George Berkeley: Religion and Science in the Age of Enlightenment

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Springer

Chapter 1
How Berkeley's Works Are Interpreted

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There are different kinds of studies of Berkeley. Some focus on specific areas of his thought; some provide overviews.[1] Of the overviews, some are arranged according to the chronology of his individual works; others are arranged according to topics.[2] Internal, analytic studies examine the cogency of his arguments and show how different interpretations of his texts handle criticisms raised by recent commentators; historical studies describe the background assumptions that inform his thinking.

More often than not, historical studies propose that we focus on issues and ways of thinking characteristic of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy in order to appreciate Berkeley's insights. Generally that has meant that Berkeley is interpreted primarily in terms of Locke. A. A. Luce and Harry Bracken, however,

[1] Representative studies of specific areas of Berkeley's thought include: Margaret Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990); George Pappas, *Berkeley's Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Daniel Flage, *Berkeley's Doctrine of Notions* (London: Croom Helm, 1987); Douglas Jesseph, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993); C. George Caffentzis, *Exciting the Industry of Mankind: George Berkeley's Philosophy of Money* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Press, 2000); and Paul Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). Overviews include: David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); A. C. Grayling, *Berkeley: The Central Arguments* (London: Duckworth, 1986), and Geneviève Brykman, *Berkeley: philosophie et apologétique* (2 vols.; Paris: Vrin, 1984).

[2] Examples of chronologically arranged overviews include: John Wild, *George Berkeley: A Study of His Life and Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936); and Dominique Berlioz, *Berkeley: un nominalisme réaliste* (Paris: Vrin, 2000). Topically arranged overviews include: Ian C. Tipton, *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism* (London: Methuen, 1974); George Pitcher, *Berkeley* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); and Kenneth P. Winkler, *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989).

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S. Parigi (ed.), *George Berkeley: Religion and Science in the Age of Enlightenment*,
International Archives of the History of Ideas/Archives internationales d'histoire des idées 201,
DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-9243-4_1, © Springer Science+Business Media B.V. 2010

have argued that Malebranche is just as viable a source for Berkeley's thought.[3] Charles McCracken has highlighted Berkeley's similarities with English Malebrancheans (e.g., John Norris).[4] And Richard Popkin and Geneviève Brykman have traced some of Berkeley's ideas to Pierre Bayle.[5] But since Locke does not differ from Malebranche or Bayle regarding some fundamental ontological and epistemological presuppositions, in many historical treatments Locke is still used as the key for understanding Berkeley.

Indeed, for many commentators, the assumption that Berkeley shares doctrines with Locke, Descartes, or Malebranche (e.g., about mental substances) is so central that it has been called the official or standard approach to the study of Berkeley. Proponents of this approach acknowledge that, unlike Locke and Malebranche, Berkeley maintains that only minds and ideas exist; but they usually take it for granted that Berkeley agrees with Locke and Malebranche at least about the fact that minds and ideas are things that exist. As is well known, though, Berkeley insists that spirits and ideas are so different that to say that they are *things* or even that they *exist* fails to appreciate how misleading such beliefs can be (PHK 89, 142).[6] Nonetheless, defenders of the standard approach claim that Berkeley's engagement with the issues raised by Locke or Malebranche indicates that the principles for interpreting Berkeley should be based on Lockean or Malebranchean ways of thinking. Accordingly, they fail to consider how he appeals to the vocabulary of Locke and Malebranche to undercut and supplant their doctrines with his own distinctive views. Those views become evident only when his discussions of Cartesian or Lockean topics (particularly in his *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*) are understood in the context of the entire corpus of his writings. By using the *Principles* and *Dialogues* to authorize Berkeley's "considered" views, the standard approach minimizes how his unpublished remarks and other publications raise doubts about the propriety of interpreting his central insights in Cartesian, Malebranchean, or Lockean terms.

The standard reading of Berkeley thus proposes that we ignore how his doctrines of mind and ideas must be understood within his entire corpus. It invokes a strategy

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[3] A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley's Thought* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934); A. A. Luce, *The Dialectic of Immaterialism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963); and Harry M. Bracken, *Berkeley* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974), 16–18.

[4] Charles J. McCracken, *Malebranche and British Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

[5] See Richard Popkin, "Berkeley and Pyrrhonism," *Review of Metaphysics* 5 (1951): 223–246; and Geneviève Brykman, "Berkeley: sa lecture de Malebranche à travers le *Dictionaire* de Bayle," *Revue internationale de philosophie* 114 (1975): 496–514.

[6] Citations from *The Works of George Berkeley* [*Works*], ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–1957) include *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [PHK section] and *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* [DHP page], vol. 2; *Alciphron* [Alc dialogue and section], vol. 3; and *Siris* [section], vol. 5; *Passive Obedience* [PO section], vol. 6. References to Berkeley's *Notebooks* [NB entry], and *De Motu* (Luce translation) [DM entry], and *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* [TVV section] are from his *Philosophical Works*, ed. Michael. R. Ayers (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992).

of interpretation that is unacknowledged and unchallenged – even when it ends up portraying Berkeley as confused, contradictory, or prone to fundamental changes in his positions.[7] In the standard interpretation, the focus on Berkeley's *Principles* and *Dialogues* justifies the appeal to Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke as the interpretive filters through which his other works are understood, because the *Principles* and *Dialogues* are the works in which he most directly addresses their issues. Interpretations that do not rely on a Cartesian or Lockean framework are usually dismissed as tendentious, far-fetched, or inconsistent with what the text "actually" says.[8] The attempt to avoid an ahistorical reading is thus replaced by the equally pernicious strategy of thinking that Berkeley's citations of Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke indicates that he thinks in their terms as well. When Berkeley says something that is inconsistent with a Cartesian or Lockean position – such as, "the very existence of ideas constitutes the soul" (NB 577) – his comments are then usually interpreted (in the standard approach) to be positions he ultimately rejects – in some instances, just a few pages or days later.[9]

John Roberts has recently thematized such an interpretive strategy, recommending that we elucidate Berkeley's views "by locating them with respect to two traditions of the early modern period that inform and compete with his, those of Descartes and Locke."[10] When we do this, he concludes, we have a much clearer view of the basic features of Berkeleian thought. To make sure that those features are protected from any unnecessary complications in comparing remarks in Berkeley's unpublished *Notebooks* and his published works, Roberts says that we should adopt what he calls "Constraint 1": "When there is a conflict, one should reject early views that the author chose not to publish in favor of later views that the author chose to publish repeatedly" (*Mob* 7). Of course, this constraint is intended to be used especially in those instances in the *Notebooks* where Berkeley says something that sounds uncharacteristic of his more well-known views. In those cases, it is obviously easier to explain away the remarks by considering them as ill-conceived and subsequently rejected views, rather than to show how they can be interpreted in a way that is consistent with Berkeley's other comments when they are understood apart from a non-Cartesian or non-Lockean context.

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[7] For example, see Phillip D. Cummins, "Berkeley on Minds and Agency," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 209–218.

[8] For example, see Michael R. Ayers, "Berkeley, Ideas, and Idealism," in *Reexamining Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007): 27–28; and Marc Hight and Walter Ott, "The New Berkeley," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34 (2004): 8–18.

[9] Cf. Charles J. McCracken, "Berkeley's Cartesian Concept of Mind: The Return through Malebranche and Locke to Descartes," *The Monist* 71 (1988): 597–600; idem, "Berkeley's Notion of Spirit," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986): 597–602; and Bertil Belfrage, "Berkeley's Four Concepts of the Soul," in *Reexamining Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 172–187.

[10] John R. Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 8. Hereafter: *Mob*.

No doubt, this easy way of reading Berkeley has kept him in the forefront of thinkers to be reckoned with in early modern philosophy. But it has also meant having to tweak the standard presentation of some of his stranger doctrines (e.g., the language of nature, spiritual substances, cosmic fire) to bring them more in line with Descartes or Locke. These efforts have hardly been met with enthusiasm, and in some cases they have even been characterized as annoying. So to avoid a direct challenge to the standard interpretation, some scholars focus instead on Berkeley's *Alciphron*, *Analyst*, *Querist*, or *Siris*.[11] Because such shifts in focus generally do not affect our understanding of Berkeley's relation to the Cartesian or Lockean project, they are hardly considered a threat to the standard view.

But what if there were a non-Cartesian, non-Lockean way to understand Berkeley's writings without having to assume that he changes his fundamental insights or at times simply contradicts himself? That is, suppose that Berkeley says exactly what he means, and that all of his claims are consistent with one another. In that case, we could say that there are occasions when he chooses to modify his expressions because he recognizes how his views are misunderstood by those with whom he disagrees. Such choices, though, would not indicate changes in his views; rather, they would reveal only a willingness on his part to accommodate the limited perspectives of some of his contemporaries.

This way of reading Berkeley would, of course, require that we maintain the same scholarly standards used in any interpretation of his work. But more importantly, it would make explicit its commitment to the principle of charity. So if reading Berkeley in the context of a Cartesian or Lockean way of thinking leads us to conclude that he is confused or needs to change his views or fails to explain why he would subsequently be attracted to seemingly unrelated doctrines, then we should look for another way to interpret his thought. Such a practice would, no doubt, challenge the standard view and open up a number of strategies for interpreting Berkeley by considering his doctrines in the context of contemporaries with whom he is seldom linked.[12]

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[11] See *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher: In Focus*, ed. David Berman (NewYork: Routledge, 1993; Roomet Jakapi, "Emotive Meaning and Christian Mysteries in Berkeley's *Alciphron*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10 (2002): 401–411; Olscamp, *Moral Philosophy of Berkeley*; Jesseph, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics*; Caffentzis, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Money*; Timo Airaksinen, "The Path of Fire: The Meaning and Interpretation of Berkeley's *Siris*," in *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2007), 261–281; and Costica Bradatan, *The Other Bishop Berkeley: An Exercise in Reenchantment* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2006).

[12] I have argued elsewhere that Berkeley's doctrines can be fruitfully interpreted by comparing them to the Stoics, the seventeenth-century followers of the Renaissance logician Peter Ramus, Jonathan Edwards, Francisco Suárez, Baruch Spinoza, and G. W. Leibniz – all of whom develop philosophies that are markedly different from those of Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke. See Stephen H. Daniel, "Stoicism in Berkeley's Philosophy," in *Berkeley's Lasting Legacy: 300 Years Later*, eds. Bertil Belfrage and Timo Airaksinen (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, forthcoming); "The Ramist Context of Berkeley's Philosophy," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy* 9 (2001): 487–505; "Edwards, Berkeley, and Ramist Logic," *Idealistic Studies* 31

Informing a shift away from the traditional or received strategy of interpreting Berkeley are the following historiographic assumptions:

- First, the fact that Berkeley's published comments appear to be inconsistent with one another does not mean that they *are* inconsistent. It is arbitrary and even arrogant to assume that it is more likely that he is confused or inconsistent than that we have failed to understand the nuances of his position.
- Second, the fact that Berkeley's published comments appear to be inconsistent with some of his unpublished comments does not permit us to conclude that the unpublished comments represent views that he rejects or doubts. It is obviously easier to dismiss his unpublished remarks rather than to do the hard work of discerning how seeming inconsistencies can be overcome. Besides, authors are not required to publish all of their ideas, especially when they suspect (as Berkeley quickly discovered) that readers locked into a Cartesian or Lockean mindset will misinterpret them. When commentators refuse to treat Berkeley's private 1708 notes on a par with his "considered" opinions published a year or two later, or cite an unpublished remark only when it supports a favored interpretation, or ignore *De Motu* (1721), *Alciphron* (1732), and *Siris* (1744) in favor of the "mature" works of 1709–1713 – they reinforce the bias in favor of thinking that Berkeley's importance relies on reading him in a Cartesian or Lockean context.
- Third – and this one should be apparent to anyone familiar with the fallacy of the appeal to authority – the fact that an interpretation has become the official or received view does not guarantee its correctness – especially if it is based on violations of the two prior principles.

My purpose in raising these points is to emphasize how Berkeley's published works in philosophy, religion, mathematics, science, economics, and politics are often understood apart from one another. Considering how his unpublished writings are relegated to a secondary status, and how his "early" (pre-1709) and "late" (post-1737) writings are treated as unimportant for grasping his central insights, and how he is supposed to have changed his mind even in his most well-known works, it is no wonder that commentators complain about not being able to determine Berkeley's *real* position on certain issues.

All of this can be avoided, however, if we treat Berkeley's writings as consistent with one another, and instead of thinking that he rejects his own ideas, we think that he merely refocuses his attention and adapts his ways of speaking to accommodate certain contexts or to clarify earlier remarks. His *Notebooks* provide the best opportunity for testing such a strategy. However, because Berkeley's writings are so

(2001): 55–72; "Berkeley, Suárez, and the *Esse-Existere* Distinction," *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly* 74 (2000): 621–636; "Berkeley and Spinoza," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* 135 (2010): 123–134; and "The Harmony of the Leibniz-Berkeley Juxtaposition," in *Leibniz and the English-Speaking World*, ed. Stuart Brown and Pauline Phemister (Dordrecht: Springer, 2007): 163–180.

varied, this way of interpreting him also invites us to consider a wealth of previously unexplored connections between topics such as mind, political obligation, divine grace, and money. And by failing to assume the overall integrity of Berkeley's thought, we miss out on the opportunity to understand his immaterialist and idealist views in ways that are not fraught with confusion, changes of heart, or contradictions.

To test my proposal, I appeal to three examples. The first concerns Berkeley's supposed change regarding his view that "Bodies taken for Powers do exist when not perceived" (NB 293a; also NB 52), in that bodies can be understood as collections of powers to cause our thoughts (NB 80, 282). Some interpreters (e.g., A. A. Luce, Charles McCracken, A. C. Grayling, Robert McKim) claim that he later drops his belief in powers when he decides "not to mention the Combinations of Powers but to say the things, the effects themselves, to really exist even when not actually perceived" (NB 802).[13] However, instead of dismissing Berkeley's initial insight as an unfortunate gaff, we can just as easily say that he realizes that his attempt to reframe talk of bodies in terms of the source of regular patterns of experience is destined to be misunderstood by Cartesian and Lockean readers because of their inability or unwillingness to think of powers in terms other than as qualities inhering in material substances.

Berkeley's doctrine of powers is therefore not something he rejects or changes. Indeed, in the *Dialogues* Philonous allows for talk of powers: "I assert as well as you that, since we are affected from without, we must allow Powers to be without, in a Being distinct from ourselves" (DHP 240; also 242, NB 41, TVV 11–12); and in *De Motu* he notes that the real powers of bodies reside in their cause (DM 71). As Berkeley maintains early on in his *Notebooks* and consistently throughout his career, that cause or "active power" (NB 131, 155) is nothing other than the will of "one simple perfect power" (NB 282). His decision "not to mention" powers thus represents no change, only an accommodation to those who otherwise do not understand how bodies (the proper domain of natural philosophy) cannot be described by appealing to metaphysical principles.[14]

The second example concerns Berkeley's much discussed "bundle theory" of mind. Some readers have interpreted his remark that the "mind is a congeries of perceptions" (NB 580) as an anticipation of Hume's theory that the mind is a bundle of ideas. But such a view seems to contradict his published pronouncements that the mind is a spiritual substance. To resolve the conflict, commentators have suggested three ways to handle Berkeley's so-called two concepts of mind.

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[13] Cf. Luce, *Dialectic of Immaterialism*, 134–135, 140, 154; Charles J. McCracken, "What *Does* Berkeley's God See in the Quad?" *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979): 284–285; Grayling, *Berkeley*, 97–98, 101; and Robert McKim, "Berkeley's Notebooks," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 87–88.

[14] See Stephen H. Daniel, "Postface: les limites de la philosophie naturelle de Berkeley," in *Science et épistémologie selon Berkeley*, ed. Sébastien Charles (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004), 165–170.

According to the first approach, Berkeley is said to have always endorsed a Cartesian notion of the self as a spiritual substance, and his mention of the bundle theory is simply an indication of passing musings about a theory he ultimately rejects.[15] Proponents of the second approach argue that the bundle theory was Berkeley's real position, but for prudential reasons he gave lip service to the view that the mind is a Cartesian or Lockean substance.[16] Those who adopt the third approach say that Berkeley accepted the bundle theory for a short time and then rejected it in favor of his published view.[17] Despite their differences, all three strategies grant that the Cartesian and Humean concepts of mind are incompatible, and that is what drives the effort to show how Berkeley could not have proposed both.

Of course, the major flaw in these strategies is that they impose a Cartesian or Humean way of thinking about spiritual substance or mind onto Berkeley, and they refuse to acknowledge how he could develop a distinctive doctrine that does not draw on either view and does not attempt to reconcile them. These strategies of interpretation thus fail to appreciate how Berkeley objects fundamentally to describing the mind or spiritual substance as a *thing* that thinks or wills – not only because such a description is unnecessary but also because it easily misleads us into thinking that mind can be an object of thought (i.e., an idea) or can even be said to be a thing that thinks or wills:

> Say you the mind is not the perceptions but that thing which perceives. I answer, you are abused by the words *that* and *thing*: these are vague, empty words without a meaning .... Say you there must be a thinking substance, something unknown which perceives and supports and ties together the ideas. Say I, make it appear there is any need of it, and you shall have it for me .... If you ask what thing it is that wills, I answer if you mean idea by the word *thing* or anything like an idea, then I say tis no thing at all that wills. This how extravagant soever it may seem yet is a certain truth. We are cheated by these general terms, *thing*, *is*, etc. Again, if by *is* you mean is perceived or does perceive, I say no thing which is perceived or does perceive wills .... Substance of a spirit is that it 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; its substance is not knowable, not being an idea. (NB 581, 637, 658–59, 829)

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[15] See Luce, *Dialectic of Immaterialism*, 24–33, 173; and Marc Hight and Walter Ott, "The New Berkeley," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34 (2004): 8–11. This strategy relies on the now discredited assumption that Berkeley's marginal "+" mark indicates a position he comes to reject.

[16] See Colin M. Turbayne, "Berkeley's Two Concepts of Mind," in *Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge, Text and Critical Essays*, ed. Colin M. Turbayne (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1970), 145–160; and Robert G. Muehlmann, "The Substance of Berkeley's Philosophy," in *Berkeley's Metaphysics: Structural, Interpretive, and Critical Essays*, ed. Robert G. Muehlmann (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 89–105.

[17] See Pitcher, *Berkeley*, 183–189; Charles McCracken, "Berkeley's Notion of Spirit," *History of European Ideas* 7 (1986): 597–602; idem, "Berkeley's Cartesian Concept of Mind," *The Monist* 71 (1988): 597–611; Berman, *Berkeley*, 69–70; Talia Mae Bettcher, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Spirit* (London: Continuum, 2007), 2; Bertil Belfrage, "A New Approach to Berkeley's *Philosophical Notebooks*," in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. Ernest Sosa (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), 217–230; and idem, "Four Concepts," 174–182.

To think that Berkeley appeals to a description of mind or spiritual substance similar to that of Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, or Hume is merely to adopt a historiographic prejudice that precludes the possibility that Berkeley can invoke the terms they use in his own unique, even "extravagant" ways. No doubt, respecting Berkeley's own use of such terms threatens to make his doctrine of mind less easily compared to those of his contemporaries, but it opens up new ways to understand how that doctrine complements other aspects of his philosophy.

Instead of presuming a Humean context – in which the mind as "a congeries of perceptions" is understood as a mere bundle of *objects* of perception – we can just as easily think that Berkeley is referring to the unity of *acts* of perceiving. After all, he uses the word "perception" as either object or act on numerous occasions (e.g., PHK 5; DHP 195–196). We certainly do not have to conclude that at some point in 1707 or 1708 he briefly held a Hume-like view that he quickly came to see was flawed. To be sure, he subsequently avoids describing mind in those terms, but this says less about his position than it does about his concern that calling mind a congeries will be misunderstood by those who think of mind as an object rather than as the will that objects be identified and related. As in his appeal to "powers," Berkeley here again signals his reluctance to cede the description of mind to those who would interpret him solely in a Cartesian or Lockean context.

When we read, then, that "the very existence of ideas constitutes the soul" (NB 577), we need not think that this contradicts Berkeley's fundamental belief that spirits are radically different from ideas. Instead, it indicates how the very existence of the soul consists in the will that there be the differentiation and association of ideas. As Berkeley observes, "The spirit, the active thing, that which is soul and God, is the will alone .... Tis one will, one act distinguished by the effects. This will, this act is the spirit, operative principle, soul, etc." (NB 712, 788). Spirit is not some thing or object that has a will or that engages in willful activity, for to think of it that way – that is, "by way of idea" (PHK 142) – would reinstate the very substance–mode ontology that Berkeley wants to overthrow. Rather, mind *is* the will, and it does not exist apart from its activities (PHK 98).

In this sense, God's will that there be a distinctive sequence of acts of differentiating and associating ideas in perceptions constitutes the existence of a soul or mind.[18] Accordingly, Berkeley can admit that "there are innate Ideas i.e. Ideas created with us" (NB 649), for God's creation of minds is the very same act as his specification of their ideas. As Berkeley later notes regarding Parmenides and Plato, "To understand and to be ... are the same thing .... Whence it follows that mind, knowledge, and notions, either in habit or in act, always go together" (*Siris* 309). It is this interrelation of minds and their ideas that is captured in Berkeley's doctrine of innate ideas.

[18] See Stephen H. Daniel, "Berkeley's Semantic Treatment of Representation," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 25 (2008): 41–55; and idem, "Berkeley's Stoic Notion of Mind," *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2007), 203–230.

To say that Berkeley endorses a doctrine of innate ideas – especially when he is generally assumed to follow Locke in rejecting them – is hardly a commonplace in Berkeley scholarship.[19] Indeed, when confronted with Berkeley's claim that we are created with innate ideas, commentators typically dismiss NB 649 as an aberration.[20] But as with powers and the bundle theory, Berkeley does not change his mind on innate ideas. Rather, he adapts its salient features to his idealism, redefining innatism in a way that permits him to argue that different minds perceive the "same" ideas and experience the same moral sentiments – not because the objects of their perceptions (i.e., the standard Cartesian or Lockean innate ideas) are identical, but because God wills that their acts of perceiving are in concert with one another (PO 25; Alc I.14).[21] In this way, the issue of innate ideas serves as a third example of how an otherwise puzzling doctrine in Berkeley's philosophy can be explained without portraying him as confused or dismissing his texts as unrepresentative of his "considered" views.

Admittedly, Berkeley's way of thinking about the mind's relation to its ideas is different from that found in Descartes, Malebranche, or Locke, so it is hardly surprising to see how few commentators have appreciated its significance for understanding the overall cohesiveness of his thought. Geneviève Brykman, however, points out that Berkeley's description of nature as a language links our ideas essentially to mind by embedding them in an always already discursive context.[22] This linguistic characterization of mind challenges the standard Cartesian or Lockean strategies for interpreting Berkeley by refusing to assume that minds and ideas are ontological givens. Instead, she sees Berkeley as developing a philosophy in which things in the world are identified by being *differentiated* in the "veil" of the divine language that minds enact.

No doubt, this strategy for interpreting Berkeley is unfamiliar to some historians of modern philosophy because it requires thinking in the Stoic terms of difference and propositional expression rather than the Platonic/Aristotelian terms of identity and predication on which Cartesian and Lockean strategies draw.[23] That might

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[19] But see Louis Loeb, *From Descartes to Hume: Continental Metaphysics and the Development of Modern Philosophy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 69–70; and Daniel Flage, "Berkeley, Individuation, and Physical Objects," in *Individuation and Identity in Early Modern Philosophy: Descartes to Kant*, ed. Kenneth F. Barber and Jorge J. E. Gracia (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 142.

[20] See Michael R. Ayers, "Was Berkeley and Empiricist or a Rationalist?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 48; and Wayne Waxman, *Kant and the Empiricists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 267n.

[21] See Berkeley, Sermon 10, "On the Will of God," *Works* 7: 130. Cf. Bracken, *Berkeley*, 115; and Flage, *Doctrine of Notions*, 188.

[22] See Geneviève Brykman, *Berkeley et le voile des mots* (Paris: Vrin, 1993), 52, 70–74, 422–423; and Henri Bergson, "Philosophical Intuition," in *The Creative Mind* [CM], trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Philosophical Library, 1946), 140–141.

[23] Cf. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense* [1969], trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale; ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 7, 105.

explain why many readers fail to appreciate how Berkeley's shift in focus to the language of nature requires that we think of things first and foremost as signs that depend on being perceived specifically as *this* or *that* thing – that is, as related to other things.

This shift in perspective – from simply assuming that things have their identity apart from their role in a communicative network to thinking of things in terms of that network – is at the heart of not only Berkeley's philosophy but also his self-acknowledged Irish identity. For even at 8 years old, he says, he distrusted certain doctrines of English and continental contemporaries (NB 266), seemingly because they are so inconsistent with *common* (i.e., communal) sense. That Irish sensibility is not due to Berkeley's Irish birth. Rather, it refers to his belief that everything has meaning in terms of distinctions and relations that are literally sensible (i.e., as both meaningful and based on sense experience).

This commitment to the rhetorical heritage of experience runs throughout Berkeley's work, and it makes his thought stand out from the pronouncements of contemporaries who overlook the practical, sensible, or communicative legacy of things. "We Irishmen," he observes, know that being aware of anything – whether it be a material object or an infinitesimally small point – means invoking a discursive heritage apart from which no identity or reasoning is possible (NB 392–94, 398). As Berkeley sees it, any truly learned person knows that he or she is immersed in and identified by such a heritage. Only a "vulgar" person would think that things are simply *there* in the world, wearing their meaning or significance on their sleeves, indifferently available to all who would gaze upon them. Perhaps the English or the French might be arrogant enough to presume that their linguistic and cognitive heritage captures the universal experience of reality, but the Irish cannot pretend to such vulgarity. That is why when Berkeley says that we should speak with the vulgar and think with the learned, he means that even if we adopt the language of a Malebranche or Locke, we can still subvert it by drawing attention to its contingency.

Underlying Berkeley's philosophy (including his epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of science, and ethics), then, is his theory of meaning. In that theory, statements are intelligible in virtue of how they function within a system of signs. Mind is central in this account, because it is the activity of differentiating and relating things in the world as terms in the language of nature. Minds are not so much things addressed in the language (though they can be described derivatively in such terms) as the principles that identify how things in the world are intelligible. Mind is thus the signification, the intelligibility, or more specifically, the linguisticality of the world.

Hence, it is in terms of mind that all of Berkeley's works – including those sometimes considered on the periphery of his philosophy, such as *Passive Obedience*, *Alciphron*, *The Analyst*, *The Querist*, and *Siris* – take on greater importance, in that they reveal how freedom, morality, value, and beauty are explicable in the same terms that characterize Berkeley's epistemology and metaphysics. For as he notes early on, "there can be no perception, no idea without will, being there are no ideas so indifferent but one had rather have them than annihilation, or

annihilation than them . . . there being no ideas perfectly void of all pain and uneasiness" (NB 833). All perception is thus unavoidably affective, because everything we experience – whether or not we recognize it as such – is significant in virtue of its place in a system of signs. By embedding the discussion of mind in the context of a system of signs, Berkeley (unlike his contemporaries) portrays mind as the will or intention that things be identified by being differentiated and related rather than as something distinct from already differentiated things.

In short, the way to interpret Berkeley's works is (as he recommends to Samuel Johnson) to read them in order.[24] In his *Notebooks* he sketches out the issues that will occupy his subsequent works, including examinations of: (1) how things are intelligible within networks of sign relations (*New Theory of Vision*, 1709); (2) what it means for things to exist (*Principles* I, 1710); (3) what minds are and how they relate to one another (*Principles* II, lost; *Passive Obedience*, 1712); and (4) how God's act of creation is related to ideas and finite minds (*Dialogues*, 1713). Later works describe God's ordering of events in terms of how objects are regulated by the laws of nature (*De Motu*, 1721) and how the minds that experience those objects are morally responsible and still free (*Alciphron*, 1732). The *Theory of Vision Vindicated* (1733) highlights the different ways in which finite minds confront the challenge of ordering experience (i.e., suggestion, inference); and the second edition additions to *Principles* and *Dialogues* (1734) reveal how the inherently semiotic or intentional character of mind is captured in the vocabulary of notions. In his works on mathematics and money – *The Analyst* (1734), *A Defence of Free-thinking in Mathematics* (1735), and *The Querist* (1735–1737) – Berkeley indicates how "notions" provide an intermediate concept between the signifying relations of ideas as determined by the divinely-instituted language of nature and those established through merely human convention.[25] Indeed, notional signification is Berkeley's accommodation to our fallen human situation, in that the notions on which we rely in mathematics (e.g., proportion, infinity) and economics (e.g., money) are neither purely natural nor simply conventional, neither divine nor grounded merely in extra-systemic reference. In *Siris* (1744) this appeal to an intermediate way of speaking is extended to the minute corpuscles responsible for the efficacy of tar water. As the *ultimate* cause of all things, however, mind is the principle by which things are differentiated from and related to one another. Because our fallen nature precludes our thinking simply in those terms, Berkeley appeals to "pure elementary fire" (or "acidity") as the *instrumental* cause of such differentiation.

In *Siris*, Berkeley's philosophy comes full circle back to its original enquiry into how existence has meaning, in that it characterizes the central activity of mind not as an impulse toward homogenous unity but as the effort to achieve harmony in an

[24] Berkeley to Johnson, 30 March 1730, in *Philosophical Works*, 355.

[25] See C. George Caffentzis, "Algebraic Money: Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics and Money," *Berkeley Studies* 18 (2007): 3–23.

ever-increasing variety of expressions. Instead of removing differences, mind and fire create multiplicity – but always within patterns of regularity. Just as in *Alciphron* (IV.12), mind in *Siris* is recognized in the copious, articulate, and varied expressions of will. In *Siris*, as in Berkeley's other works, mind is portrayed as the principle of intelligibility and meaning precisely because it is the principle of differentiation whereby the multiplicity of things in the world is expressed in and as a language.

In Berkeley's last major work, mind, language, and fire thus come together in a way consistent with his early insistence on heterogeneity among the senses. As *Siris* makes clear, God himself is differentiated in the Trinity, and it is this feature of mind's inherent otherness that makes possible the effort to will that there be light – not only in terms of understanding but also in the fiery creation of beings. That theme is there at the beginning of Berkeley's philosophical career, and it is also there at the end. By thinking of it as a central organizing motif, we can appreciate more clearly the unity of his thought and resist the temptation to imagine contradictions where there are none.