (2): 202-214.

Daniel, Stephen H.. 2008. “Berkeley’s Stoic Notion of Spiritual Substance.” in *New Interpretations of Berkeley’s Thought*, edited byStephen H. Daniel, 202-233. New York: Prometheus Books.

Daniel, Stephen H.. 2018. “Berkeley’s Non-Cartesian Notion of Spiritual Substance.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56 (4): 659-682.

Falkenstein, Lorne. 1990. “Berkeley's Argument for Other Minds.” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (4): 431-440.

Flage, Daniel. 1987. *Berkeley’s Doctrine of Notions: A Reconstruction based on His Theory of Meaning*. London and New York: Croom Helm and St. Martin’s Press.

Flage, Daniel. 2008. “Berkeley’s Epistemic Ontology: The *Three Dialogues*.*”* In *New Interpretations of Berkeley’s Thought*, edited byStephen H. Daniel, 45-76. New York: Prometheus Books.

Fogelin, Robert J.. 2001. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Berkeley and the Principles of Human Knowledge*.Routledge: London.

Frankel, Melissa. 2009. “Something-We-Know-Not-What, Something-We-Know-Not-Why: Berkeley, Meaning and Minds.” *Philosophia* 37 (3): 381-402.

McDonough, Jeffrey K.. 2008. “Berkeley, Human Agency, and Divine Concurrentism.” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (4): 567-590.

Holden, Matthew. 2017. “Berkeley on Inconceivability and Impossibility.” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 98:1, 107-122.

Pearce, Kenneth L.. 2017. *Language and the Structure of Berkeley’s World*.Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Roberts, John Russell. 2007. *A Metaphysics for the Mob*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Russell, Bertrand. 2001 (1912). *The Problems of Philosophy*.Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stoneham, Tom. 2010. “Berkeley” In *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, edited byTimothy O’Connor and Constantine Sandis, 496-504. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.

Thiel, Udo. 2011. *The Early Modern Subject*.Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Winkler, Kenneth. 2011. “Marvellous Emptiness: Berkeley on Consciousness and Self- Consciousness.” In *Berkeley’s Lasting Legacy: 300 Years Later*, edited byTimo Airaksinen and Bertil Belfrage, 223-50. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholarly Publishing.

1. In what follows, references are to the final 1734 edition of the *Principles*. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For Berkeley’s remarks on the dangers of abstract thought see PHK §97, §99; AMP 7.15. For an insightful discussion of the discussion surrounding the relation between conceivability and possibility in Berkeley’s thought, see Holden 2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. In what follows, ‘self-knowledge’ refers to the immediate knowledge we have of ourselves *as spirits*. Like Berkeley, I use the terms ‘spirit’ and ‘mind’ interchangeably (see PHK §2). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This rests on Berkeley’s acceptance of what we might call ‘the resemblance thesis’ which dictates that in order for one thing to represent another, the two things must *resemble* one another. See MI §12; PHK §§56-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Both PHK and DHP are anti-sceptical and anti-*atheistic* works. The frontmatter to DHP sets it “In opposition to sceptics and atheists.” [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. I will not discuss Berkeley’s account of our knowledge of God. This is a contested issue in its own right. Literature surrounding this issue focuses primarily on Berkeley’s account of ‘divine analogy’. For Berkeley’s most thorough discussion of divine analogy, see AMP 4.16-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Stephen H. Daniel (2018) has recently provided a more straightforwardly metaphysical account of Berkeley’s move away from the Cartesian account of spirit (my own emphasise is largely epistemological). Daniel notes that many commentators take it for granted that Berkeley adopts a largely Cartesian view of spiritual substance and selfhood (660, footnote 2). It will become clear that I, like Daniel, reject such an assumption. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See also Descartes’ replies to Hobbes’ second and third objections where he makes a number of such claims including; “I do not deny that I, who am thinking, am distinct from my thought, in the way in which a thing is distinct from a mode… And when I add, 'Which of them can be said to be separate from myself?', I simply mean that all these modes of thinking inhere in me.” CSM 2:123-24. See also CSM 1;196, 1:210, 1:215. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Again, this requires acceptance of the ‘resemblance thesis’. In §8 of the *Principles,* Berkeley states that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (‘the Likeness Principle’). This, in turn, means that an idea cannot resemble – and therefore cannot *represent* – a spirit (since a spirit is not an idea) (PHK §27). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See also Winkler 2011, 227-229; Daniel 2018, 660. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Berkeley’s use of the term ‘notion’ is a point of contention amongst commentators but that discussion is beyond the scope of my current concerns. The most developed account of Berkeley’s ‘doctrine of notions’ is Flage 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Stephen H. Daniel denies that Berkeley saw spirits as subjects in a perceptual relationship but rather as “the activity or principle whereby objects are identified in relation to one another” (2018, 660; see also 2008, 204-205). On the other hand, Bettcher and Pearce both maintain that Berkeley’s spirits are subjects that perform acts of perception (Bettcher 2007, 42-54; Pearce 2017, 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. As such, Descartes’ appears to undermine his claim in the *Replies to the Second Set of Objections* that there is no general principle – ‘what is thinking must also exist’ – at work when I come to know the existence of my mind. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Daniel argues that Berkeley rejects this broadly Aristotelian subject-mode ontology of mental substance entirely. See 2008, 674, 679-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. See Thiel 2011, 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. See CSM 1:127. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Berkeley’s remarks in PHK §142 demonstrate that volition or ‘willing’ is an act of perception. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See also NB 674. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See also NB 580-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For Berkeley’s account of what we can and cannot conceive see the *Principles* Introduction, especially §10 and §22. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. For an explanation of why Berkeley’s claims undermine both Cartesian and Lockean accounts of spiritual substance, see Daniel 2008; 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. One reviewer pointed out to me that it may well follow from the fact that, for Berkeley, we cannot gain knowledge of the self beyond its (perceptual) activity that Berkeley does not, in fact, have an account of *self-knowledge* at all. I.e. perhaps there is, for Berkeley, a self beyond its perceptual activities but we just cannot gain knowledge of it. However, Berkeley’s claim that we know other spirits by virtue of the knowledge we have of our own seems to preclude this possibility (see PHK §140; DHP 231). The claim in DHP 231 that “*My own mind* and ideas I have an immediate knowledge of” is especially indicative of this. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. This terminology is borrowed from Russell 2001, 20. Russell uses the term to refer to Berkeleian *ideas* specifically, while I am using it to refer to perceptual data more broadly (i.e. I use it to refer to *perceptual acts* as well as *perceptual objects*). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Both Adams and Winkler go even further, arguing that self-knowledge is, for Berkeley, infallible. See Adams 1973, 47-69; Winkler 2011, 239-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. In this instance, Hylas (the materialist) reflects Berkeley’s own view, as he is lead to this conclusion by Philonous via a series of leading questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. That is, when I either perceive ‘external’ things or else when I reflect on my ideas of memory or imagination. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. For a discussion of the scope of our ideas’ representational content, see Bolton 1987. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Contrary to Locke, Berkeley does not take the mind to be a substance with distinct *powers.* EHU 2.4.2. See Roberts 2007, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. It is a mistake to think, in Berkeley’s system, having an idea of something is the only kind of knowledge. In PHK §89, he writes: “the term ‘idea’ would be improperly extended to signify every thing we know or have any notion of.” See also PHK §27, §142. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. For a similar claim, see Pearce 2017, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. See also NB 499. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Within the literature, there remains a debate concerning ‘human agency’ in Berkeley’s philosophy; i.e. the extent to which finite spirits can be said to act upon things in nature. The debate focuses on whether finite spirits can be said to have causal efficacy (or if Berkeley is really an occasionalist). My focus is on the way we experience the ‘will’ and the ‘understanding’ – and Berkeley is clear (in PHK §§28-29) that we *experience* ourselves as affectingsome things and unable to affect others. It is not critical to my reading, then, that this debate be resolved one way or the other. For recent accounts of this debate see (for example) Roberts 2007, 111-123; McDonough 2008. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. I *know* when I am voluntarily imagining things, but I don’t know when I’m hallucinating until after the event – that’s what is so disconcerting. Of course, if I voluntarily took a hallucinogenic I would be expecting to hallucinate (as Manuel Fasko pointed out to me). Nonetheless, (I presume) there would be some involuntariness (i.e. ‘reality’) in the resulting experiences. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Similarly, see NB 658-59; 499a. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For more on this, see Cummins 1963. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Winkler suggests such a move might be derived from PHK §27 where Berkeley writes that spirit, “cannot be of itself perceived”. See 2011, 234. As I have stressed, for Berkeley there is more to perceptual knowledge than just what is perceived; we also gain immediate knowledge of the *acts* of perception. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. See Daniel 2018, 668 for a similar claim. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. For discussion of Berkeley’s answer to the ‘problem of other minds’ and how we know they exist, see (for instance) Bennett (2001); Falkenstein (1990); Fogelin (2001). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Thanks to Kenneth Pearce, Manuel Fasko, and two reviewers from this volume for comments on earlier drafts of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)