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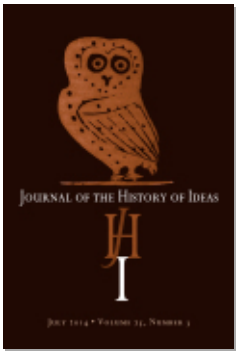

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Kenneth L. Pearce

Despite their shared empiricism, it is tempting to regard Locke and Berkeley as natural enemies when it comes to religious epistemology. Locke's religious epistemology has recently been much discussed,[1] and the scholarly consensus is that, as Michael Ayers aptly put it, Locke's "evident purpose" in his theorizing on this subject "was to clip the wings of revelation."[2] Locke's whole *Essay* is characterized by a modest, if not skeptical, epistemology and has as one of its key conclusions the denial that genuine knowledge is to be had in revealed religion. Berkeley's religious epistemology has received considerably less critical attention, but it certainly seems that he is out to defend claims to religious knowledge. His aim, in his well-known early works, is to identify and refute "the grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion,"[3] and the grounds he identifies are Locke's doctrines of

I thank the participants in the 2011 International Berkeley Conference, as well as Edwin McCann and two anonymous referees for this journal, for very helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

[1] See e.g. Michael Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 2 vols. (London: Routledge, 1991), 1:118–24; Thomas M. Lennon, *The Battle of the Gods and Giants: The Legacies of Descartes and Gassendi, 1655–1715* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 169–90; Nicholas Jolley, "Reason's Dim Candle: Locke's Critique of Enthusiasm," in *The Philosophy of John Locke: New Perspectives*, ed. Peter R. Anstey (London: Routledge, 2003), 179–91; Nicholas Jolley, "Locke on Faith and Reason," in *The Cambridge Companion to Locke's "Essay Concerning Human Understanding,"* ed. Lex Newman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 436–55.

[2] Ayers, *Locke*, 1:121; Jolley, "Locke on Faith and Reason," 441.

[3] George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [PHK], in

abstraction and material substratum. To all appearances, (future) Bishop Berkeley, like Bishop Stillingfleet before him, is out to protect the religious establishment from Locke's wing-clipping.

In this article, I argue that these appearances are deceiving. This simplistic picture is contradicted by later works in which Berkeley is decidedly pessimistic about the prospects for religious knowledge, and discusses the matter in strikingly Lockean terms. In these late works, Berkeley self-consciously endorses the main principles of Locke's religious epistemology and, in doing so, he does not contradict any of the major theses of his early works. Recognizing this fact will help to clarify Berkeley's relationship to Locke and to prominent critics of Locke, such as Stillingfleet. In particular, I will argue that one of Berkeley's main aims in the famous early works was to show that Stillingfleet and others had misidentified the grounds of skepticism, atheism, and irreligion in Locke's philosophy. Locke's epistemology is innocent; the doctrines of matter and abstraction are to blame.

I. THE TEMPTING NARRATIVE

In this section, I lay out in more detail the story I will call the "Tempting Narrative," which sees Berkeley as fitting into the tradition of religious critics of Locke's epistemology.[4] I begin with a description of Locke's religious epistemology and an overview of the critical responses, then proceed to show how and why Berkeley might be thought to fit into this tradition.

I.1 Locke's Religious Epistemology

The general tendency of Locke's philosophy is toward epistemic humility or, as Locke's opponents called it, skepticism. Locke famously endorsed a strong form of epistemic individualism, arguing that, "We may as rationally hope to see with other Mens Eyes, as to know by other Mens Understandings."[5] However, the individual understanding, he says, "comes exceeding short of the vast Extent of Things."[6] Failure to recognize our limitations,

vol. 2 of *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols. (1710; London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–57), subtitle.

[4] For a detailed historical account of this tradition, see John W. Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956).

[5] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [EHU], ed. Peter H. Nidditch (1690; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), §1.4.23.

[6] Ibid., §1.1.5.

Locke argued, leads to confusion and doubt. In order to have any secure knowledge at all, we must first know that there are many things we do not (and cannot) know. Locke's moderate skepticism is thus advertised as the only antidote to "perfect Scepticism,"[7] or the denial that there is any knowledge at all.

In the chapter "Of Faith and Reason"[8] in the *Essay*, Locke applies these general principles to religious questions. Here, as elsewhere, Locke believes that people have supposed that knowledge was available, or even that knowledge was actually possessed, where only probable belief is possible. Locke describes this error as a confusion regarding the "distinct provinces" of faith and reason and says that it "may possibly have been the cause, if not of great Disorders, yet at least of great Disputes, and perhaps Mistakes in the World."[9] It is likely that Locke intends this as an ironic understatement, since it is clear from his political writings that Locke believes that excessive religious confidence is not merely a possible cause of disputes and mistakes, but an actual cause of violence and persecution.[10] Even without knowledge of Locke's (anonymous) political writings, the irony would not be difficult to see for anyone who had lived through the religious strife of the seventeenth century. Locke believes that undermining this excessive confidence in doubtful religious matters is necessary to achieve the political goal of religious toleration.[11]

Locke's excessively confident opponents are of two sorts: *epistemic authoritarians*, such as Roman Catholics, who claim theological certainty on the basis of pronouncements from religious authorities; and *enthusiasts*, such as Quakers and some radical Puritans, who claim theological certainty on the basis of private religious experience.[12] Both of these amount to claims of certainty on the basis of divine revelation, though the authoritarians believe that God speaks to the religious authorities, whereas the enthusiasts believe that God speaks directly to the individual. In "Of Faith and Reason," the primary target is epistemic authoritarianism. The fourth edition of 1700 added a new section against enthusiasm.[13] The focus here will

[7] Ibid., §1.1.7.
[8] Ibid., §4.18.
[9] Ibid., §4.18.1.
[10] John Locke, *The Works of John Locke*, 10 vols. (London: Thomas Tegg, 1823), 6:424–27.
[11] G. A. J. Rogers, "Introduction," in *Locke's Philosophy: Content and Context*, ed. Rogers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 4–7, 13–20; Sam Black, "Locke and the Skeptical Argument for Toleration," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 24, no. 4 (2007): 355–75.
[12] Ayers, *Locke*, 1:122; Jolley, "Locke on Faith and Reason," 441.
[13] EHU, §4.19; on possible motivations for this addition, see Jolley, "Reason's Dim Candle."

be on "Of Faith and Reason," as this was the focus of Locke's early critics, many of whom wrote before the fourth edition was available.

Locke begins the project of undermining excessive religious confidence by conceding to the proponents of revelation that the following principle is necessarily true and known with certainty:

> Divine Veracity (DV) For any proposition *p*, if God has revealed that *p*, then *p*.[14]

Locke defines "faith" as assent generated by a *modus ponens* syllogism which has (DV) as its major premise.[15] That is, when one reasons that whatever God has revealed is true, but God has revealed that *p*, therefore *p* is true, the resulting belief that *p* is an instance of faith. Locke then proceeds to defend the following three claims:

> (1) No New Ideas. Traditional revelation cannot give us any new simple ideas.[16]
>
> (2) Faith is Not Knowledge. Because of uncertainty about what, if anything, God has revealed, faith always falls short of knowledge.[17]
>
> (3) Judgment of Revelation by Reason. We must make use of reason in determining what, if anything, God has revealed.[18]

Each of these propositions plays a different role in Locke's project of undermining excessive confidence: (1) is used to limit the range of propositions which can be believed on the basis of traditional revelation; (2) is used directly to decrease the level of confidence we ought to have in allegedly revealed propositions, and also to argue that natural knowledge ought to overwhelm faith in case of conflict; and (3) is used to affirm the importance of individual judgment in religious matters, against the epistemic authoritarians.

Proposition (1) is meant to follow from the fact that traditional revelation must be given in ordinary human language.[19] According to Locke, language cannot be meaningful to us unless the meanings of the words can be

[14] EHU, §4.16.14; Jolley, "Locke on Faith and Reason," 443.
[15] EHU, §§4.18.2, 4.18.10.
[16] Ibid., §4.18.3.
[17] Ibid., §§4.18.4–6.
[18] Ibid., §4.18.6.
[19] Ibid., §4.18.3.

given in terms of simple ideas we already possess.[20] It follows that a string of words which did not correspond to simple ideas we already possessed could not be a revelation, since, being meaningless to us, it could not reveal anything.

From this proposition Locke draws the corollary that those of us who have not received personal revelation from God cannot have faith in any proposition unless we have previously acquired the constituent ideas of that proposition by means of our natural faculties, i.e. by sensation and reflection. This is a straightforward consequence of Locke's general epistemology.

"Judgment," which Locke uses as a synonym for "belief," is defined as "the putting *Ideas* together, or separating them from one another in the Mind, when their certain Agreement or Disagreement is not perceived, but *presumed* to be so."[21] The mind can, however, only operate on those ideas it has, and can only get ideas from sensation and reflection. Thus, in order for us to have faith in a proposition, that proposition must be formed by the joining or separating of ideas gained by sensation and reflection.

Proposition (2) follows from Locke's general skepticism about history.[22] Knowledge, for Locke, requires absolute certainty and, although some historical claims, such as the existence of Julius Caesar, are so well supported that "a Man cannot avoid believing" them,[23] these claims still fall short of Locke's demanding standards for knowledge. Now, the claim that a certain book is a revelation from God will typically be supported by certain historical claims related to the origin of the book—for instance, that its author performed certain miracles. In fact, Locke argues in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that the writings of the prophets and apostles should be regarded as a divine revelation for just this reason.[24] However, historical beliefs, including the belief that the authors of certain biblical books performed miracles, are beliefs on the basis of testimony, and testimony can produce only probable belief, never genuine knowledge.

Faith has been defined as assent formed by an instance of *modus ponens* in which (DV) serves as the major premise. What Locke here argues is that the *minor* premise, which will be of the form *God has revealed that p*, will always have the status of merely probable belief and, therefore, the conclusion of the syllogism will have the status of probable belief. Faith, therefore, always falls short of knowledge.

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[20] Ibid., §§3.2.2–3.
[21] Ibid., §4.14.4.
[22] Ibid., §§4.16.8–11.
[23] Ibid., §4.16.8.
[24] Locke, *Works*, 7:136–38, 143, 146–47.

From this proposition, Locke draws the corollary that knowledge always overwhelms faith in case of conflict. That is, if I know that *p*, I must conclude by *modus tollens* that God has not revealed that *p*, regardless of any contrary evidence, for the evidence that God has revealed that *p* can never be more than merely probable, and my knowledge that *p*, combined with my knowledge of principle (DV), renders it *certain* that God has *not* revealed that *p*. More generally, once (DV) is accepted it must be admitted that independent evidence against the truth of a proposition is also evidence against its having been revealed by God. As a result, individuals who are confident of (DV) cannot rationally engage in an inquiry as to whether some proposition is divinely revealed without considering independent evidence as to the truth of that proposition. This applies both to inquiry as to whether a particular book is a revelation, and inquiry as to whether a (supposedly) revealed book in fact teaches a particular proposition. Thus, to take a present-day example, traditional Christians inquiring as to whether the teachings of Genesis are contrary to the theory of evolution are rationally obligated to take the scientific evidence for the truth of evolution into account as evidence against the claim that Genesis is both a revelation from God and contrary to evolutionary theory.

Locke defends (3), the judgment of revelation by reason, by arguing that to deny it will lead to either circularity or regress. According to Locke, if the claim that God has revealed that *p* is rationally justified despite not being directly supported by reason, then it must be an article of faith. However, given Locke's definition of "faith," the proposition that God has revealed that *p* cannot be an article of faith unless God has revealed that God has revealed that *p*. This proposition must in turn either be supported by reason, or be an article of faith. If it is supported by reason, Locke's point stands, and reason is the ultimate ground of faith. If it is an article of faith, then yet another revelation is required, and so on.[25] Thus we can see how badly John Milner, one of Locke's early critics, misunderstood the argument when he responded by citing 2 Timothy 3:16 to show that it was indeed divinely revealed that the Bible was a revelation.[26] The question is, what supports the belief that the Bible is a revelation? In answer to this question, it would be perfectly legitimate to cite some other revelation, provided that there were independent support for that revelation, but it is surely fatuous to cite the Bible itself. If the chain of revelations is to come

[25] EHU, §4.18.6.

[26] John Milner, *An Account of Mr. Locke's Religion, Out of his Own Writings, and in his Own Words* (London: J. Nutt, 1700), 76–77.

to an end, rather than exhibit circularity or regress, then, Locke thinks, the foundation will have to be some text whose status as a revelation can be supported by reason.

Given Locke's epistemological individualism, it follows from (3) that there is a wide role for individual judgment in religious matters. No one can do our reasoning for us. If, then, whether a proposition is divinely revealed must be determined by reason, it must be determined by each of us individually. We cannot simply take it on the authority of some other individual or institution.

I.2 Locke's Religious Critics

Locke's aim in theorizing about religious epistemology was to undermine what he saw as excessive confidence in revealed religion on the part of many of his contemporaries. By undermining this excessive confidence and making faith subordinate to reason, Locke believed that he could bolster his case for religious toleration. It is, then, not at all surprising that Locke's approach was not popular with religious conservatives. As early as 1695, John Edwards complained that Locke's *The Resonableness of Christianity* was "all over Socinianized."[27] However, the storm did not really break until the 1696 publication of John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*. By today's standards, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the first section of Toland's book was plagiarized from Locke's *Essay*. Locke, for his part, was likely more thankful for than irritated by the lack of attribution, for Locke wanted nothing to do with the rest of Toland's project.[28] The aim of Toland's book was to use Locke's epistemology as a platform to attack major doctrines and practices of traditional Christianity as inventions of "priestcraft." Most notoriously, Toland argued that Arianism and orthodox Trinitarianism are alike incomprehensible.[29]

Locke's *Essay* was widely read and carefully studied in the late seventeenth century, with the result that the echoes of Locke in Toland's book were not lost on its readers, and a number of writers began to attack Locke

[27] John Edwards, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism, Especially in the Present Age* (London: J. Robinson/J. Wyat, 1695), 113.
[28] Locke, *Works*, 9:421–22, 425–26; M. A. Stewart, "Stillingfleet and the Way of Ideas," in *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, ed. Stewart (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 252.
[29] John Toland, *Christianity not Mysterious: Or, a Treatise Shewing, That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine Can be Properly Call'd a Mystery*, 2nd ed. (London: Sam. Buckley, 1696), 27.

and Toland, and often also Descartes, indiscriminately. By far the most famous of these was Edward Stillingfleet, the Anglican Bishop of Worcester. Two others who are important to the present project because of their likely influence on Berkeley were John Sergeant and Peter Browne. Sergeant was an English Roman Catholic priest, apologist, and philosopher, who had earlier engaged in an acrimonious debate with Stillingfleet about the "rule of faith." Browne was Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, during Berkeley's time there and later served as Anglican Bishop of Cork and Ross. During the 1730s and 1740s, Browne and Berkeley engaged in a public debate about religious language.[30]

Stillingfleet, Sergeant, and Browne published simultaneously in 1697, and all took Toland to have shown that the rejection of religious mysteries, and especially the Trinity, was a consequence of Locke's epistemology. Stillingfleet, especially, seized on the inability of Locke's epistemology to provide us with adequate ideas of person and substance, the key concepts in the doctrine of the Trinity. Since Locke's epistemology could not account for the rational acceptability of that doctrine, Stillingfleet thought, Locke's epistemology must be mistaken.

Locke's critics were not, however, satisfied with merely defending the rational acceptability of religious mysteries; Stillingfleet, Sergeant, and Browne all wished to reject Locke's principle (2) and claim that the doctrines of the Christian faith were not merely rationally acceptable, but knowable. In the earlier controversy between Sergeant and Stillingfleet, Sergeant had contended that Roman Catholicism could, and Protestantism could not, provide theological certainty.[31] Stillingfleet had responded by attempting to show that certainty was available to Protestants after all.[32] In criticizing Locke and Toland, Stillingfleet speaks of "certainty of faith."[33] Sergeant insists that "inward assent" should not be given in the absence of "perfect evidence,"[34] and that such evidence is available for the Christian

[30] David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 11–12, 139–44; Jean-Paul Pittion, David Berman, and A. A. Luce, "A New Letter by Berkeley to Browne on Divine Analogy," *Mind* 78 (1969): 375–92.

[31] Beverley C. Southgate, "'Beating Down Scepticism': The Solid Philosophy of John Sergeant, 1623–1707," in Stewart, ed., *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, 288–93.

[32] Stewart, "Stillingfleet and the Way of Ideas," 270–77.

[33] Edward Stillingfleet, *A Discourse in Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity: With an Answer to the Late Socinian Objections Against it from Scripture, Antiquity and Reason*, 2nd ed. (London: Henry Mortlock, 1697), 233.

[34] John Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy Asserted, Against the Fancies of the Ideists: Or, the Method of Science Farther Illustrated* (London: Roger Clavil/Abel Roper/Thomas Metcalf, 1697), 409–10.

faith.[35] Browne is even more explicit in his rejection of (2). He writes, "the *Christian Faith* may be called *Knowledg* . . . because we are obliged to believe nothing, but what we have infallible proof for."[36]

Locke was widely criticized for his general skeptical tendencies,[37] but these tendencies were nowhere found so objectionable as in religion. The response of religious conservatives was a frontal assault on Locke's total epistemological system, designed to show that the truth of the Christian faith, including its "mysteries," is known with certainty after all.

I.3 Berkeley as Religious Critic

It was in this intellectual context that Berkeley set out to write his *Treatise on the Principles of Human Knowledge*, to which he affixed the subtitle, "Wherein the Chief Causes of Error and Difficulty in the Sciences, with the grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion, are inquired into." Berkeley, like Stillingfleet, Browne, and many other critics of Locke, was a member of the Anglican clergy; he was ordained in 1710, the same year he published the first edition of the *Principles*. Given the wide circulation of the many criticisms of Locke during the period of Berkeley's education, it is quite likely that Berkeley was familiar with them. The likelihood is further increased by apparent echoes of these writings found in Berkeley's works. To cite just a few examples, we may note Berkeley's use of a cherry as a paradigmatic physical object, which is likely drawn from the discussions of substance in the Locke-Stillingfleet correspondence,[38] and also the similarity between Berkeley and Sergeant in their criticism of Lockean abstraction and introduction of "general notions."[39] It is also worth noting that Sergeant's main contention throughout *Solid Philosophy Asserted* is that we

[35] Ibid., 416, 442.

[36] Peter Browne, *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled Christianity not Mysterious* (Dublin: John North, 1697), 63. Browne seems to adopt a weaker stance in later writings. See Peter Browne, *Faith Distinguished from Opinion and Knowledge: In some REMARKS upon a Book lately Publish'd, By the Lord Bishop of Rapho* (1716), 7–32, esp. 12; Peter Browne, *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding* (London: William Innys, 1728), 243–53. For discussion of Browne's later views on faith and knowledge, see Arthur Robert Winnett, *Peter Browne: Provost, Bishop, Metaphysician* (London: SPCK, 1974), 95–96, 116–18.

[37] See especially Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy*; Henry Lee, *Anti-Scepticism: Or, Notes Upon Each Chapter of Mr. Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: R. Clavel and C. Harper, 1702).

[38] Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous: In Opposition to Scepticks and Atheists* [DHP], in *Works*, 2:249; Locke, *Works*, 4:26.

[39] Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy*, preface, §24; PHK, introduction, §§6–16.

can have genuine knowledge of things only if the things themselves are present in the mind. Thus Sergeant's influence on Berkeley was likely quite significant.

In fact, not only was Berkeley familiar with the tradition of religious criticism of Locke, but there is at least some reason to believe that he intentionally sets the *Principles* in that context. Berkeley's subtitle may well have been intended to call to mind John Edwards's 1695 work *Some Thoughts Concerning the Several Causes and Occasions of Atheism, Especially in the Present Age*. For Berkeley's original audience, this parallel would have been confirmed when Berkeley began, in his introduction, to criticize Locke's philosophy, for Edwards had concluded that the principal cause of atheism was none other than John Locke. Furthermore, Berkeley begins his introduction by noting that the study of philosophy seems to lead to skepticism, and that this skeptical tendency is often blamed on "the obscurity of things."[40] Locke's doctrine of the unknowability of "the inward essence and constitution of things" is mentioned as an example,[41] though Locke himself is not yet mentioned by name. However, Berkeley says, the real cause is not "the obscurity of things" at all; rather, in our philosophical inquiries, "we have first raised a dust, and then complain, we cannot see."[42] Browne began his criticism of Locke and Toland quite similarly, accusing them of "agree[ing] to speak of plain things in a peculiar dialect of their own" which so confuses their readers "that the Question is lost in a multitude of Words, and then Men wander far in pursuit of Truth, when they left it behind them at their first setting out."[43] This parallels not only Berkeley's dust-raising remark, but also his observation that "the illiterate bulk of mankind . . . are out of all danger of becoming sceptics."[44] Browne's metaphor of setting out on a philosophical journey only to find the truth back at home is also echoed by Berkeley.[45] David Berman has collected a good deal of circumstantial evidence for the claim that Berkeley's rejection of Locke's philosophy of language may have been occasioned by an encounter with Browne and Archbishop William King at a meeting of the Dublin Philosophical Society in 1707.[46] If this is so, then it is hardly surprising that Berkeley should begin, in the early works, by emphasizing the commonalities between his perspective and Browne's, and so placing himself in the tradition of religious critics of Locke's epistemology.

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[40] Ibid., introduction, §2.
[41] Ibid., introduction, §2.
[42] Ibid., introduction, §3.
[43] Browne, *Letter*, 3.
[44] PHK, introduction, §1.
[45] DHP, 168.
[46] Berman, *George Berkeley*, 11–17.

There are, then, three reasons for classing Berkeley among the religious critics of Locke's epistemology. First and most importantly, Berkeley criticizes Locke for undermining knowledge, and he does so from a religious perspective. Thus Hans Peter Benschop asserts that Berkeley follows this tradition in arguing that "Locke's concept of knowledge is wrong" because "[i]t leads to scepticism and free-thinking, and from free-thinking to atheism and anarchy."[47] Second, Berkeley appears to begin his early works with an invocation of this tradition, and especially of Peter Browne. Thus F. H. Heinemann characterizes Berkeley's philosophy as "a violent reaction . . . against everything Toland stood for," and in this, he says, Berkeley "followed [Browne's] lead."[48] Third and finally, Berkeley was a member of the religious establishment, and there was considerable institutional pressure to disown Locke for his associations with Toland. These are all reasons to expect that Berkeley would follow Stillingfleet, Sergeant, Browne, and others in insisting, against Locke, that genuine knowledge is available in revealed religion. Furthermore, this expectation often appears to be confirmed in Berkeley's *Principles* and *Dialogues*. Berkeley is consistently optimistic about the prospects for human knowledge, and especially religious knowledge, throughout these works, as, for instance, when Berkeley has Philonous insist that by his principles we "may now, without any laborious search into the sciences, without any subtlety of reason or tedious length of discourse, oppose and baffle the most strenuous advocate of atheism."[49] It is therefore tempting to suppose that Berkeley's philosophy is meant to uphold genuine knowledge of religious truths against Locke's skeptical challenges.

II. LOCKEAN RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY IN TWO LATE WORKS OF BERKELEY

According to the Tempting Narrative, Locke had sought to undermine religious knowledge, and Berkeley, in his two famous early works, was part of an already established tradition of religious conservatives seeking to uphold religious knowledge. A number of circumstances conspire (perhaps with Berkeley's own assistance) to make this approach to the *Principles* and *Dialogues* tempting. However, there is a serious and, indeed, ultimately fatal

[47] Hans Peter Benschop, "Berkeley, Lee and Abstract Ideas," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 5 (1997): 60.
[48] F. H. Heinemann, "Toland and Leibniz," *Philosophical Review* 54 (1945): 438.
[49] DHP, 213.

problem for the Tempting Narrative. In two late works, Berkeley explicitly endorses all of the main theses of Locke's religious epistemology. These works are *Alciphron* (1732), and a letter to Sir John James, dated June 7, 1741.[50] Berkeley was consecrated Bishop of Cloyne in 1734, so these works date from the period of Berkeley's life when he is most intimately attached to the religious establishment.

The targets of *Alciphron* are "free-thinkers" such as Mandeville and (Locke's student) Shaftesbury. These free-thinkers are radical epistemological individualists, especially on the subject of religion. Berkeley attempts to meet the free-thinkers' challenges head-on and on their own terms, using only individual reason without appeals to authority.

Sir John James was a close friend of Berkeley's who accompanied him to America and stayed there when Berkeley returned to Ireland. James was evidently considering converting to Roman Catholicism, and Berkeley wrote in 1741 to dissuade him. It is, however, not clear whether the letter was ever sent, since the letter was in Berkeley's possession at the time of his death.[51] The main argument which James found impressive was apparently the same one that Sergeant had made against Stillingfleet: that Roman Catholicism can, and Protestantism cannot, provide theological certainty. As we shall see, Berkeley responded not by arguing, with Stillingfleet, that Protestants can be certain after all, but by arguing, with Locke, that certainty is impossible for Catholics and Protestants alike.

Locke had tried to portray himself as a good moderate Anglican by steering between the extremes of the epistemological authoritarianism of the Roman Catholics and the avowedly anti-rationalistic epistemological individualism of the enthusiasts (that is, the Quakers and some radical Puritans). However, he had raised the suspicions of the religious establishment at least partly because he said nothing against a third extreme, the rationalistic epistemological individualism of the Socinians, free-thinkers, deists, and so on. Whereas the Quakers and radical Puritans rejected tradition and authority in favor of individual religious experience, these thinkers rejected tradition and authority in favor of individual rational judgment. For all Locke himself says, an individual may rationally judge that the testimony of an authority or tradition is likely to be true, and thereby come to a probable belief in the truth of some religious system. This would not be to excise individual judgment from the picture, for (as Berkeley points out to James) individual judgment is still necessary in determining which traditions or authorities to trust, and to what extent. The Socinians and free-thinkers went further than Locke's stated position in the published works

[50] Berkeley, *Works*, 7:143–55.
[51] See Luce's introduction in Berkeley, *Works*, 7:141–42.

by harboring a deep suspicion of authorities and traditions.[52] Toland's invective against "priestcraft" is characteristic of these movements: both the past religious authorities, who were responsible for forming the tradition, and the present religious authorities are seen as corrupt and interested only in power. As a result, their testimony is less than worthless.

In *Alciphron* and the letter to James, Berkeley seeks to avoid all three extremes, and he does so by endorsing the main principles of Locke's religious epistemology. Locke's religious epistemology, recall, consisted of five main components: general skeptical attitudes, the background assumption of epistemological individualism; and the three theses Locke defends in "Of Faith and Reason." All five of these are endorsed by Berkeley.

Locke had compared the human understanding to a "dim candle," but noted that it "shines bright enough for all our Purposes."[53] Whereas in the *Principles* Berkeley had chided Locke, remarking, "We should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men,"[54] he responds to James's assertion of the need for an infallible judge in order to achieve theological certainty by remarking, "We are like men in a cave in this present life seeing by a dim light through such chinks as the divine goodness hath open'd to us. . . . We confess that we see through a glass darkly: and rejoice that we see enough to determine our practice and excite our hopes."[55] Berkeley repeats not only Locke's metaphor of the dimness of the light, but also Locke's emphasis on its sufficiency for practical purposes.

It seems that, according to the argument James was considering, an infallible judge was necessary not only for theological *certainty*, but also for theological *unity*. Berkeley answers this argument by further developing Locke's famous metaphor of seeing with another's eyes:

> Men travelling by day-light see by one common light, though each with his own eyes. If one man shou'd say to the rest, Shut your eyes and follow me who see better than you all. This wou'd not be well taken. The sincere Christians of our communion are governed or led by the inward light of God's grace, by the outward light of his written word, by the ancient and Catholic traditions of Christ's church, by the ordinances of our National Church which we take

[52] On Locke's attitude to Socinianism, see John Marshall, "Locke, Socinianism, 'Socinianism,' and Unitarianism," in Stewart, ed., *English Philosophy in the Age of Locke*, 111–82.
[53] EHU, §1.1.5; see Jolley, "Reason's Dim Candle," 187–89.
[54] PHK, introduction, §3.
[55] Berkeley, *Works*, 7:147.

> to consist all and hang together. But then *we see, as all must do, with our own eyes, by a common light but each with his own private eyes. And so must you too or you will not see at all.* And not seeing at all how can you chuse a Church? Why prefer that of Rome to that of England? Thus far, and in this sense, every man's judgment is private as well as ours. Some indeed go farther and without regard to the holy Spirit or the word of God, or the writings of the primitive fathers, or the universal uninterrupt'd traditions of the Church, will pretend to canvass every mystery, every step of Providence, and reduce it to the private standard of their own fancy, for reason reaches not those things. Such as these I give up and disown as well as you do.[56]

Berkeley's emphasis on a "common light" allows him to disown the Socinians and free-thinkers and maintain a moderate epistemic individualism. It also allows him to account for the expectation of a moderate degree of doctrinal uniformity within the Anglican Communion. The fact that each of the believers is engaged in evaluating the same evidence prevents epistemic individualism from leading to doctrinal anarchy.

Berkeley evidently also worried that James had gone too far onto the side of enthusiasm. He warns,

> Light and heat are both found in a religious mind duly disposed. Light in due order goes first. It is dangerous to begin with heat, that is with the affections. To ballance earthly affections by spiritual affections is right. But our affections shou'd grow from inquiry and deliberation else there is danger of our being superstitious or Enthusiasts.[57]

This amounts to an endorsement of Locke's principle (3), the judgment of revelation by reason. That principle is also endorsed in *Alciphron*, where Euphranor is made to ask, "Shall we not admit the same method of arguing, the same rules of logic, reason and good sense to obtain in things spiritual and things corporeal, in faith and science?"[58] Of course Berkeley's free-thinking opponents can hardly answer "no," for the principle is theirs.

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[56] Berkeley, *Works*, 7:146 (emphasis added).
[57] Berkeley, *Works*, 7:147.
[58] George Berkeley, *Alciphron: or, the Minute Philosopher* [Alc], in *Berkeley's Alciphron: English Text and Essays in Interpretation*, ed. Laurent Jaffro, Genevieve Brykman, and Claire Schwartz (1732; Hildesheim: Georg-Olms-Verlag, 2009), §7.11.

Berkeley also endorses Locke's principle (2), that faith is not knowledge,[59] and its corollary, that, as Berkeley puts it, "That, indeed, which evidently contradicts sense and reason you have a right to disbelieve," even when it purports to be divinely revealed.[60] In denying that faith is knowledge, Berkeley has Crito ask, "Who ever supposed that scientifical proofs were necessary to make a Christian?"[61] Although the question is made to look rhetorical, it has an answer: John Sergeant and Peter Browne both supposed this very thing. Again, however, Berkeley sides with Locke.

The only major principle of Locke's religious epistemology which has not yet been discussed is Locke's principle (1), that traditional revelation cannot convey any new simple ideas. Here things are a bit more complicated, for Berkeley endorses the principle, but denies Locke's corollary, that we can have faith only in propositions whose constituent parts are simple ideas gained by sensation and reflection. This is the topic of *Alciphron* 7. In that dialogue, Berkeley has the free-thinker Alciphron repeat the Locke-Toland argument about the limits of faith, and conclude (as Locke did not) that it is impossible to have faith in God's grace or in the Trinity, since we lack the necessary ideas.[62] There is not space here for a detailed discussion of the theory of language Berkeley develops in response to this objection.[63] However, it will be well to observe that, despite Berkeley's criticism of Browne's account of religious language,[64] Berkeley and Browne use the same basic strategy to respond to the Locke-Toland argument: both claim that statements may be meaningful by being connected to our simple ideas by a more complicated and tenuous route than Locke's theory allows, and that religious statements are so connected.[65]

Throughout these late works, Berkeley consistently sides with Locke,

[59] Ibid., §6.31.
[60] Ibid., §6.15.
[61] Ibid., §6.31.
[62] Ibid., §§7.1–4.
[63] For such discussions, see Anthony Flew, "Was Berkeley a Precursor of Wittgenstein?" in *George Berkeley: Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher in Focus*, ed. David Berman (1974; London: Routledge, 1993), 214–26; Kenneth P. Winkler, "Berkeley and the Doctrine of Signs," in *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Winkler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 125–65. I have briefly treated this subject in Kenneth L. Pearce, "The Semantics of Sense Perception in Berkeley," *Religious Studies* 44 (2008): 259–62.
[64] Alc, §§4.17–21.
[65] On the similarity between Berkeley and Browne on religious language, see Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas*, 198–200; Winnett, *Peter Browne*, 147. For a more general account of the relationship between Berkeley and Browne, see Paul J. Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), chap. 9.

endorsing all of the main points of Locke's religious epistemology, excepting one corollary. In this he opposes Locke's religious critics, including Stillingfleet, Sergeant, and Browne. Curiously, even in the one case where Berkeley dissents from Locke and adopts a position similar to Browne's, he nevertheless feels the need to paint himself as Browne's opponent. Contrary to the Tempting Narrative, Berkeley appears in these works to side with Locke, *against* the establishment.

III. LOCKEAN RELIGIOUS EPISTEMOLOGY IN BERKELEY'S EARLY WORKS

In section I we saw that there are good reasons for viewing Berkeley's early works as part of a tradition of conservative critics of Locke's religious epistemology. However, we have now seen that, in later works, Berkeley sides with Locke, against the conservative critics. This is, *prima facie*, a serious tension in Berkeley's thought. In this section, I argue that Berkeley had in fact endorsed Locke's religious epistemology all along, and that Berkeley's early works therefore bear a rather more complicated relation to Locke and his critics than the Tempting Narrative supposes. In particular, I will argue that one of the main aims of Berkeley's *Principles* and *Dialogues* was to show that earlier critics had misidentified the grounds of atheism and irreligion in Locke's philosophy. Berkeley aims to show that Locke's epistemology is perfectly harmless once the erroneous doctrines of matter and abstraction are rejected.

Before proceeding with this project, it will be necessary to consider two tactics which might be employed in attempts to save the Tempting Narrative. First, it might be held that Berkeley simply changed his mind. This, however, will not do. The identification and refutation of the sources of religious errors in Locke's philosophy are clearly among the main aims of the *Principles* and *Dialogues*, as their subtitles indicate. Therefore, to claim that Berkeley changed his mind on this issue would be to claim that in 1732, when he published *Alciphron*, and in 1741, when he wrote to James, Berkeley rejected some of the central theses of the *Principles* and *Dialogues*. However, Berkeley re-issued these works with only minor revisions in 1734. It is therefore quite implausible to suppose that he changed his mind as to any of their central theses.

Second, it might be suggested that in the late works Berkeley is making *ad hominem* concessions to his opponents. That is, it might be thought that

the people Berkeley is writing against endorse Locke's religious epistemology, and that Berkeley is trying to show that even their own principles do not support their irreligious conclusions. This, indeed, makes a good deal of sense in some of the passages from *Alciphron*. However, some of the most striking echoes of Locke are to be found in the letter to James, and in that text Berkeley is clearly trying to persuade James to endorse these Lockean principles, especially the claim that there can be no knowledge or certainty in revealed religion. The Lockean religious epistemology of the letter to James cannot be written off as a mere concession.

If the Tempting Narrative cannot be saved in either of these ways, a reevaluation of the early works is necessary. We should begin by noting that, although the subtitles and front matter of the *Principles* and *Dialogues* appear to place Berkeley in the tradition of religious objections to Locke, the texts do not, in fact, fit into that tradition as neatly as expected. First and foremost, Stillingfleet, Sergeant, Browne, and most of Locke's other early critics regarded the objectionable religious consequences of Locke's view as justifying a wholesale rejection of the "Way of Ideas."[66] They could not, therefore, be expected to be pleased with the opening of the main text of the *Principles*:

> It is evident to any one who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly ideas formed by help of memory and imagination.[67]

This is an invocation not just of that broad family of approaches known as the Way of Ideas, but, much more narrowly, of Locke's empiricist theory of ideas. To say that the *Principles* begins by invoking Locke's theory of ideas is not, of course, to deny that Berkeley ultimately departs from that theory in important ways. The key point is, rather, that this sentence shows a significant difference in attitude as compared to the religious critics of Locke we have been discussing. Whereas Browne had criticized "the talking of Ideas, and running endless divisions upon them" as "a cheap and easie way, some Men now adays have taken up, of appearing wise and learned to

[66] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, 273; Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy*, passim; Browne, *Letter*, 2–3; Milner, *Locke's Religion*, 14–15; also see Yolton, *Locke and the Way of Ideas*. For a detailed study of Stillingfleet's somewhat complicated attitude to the Way of Ideas outside his correspondence with Locke, see Stewart, "Stillingfleet and the Way of Ideas."
[67] PHK, §1.

the world" and blamed this way of speaking for causing important religious questions to be "lost in a multitude of Words,"[68] Berkeley begins by endorsing Locke's "endless divisions."

Furthermore, Berkeley often sees his own theory of ideas as part of the solution to the religious difficulties raised by Socinians and free-thinkers, rather than as part of the problem. For instance, in section 95 of the *Principles*, Berkeley notes that "Socinian scruples" about bodily resurrection "come to nothing" if we "mean by 'body' what every plain ordinary person means by that word, to wit, . . . a combination of sensible qualities, or ideas." The reference here is undoubtedly to Locke's denial, in his correspondence with Stillingfleet, that human persons will be raised in their same bodies prior to the Last Judgment.[69] Milner had used this discussion to connect Locke with Socinianism,[70] and John Edwards also accused Locke of promoting Socinianism "by his ridiculing the Resurrection of the same Body [and] by his Scruples about the Souls Immateriallity."[71] Stillingfleet's charge was that Locke's idea-based account of identity renders the resurrection of the same body impossible; Berkeley responds that the difficulties for resurrection stem instead from "the supposition that a body is denominated the *same*, with regard . . . to . . . the material substance."[72] The problem therefore arises quite independently of the Way of Ideas, but, once material substance is eliminated, the Way of Ideas has a role to play in its solution.

Second, there is evidence that Berkeley was well aware that he was likely to provoke hostility from earlier conservative critics of Locke. In the *Principles*, when Berkeley comes to consider objections to his view, the very first objection he answers is "that, by the foregoing principles [i.e. immaterialism], all that is real and substantial in nature is banished out of the world, and instead thereof a chimerical scheme of ideas takes place."[73] The identity of this objector would have been obvious to Berkeley's audience: much of the Locke-Stillingfleet correspondence revolved around Stillingfleet's allegation "that the Gentlemen of this new way of reasoning [i.e. Locke and Toland], have almost discarded *Substance* out of the reasonable part of the World."[74] Thus, at least sometimes, Berkeley seems to view Stillingfleet as a potential objector, rather than as an ally. The same may well

[68] Browne, *Letter*, 3.
[69] Locke, *Works*, 4:303–34.
[70] Milner, *Locke's Religion*, 187.
[71] John Edwards, *A Free Discourse Concerning Truth and Error, Especially in Matters of Religion* (London: Jonathan Robinson, 1701), 87.
[72] PHK, §95.
[73] Ibid., §34.
[74] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, 234.

be true of Locke's conservative critics more generally. At one point in the *Third Dialogue*, Hylas, apparently having run out of substantive objections to Philonous's views, exclaims, "But the novelty, Philonous, the novelty!"[75] Philonous's answer is clearly intended to ease the suspicions of religious conservatives.

In the *Principles* and *Dialogues*, Berkeley employs a sort of bait-and-switch tactic with Locke's conservative critics. In the front matter, he portrays himself as one of them, but in the main texts he advances views he knows they will find shocking. This is in line with Berkeley's famous remark to Percival that, for strategic reasons, he intentionally "omitted all mention of the non-existence of matter in the title-page, dedication, preface and introduction" to the *Principles*,[76] as well as Berkeley's reminder to himself in the notebooks "[t]o use the utmost Caution not to give the least Handle of offence to the Church or Church-men."[77] Berkeley intentionally portrays himself as just another conservative critic of Locke, in the tradition of Stillingfleet, Sergeant, and Browne. However, contrary to expectations, he never actually gets around to disagreeing with Locke on any central element of religious epistemology.

It will be objected at this point that Berkeley surely does attempt to secure religious knowledge in the early works. This is, of course, quite correct. However, it is necessary to pay attention to exactly what religious knowledge Berkeley defends. In the *Principles* and *Dialogues*, Berkeley claims to prove only two religious doctrines: the existence of God and the natural immortality of the soul.[78] Now, Locke did notoriously deny that the immateriality of the soul could be demonstrated,[79] and this was widely taken to undermine proofs of the natural immortality of the soul. Although Locke did not intentionally set out to undermine arguments for natural immortality, he was happy to treat both immateriality and immortality as matters of faith, and hence as merely probable.[80] Nevertheless, Locke did offer a purported proof of the existence of God.[81] The claim that a few basic principles of natural theology can be demonstrated is not, therefore, in opposition to Locke's religious epistemology.

On the other hand, in the late works where Berkeley explicitly endorses

[75] DHP, 243; also see PHK, preface [1710 ed.].
[76] Berkeley, *Works*, 8:36; see Berman, *George Berkeley*, 22–23.
[77] George Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, ed. George Hasson Thomas and A. A. Luce (New York: Garland, 1989), §715.
[78] PHK, §§141, 146–49; DHP, 167, 212–15, 257.
[79] EHU, §4.3.6; Locke, *Works*, 4:34.
[80] In addition to the previously cited passages, see ibid., 4:188, 4:473–80.
[81] EHU, §4.10.

Locke's religious epistemology, the topic is *revealed theology*, that is, faith. The only matter of faith Berkeley discusses in the *Principles* is the resurrection of the same body, and Berkeley there argues only that it is self-consistent, not that it is true. This is exactly what we should expect if Berkeley accepts Locke's principle (2), that faith is not knowledge, and its corollary, that natural knowledge overwhelms faith in case of conflict: the thing that we should expect to be proved is only that the doctrine of the resurrection of the same body is not known to be false. In order to know the doctrine to be false, by Locke's high standards for knowledge, we would need to demonstrate the "disagreement and repugnancy" of the ideas which are put together in that proposition,[82] that is, to show that the doctrine is self-contradictory. Berkeley aims to prove that, without the assumption of material substance, this cannot be done. Since the doctrine of the resurrection of the same body is not known to be false, it is eligible to be believed by faith. It is only in *Alciphron* that Berkeley takes up the task of defending the truth of the Christian faith in the only way it can be defended, namely, by probable arguments for divine revelation.

IV. THE GROUNDS OF SKEPTICISM, ATHEISM, AND IRRELIGION

In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, "skepticism, atheism, and irreligion" were on the rise, and religious conservatives were understandably anxious to discover the cause of this phenomenon. The use of Locke's *Essay* by Toland, its wide circulation in free-thinking circles, and Locke's evasions on major Christian doctrines in the Stillingfleet correspondence and *The Reasonableness of Christianity* led to Locke's being fingered as the locus of the infection. The consensus position was that Locke's epistemology and, indeed, the whole Way of Ideas, led inexorably toward religious nonconformity, and perhaps even to atheism. This put Berkeley, who was a Lockean in his epistemology and a traditionalist in his religion, in a difficult position. To deal with this situation, Berkeley set out, as others had before him, to inquire into the specific grounds of objectionable religious consequences in Locke's philosophy. Berkeley, however, returned an answer radically different from that of any of his predecessors. According to Berkeley, skepticism, atheism, and irreligion follow inexorably from the

[82] Ibid., §4.1.2.

doctrines of matter and abstraction. It is, Berkeley argues, upon the foundation of materialism that "have been raised all the impious schemes of atheism and irreligion."[83] Because it is so difficult "to conceive matter to be produced out of nothing," many philosophers have supposed matter to be uncreated and eternal,[84] and from here it is a short step to denying the existence of a creator altogether.[85] Furthermore, even if the materialists do not fall into outright atheism, they are left with a "distant Deity" who works through "unthinking second causes," and this notion leads to "negligence in their moral actions."[86] All of this is in addition to the previously mentioned doubts materialism creates about the resurrection of the body[87] and the natural immortality of the soul.[88]

"Besides the external existence of the objects of perception," Berkeley writes, "another great source of errors and difficulties . . . is the doctrine of abstract ideas."[89] The "errors and difficulties" caused by abstraction which are instanced by Berkeley are mostly confusions in science, mathematics, and philosophy. However, he does also charge the doctrine of abstraction with irreligious consequences. The most objectionable consequence of abstraction is, in fact, materialism. The doctrine of abstraction gives rise to the illusion that we have an intelligible notion of the existence of a perceivable thing distinct from its being perceived.[90] Additionally, the doctrine of abstraction has engendered the false belief that one cannot know "[w]hat it is for a man to be happy, or an object good" until one is able "to frame an abstract idea of *happiness* prescinded from all particular pleasure, or of *goodness* from everything that is good."[91] Berkeley takes moral conduct to be the central element of the Christian faith.[92] The serious moral confusions brought about by the doctrine of abstraction would therefore have been regarded by Berkeley as irreligious consequences of the most serious kind.

Of the two grounds of skepticism, atheism, and irreligion Berkeley discovers, materialism is certainly endorsed by all of the critics of Locke we have discussed. The case of abstraction is more complex, but it is safe to say that the elements of that doctrine which Berkeley found objectionable

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[83] PHK, §92.
[84] Ibid., §92; cf. DHP, 256.
[85] PHK, §93.
[86] DHP, 258.
[87] PHK, §95.
[88] Ibid., §141.
[89] Ibid., §97.
[90] Ibid., §5.
[91] Ibid., §100.
[92] Alc, §§5.4–5.

were not among the major points of controversy.[93] Sergeant, for instance, rejects the idea that there is a process of abstraction of the sort described by Locke, but nevertheless believes in "notions" of a sort which Berkeley would clearly regard as abstract ideas by another name.[94] Stillingfleet asserts that "there must be some *general Ideas*, which the mind doth form, not by *meer comparing those Ideas it has got from Sense or Reflection*; but by forming distinct general Notions of things from particular *Ideas*."[95] In this passage, and throughout most of his dispute with Locke, Stillingfleet aims to defend the "distinct general notion" of substance, a notion Berkeley explicitly rejects.[96]

Because he located the grounds of atheism and irreligion in the doctrines of matter and abstraction, Berkeley can be seen, to a certain extent, as a *defender* of Locke, for on Berkeley's view all of Locke's *distinctive* doctrines, including his "new way of reasoning," are innocent. The true grounds of irreligion are grounds Locke shares with his critics. According to Berkeley, Locke had done no more to provide grounds for irreligion than Bishop Stillingfleet had.

The traditional view of Berkeley as a critic of Locke is no doubt, to a certain extent, correct: it is, indeed, one of Berkeley's main aims to point out what he takes to be very serious problems in Locke's philosophy. However, it is important in understanding Berkeley to recognize that he is also, and perhaps more importantly, a critic of Locke's critics. According to Berkeley, Locke's earlier critics had misidentified the grounds of irreligion in Locke's philosophy, all the while endorsing the true grounds of irreligion themselves.

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[93] Contrary to Benschop, "Berkeley, Lee and Abstract Ideas," 56.
[94] Sergeant, *Solid Philosophy*, 79.
[95] Stillingfleet, *Vindication*, 235.
[96] PHK, §49.