Berkeley's Doctrine of Signs

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Edited by
Manuel Fasko and Peter West

DE GRUYTER

Die Druckvorstufe dieser Publikation wurde vom Schweizerischen Nationalfonds zur Förderung der wissenschaftlichen Forschung unterstützt. | The open access publication and prepress of this book has been published with the support of the Swiss National Science Foundation.

ISBN 978-3-11-119728-9
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-3-11-119758-6
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-3-11-119775-3
DOI https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586

Library of Congress Control Number: 2023952298

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the internet at http://dnb.dnb.de.

Cover image: “Dysart Castle” by Geraldine Walsh, 40 x 30cm, oil on board.
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck

www.degruyter.com

Acknowledgements

This volume would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the Swiss National Science Foundation (grant no. 10BP12_221956) for which both editors are very grateful. They also want to acknowledge the many scholars – too numerous to name them all – with whom they had the pleasure to discuss Berkeley over the years!

Moreover, we want to thank all the people at the De Gruyter who supported us throughout the process of publishing this collected edition, particularly Marcus Böhm, Serena Pirrotta, and Anne Hiller. Of course, we also would like to extend our gratitude to the contributors of this volume for their time and patience.

Manuel Fasko thanks Peter West for the great collaboration, moreover, he is grateful to Janine, Youri, and Ilja for their understanding and support during this project. Ich lieb Eu!

Peter West thanks all the authors for their excellent contributions and Manuel Fasko for, as always, being a pleasure to work with.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-001

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List of Abbreviations

Unless explicitly stated, all of the page numbers refer to the nine-volume edition of Berkeley's work by Luce & Jessop (1949–57) referred to here as *Works* I–IX. The correspondence is cited after Marc Hight's edition (2013). All authors of this volume use the following abbreviations and format.

AMP x.y = *Alciphron* dialogue, section
DHP xxx = *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, page number [referring to *Works* II]
DM § xx = *De Motu*, paragraph number
Letter xxx = Berkeley's correspondence [enumeration after Hight 2013]
NB xxx = *Notebooks,* entry number
NTV § xxx = *New Theory of Vision*, paragraph number
PHK § xxx = *Principle of Human Knowledge*, paragraph number
TVV § xx = *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, paragraph number

Additionally, references to Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* are to the edition edited by Peter H. Nidditch, published by Clarendon Press (1975) and take the following format:

Essay x.x.x = book number [roman numeral], chapter number [roman numeral], section number [arabic numeral]

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-002

Manuel Fasko & Peter West

Introduction

This volume focuses on Berkeley's doctrine of signs. Rather than picking out a specific theory that Berkeley endorses or defends, we take the 'doctrine of signs' to refer to the use that Berkeley makes of a phenomenon that is central to a great deal of everyday discourse: one whereby certain perceivable entities are made to stand in for (as 'signs' of) something else.[1] Things signified might be other perceivable entities or they might also be unperceivable notions – such as the meanings of words. This is the first volume on Berkeley's doctrine of signs. Yet, it is clearly an issue that remained central to Berkeley's thought throughout his career. From his earliest published work, *A New Theory of Vision* in 1709, to those works written at later stages, including *Alciphron* in 1732, Berkeley is at pains to emphasise the crucial role that sign-usage, particularly, but not only, in language, plays in human life. Berkeley also connects sign-usage to our (human) relationship with God: an issue that was right at the heart of his philosophical project. The contributions in this volume explore the myriad ways that Berkeley built on such insights to better understand a range of philosophical issues – issues of epistemology, language, perception, mental representation, mathematics, science, and theology. We are grateful to the contributors in this volume for demonstrating that Berkeley's views on sign-usage play such an important role in his understanding of all these issues.

Indeed, having read all the contributions to this volume, and heard from all the contributors during a stimulating preparatory workshop in 2022, we feel confident that the 'doctrine of signs' can plausibly be said to be *a* unifying theme of Berkeley's philosophical project – although we do feel that this statement should be further qualified. Berkeley scholarship, in recent years, has tended to move away from the idea that there is *one correct way* to tie together Berkeley's philosophical output in an all-encompassing narrative. At the same time, Berkeley scholars have become increasingly interested in exploring the wide range of writings that he produced during his lifetime; not just the best-known *Principles* and

1 It is worth noting that the 'doctrine of signs' should not be taken as referring to a particular theory or thesis that Berkeley defends. Rather, the 'doctrine of signs' is here intended to pick out a phenomenon – sign-usage – that Berkeley has much to say about (as the contributions in this volume demonstrate). Thus, the 'doctrine of signs', as we use the term here, is distinct from the divine language hypothesis for instance, which *is* a particular theory concerning sign-usage (one which implies that ideas of sense are signs representing a language of nature, spoken by God) defended by Berkeley.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-003

Three Dialogues, but also his later works on mathematics, natural science, and even his essays in *The Guardian* magazine – and we are pleased that the contributions in this volume explore many works that would have once been considered at the 'fringes' of Berkeley's philosophy.[2] In terms of unifying themes, while one might have once been able to confidently state that *idealism* (or immaterialism) is *the* theme that unifies Berkeley's project, inevitably, greater scrutiny of lesser-known works now puts such grand, objective statements on more shaky ground. Current attempts to identify a unifying theme in Berkeley's philosophy look quite different. For instance, in his 2022 monograph *Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, Tom Jones argues that one framework through which we can helpfully examine Berkeley's philosophy is *subservience* – bringing the longstanding moniker of 'the good bishop' into question. Our aim, with this volume, is not to show that Jones, or any other attempt at unifying Berkeley's thought, is incorrect.[3] That is, we are not setting out to prove that the doctrine of signs is a more appropriate unifying theme of Berkeley's philosophy than others. And we certainly do not intend to establish the doctrine of signs as *the* 'correct' way to bring together Berkeley's writings. Our aim is more modest: we simply think that, by surveying Berkeley's array of philosophical writings through the lens of his doctrine of signs, we can arrive at *one* way of identifying one possible way of tying together the various aspects of his philosophical corpus.[4]

Before moving onto an overview of the contributions in this volume, we want to take a moment to acknowledge our debt to the scholarship of Kenneth Winkler. In his *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (published in 1989), Winkler emphasises the role that sign-usage plays across Berkeley's writing, helpfully brings in elements of Ber-

2 It is worth acknowledging that there are other areas of Berkeley's philosophy not discussed in this volume, including his socio-political writings, like *Passive Obedience*, published in 1712, where the doctrine of signs is present (many thanks to a reviewer from De Gruyter for pointing this out). Thus, the discussion of Berkeley's doctrine of signs in this volume is not exhaustive – and it is not intended to be. Indeed, we would be happy to see this volume act as a springboard for such discussion in the future.

3 For a detailed discussion of the issues facing such enterprises as well as the introduction of another avenue of unification see John Blechl's *Active Berkeleyanism: Containing an Exposition of an Improved Methodology for Berkeleyan Scholarship Via a New Unified Interpretation of Berkeleyanism with Objections and Replies* (2019).

4 Thus, our aim is *not* to prove that the doctrine of signs is *the* 'cornerstone' of Berkeley's philosophy. Rather, our contention is that *if* one wishes to consider Berkeley's philosophy as an ongoing, continuous project, then one might think of it as a series of interconnected attempts to examine the myriad ways that sign-usage plays a role in our understanding of issues like God, nature, language, and mathematics (to name but a few examples). Many thanks to an anonymous referee for challenging us with the suggestion that we are, in a veiled way, defending yet another 'correct' unifying theme of Berkeley's philosophy.

keley's later works, like *Alciphron,* into his interpretation of the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, and draws a distinction between Berkeley's understanding of two distinct notions: 'representation' and 'signification'. In our own work,[5] this distinction has been crucial to our understanding of Berkeley's epistemology and metaphysics – and a desire to know *how far* Berkeley's views on sign-usage might elucidate his wider philosophical project is what prompted us to begin work on this volume. We are grateful to Winkler's insights for having sparked our interest in this topic.

It is also worth saying something about the kind of audience this volume is intended for. The contributions in this volume are designed to be generally accessible and do not draw on assumptions implicitly known in Berkeley scholarship. Thus, we are confident that the contributions in this volume will be of interest not only to Berkeley scholars but also to specialists (as well as advanced students) in early modern philosophy more widely. We think, moreover, it ought to be of particular interest to those working on topics like semiotics, theories of mental representation, philosophy of nature, philosophy of language, and philosophy of religion.

We now proceed to give an overview of the contributions of this volume, and some of the key themes that emerge.

Overview

The volume begins with a cluster of chapters (1, 2, and 3) focusing, broadly speaking, on Berkeley's views on mental representation and perception. Robert Schwartz explores what he calls **'A Puzzle about Mediate Perception'.** Schwartz's puzzlement arises from Berkeley's view, espoused in *A New Theory of Vision,* that we do not immediately perceive distance. Berkeley claims that we *mediately* perceive distance. That is, he argues that the ability to perceive that something is at distance from us is something we learn early on in life by coming to associate certain visual and tangible perceptions. When something is far away from us, for example, two kinds of perception are available to us: the tangible perception of taking several steps to reach that object and the visual perception of the object appearing small (a tower in the distance, for instance, will *look* smaller than one near to us). The puzzle, for Schwartz, is to characterise how the experiences from the two senses 'mesh' together. Solving the puzzle involves understanding

5 For example, Fasko, Manuel, and Peter West. 2020. "The Irish Context of Berkeley's 'Resemblance Thesis'." *Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplements* 88: 7-31; Fasko, Manuel, and Peter West. 2020. "Molyneux's question: The Irish debates." In *Molyneux's Question and the History of Philosophy*, pp. 122–134. London: Routledge.

what it is like for perceivers to mediately perceive that something is at a distance from them.

Dávid Bartha then addresses the question: **'Did Berkeley Endorse the Resemblance Theory of Representation?'** The resemblance theory of representation is the view that for one thing to represent another, (necessarily or sufficiently) those two things must resemble one another. Typically, it is taken as non-controversial that Berkeley does indeed accept the resemblance theory of representation – even if the plausibility of the resemblance theory itself comes under scrutiny. One piece of evidence in favour of this reading of Berkeley is his commitment to the 'likeness principle': the view that 'an idea can be like nothing but an idea' (PHK § 8). The likeness principle is typically seen as a rejection of the kind of indirect theory of perception often attributed to Locke. However, by paying particular attention to Berkeley's account of how mental representation via the imagination works, Bartha casts doubt on the consensus view that Berkeley does accept the resemblance theory of representation.

Picking up on the theme of resemblance in Berkeley, Manuel Fasko's **'Resemblance and Representation: The Complexity of Berkeley's Notion of Likeness and Mental Representation'** argues for a twofold thesis. First, he shows that across Berkeley's writings there is evidence of a commitment to several different *groups* of resemblance relation: relations of generic likeness (between two things of the same genus); relations of specific likeness (between two ideas of the same sense modality); and natural resemblance or identity of nature (between ideas of the imagination and the ideas of sense of which they are copies). Second, Fasko argues that the third kind of resemblance relation, natural resemblance or identity of nature, is a necessary and sufficient condition for one thing (an idea of imagination) to *represent* another (an idea of sensation). Thus, albeit indirectly, Fasko pushes back on Bartha's thesis that for Berkeley, representation does not depend on resemblance. For Fasko clarifies the necessary and sufficient conditions required for resemblance-based mental representation.

Chapters 4 and 5 both focus on Berkeley's epistemology and his relationship with indirect realism (or 'representationalism'). Berkeley criticises a specific version of indirect realism, often attributed to thinkers like Locke and Descartes, which says that we do not directly perceive things in the world, but rather *indirectly* perceive them by means of ideas in our minds which represent them. Katia Saporiti expands on that criticism in her chapter **'Why Berkeley was not a Representationalist'.** She argues in detail that Berkeley ought to be considered a realist with regard to sensible things and highlights the importance of his well-known distinction between ideas of sense and imagination in this context. As Saporiti points out, ideas of sense are not ideas *of* (i. e. representations of) anything. Ideas of imagination, on the other hand, *are* representations but only of particular sensible

things. She contends that any thinking that goes beyond these things thus requires the usage of ideas in a way that significantly differs from what a representational theory of mind would assume.

Berkeley's realism about sensible things is also the starting point of Peter West's chapter, **'Is There Anybody Out There? Berkeley's Indirect Realism About Other Minds'**, in which he addresses a possible inconsistency in Berkeley's epistemology: Berkeley rejects indirect realism about sensible things but defends indirect realism when it comes to the existence of other minds. Berkeley's view is that we do not know other minds directly, like we know our ideas, but indirectly: via certain ideas which *signify* them. This account of knowledge of other minds looks structurally similar to the account of knowledge of external things (the indirect realist account) that Berkeley rejects on the grounds that it leads to scepticism. Should Berkeley's own views lead him to reject indirect realism about other minds too? West provides reasons for thinking that Berkeley *can* consistently defend this account despite his criticisms of representationalism elsewhere.

Chapters 6 and 7 both address Berkeley's philosophy of language and the role that the doctrine of signs plays therein. Margaret Atherton's contribution asks: **'Does Berkeley Have a Theory of Meaning?'** This is a provocative question: several pieces of Berkeley scholarship over the last decade have provided reconstructions of Berkeley's theory of meaning, working on the assumption that he does, in fact, have one. Indeed, Berkeley's philosophy of language is by now a flourishing sub-field of Berkeley scholarship. Commentators have defended the notion that Berkeley adopts a Lockean 'ideational' theory of meaning, whereby a word is meaningful if and only if it signifies an idea in the mind of the speaker, and various 'non-ideational' readings of his theories of meaning, including precursors to the 'use' theory of meaning made famous by Wittgenstein. Against this trend in recent scholarship, Atherton argues that attention to the context in which Berkeley was writing, along with close textual analysis of the places where Berkeley is said to develop his theory of meaning (especially the draft introduction to the *Principles* and *Alciphron*) reveal that, strictly speaking, it is not right to attribute a 'theory' of meaning to him at all.

In line with those readers of Berkeley who *do* think he has a theory of meaning, Keota Fields' **'Berkeley on the Meaning of General Terms'** develops an original interpretation. Against 'non-ideational' interpretations of Berkeley's theory of meaning, which entail that words need not signify ideas at all to be meaningful, Fields argues that, for Berkeley, the meaning of a general term (such as 'good') is all the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by that term. This reading respects Berkeley's rejection of the existence of abstract ideas (such as the abstract general idea of 'goodness') but comes up against two problems. First, in places, Berkeley's remarks suggest that a general term's meaning is a single, particular idea

that it signifies and which, in turn, signifies all the other particular ideas of the same kind. Second, Berkeley also maintains that a word like 'good' can be meaningful to a language-user even if it does not signify any ideas at all. To address these problems, Fields appeals to Berkeley's theory of mediate perception, arguing that some terms *mediately* signify ideas beyond those they *immediately* pick out.

Chapters 8 and 9 both cover Berkeley's 'divine language hypothesis': the idea that the natural world is a language by means of which God communicates with us. In chapter 8, **'Natural Causes and Berkeley's Divine Language Hypothesis'**, Todd DeRose raises the question of how best to understand causation in nature, given this picture of reality along with Berkeley's commitment to the view that the only *true* causes are minds (whether they be finite minds like ours or the infinite mind of God). DeRose's aim in this chapter is not so much historical reconstruction or contextualisation, but rather to explain how Berkeley's account of natural causation might fit into contemporary discussions about the metaphysics of causation. For instance, DeRose points out that in contemporary discussions it is generally accepted that causation relations are asymmetric. It is not clear how this might square with Berkeley's view that 'causes' and 'effects' in nature should properly be understood as 'signs' and 'things signified'. In response to this kind of concern, DeRose argues that such a relation ought to be construed as *semantic.* The relation between a 'cause' and its 'effect', is therefore akin to the relation between a word and its *meaning*. This, DeRose argues, explains how such a relation can, in fact, be seen as asymmetrical.

In chapter 9, Lauren Slater brings together Berkeley's doctrine of signs with Descartes' thoughts on signification, language use, and the relation between the mind, body, and sensations. Slater's **'Reading the Signs of My Body: Berkeley and Descartes on Signs and Sensations'** makes a persuasive case for thinking that by holding up Berkeley and Descartes' accounts of sign-usage alongside one another, new insights can be revealed into both thinkers' views on how the mind and the world are connected via sensation. The chapter begins by noting Berkeley's objection to what he characterises as Descartes' 'geometric' model of perception in *A New Theory of Vision.* However, over the course of this chapter, Slater demonstrates that Berkeley's own position is not as far from Descartes' own view as he might think. In part, this may be down to his having mischaracterised Descartes. Slater also argues that while Berkeley may have gone further in arguing that the natural world is *literally* a language spoken to us by God, there is reason to believe that Descartes also develops a theory in which God instantiates a semantic relation between our sensations and what they mean.

In chapter 10, Clare Marie Moriarty emphasises the role the doctrine of signs plays in Berkeley's philosophy of mathematics. In **'Mathematics: Signification and Significance'**, Moriarty does an excellent job of showing just how important

it is to look at what might typically be seen as the 'fringes' of Berkeley's philosophical corpus. His philosophy of mathematics, much celebrated but disproportionately under-represented in Berkeley scholarship, is an area where the doctrine of signs, and semiotics more generally, plays a crucial role. Thus, part of Moriarty's aim is to show how far-reaching the doctrine of signs is in Berkeley's oeuvre. But Moriarty's aim is also to establish a relation of significance that goes in the other direction. Her thesis is that properly understanding Berkeley's doctrine of signs is virtually impossible without an appreciation of the influence and impact of developments in his thoughts concerning mathematics.

Finally, in chapter 11, Tom Stoneham brings the doctrine of signs into another less-explored area of Berkeley's writing: his essays in the *Guardian* from 1713, as well as into the afterlife. In **'The Future State and Signs of Desire'**, Stoneham introduces an argument found in Berkeley's essays on the immortality of the soul. This argument can be sketched out like so: all human appetites can (possibly, at least) be satisfied; there is a human 'appetite for immortality'; thus, the appetite for immortality can (possibly) be satisfied. Stoneham introduces two objections to this argument, one which Berkeley is likely to have anticipated and one which draws on more contemporary insights. Stoneham then argues that Berkeley has the resources to overcome both objections. In putting forward this defence of Berkeley's argument, Stoneham's chapter offers novel insights into the role that sign-usage plays in his account of natural desires. As Stoneham reads him, Berkeley sees natural desires as signs of future experiences in roughly the same way that visual experiences serve as signs of tactual experiences in *A New Theory of Vision.*

* * *

The array of topics explored in this volume and our contributors' ability and eagerness to focus on a wide range of Berkeley's philosophical writings is, to us, (if you will excuse the pun) a clear sign that the doctrine of signs offers a useful framework through which to examine his philosophy as a whole. For instance, Berkeley was clearly fascinated by the way that words, as signs, can be imbued with meaning simply in virtue of how they are used and understood. Consider, for instance, the following passage from *A New Theory of Vision:*

> No sooner do we hear the words of a familiar language pronounced in our ears, but the ideas corresponding thereto present themselves to our minds. In the very same instant the sound and the meaning enter the understanding; so closely are they united that it is not in our power to keep out the one, except we exclude the other also. We even act in all respects as if we heard the very thoughts themselves. (NTV § 51)

The point Berkeley is making here serves a purpose: he goes on to draw an analogy with the way that an encounter with certain visual ideas (like seeing a sharp knife) causes certain tangible ideas (like the feeling of a sharp pain) to almost immediately 'enter the understanding'. But even leaving aside Berkeley's wider aims here, the impression one gets in such a passage is that he is describing something of almost intrinsic interest. *How* do words do this? *Why* is it impossible to pick up a book in one's native tongue and fail to see words and sentences, things with meaning, and not just marks on a page? These are the kinds of questions, the evidence suggests, that continued to shape Berkeley's thinking long after the *New Theory* was published and as he developed his more systematic philosophical views.

We are extremely grateful to the contributors in this volume for shedding new light on Berkeley's doctrine of signs and feel confident that the result is a collection of essays that justify our contention that this doctrine is a helpful framework through which to examine Berkeley's philosophical project.

Robert Schwartz

1 A Puzzle about Mediate Perception

Abstract: Robert Schwartz explores what he calls 'A Puzzle about Mediate Perception'. It arises in Berkeley's view, espoused in NTV, that we do not immediately perceive distance. Berkeley claims that we mediately perceive distance. That is, he argues that the ability to perceive that something is at a distance from us is something we learn early on in life by coming to associate certain visual and tangible perceptions. When something is far away from us, for example, two kinds of perception are available to us: the tangible perception of taking several steps to reach that object and the visual perception of the object appearing small. The puzzle, for Schwartz, is to characterise how the experiences from the two senses 'mesh' together. Solving the puzzle involves understanding what it is like for perceivers to mediately perceive that something is at a distance from them.

Introduction

> Hence it is we find it so difficult to discriminate between the immediate and mediate objects of sight, and are so prone to attribute to the former what belongs only to the latter. (NTV § 51)
>
> The peculiar objects of each sense, although they are truly or strictly perceived by that sense alone, may yet be suggested to the imagination by some other sense. The objects therefore of all the senses may become objects of the imagination, which faculty represents all sensible things. (TVV § 10)
>
> What we immediately and properly perceive by sight is its primary object, light and colours. What is suggested or perceived by mediation thereof, are tangible ideas, which may be considered as secondary and improper objects of sight. (TVV § 42)

According to Berkeley what is immediately perceived by the senses are the phenomenal qualities that distinguish the senses from one another.[1] Thus, for vision it is colours and light; for smell, odours; for hearing, sounds; for touch, motion, resistance, and heat; for the palate, tastes (PHK § 1). These sensations, which Berke-

1 There is a large and growing literature on Berkeley's distinction between immediate and mediate perception. See, for example, Pitcher 1977, Pappas 2000, Dicker 2011, Winkler 1989, Atherton 1990, Glauser 2017, Rickless 2013, Copenhaver 2013, and Fields 2022. The puzzle about perception that is the topic of this paper, however, has not been a focus of attention in these works. I wish to thank Margaret Atherton, Katia Saporiti, Evan Sommers, and the volume editors for their helpful suggestions.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-004

ley refers to as the *proper* or *immediate* objects of the senses, trigger/suggest fully-fledged perceptions of how things are. Such perceptions go beyond what is simply given in sensations. Perceptions, as opposed to sensations, are experienced mediately. In particular, in Berkeley's account of spatial perception the immediately experienced visual sensations of colour and light serve as *signs* for a world as revealed by touch. These latter *signified* ideas are not immediate ideas of sight, but imagined representations of the proper objects of our tangible sense.

In his *New Theory of Vision* (NTV §§ 51 & 143–144), Berkeley gives an example of what he means by this sign/signified relation using a language analogy.[2] We immediately hear some sounds, but unless we know the language, the sensation of the words does not suggest any specific thoughts or ideas. They are just sounds. By contrast, once we learn a language its words take on meaning. They become signs, and the associated meanings, which for Berkeley are themselves ideas, are the signified. It is also the case that when we immediately experience the words we tend to 'read through' them. We do not pay attention to the sound or written properties of the signs as such, but mediately focus on the ideas they convey The transition from the immediately experienced sign to the mediately experienced signified, however, depends on input from the imagination, since in most contexts the actual signified is not present in experience as the words are being heard or seen. Instead, the imagination *re*presents the signified idea to the mind. Most important for Berkeley is that in the case of perception, this sign/signified relation is not necessary. Nor is there a resemblance between the sign that is given immediately and the signified that is mediately perceived (TVV §§ 41–42; AMP 4.8).

While this language analogy is helpful in elucidating aspects of Berkeley's account of the relationship between sign and signified, without elaboration it is not altogether helpful when it comes to characterising the qualitative nature of mediate perception. For what is the sensory experience of word meanings like?[3] Are pictorial images of the signified triggered in response to the immediate sensation of the verbal sign? If so, are there only visual images that accompany the understanding of the words or does it include related tactile, smell, taste and sound images? If not images, then what sort of ideas do come to mind when understanding words? Or might the experience of understanding words not have a sensible quality or a phenomenal sensory component'? In which case the analogy with visual

2 Some have argued that for Berkeley, the sign/signified relation underpinning his account of vision is literally and not just metaphorically that of a language. For the purposes of this paper, nothing hinges on this further claim, and as I point out in places below, a too strong identity claim can mislead.

3 See Pearce 2022 for a discussion of related issues. See also my footnote 12.

perception loses contact with the sensible nature of perception. So then what is the phenomenology of mediate sense perception according to Berkeley? More specifically, what is it *qualitatively like* to have mediate visual experiences of space and colour?

1 The Puzzle

Consider how this problem arises with respect to Berkeley's theory of distance perception. According to Berkeley, what we immediately perceive by sight is a phenomenally, two-dimensional sensation of colours and light (TVV §§ 54–55). We acquire the ability to see physical distance mediately by learning to correlate sensations of sight with those of touch. Once these visual/tangible associations are in place, we usually read through what is immediately given to sight and pay attention to the tangible ideas they provoke. That is, we focus on the tangible significance of the visual experience. The problem is that according to Berkeley the senses are heterogeneous. Visual extension and tangible extension are entirely distinct; they have nothing in common (NTV § 62; PHK § 44). At the same time, Berkeley seems to indicate that the mediate perception of distance is some kind of blend or amalgam of sight experience and touch experience (NTV 79). The puzzle is to characterise how the experiences from the two senses mesh.[4] What is it like for perceivers to experience visually and mediately that an object is at a given tangible distance and direction from them?

Similarly, consider the perception of magnitude. We see a tower up close. As we move away from it, the image it projects on the retina and the immediately experienced phenomenal image of the tower decreases in size until it is no longer visible (NTV § 61). Yet, we mediately perceive that the tower's physical/tangible size is constant. We 'see' the tower's tangible size as unchanging. Again, the problem is to characterise the phenomenology of this interaction of sensations from the two modalities.

4 For Berkeley, not all relevant associations involved in the visual perception of space are visible/tangible. He stresses, for example, that two kinds of tactile sensations play a prominent role in the perception of distance and magnitude. These are the cues of convergence, the felt experience of our two eyes converging to focus on an object in space, and accommodation, the experience of the adjustment of the lens in response to the distance of an object from the perceiver. Thus with these cues, the sign and the signified are from the same not heterogeneous senses. Berkeley holds, nonetheless, that in these cases too, there is no necessary connection or resemblance between the sign and signified.

Learning the associations between sight and touch requires input from both senses. By contrast, when sight sensations serve as a sign of the signified, the experience of the latter is not the product of sense. It is supplied by the imagination. Having learned the links between sight and touch experiences, the imagination *re*presents the signified in response to the sign. Berkeley is clear throughout that imagination itself is a form of perception and not conception: 'things not actually perceived by sense are signified or suggested to the imagination, whose objects they are, and which alone perceives them' (TVV § 39).[5] Shifting responsibility from the senses to the imagination, however, does not resolve the question of the phenomenology of mediate perception. It inserts one more factor into what feels like a seamless visual experience. Here are some answers to the puzzle that may be found in Berkeley's work:

1. It has been shown there are two sorts of objects apprehended by sight [...] The one, properly tangible, [...] and not immediately falling under the sense of seeing: The other properly and immediately visible, by mediation of which the former is brought in view. (NTV § 54)

Our immediate visual experience actually triggers in the mind the correlated tangible ideas of space. For example, in seeing an object several paces away we actually experience what it would feel like tangibly were we to traverse the distance. The difficulty with this solution is that we typically have no such tangible experiences accompanying sight. Similarly, to see that a tower has a constant size as we move about would be to have an experience of a constant sensation of a tangible size. Once again, the difficulty is that we do not have the posited tangible experiences that correspond to an object's tangible spatial properties. In the case of both distance and magnitude, what is mediately perceived is not phenomenally something immediately visual plus a copy of a tangible experience.

2. It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses, or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind, or lastly ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways. (PHK § 1)

5 Interestingly, Berkeley seldom claims, as he does here and in TVV § 10, that sense suggests mediate ideas to the imagination. By contrast, throughout NTV *and* TVV he says that the mediate ideas of sense are suggested to the mind or to the understanding. I think there are distinctions to be drawn, but it is unclear to me whether Berkeley's choice of terminology marks a substantive difference or is more a matter of stylistic presentation.

What comes to mind in mediate perception of space are not the tangible ideas themselves, but the tangible meanings of what is immediately perceived. This account runs into the problem encountered with the language analogy. For what is it like to experience a meaning? If it is like experiencing an imagined copy of a tangible sensation, the response to this solution is the same as that given to the first. We experience no such tangible sensations. If not, how is this signified tangible meaning incorporated into what we experience immediately by sight?

> 3. [C]onsider the case of an intelligence or unbodied spirit, which is supposed to see perfectly well … but to have no experience of touch. … He would not have any idea of distance, outness, or profundity, nor consequently of space or body, either immediately or by suggestion. (NTV §§ 153–154)

Another characterisation of the process is that to mediately see the world in spatial terms is to be disposed to behave in ways appropriate to the 'real' tangible situation. Indeed, you are not a spatial perceiver unless your responses are appropriate to the way things are tangibly. If you are not disposed to reach, grasp, or otherwise interact appropriately with respect to tangible space, you do not have visual spatial perception. In the case of animals and infants, such behavioural criteria are the only thing we have to go on.[6]

Although a dispositional analysis may be necessary and sufficient for *attributing* the ability to perceive spatial relations to an organism, this behavioural approach presents difficulties of interpretation for our project. Most significantly, a disposition to behave is not an occurrent phenomenon. Dispositions are not ideas. They are not objects of sense, so an account is needed of what contribution such behavioural dispositions can make to how things appear visually. In addition, what we are disposed to do in response to visual experience is a function of our beliefs and desires. Whereas by and large, perceiving the spatial properties of the environment is not.

> 4. I believe whoever will … examine what he *means* by saying he sees this or that thing at a distance, will agree with me that what he sees only suggests to his understanding that, after having passed a certain distance, … which is perceivable by touch, he shall come to perceive such and such tangible ideas. (NTV § 45, emphasis added)

Berkeley offers a related, more mentalist dispositional analysis that escapes the criticism of 3. What comes to mind in mediate perception are expectations. We im-

6 See NTV § 146 and Berkeley's (NTV §§ 85–86) discussion of why microscopic eyes would be an 'empty amusement' detrimental to our ability to survive.

mediately see a display of colour and light that leads us to expect the tangible experiences that have been previously associated with such visual experience. The problem again is that dispositions *per se* are not sensible states. Moreover, in perceiving the spatial layout we do not experience having such ideas in mind. In what way, then, can expectations themselves be understood as actual *objects* of mediate perception?

I think each of these proposals has something to contribute to an account of mediate perception, and in what follows I will offer a position on the nature of visual experience that attempts to avoid the pitfalls of solutions 1–4. Admittedly, the solution I propose is not explicitly developed by Berkeley. This is not surprising since he does not address the problem in any detail. Nor, to the extent that he does address nearby issues, does a singular position emerge. I believe, nonetheless, that my approach offers a way to respond to the puzzle that fits in with Berkeley's distinction between immediate and mediate perception and with what he says about the nature of the sign/signified relation. It does, though, require some rethinking of the role played by the imagination.[7]

2 Three Analogies

In addition to his language analogy, Berkeley offers three other analogies meant to support the picture of the nature of the sign/signified relation underlying his account of the perception of space by vision. Consider first Berkeley's discussion of hearing the sound of a coach (NTV § 46; DHP 204). There is no coach in sight, but we have an immediate experience of a sound that we have learned to associate with that of visible, tangible coaches. Also, if the coach is coming in our direction, the sound gets louder, and we expect a coach to appear soon. Prior to learning these correlations, if we were to hear the same sound, it would have no connection to the visual or tangible perception of a coach, and there would be no basis for expecting either idea to come to mind on experiencing the former. Once the correlations between sound, sight, and touch have been established, however, we have learned what the sound of a coach is like. The sound becomes a sign of the tangible and visual coach. Still, the sound neither resembles nor has a necessary connection with the coach as experienced by either sight or touch. What is more, there is a good chance we never saw or felt this particular coach before.

To hear a coach-like sound, though, it is not necessary to hear the sound of an actual coach, for there need not be one. Nor must the sound you do hear be a du-

7 See remarks in PHK and DHP for more on the functions of the imagination.

plicate of one previously heard. It is enough that it is experienced as similar to those previously linked to visible and tangible coach encounters. In turn, the sound heard often does not signify a specific coach; it functions like a general term. It only suggests the presence of a visual/tactile object that we imagine to be similar to coaches earlier experienced.

I think a better way to describe the phenomenology of such encounters is that we immediately hear the sound of a coach, while mediately experiencing it *as* a coach-sound. That is, based on past experience, the sound is experienced not only as familiar, but the mind now distinguishes the sound as being of a certain kind, namely the kind associated with coaches. If presented with a variety of sounds, we can discriminate and pick out which among those immediately experienced sounds are coach-sounds. In hearing the sound as a coach-sound, the imagination does not copy or *re*present a visual and tangible sense experience. Nor from the sound alone are we likely to have any idea of what the specific colour, shape, and size of the actual coach is. So it would only be misleading to bring to mind a visual or tangible image of any particular coach, whether one previously encountered or newly imagined.

What makes coach-sounds similar, though, is not only their immediately perceived properties. Rather, due to the power of association, they also come to share the property of being 'signs-of-coaches'. The association of ideas presupposes assessments of similarity:[8] Similar A's are correlated with similar B's. Importantly, what makes A's similar is not only their inherent properties. Due to learning and the power of association, the A's also come to share the property of being signs-of-B's. When a new A comes along, we recognise it as a B-kind of sign. Appreciation of such similarities requires neither language nor intellectual judgement. For Berkeley, similarity assessments involve comparisons, and I am proposing that these associative sense comparisons are the work of the imagination. In perceiving their environment, animals and humans alike display this capacity (NTV § 59).

A related case may help capture the nature of the experience of sound that I have in mind in explicating Berkeley's coach analogy. How sounds are mediately

8 I believe Berkeley's notion of similarity to be relativist and context sensitive rather than absolutist. See his discussion of how differently (NTV § 86) things would look if we had microscopic eyes. Or consider his remarks in the *Notebooks*, that 'Knowledge or certainty or perception of agreement of Ideas as to Identity & diversity & real existence Vanisheth of relation becometh meerly *Nominal* of Coexistence remaineth.' (emphasis added, NB 739), and in the *Three Dialogues*, where he explains that men who may have the same phenomenal experiences may 'perhaps when they came to the use of speech [...] call it the *same* thing; others [...] might choose the denomination of different things.' (DHP 247–248)

experienced is a function of learning. The first four notes of Beethoven's Fifth symphony have no inherently special status or coherence. Yet they do come to sound familiar and similar to those who have encountered the sequence of notes, say in the context of hearing the whole piece. We can discriminate that sequence of notes from other sound patterns. And we can do so whether the notes now experienced are the sounds of a trumpet, piano, a whole orchestra, etc., regardless of whether we previously heard the notes played with any of these instruments. In relevant circumstances, too, the notes may serve as a sign of the entire symphony.

Two other vision/touch analogies Berkeley offers seem to support this analysis of the situation. In front of us is a piece of iron that is red in colour (DHP 204). In the past, iron bars similar to this one in colour have turned out to be very hot to the touch. Nevertheless, when seeing such a red glowing piece of iron we do not feel tangible heat the way we would if we came close to or touched it. Rather, we experience the redness as a sign of heat. It is different from other colour experiences, including other red experiences. That is the more specific similarity the mind brings to bear on what is immediately perceived. It appears to the mind as a token of a hotness-look type. Before learning the correlation between iron, colour, and heat, it is not perceived as such. As it becomes a sign that signifies heat, the experience becomes phenomenally more distinctive. At the same time, experiencing the redness as a sign of heat does not lead to any specific action or disposition to act. Although in combination with other beliefs and desires, recognising the appearance for what it is will guide our behaviour.

Another sign/signified analogy Berkeley offers concerns our ability to determine someone's emotional state on the basis of facial appearances (NTV § 9). For instance, from past experience we have learned to associate a person's facial colour and expression with shame. When encountering someone displaying these visible properties, it suggests to our mind that they are feeling shame. Just as we may recognise by looks who someone is, we recognise a person's shame. A shamed appearance looks different from that of other facial expressions. Clearly, when seeing someone as shamed, perceivers themselves need have no shameful feelings. The emotion of the perceiver may be one of concern or worry. Nor need experiencing the facial configuration and colour in itself trigger any particular disposition to act.

3 A Solution

Let us now return to our starting puzzle. What do things look like mediately after one has learned to correlate sight with touch? For Berkeley, given the heterogeneity of the senses, there is neither a necessary connection nor a resemblance rela-

tion between the phenomenal experiences of the two senses. On the other hand, the immediately given phenomenal displays of colour and light do contain phenomenally experienced cues/signs to tangible distance and size. Among them Berkeley cites interposition, height in the visual field, blur, faintness, familiarity, and perspective (see, for example, NTV §§ 3, 64, 68 etc.).

These are cues, as Berkeley notes, that had long been cited as signs of distance in discussions of picture perception. Before correlations are made with touch, the distribution of colour and light in visual extension have no spatial significance. They are not signs. Once the associations are acquired, they signify spatial relations. It is the immediately experienced visual cues, along with the tangible cues associated with convergence and accommodation of the eyes, that inform us of the tangible properties of the space visually experienced.[9] The immediately given cues are experienced by the mind for what they are. The visual appearances, for instance, of something 3 paces, 10 paces, or 50 paces in front of us look different in that the cues for each are different. If the cues were not different, there would be no way to distinguish the distances by sight. According to Berkeley, the visual cues, i. e. the distribution of colour and light in visual extension, do not change when the correlations between sight and touch are acquired. They are given immediately by sense. Instead, we come mediately to recognise which visual appearances go with which tangible spatial arrangements. We do not, though, see or otherwise experience tangible sensations. The looks are signs of the signified tangible space, but the mediate visual experience has no experienced tangible component. Just as we learn that certain things are coach-sounds, hotness-looks, and shame-appearances, we come to see certain looks as similar in being 3-paces-away looks, or 10-paces-away looks, or 50-paces-away looks. The visual cues, and for that matter the cues of convergence and accommodation, neither resemble nor have a necessary connection to the tangible; rather, they are experienced as similar by virtue of what they signify tangibly.

Perceiving the constant tangible size of a tower in spite of movement is given a similar treatment. We have learned in general that with movement, the portion of visual extension an object occupies grows or shrinks the nearer or farther we move from it. Nevertheless, the experienced pattern of image size changes is a sign of tangible stability. In fact, if the number of Minimum Visibilia (MV) the tower occupies in visual extension remains constant in light of movement, the immediately given sensation would not be taken as a sign of a physically stable tower.

9 The tangible cues, of course, have no explicit representation in visible extension, but as with the visual cues, we tend to read through them.

The experience would not be that of a constant-tower look. It would be the sign of a tower growing, if moving away, or shrinking, if moving closer.

Likewise, consider the case of the visual appearance of a road running straight away from a perceiver. According to the optical laws of perspective, the image the road projects onto the retina converges, and it converges in the immediately perceived visual extension. According to Berkeley, even after learning to correlate the visual and the tangible there is no change here. What the spatial perceiver has learned, however, is that this is how tangible parallels sometimes appear. As a contingent fact the immediately sensed converging lines are the way parallel lines are expected to look as they recede from an observer. If they do not converge in the visual field, they will not be recognised as the look of tangibly parallel lines. Through the association of ideas, we learn that convergence of this sort is a sign of distance, and that the converging appearance is the way tangible parallels appear. The converging lines that are immediately perceived are mediately perceived as tangibly parallel-line looks, and are recognised/taken as such. The imagination does not substitute for what is immediately given in sight a visual appearance in which the lines in visual extension are parallel, nor does it provide a tangible feel of parallels.

4 Phenomenology and Illusions

This proposed solution to the puzzle fits in with Berkeley's position on illusions, or rather with his reasons for denying that there really are illusions in the way they are usually interpreted.[10] For example, according to Berkeley there is nothing intrinsically amiss in the appearance of an ordinary oar half in and half out of water (DHP 238). It does visibly look bent, that is, the MV of the oar do not form a straight line in visual extension. For Berkeley, prior to learning the visual/tangible correlations, the bent display that is given immediately in visual extension is not inherently a sign. It has no symbolic significance. In and of itself it is not misleading. It is neither true nor false. What makes for error is not to be found in what is immediately given to sight. Things only go wrong when due to past experience the mind 'mistakes' the bent display in visual extension as being a tangibly-bent look. Then one is led to assume/expect that the oar will feel tangibly bent and look visually bent when placed entirely on dry land. Note, though, that it is also true that if upon tangibly experiencing an oar on dry land, one expects it to look straight half in and half out of the water, the person will be mistaken. Like-

10 For an in-depth look at Berkeley on illusions, see Schwartz 2018 and 2019.

wise, the straight visual appearance of an oar out of water can mislead as to its appearance in water.

According to Berkeley, had we grown up in an environment where most things were typically anchored in water, the mind would not be tempted to take an immediately experienced bent visual shape as a sign of something that is tangibly bent. Nor would we assume/expect the oar to have a bent shape in visual extension when seen on dry land. For those of us living in our world who are aware of the optics underlying the phenomena, the situation is different. Past experience has instilled in us a sign/signified relation between visually bent and tangibly bent objects. Due to this entrenched habit, it is hard not to perceive a bent display in visual extension as a tangibly-bent-appearance. The power of suggestion is strong. Nevertheless, at an intellectual level we reject the idea of so classifying the experience. What we immediately perceive, though, does not go away whether we judge things correctly or incorrectly. Nor is the difference in such judgments accompanied by or reflected in actual tangible experiences.

Consider next the difference between the visual experience of a penny looked at straight ahead on a fronto-parallel plane (i. e. a plane perpendicular to the line of sight) and the same penny viewed slanting away from the line of sight. The first projects a circular image on the retina and in turn, a circular pattern of MV in visual extension. The second projects an elliptical image on the retina that elicits an elliptical display of MV. For those enamoured with the arguments from illusion, what is immediately given in the second case is said to be illusory. According to Berkeley, since the senses make no inferences, in and of itself there is nothing inherently misleading or incorrect in how it immediately appears in either setup. Those who have learned the correlation between sight and touch perceive the penny as round in spite of the fact that its shape in visual extension changes with its orientation. The situation is analogous to what goes on when the tangible magnitude of the tower is perceived as constant, in spite of the variations in how it appears when viewed from different distances.

What is the phenomenology of the mediate veridical perception of the penny from multiple locations in space? Once again, it seems introspectively false that we actually have an experience of a tangible circle. Nor does the imagination conjure up a visual image of the penny as it would look if seen on the fronto-parallel plane. Mediately, the penny still is elliptical in visual extension, but the elliptical look is experienced for what it is – the appearance of a tangibly round object seen off the fronto-plane. The elliptical visual array is how a tangible circle oriented off a plane perpendicular to the line of sight in fact looks. Just as the circular array in visual extension is the way a real penny appears when viewed straight on. Both are sign tokens of the same type of tangible shape. Although the signs do not inherently look alike, both are recognised by the mind as similar in being tangible-circle

looks. For Berkeley, a circular display in visual extension *per se* is no more a veridical appearance of a tangible circle than is an elliptical display in visual extension. Indeed, in the normal run of things, tangible circles appear in visual extension much more often as visual ellipses than as circles.

Consider Berkeley's treatment (NTV §§ 67–78; TVV § 60) of the so-called 'moon illusion'.[11] When viewed on the horizon, people report that the moon looks bigger than it does when it is viewed at its zenith. The puzzle is that the physical/tangible moon does not change its size when moving from one location to the other, and the size of the image it projects in visual extension is also constant. Berkeley's explanation of the phenomenon is to claim that the image in visual extension is fainter when the moon is low in the sky than when high. And in general, more faintness of a visual image is correlated with greater physical/tangible magnitude (NTV §§ 3, 58, 73). Thus, when taken as a cue or sign, more faintness suggests to the mind that the horizon moon is larger than the zenith moon.[12] It is, nonetheless, the case that the number of MV the image of the moon takes up in visual extension is the same in both setups. It is also the case that the number of MV taken up by the moon is the same both for us who have learned the correlation between sight and touch and the man born blind. As Berkeley says (NTV § 79), 'Now, it being certain that any visible point can cover or exclude from view only one other visible point, it follows that whatever object intercepts the view of another hath an equal number of visible points with it'. Hold up a coin, for example, at a distance from the eye so that it that just occludes the visual moon. Notice that the distance of the coin from the eye is the same whether the moon is high in the sky, low in the sky, or anywhere in between. The moon always occupies the same number of MV in visual extension. Berkeley argues then that when we report that the horizon moon appears larger than the zenith moon we are not actually reporting on how things appear immediately, but mediately. The mistake is a result of our reading through the proper objects of sense and inaccurately assessing the magnitude of what we see immediately. So Berkeley concludes (NTV § 74), the faintness cue 'can put this cheat on the understanding'. The imagination goes wrong in comparing magnitudes in visual extension.

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11 For reasons canvassed above, Berkeley himself never calls the phenomenon an illusion. According to him, there is no such thing as a given retinal image size corresponding to the singular tangible size of objects. See Kaufman and Rock 1962 and Schwartz 1994. For a detailed historical review of the problem and proposed solutions to it, see Ross and Plug 2002.

12 Faintness is not the only cue to magnitude that Berkeley considers. Although dismissing geometric solutions to the puzzle, he allows that the cues other theorists have proposed to solve the puzzle also have weight in his own theory. He argues, though, that faintness is special in that it can account for certain phenomena his competitors' accounts leave unexplained.

Finally, consider a non-spatial example. A yellow wall part in and part out of shadows looks differently from how it immediately appears when no shadows are cast upon it. According to Berkeley, it is not the case that the former is an illusory presentation and the latter veridical. For there is no unique way a yellow wall should look. It depends on what the mind makes of it. We who have had experience of seeing things both in and out of shadows typically 'read through' the immediate experience of the wall in shadows and recognise the wall for what it is, uniformly yellow in colour. We experience it is as a token of a colour appearance of something of constant colour throughout, but part in shadows. The imagination does not, however, produce a visual image of the wall as it would look were no shadows cast upon it. Nor is the appearance of the wall in sunlight a more accurate reflection of the wall's yellow colour than its appearance in shadow.[13]

5 Review

Here then is a brief summary of where things stand with respect to the interpretations 1–4 presented at the start:

1. On all accounts of mediate perception, tangible experience and the association of ideas play crucial roles. The view that distance, size and other spatial properties like shape are not immediately perceived by sight stands. Their spatial significance depends on their being correlated with touch. The correlation establishes a non-necessary, non-resembling sign/signified relation between sight and touch. Still, the tangible experience of space itself does not make an appearance in an account of the phenomenology of visual experience.
2. Although the imagination does not *re*present/copy tangible experience as the signified, visual signs are seen as similar according to how they tangibly signify. Signs are experienced as being similar by virtue of being signifiers of similar signified experiences. They are, for example, seen as 3-paces signs, stable-size signs, circular-figure signs, etc.
3. The criterion for being a spatial perceiver is being disposed to respond appropriately to the tangible environment. It does not lie in how things appear in visual extension as such. If the correlation of the visual and the tangible has the right consequences for behaviour that is all that matters. If verbal reports conflict with behaviour, the latter wins out. Such behavioural dispositions serve as criteria or tests for being spatial perceivers. Being non-occurrent

13 See Berkeley's discussion of the veridical perception of the colour of a pigeon's neck given the difference of its appearance when wet and dry (DHP 258).

states, these dispositions themselves are not reflected in the phenomenology of perceiving spatial arrangements.

4. To give criteria or tests for a property, as in 3, is not to give its meaning. Berkeley's expectations analysis of these dispositions does. As he says:

> [W]hoever will [...] examine what he means by saying he sees this or that thing at a distance, will agree with me that what he sees only suggest to his understanding that, after having passed a certain distance [...] which is perceivable, by touch he shall come to perceive such and such tangible ideas. (NTV§ 45)

The same sort of analysis can be given for perceiving magnitude and shape. Be that as it may, in perceiving the spatial layout we do not experience expectations.

For Berkeley, perception has a dual nature. How things appear immediately does not go away after we have learned to correlate sight with touch. The focus of attention, nevertheless, is on how what is immediately perceived is mediately experienced with regard to what kind of sign it is. Doing so alters the phenomenology. Hearing sounds as of a coach or four notes as of the start of Beethoven's Fifth is different from simply hearing the same sounds *tout court.* And learning to recognise a face as shameful may not only have consequences for thought and action, but also for how the person looks. It is experienced as a shameful look. According to Berkeley, the story is the same when it comes to perceiving space. Having learned to read the cues for spatial perception does not alter the distribution of colour and light in visual extension, yet it does affect how we organise and report on how things immediately appear. Given that the focus of attention is on the signified, we are not very good at reporting our sign sensations. Although with training and aids we can tease them apart, the phenomenon of reading through is pervasive.

6 Perceptual Constancy

I argued at the start that Berkeley's language model of perception in and of itself does not provide us with much insight into the phenomenology of perception.[14] At

14 I believe the analysis of mediate perception does suggest an approach to thinking about the phenomenology of language. First, in the same way as the sounds we come to associate with coaches are experienced differently once they are taken to be signs, the physical sounds of a language are experienced differently once we come to appreciate that they are language sounds. We group them in new ways and distinguish such sounds from non-language sounds. But to hear sounds as language sounds is not to know a language. The words must be understood.

the same time, I think this exploration of the phenomenology of perception does bolster the main point of Berkeley's language analogy, namely, that there are no necessary or resemblance relations between visual and tangible experience. Just as the properties of words, their colour, shape, and size, tell us nothing about their reference and meaning, so the properties of what is given immediately in visual perception are not determinative of the properties these signs signify. There is no resemblance relation between sign and signified. Convergent lines in visual extension signify distance in tangible space. As we move about, changing visual size, not stable visual size, signifies sameness of magnitude; an elliptical pattern in the visual field signifies a tangible circle, etc.

Most significantly for my concerns, the relation between the world as visually experienced and as tangibly experienced is, as I shall explain, many-one. This fundamental feature of spatial perception highlights an important disanalogy between the sign/signified relation underlying visual experience and the language sign/signified relation that it is thought to be modelled on. In the case of language, unless ambiguous, what we are asked to think of is the relationship between one word and its meaning. We immediately experience a sign, for example a token of the type 'circle', and in reading through it we become mediately aware of what it signifies. Tokens of the sign, however, are grouped together as a type due to their shape likeness, regardless of what they signify. But as our above discussion of spatial perception indicates, a major problem for a theory of vision is to explain perceptual constancy, i. e. how signs not of the same shape are grouped as a type in light of their being signs of the same signified. The task is to provide an account of the fact that not only immediately experienced circles in visual extension, but innumerable elliptical displays in visual extension all may mediately suggest to

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To understand words is not to have pictures or images flash before the mind. It is not a phenomenal experience, nor any other sort of occurrent event. According to Berkeley, 'We know a thing when we understand it; and we understand it when we can interpret or tell what it signifies' (*Siris* § 253). And 'the more a man knows of the connexions of ideas, the more he is said to know of the nature of things' (DHP 245). I suggest that knowing the meaning of words lies in knowing how words are characterised as sign types.

Consider, for example, the word 'C-A-T'. A minimal requirement is that the sound is taken not merely as a language-word sound, but in particular as a cat-sign, i. e. C-A-T signifies cats. A behavioural test or criterion for this is whether someone is disposed to use the term to pick out cats. But this hardly captures what speakers know about cats. The meaning of the word C-A-T is a function of the many other ways speakers are disposed to characterise the word as a sign. Then C-A-T is not only a cat-sign, but is itself taken to be an animal-sign, a pet-sign, a furry-sign, a 4-legged-sign, a feline sign, etc., etc. There is no sharp distinction between meaning and fact. In turn, the notion of understanding a sign is a graded one. Or to put the approach in more modern terms, the meaning of CAT lies in the inferences to and from characterising the word as a cat-sign.

the mind the tangible idea of a circle. And for Berkeley, it is a mistake to think that the elliptical signs are inherently illusory, and that only the circular displays in visual extension are veridical. It is simply the case that the immediately given signs of a circle are not all tokens of the same shape in visual extension. They do not resemble one another. What unites them is that they are visual signs that have the same tangible meaning. This penetration of the signified in differentiating signs is what I tried to capture early on with the idea that what can make A's similar is that they are signs of B's, or B-signs.

What holds for shape holds for visual perception in general. An object of a single tangible magnitude may take up a single MV or the entire field of vision. What is given immediately as a sign of a tower's size is many; what they all are taken to signify is one. Nor does it make sense to think that some particular size in visual extension is the true or veridical appearance of the tower's magnitude and the rest are inherently illusory. Likewise, parallel tangible lines may appear not only as parallel displays in visual extension, but as converging lines of a full range of angles of convergence. The converging visual parallels of the road are not inherently non-veridical. The sign/signified relation with colour is comparable. As the example of the yellow wall was meant to show, there is no one-to-one correspondence between how a colour immediately appears and the colour we mediately take to be signified. The view in shadows is one of many veridical appearances of a yellow wall.

In my analysis of the puzzle about the phenomenology of immediate and mediate perception, I have relied on distinguishing between two operations of the imagination, characterising what is immediately perceived with respect to what it signifies, and *re*presenting, an activity of copying what was initially presented to sense. The former assigns to the mind a more active role than the latter in being sensitive to organisation and grouping. The latter is passive. I have opted to stress the former in exploring the sign/signified relation in perception.

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Dávid Bartha

2 Did Berkeley Endorse the Resemblance Theory of Representation?

Abstract: The resemblance theory of representation is the view that one thing represents another by virtue of resembling it. Typically, it is taken as non-controversial that Berkeley accepts the resemblance theory of representation – even if the plausibility of the resemblance theory itself comes under scrutiny. One piece of evidence in favour of this reading of Berkeley is his commitment to the 'likeness principle': the view that 'an idea can be like nothing but an idea' (PHK § 8). The likeness principle is typically seen as a rejection of the kind of indirect theory of perception that is often attributed to Locke. However, by paying particular attention to Berkeley's account of how mental representation via the imagination works, Dávid Bartha casts doubt on the consensus view that Berkeley does accept the resemblance theory of representation.

Introduction

In this chapter, I ask a basic and seemingly trivial question about Berkeley's views on representation. Did he accept the resemblance theory of representation (henceforth RTR)? While the consensus among scholars is a resounding 'Yes', it is still worth laying out and evaluating the evidence *pro* and *con.* As I aim to argue in what follows, we have much less on the *pro* and much more on the *con* side than commentators tend to think. In section 1, I provide some preliminary thoughts on RTR and its main components, drawing a couple of distinctions that will prove useful when looking at Berkeley's text more closely. In section 2, I survey the putative evidence for attributing RTR to Berkeley. As is often acknowledged in the literature, he did not endorse RTR in his published works explicitly. But, *contra* the standard view, I will argue that he did not endorse it any more clearly in his unpublished writings or need to accept it implicitly as a presupposition behind some of his arguments. In section 3, I draw our attention to contrary tendencies in his works. In addition to discussing some hints at other mechanisms of representation, I propose that Berkeley was aware that resemblance cannot do the job even in the case of imaginative representation. In the final section, I draw three increasingly strong conclusions. According to the weakest conclusion, the customary appeals to resemblance in Berkeley scholarship do not resolve all the pertinent questions concerning the mechanism of representation. My more ambi-

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-005

tious aim is, however, to show that Berkeley did not endorse RTR or indeed *any* theory of representation in our sense of the term.

1 What is the resemblance theory of representation (RTR)?

By RTR I understand the theory that the mechanism of representation consists in the resemblance the content of the representing item – let it be a mental state, a mental object or idea, or an ordinary representation such as a painting – bears to the represented object or objects. In other words, the similarity the representing item has to its object(s) explains why and how it represents them and only them. Famously, RTR raises many questions with regard to both mental and pictorial representation, but I will restrict myself to a couple of rather selective and preliminary remarks that might come in handy when interpreting Berkeley. I structure these observations around the components of RTR: the concepts of *resemblance*, *theory*, and *representation.*

First, what is representation? Representation, also called intentionality, is a mysterious but apparently widespread phenomenon: that of being *about* or *of* something else. Many things display intentionality in some form or another: maps, paintings, words are frequent examples of things that are of or about something else. Most contemporary philosophers will, however, say that intentionality is a peculiar feature of mental states, and perhaps even the mark of the mental. Only mental items such as thoughts, perceptions, and memories are intrinsically or 'originally' directed on things other than themselves, the pictorial and linguistic examples only represent things in an extrinsic or derivative sense, only insofar as they are taken, or made, by a mind to be about those things.[1]

Accordingly, it will be useful to differentiate an 'intrinsic' from an 'extrinsic' variant of RTR. In the *intrinsic* version, the representing item is directed on the object it resembles *in and by itself.* If we construe the representing items as mental *states* or acts, they relate to their objects directly and intrinsically through the similarity they instantiate. At least from the early modern period onwards, few philosophers have deemed it attractive, as it seems to require that our minds actually go red when representing a red object. If, as Berkeley tended to do, we talk about mental *objects* or ideas (or even physical objects, such as paintings), the intrinsic version of RTR means that the perceiving mind or, more specifically, the mental

1 For a helpful introduction to these issues, see Crane 2003, 8–41, who also discusses some of the most pressing problems of RTR.

state or act relates only indirectly to what these items represent directly and intrinsically through the resemblance they bear to them. While, as I just said, it sounds strange to most that paintings are 'originally' directed on what they depict, the intrinsic variant of RTR is still compatible with the view that mental objects or ideas represent intrinsically, with the perceiving mind only participating in their intentionality.

In the *extrinsic* version of RTR, by contrast, it is not really the object (the idea or painting) that represents. Rather, through the resemblance its features display, it merely determines the perceiving mind or its mental state to represent what it does. The painting of Caesar, to use a stock example, is about him only as long as an observer discovers its resemblance to him. In this view, resemblance fixes the content of the representation, which is thus explained without the contribution of the perceiving mind. Nonetheless, it does not explain the nature of representation *as such*, as intentionality is not reduced to the resemblance relation. Rather, intentionality is explained in terms of a perceiving mind that takes the idea or painting as its (immediate or representing) object, discovers the resemblance it bears to its (mediate or represented) object, and thus directs itself on what the given item represents only extrinsically. Accordingly, this theory answers *how* the mind represents X, and not Y, namely because the item it takes as its representing object resembles X, and not Y; but it does appeal to resemblance to explain *why* the mind is capable of representing *anything* in the first place.

Now, early moderns used the term 'representation' (though not 'intentionality'), but often not in our contemporary way. Rather, it is conspicuous that philosophers, especially in the Cartesian tradition, often used it in a causal sense: to re-present, or simply just present or exhibit something. Accordingly, a mental item (or a painting or a word) represents its object not, as *we* would say, insofar as it is about it (even if only in a derivative sense). Rather, the given item re-presents something else insofar as it makes it present in a different situation, most notably, to the mind when the object is absent or, at least, not immediately present to it.[2] Of course, one might think that, from the opposite direction, this sense of re-presentation might approach our contemporary notion, insofar as by rendering the object present to our minds, the re-presenting item can make our minds directed on it. Nonetheless, it is important to distinguish the modern concept from the mere caus-

2 For example, in his attack on the Cartesian theory of ideas, Foucher defines 'representation' as 'rendering a thing *present*, or having the same effect as if it were actually acting [on us], or at least having a *similar* one' (Foucher 1675, 52, my translation).

al sense, which, as we will see (for instance, in footnote 10), looms large in Berkeley's use of 'representation' as well.[3]

Following Winkler (1989 and 2005), scholars often think that Berkeley differentiates mental 'representation' from 'signification' and applies RTR only to the way ideas, as opposed to signs or words, are meant to represent.[4] It might seem that Berkeley adopted the standard view I mentioned above that only mental representations display 'original' intentionality, and everything else, including paintings as well as maps and words, can do so merely derivatively or extrinsically. But this is not exactly the picture commentators tend to attribute to Berkeley. Rather, we have, on the one hand, ideas or mental objects which, modelled on how pictures are supposed to represent what they depict, represent naturally and non-arbitrarily through the resemblance their intrinsic features bear to their objects, and, on the other, ideas that are mere signs which, modelled on linguistic representation, signify their objects based on arbitrary institution or convention. Though there is some indication in Winkler that ideas represent intrinsically, and, even more clearly, that the signification relation piggybacks on mental representation insofar as it is 'only because a mark suggests an idea that it can stand for something in the world' (Winkler 2005, 128), neither claim is essential to the distinction. It might very well be that even resembling ideas represent only extrinsically, merely insofar as, in Winkler's words, they '*demand* a certain interpretation by their very nature' (Winkler 1989, 2, italics added). Furthermore, we might simply have two *sui generis* forms of (extrinsic) representation with signs such as words also signifying things directly, that is, without the intermediation of (other) ideas they suggest to the mind. In any event, there is much more to say both

3 Just to be clear, the causal *sense* of 're-presentation' does not entail the causal *theory* of representation in our sense, but it is compatible with adopting any alternative view. The representation, which renders something present to us, can direct our minds on its object through the causal chain it is involved in, its intrinsic features, or anything else a theory of representation might hold to be the case. Also note that 'cause' is meant rather broadly here, including a sense in which a representation can make an object present to the mind even without acting as an efficient cause of our corresponding mental state. As Descartes's example aptly shows, brain images, which represent objects to us, can be said to be the 'causes' of our ideas in this weak sense. One might want to say that they only 'occasion', 'trigger' or 'suggest' our perceptions.

4 For a clear and recent example, see Fasko and West 2020. If someone does not accept Winkler's distinction between 'representation' and 'signification' in Berkeley, they, on the face of it, are already on board with my reading. Since without this distinction in place, the sort of non-resembling signification words and other conventional signs display has to be seen as a form of genuine mental representation, and, hence, it is obvious that Berkeley did not accept RTR *across the board.* But this is not exactly the point I want to make in this paper. Rather, my aim is to show that, even if we ignore the case of 'signification', Berkeley did not reduce (genuine) mental representation to a matter of resemblance.

for and against this influential interpretation, but for now all that matters is that RTR is supposed to concern only mental representation, and we do not need to worry too much about signification or linguistic representation.

We can finally turn to our next component: what sort of *resemblance* does RTR invoke to explain the mechanism of mental representation? For Winkler's traditional distinction, it is essential that the resemblance Berkeley has in mind is more than mere structural conformity or isomorphism. It then supposedly explains why maps merely *signify* cities, and why the relation between structurally similar visual and tangible ideas does not amount to representation strictly speaking. As Berkeley clarifies in the NTV §§ 141–143, isomorphism requires only that two objects or ideas be structured in the same way, for instance contain the same number of parts or distinctions, regardless of whether those are of a similar nature individually. But for two (or more) things to genuinely resemble one another, they have to share at least one non-structural property of the same sort. Accordingly, if an idea resembles its object, it is a *true* representation of it insofar as it presents to us (some of) its intrinsic, non-structural features, not merely the various ways it is related to us through its unknown powers. In other words, however corresponding or isomorphic a representation might be, it will never show how things are in themselves unless it resembles its object, as it is the only way in which a representation can reveal to us at least some properties the represented thing has intrinsically. But it is important to contrast this *true* representation with intentionality or representation *simpliciter*, the notion of the directedness or aboutness a representing item displays irrespective of its ability to reveal anything true about its object's *intrinsic* properties.

Now, the intrinsic properties a representing item shares with its object can belong to either its content or vehicle. Berkeley asks (rhetorical) questions such as whether it makes sense to claim with the representative realists that our ideas of vision, for instance, resemble objects which are not *perceivable*, or *sensible*, let alone *visible*; or whether our ideas of minds and God could resemble these things when our ideas are essentially *passive*, while spirits are of an *active* nature. In this sense of similarity, the *vehicle* of representation R is such that it shares a property with object O in terms of their metaphysical nature. But note that even if one requires this for R to be able to represent O, a proper theory of representation needs more than just asserting that an object must be perceivable, visual, passive, etc. in order to resemble, and hence be represented, by our ideas having these features. Rather, the resemblance should concern the specific *content* of our ideas, sharing such properties with its object as the particular shade of red or figure it displays.

Thirdly, and relatedly, RTR is a *theory*. As I claimed earlier, if ideas need to resemble their objects merely to enable the mind to actually do the job of represent-

ing them, it is not a complete explanation of *why* our mental states have *original* directedness. As such, the extrinsic version of RTR does not go all the way to explain the mystery *we* find so fascinating about intentionality. Moreover, as I just noted, the resemblance that concerns only the metaphysical nature of representation as a vehicle will not explain any better *how* an idea – with a perceivable, visual, passive, etc. nature – picks out a red apple instead of a blue pen insofar as these objects do not differ in these respects. Berkeley might have insisted that in order for the content of a representation to resemble its object, the idea must resemble it in terms of the nature of its vehicle as well. Though I do not think Berkeley actually made use of such a *critical* argument against representative realists, it could be used to justify why no mind-dependent idea can pick out an external, material object. In any event, since it does not amount to a *positive* theory of how ideas (of imagination) represent other ideas (of sense), this requirement hardly takes us any further with regard to the *how*-question of specific mental representations.

And even if we assume that Berkeley was ultimately interested in the sort of resemblance the *content* of perception might display to its object, it can hardly be anything more than a *necessary* condition for a theory of mental representation. But a full-blown theory requires more than specifying one necessary condition. Rather, one might want to know if this is the only necessary condition, or if not, what the others are, and how they are related. Indeed, it is not outlandish to expect that a theory should put forward the *sufficient* condition(s) or at least specify and fully explain the mechanism at its heart. By mechanism, I mean the way in which a process is supposed to work or, simply, its mode of operation. But even with regard to fixing its content, it is really unclear how resemblance could work as the mechanism, let alone sufficient condition, of representation. To mention just one obvious problem: an idea resembles, in some respect and to some degree, many more things than how many it should make the mind represent. And the idea itself hardly shows which of its many intrinsic features that might resemble an object does actually matter with regard to representing it specifically. We, it seems, need some other mechanism in place to establish that. Berkeley, as I argue in what follows, was very much aware of this sort of problem, and realised that RTR does not actually work.

2 Textual and argumentative evidence for RTR

Despite all these potential complications, many scholars attribute to Berkeley the theory that our ideas represent their objects through resembling them. On this standard reading, he used RTR both to show that representative realism is unten-

able, leading to external world scepticism, and to shed some positive light on the way our ideas of imagination are about our ideas of sense. Commentators such as Winkler (1989 and 2005), Jacovides (2009), or, more recently, Fasko and West (2020) and Fasko (2021) often point to texts where he seems to endorse it either explicitly (if, as is often acknowledged, not publicly) or implicitly as a background assumption suggested by his (public) argumentation. Of course, not everyone attributes it to Berkeley with the same conviction and scope, as some speak only about a resemblance-*requirement* of representation.[5] However, to my knowledge, no one has ever questioned that Berkeley endorsed some form of RTR. This consensus cannot be accidental, so the textual and argumentative evidence needs careful assessment. In what follows, I will have to be selective, though, and concentrate only on those texts – whether published or unpublished – which, I believe, provide the strongest evidence for RTR, and, accordingly, are most often mentioned by the proponents of this reading.[6]

Scholars talk about RTR most often with regard to Berkeley's likeness principle and his attack on representative realism. In various places, most notably in PHK § 8 and § 9 and the closing exchange of the first of the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley argues based on his slogan 'an idea can be like *nothing but* another idea' that the representative realist position is untenable. If the likeness principle is true, representative realists cannot claim that objects, while not instantiating ideas themselves, have properties similar to them. But for many, such as the commentators mentioned above, there is (also) an epistemological point about representation that Berkeley makes here: given the lack of resemblance between the two, ideas cannot represent a mind-independent reality. I cannot go into it now (for more de-

5 Marusic 2009 is a nice example of this more cautious approach. This is of course important, as most (but not all) of my arguments are directed against those who think that resemblance has more to do with representation. With the likes of Jacovides (2009, 418–419, 421) and West (2021, 530–531) following him, Winkler (for instance 1989, 14) indeed tends to talk about resemblance as the *mechanism* or *means* of representation.

6 There is another line of thought pointing to the apparent popularity of RTR in either Berkeley's Cartesian or Irish intellectual context (see Hill 2011, and Fasko and West 2020, respectively). Since it would lead us pretty far away, I will not criticise these contextualist readings here in any detail. I merely note that, even if true, this piece of *circumstantial* evidence might explain why Berkeley attributed RTR to his opponents implicitly and, perhaps, why he did not make his own commitment to it explicit, but it cannot really prove that he consciously endorsed it in the first place. After all, he is famous for dissenting even from views universally accepted by his predecessors. But, then, one might ask: why did he not voice his dissent as in the case of, for instance, abstraction or materialism? Because in this case, as I will argue, he did not care about the whole issue that much. Simply put, he neither presumed the truth of RTR, nor consciously rejected it in favour of an alternative theory of representation. In any event, I do not think he would have dissented from a *consensus* view in the first place.

tails, see Bartha 2022) but, on my reading, the text hardly substantiates this interpretation. It is not only that RTR (or, at least, the thesis that representation requires resemblance) as a crucial premise is conspicuously missing. But Berkeley's conclusion is strikingly different and concerns a metaphysical point: insofar as the likeness principle shows that matter cannot have qualities similar to our ideas, the *sensory* concept of matter the representative realist puts forward 'involves a contradiction in it' – just as much as the direct realist's straightforward identification of ideas with material qualities does. Of course, if one has *other* evidence that Berkeley accepted RTR, one is perhaps more justified in letting their eyes wander behind this minimalist reading of the text. But it should hardly count as independent evidence for RTR.

There do appear to be bits and pieces of evidence. Berkeley claims, for instance, that we cannot have a passive idea of active mental substances, such as God and our souls, because 'being an agent cannot be like unto, or represented by, any idea whatsoever' (PHK § 27). As he puts earlier, 'all ideas whatever, being passive and inert (Vide section 25), they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts.' Berkeley likens the absurdity of forming ideas of spirits and their mental operations, in PHK § 142, to seeing a sound, or, in PHK § 136, to 'comprehend[ing] a round square' as 'it is manifestly impossible there should be any such idea' (PHK § 135). Now, based on these analogies, one might think that Berkeley's point is merely that it is impossible to perceive spiritual things, since the idea I am supposed to have of them is not the right vehicle in which they could be presented in the first place. Just as a sound cannot be grasped in the form of a visual idea, so too souls – which are not constituted by ideas, but which perceive ideas – are impossible to be cognised in the form of passive and sensory ideas, or in the way, as Berkeley clarifies, triangles are perceived. It is 'only by the effects which it produceth' that we can perceive the active spirits (PHK § 27), but we cannot have a direct, sensory grasp of them. And since an idea of imagination is nothing else but a copy of an idea of sense, if we cannot have a perceptual idea of these essentially unobservable things, then we cannot have a (quasi-)sensory idea re-presenting them in our imagination either (see, for instance, DM § 53, or NB 576 & 828).

Accordingly, it might be that all we learn from these passages with regard to Berkeley's views on representation is that there are non-sensory objects that simply cannot be perceived as ideas. One might very well insist, however, that these passages nonetheless claim that we are unable to form in our imagination a sensory representation of God and other active things because they are unlike the ideas we can have. Hence, Berkeley seems to require resemblance for representation in a more relevant sense. But even on this reading, there are a couple of things to note. The first is that this argument seems to concern what I called *true* repre-

sentation, as opposed to intentionality *simpliciter.* So, all Berkeley claims is that if we want to know the intrinsic nature of God, your own soul or another's, looking at your ideas as representations of them will not help. These ideas merely represent to us their effects, not the things as they are in themselves. But nothing said here excludes the possibility that our ideas can direct our minds to them in some other, extrinsic, way. For instance, even if imagining an idea of an old, bearded man might make us think about God, perhaps not unlike how the word 'God' or any symbolic or figurative depiction can be referred to him, it still cannot reveal to us – or in Berkeley's own terms, 'represent unto us, by way of image or likeness' – his real, purely active nature. Accordingly, all Berkeley argues here is that *truly* representing the intrinsic features of something requires resemblance, but he does not need to presuppose, much more controversially, that the mere aboutness of mental states is to be explained in terms of resemblance.[7]

The topic also comes up in PHK §§ 137–138. Since our ideas do not resemble spiritual substances in terms of their *activity* of 'willing, thinking, and perceiving', Berkeley tells us, there is nothing left of what gives the term 'soul' its distinctive meaning that the idea could reveal or (truly) represent to us. As PHK § 140 adds, we can nonetheless have ideas of other minds' *ideas*, 'which we suppose to be resemblances' insofar as their ideas are presumed to stand in similar relations to their minds as our ideas stand to our minds. But note that this passage is, again, about trying to figure out, by way of analogy with our own, what the intrinsic nature of others' ideas might be, rather than the question of how our ideas can refer to them *simpliciter.* And obviously Berkeley cannot mean that our ideas direct our thoughts on others' ideas through their presupposed resemblance, since the latter, as opposed to their external signs, are not available to our direct apprehension any more than mind-independent qualities are.

A further thing to clarify is that the similarity under discussion concerns the representing *vehicle.* So, what Berkeley seems to require for true representation or forming an idea that does justice to the represented thing's intrinsic properties is that the medium or vehicle of the representation needs to share (at least some of) the relevant features with it. Noticeably, this understanding of resemblance is at play in the likeness principle argument as well. If one thing is essentially perceivable, passive or sensory, like our ideas, it cannot be similar in terms of its nature to things that are essentially imperceivable, like material qualities, or active and non-

7 At this point, one might also wonder how our *notions* are meant to represent these active, spiritual things. While Berkeley's underdeveloped theory of notions is notoriously difficult to interpret, it does not seem to fit neatly in with the standard reading. Although they are (mental) representations of some sort, notions should not be classified as mere, non-resembling or conventional signs. But they do not resemble their intentional objects in a pictorial way, either.

sensory, like spiritual substances. Similarly, in the NTV, Berkeley glosses likeness as 'identity of nature' (NTV § 147) or being 'of the same species' (NTV § 143), specifying that resemblance construed properly can only obtain between ideas of the same sense modality. But even if this requirement *were* to apply to representation *simpliciter* as well as *true* representation, as I mentioned earlier, since it tells us nothing about its specific content, here all we get is the green light to develop a proper theory of representation. In addition to satisfying a mere necessary condition, much more is needed to spell out what makes it a representation – be it true or *simpliciter* – of a particular type of object or a specific individual. In other words, even if our mental representations were of the same nature as their objects, we would need an explanation as to why a given representation is about a particular physical or spiritual thing as opposed to any or all of the other entities of the same kind.

There are, of course, other passages commentators might, and often do, cite as evidence that Berkeley endorsed RTR in a more relevant sense. In addition to PHK § 8, Winkler (2005, 134–135), for example, alludes to DHP 203, 205, and 246 as instances where Berkeley ascribes RTR to his opponents, and to PHK § 27 and § 140 where he endorses it himself. I have already addressed PHK § 27 and § 140.[8] Similarly, in DHP 246, Berkeley himself talks about '*true* representation' in connection to 'real knowledge' about the intrinsic nature of things. And, as I argued (if admittedly briefly), on my reading, though speaking in terms of 'images' and 'resemblances' alongside 'representations', the likeness principle passages aim to deny the coherence of the sensory concept of matter, and, as such, tell us very little, if anything, about the mechanism of representation. Just like PHK § 8, DHP 203 and 205, which construes ideas as 'copies, images, or representations of certain originals', are interested in the representative realist notion of matter which holds material qualities to be like our ideas. First, in DHP 203, Berkeley argues that despite any alleged similarity between our ideas and the sensory qualities of mind-independent objects, since the latter are not perceived directly, they are not perceived at all, and, consequently, we might at best *infer* that there are mind-independent objects with qualities similar to our ideas. Then, in DHP 205, he starts attacking their putative resemblance by questioning how material objects might be truly or, as he puts it here, 'properly represented' by our 'perpetually fleeting and variable' perceptions, just before appealing to his likeness principle to show that the similarity is impossible and mind-independent things cannot

8 In addition to most passages mentioned by Winkler, Jacovides 2009 refers to PHK §§ 135, 137–138, DHP 232 and AMP 7.5., which all concern the issue that it is impossible to have passive ideas as (true) representations of active spiritual substances.

be regarded as sensory in the first place. None of these arguments presuppose RTR: what they ultimately attack in the representative realist position is the metaphysical assumption that there are resembling but material originals of our sensory ideas, and not that the latter are held to *represent* the former through this alleged resemblance.

Winkler (1989, 10) also points to PHK § 33 and § 87. In PHK § 87, Berkeley is indeed more interested in the epistemological problems of representation. He speaks about the representative realists' ideas as 'notes or images, referred to *things*', and argues that this conception inevitably leads to the sceptical problem of knowing 'which of them, or even whether any of them at all represent the true quality really existing in the thing'. The first thing to mention is that the term 'notes', which does not indicate resemblance, is apparently listed *in addition to* images as forms of representation representative realists might appeal to. Accordingly, he seems to allow here that the representative realists' ideas refer to things without resembling them.[9] Secondly, the sceptical problem raised in this passage concerns, again, the representation of the 'true quality really existing in the thing', not intentionality *simpliciter.* And, thirdly, even when, as in the next section, the problem is extended to the 'doubt of the existence [...] even of their own bodies', it is still not motivated by his implicit endorsement of RTR. Berkeley's point is that people tend to question not only the *perceived* nature but even the existence of physical objects, not because our ideas cannot resemble, and hence represent, them, but simply because ideas are erroneously distinguished from the things they are supposed to represent. Simply put, representative realism *as such* entails these epistemological problems, regardless of whether one endorses RTR or not.

PHK § 33, in turn, concerns Berkeley's views on ideas of imagination, claiming that they are 'more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things*, which they copy and represent.' This is perhaps more promising evidence for the claim that Berkeley accepts RTR unambiguously. As the proponents of the standard reading hold, while Berkeley argues that it does not allow our ideas to represent a mind-independent reality, RTR should work fine in the case of ideas of imagination directed on other ideas (of sense). But is it that clear that Berkeley has anything more in mind here than *merely* the causal sense of re-presentation? To be sure, as suggested by the term 'copy' (if not by 're-represent') our ideas of imagination are reproductions of, and hence causally related to, the ideas of sense they render present to

9 A parallel terminological point could be made regarding DHP 203, where Berkeley speaks about external things having '*conformity* or resemblance to our ideas' (emphasis added), allegedly allowing us to perceive them by sense.

us again.[10] But does he add that ideas of imagination are about, or represent in our sense of the term, these originals? Similarly, it is *only* the causal sense that is evident in his definition of imagination in PHK Introduction § 10 as the capacity for 'representing to my self' and 'variously compounding and dividing' the ideas perceived earlier.[11] So, while the term 'image' and its synonyms in Berkeley's vocabulary imply resemblance, or, more precisely, a copy or reproduction that is similar to an original (to some extent, at least), it does not itself specify that this idea directs our minds to its source. In any event, it surely does not show that this resemblance provides the mechanism of imaginative representation. In other words, even if they *represent* their resembling original, it does not specify that they do so *through* resembling them. Shouldn't the causal story involved in the copying relation (also) have a role in determining the representational content of imagination? One might think these doubts can be removed by looking at some *unpublished* materials. Jacovides (2009, 418), for instance, adds the apparently less ambiguous NB 657a to the list: 'properly speaking Idea is the picture of the Imagination's making this is ye likeness & refer'd to the real Idea or (if you will) thing.'[12]

It is, of course, a shaky move from a methodological point of view. We might wonder why something that is found *only* in unpublished works should be taken as an indication of one's actual view. Also, the NB includes early thoughts Berkeley entertained while figuring out his positions, floating ideas along the way that often were not meant to express his considered views even then, let alone when going public later on. But even if we can get over these well-known methodological concerns, despite talking about 'likeness' alongside 'reference' or our sense of repre-

10 More generally, Berkeley often uses 'represent' in the causal sense, such as in PHK § 27 where, as we have seen, ideas are said to 'represent unto us'. In NB 341, an inch is said to 'represent [a mile] to their [viz. the mathematicians'] imaginations'. Similarly, in NTV 152, 'represent' is glossed as to 'suggest to the mind'. In DHP 185, mediums such as microscopes and our eyes are said to 'represent objects to us', and in 213, 'exhibit' and 'represent [...] to the mind' are used synonymously. And in AMP 3.35, we are asked to 'represent to yourself the mind of man, or human nature in general'.

11 In TTV § 10, it is similarly characterised as the 'faculty [that] represents all sensible things', which is merely to say that a colour, for instance, can also 'be apprehended by the imagination' in a secondary manner. See also DM § 53. Without distinguishing it from *our* sense of representation, that Berkeley's ideas of imagination 're-present' (as opposed to arbitrarily 'signify') is emphasised by Winkler 2005, 134, Daniel 2021, 68–69, and Fasko and West 2020, 10.

12 See also NB 818, where he claims that ideas of imagination 'are images of and proceeds from the ideas of sense'; and 823, which regards the latter as the archetypes of their 'copies, images'. Like PHK § 33, these passages refer to the causal origin as well as resemblance of our ideas of imagination, and might not be interested in their representational content at all.

sentation, NB 657a is still hardly decisive. First, it can, at best, support the *extrinsic* reading of RTR. Insofar as, just like PHK § 87, it talks about ideas 'referred to' things by the mind, the resemblance ideas bear to their originals seems to be insufficient to explain why mental states are intentional in the first place.[13] It is, of course, compatible with holding that Berkeley addresses the *how*-question, not the *why*-question, by invoking resemblance. But, as we have seen (including footnote 12), later in both the NB and his published works Berkeley often adds quasi-causal terms to his characterisation of ideas of imagination. So, even if resemblance is invoked in this passage in connection to the mechanism of imaginative representation, the comparison with other related passages suggests that it is an incomplete explanation, and the causal story which is also relevant to how our minds refer ideas to things is missing from it.

Moreover, one might think that similarity is not adduced to in order to explain the mechanism of representation *at all.* In other words, as the symbol '&' suggests, Berkeley might have distinguished between the issues of likeness *and* reference. The only thing in this passage that suggests otherwise, especially in comparison to other similar passages, is that it looks as if the very same 'real thing' was said to be both the likeness and referent of our idea of imagination. I do not think this is intentional on Berkeley's part. To be sure, all our ideas of imagination are related to real things in terms of what they resemble insofar as they reproduce or re-present our earlier ideas of sense. But it does not seem to be true for what they are referred to or represent: what real thing does an idea of a centaur – or, indeed, any combination (or separation) of previously perceived ideas of sense – represent, as opposed to re-present and hence resemble? But even when they indeed both resemble and are referred to *some* ideas of sense, these relations do not necessarily pick out the very same *ideatum:* as we will see in the next section, our ideas of imagination might resemble a lot of things we do not want it to represent, such as in general thought or memory. Moreover, even if these relations always pointed to the same idea(s) of sense, the relations themselves could still differ, as this passage does not confirm that the reference of an idea of imagination is to be accounted for in terms of what it resembles, as opposed to, for instance, what it re-presents in a causal sense.

In any event, there is another unpublished passage where, as commentators such as Winkler (1989, 10–11; 2005, 130) and Fasko and West (2020, 12) often suggest, Berkeley seems to endorse RTR even more explicitly and unambiguously.

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13 The extrinsic nature of ideational representation is also emphasised in PHK Introduction § 12, where Berkeley claims that an idea 'becomes general, by being *made to* represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort.' (emphasis added).

> Any Name may be used indifferently for the Sign of any Idea, or any number of Ideas, it not being determin'd by any likeness to represent one more than another. But it is not so with Ideas in respect of Things, of which they are suppos'd to be Copies & Images. they are not thought to Represent them otherwise, than as they resemble them, Whence it follows, that an Idea is not capable of representing indifferently any Thing whatsoever it being limited by the likeness it bears to some particular Thing, to represent it rather than any other. the Word Man may equally be put to signify any particular Man I can think of. But I cannot frame an Idea of Man, which shall equally represent & correspond to each particular of that Sort of Creatures, that may possibly exist. (Manuscript Introduction to the PHK, *Works* II.129)

Before dealing with its content, it is important to note that it is not simply an unpublished passage like NB 657a, raising the methodological doubts mentioned above. It is in fact more like those entries of the NB Berkeley marked with his mysterious signs possibly indicating statements to reconsider. Indeed, he consciously revoked this passage when deciding on the version of the *Principles* to publish. In any event, Berkeley here indeed claims that while words can be made to represent anything indifferently, that is, without any resemblance relation to the represented thing, ideas represent only through resemblance. They do so perhaps not intrinsically but by determining the mind to represent the things they resemble.

But even so, this is problematic, since, as Berkeley suggests in the last sentence, the idea we form, say, of a man does not resemble equally all particular men it is supposed to represent. Suppose again that I form an image of an old, bearded man. How can it represent all (and only) men equally – even those who are not bearded or old? This is a familiar line of attacking the resemblance theory of representation: depending on how strict or permissive our standards are, resemblance can connect our ideas to too few or too many things. Moreover, representation *simpliciter* (as opposed to *true* representation) should not be gradable in the way resemblance is. While my idea of an old, bearded man resembles young, bearded men more than, say, young, beardless women, it makes no sense to say that it represents one of these groups more or less than the other – it is either directed on them or not. So, then, do we have a passage where Berkeley endorses and raises a problem for RTR in the same breath? Isn't it rather one where while attributing it to his abstractionist opponents, he attempts to steer clear of it? He writes, after all, that ideas 'are *suppos'd* to be Copies & Images' of things and 'not *thought* to Represent them otherwise, than as they resemble them' (my emphasis).

But even if this phrasing is not to distance himself from the proponents of RTR, or the remark at the end of the quote is not intended as a criticism of RTR as such, it still remains a puzzling passage. Did Berkeley accept RTR, but warned that it does not work for *general* representation, since while we cannot form ab-

stract ideas, for the determinate ideas we do have, resemblance does not pick out the objects they are meant to represent? But isn't his own view that we can form thoughts with general representational contents, not only speaking in general terms? If so, in light of his critical remark, he can hardly think that our particular ideas represent sorts of things through resemblance. Indeed, that would go against the theory of general representation he embraces in the published version, according to which we make particular ideas 'to represent or stand for all other particular Ideas of the same sort' (PHK Introduction *§* 12) – irrespective of what their intrinsic features resemble more or less. Accordingly, Winkler (1989, 12) and Belfrage (1987, 33) suggest that Berkeley basically went on to endorse the very view he is attacking here, contradicting his claim that we cannot form 'an Idea of Man, which shall equally represent & correspond to each particular of that Sort of Creatures, that may possibly exist.' In the published version, I believe, he could accept a similar statement precisely because he dropped RTR, which, according to the manuscript argument, caused the problems. So, even if he entertained it as his own view, he apparently realised rather quickly that he needed to abandon it in order to be consistent with his considered theory of general representation.[14]

In any event, even if he discarded this passage for another reason, in light of the undeniable strangeness surrounding it, I conclude that the strongest and most explicit evidence for RTR is much less decisive than ordinarily supposed. To be sure, there might be a long list of arguments where Berkeley potentially relies on RTR. Jacovides (2009, 424–428), for instance, brings up the so-called master argument. Since discussing this controversial argument would lead us very far away, I cannot deal with it in any detail. Nonetheless, I hope that the general strategy to approach that, or similar arguments, is clear by now. As Marusic (2009, 433–435) notes, the master argument promises to be a self-standing argument which

14 By contrast, Winkler (1989, 11–12) speculates that apart from realising that RTR is irrelevant to his attack on abstractionism, Berkeley decided to drop this passage from the published version of the PHK Introduction because it might suggest materialism in that it speaks about representing things (possibly, indicating material objects), or, alternatively, reveal his immaterialist agenda too early. But don't forget that Berkeley is just reporting a view (without actually referring the *material* objects), making, as I argued, quite clear that it 'is supposed' or 'thought' to be the case by his opponents, and RTR itself is neutral on the question of (im)materialism. Hill (2011, 76–77) suggests an alternative explanation to the effect that Berkeley realised that he does not need to explicitly mention the resemblance theory at all, since 'it would be entirely natural for anyone familiar with the Cartesian tradition and especially the sceptical criticism of that tradition.' But it is pretty hard to believe that RTR was so obvious in his intellectual environment that Berkeley not only thought that making his commitment to it explicit is unnecessary, but when he (accidentally?) did so, he revoked it as soon as he realised the 'mistake'. Could he possibly be so embarrassed of saying aloud a commonplace that he threw out a whole argument that rests on it?

seems to show only that mind-dependent ideas cannot represent objects *as* mind-independent. Invoking an intuition based on the nature of the *vehicle* of our representations, it hardly tells us anything about the mechanism of representing *simpliciter.*[15]

3 Contrary tendencies and some problems for RTR

Since my chief aim is to raise doubts about attributing RTR to Berkeley, it might have been enough to offer alternative readings of the passages and arguments proponents of the standard interpretation most often adduce to. But we can even go on the offensive and point to contrary tendencies, if not pieces of evidence, in his works, either suggesting that RTR cannot do the job or hinting at other mechanisms at play in representation.

If we presume RTR, as we have just seen, questions arise about general representation. Berkeley argued in the manuscript Introduction that our particular and determinate ideas do not resemble all things equally that they are supposed to represent generally and indiscriminately. Accordingly, the resemblance their intrinsic features display does not simply determine what they are made to represent. Rather, through its selective attention, the mind attends rather arbitrarily to whatever intrinsic feature of the idea it deems relevant to representing the intended classes of things. For instance, I can use my idea of an old, bearded man to stand for all old, bearded men just as much as for all old men (bearded or not), all human beings (male or female; old or young; bearded or not), all beings including non-human animals and God, and even all entities whatsoever. Though some proponents of the standard reading might disagree about this, I suspect that Winkler would not want to say that our idea of an old, bearded man – just like the terms 'old, bearded men', 'old men', 'humans', 'beings', etc. – arbitrarily *signifies* any or all of these (in many respects) rather dissimilar objects to our minds because it did not manage to fix the content of our thought through resemblance. Restricting the scope of RTR to ideas with particular representational content would not only seriously decrease its relevance to accounting for the mechanism of representation *as such.* It is a rather *ad hoc* move as well, insofar as ideas with general representation content appear to be just as genuine cases of *mental* representation as any idea referring to a single individual. If so, Berkeley's theory of

15 See also Winkler 1989, 186–187, who, despite attributing RTR to Berkeley, proposes an interpretation that is independent of it.

general representation seems to rely on two factors. The scope of what an idea can represent is limited by resemblance, but the mechanism to call upon in order to adjudicate between the almost infinitely many respects one thing can be similar to another, and hence to determine their relevance to representation, obviously cannot be resemblance itself. In fact, it seems that the role resemblance plays is not primarily in representation. For Berkeley, on my reading, an idea represents a class of things not, strictly speaking, through resembling all its members in terms of features selected by our minds, but simply through being regarded as a *representative* member that stands in for the whole of one of the (arbitrarily picked) *resemblance* classes it belongs to.

Furthermore, Berkeley seems to think that resemblance does not account for the mechanism of imaginative representation. That is to say, RTR does not work in the only case it is supposed to work. First, it is not the only mechanism Berkeley alludes to, and, as I mentioned, causal terms are always in the vicinity too: if not 're-present' then 'copy' (and 'original', etc.) makes this clear. When I imagine or remember my house, the original idea of sense I had of the house is one of the causes of my current resembling representation.[16] It, of course, does not determine *when* and *what* I imagine, and hence should not be seen as its real or efficient cause, but it is a necessary condition for the particular act of imagination, providing it with its content. My mind is the efficient cause as it does the copying at its own initiative, but copying this rather than that idea of sense, as the object of this act, constitutes the fact that I am re-presenting in imagination my house and not something else. As Berkeley says in PHK § 1, one important use of our imagination, most notably in remembering, is that we 'barely represent' our original ideas, which simply means that we copy them from an idea of sense, re-presenting it to our minds 'barely', that is, without the intention of modifying its content, for instance, by combining it with another idea of sense. But if Berkeley wants to explain representation *simpliciter* through this re-presenting aspect of imagination, why think that the obvious quasi-causal relation it involves does not matter at all?[17] Indeed, it might be that this causal story does all the work of referring our 'barely re-presented' ideas of imagination to certain ideas of sense, and Berke-

16 Presumably, for Berkeley, as for Locke (see *Essay* I.iv.20), remembering my house differs from imagining it insofar as I am not only re-presenting one of my earlier experiences but also conscious of this fact.

17 The same could be asked about the structural conformity, as Berkeley acknowledges in his NTV (§§ 141–143), ideas of sight bears to ideas of touch (or tangible things) with the same shape. While there is no similarity in terms of the intrinsic nature of their parts, and hence the visible and tangible squares are completely heterogeneous, due to their corresponding structure, the former is said to be a 'fitter' representation of the latter than, say, a visible circle.

ley's account of imaginative representation only incidentally imply that they, as representations or copies, are also resemblances of their originals.

Moreover, is it not only that when it comes to imaginative representation, another mechanism is mentioned that contributes to its representational content, indeed one that can explain it on its own. But Berkeley suggests that resemblance *cannot* even do the job. The general worries concerning RTR are aggravated by Berkeley's view that our ideas of imagination are *vague* reproductions of their originals. As he puts it in DHP 235, they 'are faint and indistinct', including even 'the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused.' This, of course, does not affect the fact that they are in a quasi-causal connection with, and hence re-present, them. It does, however, raise questions about how they can represent those things through resemblance. As Berkeley himself acknowledges, the resemblance between two ideas can be very (c)rude in the case of remembering.

> [...] the ideas laid up in the imagination need not be images, strictly speaking, of what they represent. [...] When you recollect in your thoughts the idea of any house or city, for instance, 'tis certain that idea do's very rudely resemble the thing it represents, and not in each circumstance accurately correspond with it. And yet it may serve to most Interests and purposes as well as if it did. (Letter 9, 29)

When remembering a house we perceived earlier, we produce a copy or re-presentation of that house in our minds, but, as Berkeley seems to argue, the specific *correspondence* the representative relation requires between this idea of imagination and the thing to remember cannot depend on the resemblance they (hardly) have. After all, if I can remember a house in a very crude manner, how does my idea not pick out (also) an idea of a different house I saw earlier? How could a vague – both dim and indistinct – copy of my house refer specifically to, and only to, my house if it represents through resemblance? Does it resemble it any more than any other building with four walls and a roof? As Berkeley puts it, the idea of imagination does not 'accurately correspond' with the remembered object through the resemblance its intrinsic features display. This is even clearer with regard to memories of sensations. In NB 675, Berkeley compares divine cognition to the way 'we our selves can imagine the pain of a burn etc without any misery or uneasiness at all.' Since the past pain we remember is re-presented in a qualitatively very different way, indeed it can be without any painfulness, it is hard to see what sort of vague resemblance remains to connect these two experiences accurately.

What can establish then the representative relation between the actual house or the original pain and our memories of them? Though, yet again, Berkely does not give away much, there must be some other mechanism that connects these in themselves insufficient ideas of imagination with their proper intentional objects. Can Berkeley not say that the representation relation is established by our

intention to produce a re-presentation that links even the phenomenologically fundamentally different idea of imagination with the original pain? It is then not its resemblance but simply our mind's intention to reproduce an idea that accounts for the new idea being about its original. If so, the idea created in imagination 'may serve to most Interests and purposes', not because we can remember things inaccurately but because our hardly resembling ideas of imagination are connected to their objects *specifically* by our mind's unexplained ability.

Moreover, it is reasonable to think that RTR would not work for the other type of imagination Berkeley countenances, when we are 'compounding and dividing ideas'. Let's call this type 'creative imagination', as opposed to the 'reproductive imagination', for instance, memory involves. Now, note a problem for RTR we have already touched on: while the idea of a centaur resembles horses and men partially, it does not represent them at all; our idea of a centaur is composed of, but is not *about*, half men and half horses. Speculating again on Berkeley's behalf about an obvious problem for any theory of imaginative representation, one option is to deny that these ideas of creative imagination represent anything at all. But this seems *ad hoc.* What explains that the mechanism of resemblance does not work its magic in this case of mental representation, directing our minds necessarily on parts of men and horses? And remember that Berkeley claims in PHK § 1 that the ideas of reproductive imagination 'barely represent', suggesting that ideas like that of a centaur also represent things we have perceived. If so, as I argued, RTR gets the object wrong. If not, and all Berkeley has in mind here is that ideas of imagination re-present or copy things in the quasi-causal sense, I wonder why we should think that he meant 'represent' in our modern sense on other occasions – in passages such as PHK § 33 or various entries of the *Notebooks* where, as we have seen, he expresses rather similar thoughts about imagination.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to spoil one of the rare instances of consensus in Berkeley scholarship. I argued that there is no compelling evidence – based either on explicit statement or implicit assumption behind his argument – that he thought that resemblance provides the mechanism of mental representation. While a proper account of a theory of representation would concern the *content* of representation, he was more interested in resemblance in terms of the nature of its *vehicle* and of its object. Moreover, he most often pointed out the significance of resemblance as a requirement of *true* representation, not intentionality *simpliciter.* In any event, he hardly specified anything more than a single necessary condition, while suggesting that the *original* form of intentionality comes from the

mind's unexplained capacity. And even with regard to the mechanism that fixes the content of our mental representations, he left very little work for the vague and unspecific resemblance displayed by the intrinsic features of our ideas. Indeed, he hinted at other factors, such as the causal story linking our ideas of imagination to our ideas of sense, or our mind's arbitrary and selective attention in general thought. Simply put, while he thought that imaginative re-presentation involves some form of resemblance (albeit only along with a quasi-causal relation), he did not seem to think that we can account for our sense of representation in terms of it.

Now, from all this we can derive a rather modest conclusion: the issue cannot be settled based on the available evidence. But even if, despite all my efforts, one still thinks that the evidence for RTR weighs more, it seems necessary to qualify it significantly in order to accommodate and get around all these textual and theoretical quibbles and spell out more precisely what the resemblance-*requirement* is meant to achieve and explain in Berkeley's view. As a proper theory, one might also want to understand better how resemblance relates to, and potentially co-operates with, the other mechanisms hinted at by Berkeley. But after adding all those caveats, restrictions and specifications, wouldn't RTR lose too much of its explanatory power? Why label it a *resemblance* account as opposed to some other theory of representation? Accordingly, we might draw a more ambitious conclusion and doubt that Berkeley endorsed RTR in any significant sense. But even so, I do not claim that he rejected it in favour of a clear alternative. In this paper, I am afraid I have had more questions than answers. But that is partly the point: in comparison to our (and some of his) contemporaries, Berkeley was hardly interested in answering even the most obvious questions about mental representation.

Accordingly, the third – and strongest – conclusion we might draw is that he did not endorse any theory of representation in our modern sense. Apparently, he was aware of the limitations of RTR, but provided us with mere hints at other mechanisms. And in his regular appeal to resemblance and re-presentation we should not see anything else but his conviction that the intrinsic nature of matter cannot be similar to that of our ideas, and, as he claims in PHK § 5 and DM § 53, that our imaginative power – reproducing ideas of sense in various possible combinations – does not extend beyond what we can perceive. But it is not a sign, as usually assumed, of any serious interest in the problems of intentionality, be it original or derived, and the specifics of its mechanism. All that matters to Berkeley is that *any* representative theory of perception precludes the possibility of *truly* representing reality.

To be sure, showing minimal concerns for such a fundamental topic of philosophy would not be out of character. As is well-known, Berkeley was keen on tear-

ing down metaphysical constructions, such as the philosophical concept of matter, that are not only useless as explanations but contradictory or empty and even harmful with various sceptical implications. Similarly, he criticises the presupposition of cognitive abilities, such as abstraction, that is neither required to explain anything we actually do in thought or speech nor is possible to be exercised in the first place. Nonetheless, he was generally fine with accepting brute facts about our cognitive capacities which need and allow for no further explanation.[18] As part of his common sense and anti-sceptical agenda, he firmly believed that we do not need to first question if, and how, they do what they appear to do in order to know that God has given us cognitive capacities that present as well as re-present the world to us reliably.

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18 This is perhaps the most fundamental level of my disagreement with the standard reading. As Winkler (1989, 138–139), by contrast, claims that 'the relation of representation, Berkeley believes, cannot be ungrounded or brute.' In the early modern context – from, arguably, Locke and Arnauld to Reid – Berkeley would not be on his own in leaving our capacity for representation unexplained.

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Manuel Fasko

3 Resemblance and Representation: The Complexity of Berkeley's Notion of Likeness and Mental Representation

Abstract: Manuel Fasko argues for a twofold thesis. First, he shows that, across Berkeley's writings, there is evidence of a commitment to several different *groups* of resemblance relation: relations of generic likeness (between two things of the same genus); relations of specific likeness (between two ideas of the same sense modality); and natural resemblance or identity of nature (between ideas of the imagination and the ideas of sense of which they are copies). Second, Fasko argues that the third kind of resemblance relation, natural resemblance or identity of nature, is a necessary and sufficient condition for one thing (an idea of imagination) to *represent* another (an idea of sensation). Thus, albeit indirectly, Fasko pushes back on Bartha's thesis that for Berkeley, representation does not depend on resemblance. For Fasko clarifies the necessary and sufficient conditions required for resemblance-based mental representation.

Introduction

Despite an ongoing interest in various aspects of Berkeley's 'doctrine of signs,[1] Berkeley's notion of resemblance or likeness has attracted little attention,[2] but there is a scholarly consensus that Berkeley endorses a resemblance-based account of men-

1 Cf. Winkler 1989, §4 & 2005, §1. Winkler also points out that this way of representing ought to be distinguished from the arbitrary relation of 'signification' (e. g. AMP 4.10–12), which concerns the way words represent their objects (cf. also NTV § 152; TVV § 39). While not everyone agrees with the details of Winkler's account, even critical scholars such as Dunlop or Daniel accept this fundamental point (see Dunlop 2012, 536; Daniel 2008, 41).

2 Most of the discussion revolves around Berkeley's so-called 'Likeness Principle' (LP) (Cummins 1966, 63) – viz. his claim from § 8 of the *Principles* that 'An idea can be like nothing but an idea'. More particularly, scholars have attempted to explain why Berkeley felt entitled to hold the LP, for while it is clear that the LP serves an important function, especially in undermining representational realism, it is unclear how many and what kind of arguments there are in support of it (cf. Cummins 1966; Dicker 1985; Frankel 2016, 50–53; Hill 2011; Jacovides 2009, 417; Ryan 2006, 574–80; West 2021; Winkler 1989, 140–49).

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-006

tal representation (see *Works* II, 129; TVV § 39).[3] It is, moreover, equally well-accepted that Berkeley, at least as far as this resemblance-based account is concerned, is committed to what Peter West and I (2020) have called the 'resemblance thesis': that resemblance or likeness is a necessary condition for representation.[4] Thus, most scholars agree that there is a difference between representation and resemblance, but none of them has so far commented on the exact nature of this difference.[5] Thus, the complexity of Berkeley's notion of likeness is generally underestimated, and it is against this background that I will first demonstrate that Berkeley's writings warrant a threefold distinction between different groups of likeness relations:

i) Generic Likeness – obtaining between one kind of thing in virtue of its passivity or activity, i. e. between ideas or minds respectively.
ii) Specific Likeness – obtaining between one specific kind of idea in virtue of the intrinsic properties it shares qua being an idea of a particular sense modality.
iii) Natural Resemblance or Identity of Nature – obtaining between mental representations and the objects in nature they are the image of in virtue of the intrinsic features they copy to resemble it in that respect; that is, between ideas of imagination and that which they are an idea of.[6]

Secondly, I argue that it is important to keep these groups apart for our understanding of the difference between resemblance and (resemblance-based mental) representation because natural resemblance or identity of nature is necessary and

3 This is not to say that Berkeley only endorses this particular account. There may well be other mechanisms of mental representation; in fact, the chapters in this volume attest to the conceptual richness of this notion. However, the focus of my chapter is on what, following Peirce, can be called 'icons'; that is, it focuses on signs that represent something by copying something else in resembling it or, as Peirce puts it, share 'a mere community in some quality' (W2, 56)

4 Cf. Hight 2013, chap. 8.3; Jacovides 2009, 417; Saporiti 2011, 171; Putnam 1981, 59 to name but a few scholars who accept this reading. One notable exception to the rule is Bartha (2022), who argues at length against attributing any resemblance-based account of representation to Berkeley.

5 Thus Bartha (cf. chap. 2) is right to stress that no one has so far specified the necessary and sufficient conditions for resemblance-based (mental) representation – which he justifiably perceives to be a glaring oversight and which he thinks is false to attribute to Berkeley. It is part of my aim to rectify and thus also defend the attribution of the resemblance-based account to Berkeley by showing how the latter thought about the mechanics of this account.

6 At first sight, Daniel Flage makes a similar distinction. However, my use of 'generic' and 'specific' likeness differs from Flage's distinction between 'generic and specific identity'. Although Flage connects his distinction to likeness, it is due to different degrees of similarity (Flage 1987, 123–30). But as will become evident, I do not think there is a gradual difference between these groups of likeness relations. Rather, they obtain in virtue of different intrinsic properties that are shared (and not because of a 'more or less' in these shared properties).

sufficient for representation, while specific and generic likeness are only necessary conditions respectively.

My argument proceeds in three steps. First, I outline Berkeley's understanding of relations in general. This is necessary because of the mutually incompatible interpretations that have been put forward. Contrary to Ryan (2006, 578) and Muehlmann (1992, chap. 2), I argue that Berkeley is not an anti-realist about relations. In other words, Berkeley is committed to the view that whenever two things are alike, this is not merely a matter of comparison, but he thinks that they share at least one feature in the state of things *in rerum natura* – i. e. in the (causally) independent nature of things (cf. NB 305, 535 & 550 or PHK §§ 34 & 87). For instance, in §§ 66–67 of *De Motu*, Berkeley remarks that we have to distinguish mathematical hypotheses from the nature of things (*naturas rerum*) because those mathematical entities (*entia mathematica*) have no stable essence (*stabilem essentiam*) in the nature of things (*in rerum natura*). Rather (and presumably in distinction to the nature of things), they completely 'depend on the notion of the definer' (DM § 67). In the following, I will speak of these features *in rerum natura* as 'intrinsic properties', which can be discovered by comparing two things.[7]

In the second section, I scrutinise Berkeley's notion of likeness and demonstrate its hitherto underappreciated complexity by distinguishing between the previously mentioned three groups of likeness relations.[8] In the third step, I will demonstrate what the differences between representation and resemblance look like by spelling out the necessary and sufficient conditions for (resemblance-based) representation to obtain.

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7 On this interpretation, 'comparing' serves an epistemological role when it comes to likeness. Elsewhere (Fasko 2021, chap. 3) I have argued in detail that acts of comparing play a metaphysical role in instituting likeness relations. That is, drawing from the works of Saporiti (2006, chap. 7.4) and Stoneham (2002, chap. 7.4), I argued that Berkeley should be understood as a 'conceptual foundationalist' (Ott 2017). Such interpretations have been (implicitly) rejected by Peter West (2021), who has defended a 'realist' interpretation of Berkeley's notion of relations. For the sake of this chapter, I want to remain neutral on the question of the best interpretation and accept, for now, that Berkeley could have been a realist – although in distinction to West, I still argue that the *Notebooks* ought not to be fully disregarded in this context. Note, however, that everything I say here can easily be rendered consistent with my former conceptual foundationalist interpretation by putting more (metaphysical) emphasis on the mental acts in question.

8 I argue elsewhere and in more detail that there is a fourth group of likeness relations to consider, viz. 'functional similarity', which has relations as its relata (Fasko 2021, 177) and is crucial to understand the divine language hypothesis (cf. Fasko 2021, chap. 4). I will not address it in what follows and instead confine myself to the groups of likeness relations that can obtain between individual things.

1 Berkeley's understanding of relations and the role of comparing

In this section, I scrutinise Berkeley's understanding of relations and the role that mental acts of comparing play in their constitution. This is necessary for two reasons. First, despite the meagre scholarship that Berkeley's conception of likeness has attracted (cf. Atherton, chap. 6)[9], two mutually exclusive interpretations have been put forward. On the one hand, scholars such as Muehlmann (1992, chap. 2) and Ryan (2006, 578) have argued that Berkeley is an anti-realist about relations. That is, they interpret Berkeley as holding that relations are nothing but mental acts of comparing. On the other hand, West (2021, § 3.2) has most recently defended the position that Berkeley is a realist about relations. On this view, Berkeley holds that likeness relations 'are grounded upon the shared intrinsic properties of their relata' (West 2021, 532) and are thus independent of our mental acts of comparing. In this section, I argue that an anti-realist reading of Berkeley ought to be rejected on philosophical grounds, particularly because it conflicts with the basics of his metaphysics and the way Berkeley speaks about minds.[10]

The main reason such vastly differing interpretations of Berkeley's notion of relation have been advanced is arguably that Berkeley does not often comment (explicitly) on them. One particularly important remark, however, is found in the *Principles*: 'It is also to be remarked, that all relations including an act of the mind, we cannot so properly be said to have an idea, but rather a notion of the relations or habitudes between things' (PHK § 142). In this passage, Berkeley argues that we have no ideas of relations because they 'include' an act of the mind. Moreover, it seems that the inclusion of a mental act entails that relations are not passive entities in the same way that ideas are. However, it is unclear what it means to

9 This seems *prima facie* all the more surprising because Berkeley seemingly highlights their (epistemological) importance when he refers to relations as the third 'object of knowledge' in his 1734 revisions of § 89 of the *Principles*. This silence is also troubling from a contextual point of view inasmuch as the metaphysical status of relations has been a hotly debated topic, especially in the scholastic period (Brower 2018). Yet, the debate is far from over in the Early Modern period, which is evident, for instance, in Locke's discussion of relations in the *Essay* (cf. II.xxv).

10 In distinction to West (2021, 531–33), I do so while taking *Notebooks* seriously. In fact, I believe we ought to take these entries seriously and only reject them when they obviously conflict with his so-called 'published' remarks. After all, the *Notebooks* express what Berkeley thought (even though he did not write the entries for anybody but himself), and they provide the richest textual source when it comes the issue of relations. In that sense, I follow Roberts' (2007, 7) way of dealing with the *Notebooks*. For a recent interpretation that takes the *Notebooks* as seriously as any other works, cf. Daniel 2021 (esp. chap. 1).

say that relations 'include' a mental act and it needs to be clarified what kind of mental act likeness 'includes'. I will deal with these questions next in reverse order.

Berkeley explicitly states that likeness is a relation. In TVV § 39, for instance, he writes of the 'relation of similitude'. Furthermore, he is equally explicit concerning the mental act that likeness relations require: an act of comparing. There are several entries in Berkeley's *Notebooks* which suggest that there is a close connection between likeness and acts of comparing (NB 46–47, 51, 299, 378 & 861). This line of thought is, moreover, found in PHK § 104, where Berkeley writes: 'Indeed, if we take a view of the several phenomena, and compare them together, we may observe some likeness and conformity between them.'[11] This connection between likeness and comparing helps not only to answer the question concerning the mental act, but also to sharpen that about what it means to 'include' an act; in the case of likeness, the question becomes: what does it mean that such a relation 'includes' an act of comparing?

Robert Muehlmann (1992, chap. 2), one of the few scholars to deal with Berkeley's understanding of relations in detail, has argued for a strong reading of 'include.' According to Muehlmann's interpretation, Berkeley uses 'include' in the sense of 'consists of'. That is, according to Muehlmann's (1992, 29 & 67–68) interpretation, Berkeley is committed to the view that all relations are merely acts of the mind. In more recent scholarship, this line of interpretation has been adopted by Todd Ryan (2006, 578), who also draws attention to its major drawback: it restricts likeness to ideas, because Berkeley seems to repeatedly claim in the *Notebooks* that we can only compare ideas (NB 47, 51, 299, 378 & 861). If relations are nothing but mental acts of comparing, this means that likeness can only obtain between ideas. However, as Ryan points out, such a restriction would be problematic for Berkeley because volitions should be 'candidates for resemblance' as well.[12] While Ryan is

11 At least this reading suggests itself in the context of the NB entries. West, however, does not read this passage in the same way because there could be other ways that we come to know of likeness relations. More generally, West (2021, 534–536) does not think that acts of comparing do any important (metaphysical or epistemological) work for Berkeley's notion of likeness. But while he is right to stress that acts of comparing play a less important role in PHK, DHP, etc., PHK § 104 clearly indicates that they still play some role. Additionally, as West (2021, n. 6) admits, comparing still plays an important role for Berkeley's notion of analogy and metaphor. But as I have argued in detail, likeness plays a crucial role for both notions (cf. Fasko 2021, chap. 3.7–3.8).
12 Ryan 2006, 578. Ryan solves this problem by suggesting a more charitable reading of this claim which allows for a 'more limited result', according to which likeness in general is not restricted to ideas but 'immediate objects' of awareness (Ryan 2006, 578). While this allows for likeness between volitions, he points out that the resulting principle is 'too narrow' because it cannot secure that ideas and volitions are unalike (Ryan 2006, 579). Although I agree with Ryan on this, I think

right to stress this point, the problem such a restriction creates is arguably even more fundamental since a restriction of likeness to ideas conflicts with the basics of Berkeley's metaphysics.

Berkeley distinguishes two kinds of metaphysical entities: ideas and minds (PHK §§ 1–3). In the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley explicitly argues that other minds are like his own (DHP 231–232); even writing that they are, in a 'large sense', the 'image or idea' of his own (PHK § 140). Since this claim also includes God's mind, a restriction of likeness to ideas would entail that Berkeley could not uphold his commitment to the *imago-dei* thesis; that is, the thesis that human beings are made in the image of God after his likeness (cf. Gen 1, 26–27). This thesis implies that God and human beings are (in some sense) alike. Most notably and explicitly, Berkeley affirms his commitment to this thesis in his sermon 'On the Mystery of Godliness' where he states: 'The mind which is pure and spiritual [...] is made in the image of God' (*Works* VI, 88).[13]

A restriction of likeness to ideas would conflict with both his ontological dualism in general and the way he speaks about minds in particular.[14] However, this problem can be mitigated if we reject the reading by Muehlmann and Ryan; and there are further good reasons for doing so.

At first sight, it does indeed sound like Berkeley is committed to the claim that only ideas can be compared, but a closer look at the previously mentioned passages (NB 47, 51, 299, 378 & 861) reveals that Berkeley is not committed to such a restriction in the first place. Consider that the passages from the *Notebooks* support the attribution of two different versions of the claim that we can only compare ideas. The first is found in NB 51, 299 & 378. According to this version, we can only compare ideas, and nothing but ideas. Berkeley, for instance, states that we can only compare what we perceive (i. e. only ideas) (NB 51) and rhetorically asks: 'How can you compare anything besides your own ideas?' (NB 299). Finally, he says 'comparing is the viewing two ideas together', which entails that 'the mind can compare nothing but its' own ideas' (NB 378, 17–18).

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that this restricted principle is too narrow in a more fundamental sense, because a restriction of likeness to immediate objects of awareness would preclude that minds could be alike, which would be deeply problematic for Berkeley.

13 Cf. also the seventh sermon (*Works* VI, 95–96). Moreover, there are several passages in Berkeley's works where he commits himself to this thesis (cf. DHP 231–233; AMP 4.21–22; *Siris* §§ 333–334). I am grateful to Marc Hight for pointing out the passages in the sermons to me. A more recent discussion of Berkeley's interpretation of this thesis is found in John Russell Roberts' article: Roberts 2018, 152–57.

14 This problem is also acknowledged by Frankel (2009, 389–90), who, considering the aims of her paper, (justifiably) forgoes solving it. Also note that West's reading avoids the problem and allows that minds can be alike (West 2021, 546).

The second version of the comparability claim is found in NB 47 & 861. In NB 47, Berkeley rhetorically asks: 'Did ever any man see any other things besides his own ideas, that he should compare them to these & make these like unto them?'. In this entry, Berkeley raises the question of whether it is possible to compare an idea to anything other than an idea. While he does not give an explicit answer at this point, NB 861 makes it evident that he does not think that we can: 'What can an Idea be like but another Idea, we can compare it with Nothing else, a Sound like a Sound, a Colour like a Colour.' In NB 861, he explicitly answers the rhetorical question raised in NB 47 and says we can compare an idea 'with nothing else' but 'another Idea'.[15]

In short, the *Notebook* entries support ascribing two different versions of the comparability claim to Berkeley. In the first version, he says that only ideas can be compared, but in the second version the claim is that an idea can only be compared to other ideas. Considered in themselves, these entries are inconclusive. While one could argue that the textual evidence in the *Notebooks* slightly favours Berkeley's commitment to the claim that we can only compare ideas, the philosophical issues this would raise offer a strong reason against attributing this position to Berkeley. Especially since the entries that commit Berkeley to these fundamental problems are only found in the *Notebooks* and do not reappear in any of his so-called published works.[16] All of which suggest the following: if the *Notebooks* are taken seriously, Berkeley remains at least committed to the view that comparing plays an important epistemological role when it comes to likeness.[17] Yet, even if he endorsed it at some point, he comes to reject the notion that only ideas can be compared, in favour of the position that ideas can only be compared to other ideas. In other words, Berkeley endorses the view that we can only observe likeness be-

15 Given how similar the conclusion of NB 861 and PHK § 8 are (cf. Saporiti 2006, 222 n.3), it is surprising how little attention this entry received in discussions surrounding the LP. None of the previously mentioned commentators, including West (2021) and Bartha (2022), mention this entry. While West is critical about the *Notebooks* (and thus not inclined to pay attention to its entries), this particular entry and the similarity to PHK § 8 helps substantiate the claim that the *Notebooks* do contain views about relations that he retained beyond 1708.

16 Consider, moreover, that the entries 51, 299 & 378 can also be read as slightly hyperbolic versions of the claim that ideas can only be compared to other ideas (Bartha 2022, 15; Fasko 2021, 172). It is also worth noting that NB 861 basically makes the same point as PHK § 8, which strongly suggests that, even if there were two versions of the comparability claim, Berkeley comes to endorse the claim that ideas can only be compared to ideas.

17 Note that this point is confined to likeness alone. As will become evident, other mental acts are important for Berkeley's notion of resemblance-based mental representation. Also consider that someone like Peter West would reject this claim because he is not inclined to take the *Notebooks* seriously in this way.

tween ideas, which is no surprise because, as he famously states, 'an idea can be like nothing but an idea' (PHK § 8).

2 The complexity of Berkeley's notion of likeness

The previous section has established that Berkeley's claim that relations 'include' a mental act (PHK § 142) does not mean that they are reducible to said act. In the case of likeness, this claim rather entails that the mental act of comparing is at least necessary to observe that a likeness relation obtains which, in turn, exists due to some shared intrinsic property of the relata. In this section, I will establish that Berkeley's notion of likeness is considerably more complex than hitherto appreciated by focusing on these intrinsic properties. Doing so allows me to argue that Berkeley's writings warrant at least a threefold distinction of groups of likeness relations, all of which have a role to play in his account of resemblance-based mental representation. In other words, contrary to what is often tacitly assumed, 'likeness' does not always mean the same for Berkeley. Rather, there are subtle differences in Berkeley's employment of the term 'likeness', which pick out different kinds of things or different kinds of intrinsic properties in the same kind of things.

2.1 Generic Likeness

The first group of likeness relations I will consider is the one I called 'Generic Likeness.' Although Berkeley never uses the term 'Generic Likeness', it is inspired by his writings. In *De Motu*, for instance, Berkeley writes of *genus* when distinguishing between *res cogitans* and *res extensa* or *corporeas* (DM § 25; cf. also DM §§ 21 & 30), which can be plausibly read as mirroring the distinction between ideas and minds found in his other works. Generic likeness obtains between the same kinds of things in virtue of their generic intrinsic property: their passivity or activity. For instance, it obtains between *all and only* ideas *qua* their passive nature. While this is reaffirmed multiple times in Berkeley's writings, one of the most explicit passages is found in the *Principles:*[18]

> *All* our ideas, sensations, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive, there is nothing of power or agency included in them [...] whoever shall attend to his ideas, *whether of sense or reflexion*, will not perceive in them any power or activity. (PHK § 25, my emphasis)

18 Cf. also NB 643 & 843; PHK §§ 27, 89 & 139; DHP 213, 217 & 231.

Berkeley states that *all* ideas are passive, and as a result, all of them only exist when they are perceived. This holds for all ideas in virtue of their nature, whose distinct feature is their passivity. As Berkeley remarks, it holds for all ideas that 'their *esse* is *percipi*' (PHK § 3); the implicit rationale here being that this holds because all ideas are alike in this respect.

Crucially, not only ideas but also minds are generically alike. While ideas are passive, minds are active (PHK § 27), and it is this activity which makes all minds generically alike:

> *Thing* or *being* is the most general name of all, it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing common but the name, to wit, *spirits* and *ideas*. The former are *active, indivisible substances*. (PHK § 89)

According to Berkeley, minds and ideas are entirely distinct (i. e. different kinds of things); to use my terminology, they are generically heterogenous (i. e. unalike). However, given that all minds share the intrinsic feature of activity, i. e. they all agree in being 'active, indivisible substances', minds are generically alike with each other. To put it differently, a mind is active in virtue of its nature. That is, in contrast to ideas, their *esse* is *not percipi* but 'percipere or velle, i. e., agere' (NB 429).

In short, distinguishing the first group of likeness relations already makes it possible to solve the problems that anti-realist readings such as those of Muehlmann or Ryan face, because focusing on the shared intrinsic properties on the level of a genus of a metaphysical entity makes it possible to establish the following claim: that minds can be alike in virtue of their activity, while upholding Berkeley's commitment to the (epistemological) importance of the mental acts of comparing (to which Muehlmann and Ryan are committed). After all, this generic activity renders minds totally unlike the generically passive ideas, and in that sense, ideas are incomparable with minds. In Berkeleian words, if you compare minds with ideas, you will find that they are 'two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing common but the name [i.e., "thing" or "being"]' (PHK § 89).

2.2 Specific Likeness

Next to generic likeness, which obtains between *all* ideas in virtue of their passivity, there is also specific likeness. This group of likeness relations is restricted to the ideas of *one* sense because of the (specifically) different intrinsic properties they share qua being the ideas of that particular sense modality. That Berkeley distin-

guishes between the ideas or perceptions of our five sense modalities is well known. In the first section of the *Principles* he writes:[19]

> By sight I have the ideas of light and colours with their several degrees and variations. By touch I perceive, for example, hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and of all these more and less either as to quantity or degree. Smelling furnishes me with odours; the palate with tastes, and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition. (PHK § 1; cf. also DHP 249–250).

As Berkeley points out in the beginning of the *Principles,* each sense modality perceives something that is imperceptible to the remaining four. Given that Berkeley repeatedly refers to perceptions of our five sense modalities as 'species' or 'sorts' (NTV § 121), I speak of 'specific likeness' (cf. also NTV § 129; PHK § 44).

It is important to note that this group of likeness relations only obtains between the ideas or perceptions of a single sense modality. As Berkeley repeatedly stresses, the ideas or perceptions of different sense modalities are entirely 'heterogenous' (i. e. unalike) as far as their specific intrinsic properties are concerned. For example, with regard to the ideas of sight and touch he writes: 'The ideas of sight and touch make *two species*, entirely distinct and heterogeneous (my emphasis)' (PHK § 44).[20] As Berkeley explicitly says, the ideas of sight and touch are two different and distinct species of ideas. The reason for this is their differing (specific) nature as *ideas of a particular sense.* However, despite being specifically heterogenous, all ideas of different sense modalities are simultaneously generically alike in virtue of being passive entities (i. e. ideas).

This distinction between generic and specific likeness is faithful to Berkeley's writings because he not only explicitly connects the notions of 'species' and 'likeness', but even suggests that 'liker' and 'more of species' (NTV § 142) are synonymous with 'to be like unto' and 'to be of the same species' (NTV § 143). As Berkeley explains, colours such as red and blue are more like each other compared to tastes

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19 I will not address the question of whether minds may also be specifically alike, which seems plausible in light of Berkeley's distinction of the infinite and finite minds (DHP 212). Moreover, I cannot address the question of what additional differences there may be between finite minds, considering Berkeley (apart from humans) also seems to refer to angels (*Works* VIII, 38; Park 1972, 72–78) and non-human animals (*Works* VII, 222; Charles 2010) as finite minds. It might even be the case that there is an equivalent to natural resemblance in the case of minds. Cf. also West chap. 5 and Saporiti chap. 4 in this volume for more on the question of Berkeley's representationalism concerning other minds.

20 The so-called 'heterogeneity thesis' is a fundamental tenet of Berkeley and re-affirmed throughout his works: NB 31, 70, 138, 295; NTV §§ 41, 108, 131, 137 & 149; TVV § 41; DHP 201; AMP 4.9–10; cf. also Turbayne 1963; Atherton 1990, 8–9; Schwartz 2006: 55–66. For more on Berkeley's notion of mediate perception, which can 'bridge this gap', see Schwartz in this volume chap. 1.

for instance, because the colours are perceivable by the same sense and are always connected to ideas of extension (NB 484). In the subsequent entry (NB 484a) Berkeley writes: 'This I do not altogether approve of.' However, as Luce pointed out, the 'this' probably refers to 'simple ideas' and not the whole entry NB 484 (*Works* I, 61). Furthermore, Winkler (1989, 56n6) and Saporiti (2006, 230) have shown that Berkeley's remarks in NB 484 are consistent with his remarks on likeness, e. g. in the *Principles.* Thus, Berkeley's point in this entry is to say that a colour *qua* being a colour is only perceivable by sight and always extended; features which are given in virtue of its specific nature. This is true for all ideas of sight, which is why they are not only generically but also specifically alike. But an idea of sight is specifically unlike the ideas of other senses (i. e. specifically heterogenous) and generically unlike non-ideas such as minds (i. e. generically heterogenous).

Appreciating this difference between the generic and specific likeness of ideas helps to resolve the apparent (and virtually unconsidered) tension between Berkeley's heterogeneity-thesis and his claim that *all* ideas are passive (e. g. PHK § 89), which seems to imply that some ideas are simultaneously alike and entirely heterogenous (i. e. unalike). However, if we distinguish between generic and specific likeness, it becomes evident that Berkeley is committed to the view that all ideas are generically alike (inasmuch as they are passive entities), while being potentially specifically heterogenous (inasmuch as they are perceived by different sense modalities).

2.3 Natural Resemblance or Identity of Nature

With the previous distinction in mind, it is time to turn to the last group of relations that are pertinent for Berkeley's account of resemblance-based mental representation: what I call (drawing on Berkeley's remarks in NTV §§ 144 & 147) 'natural resemblance or identity of nature'. This group is different from the previous two groups because it is not concerned with additional intrinsic features of the relata beyond their generic passivity and their sense specific make-up. Rather, what sets this group apart is that it is uniquely dependent on a given finite perceiver, because it requires at least one of the perceiver's mental images (i. e. ideas of imagination) to obtain. As will become evident, mental images or ideas of imagination are mental representations of objects in nature (i. e. ideas of sense) in virtue of the intrinsic feature they copy via resembling it in that respect. Thus, the first thing to do is to become clearer on the difference between relevant objects in nature or ideas of sense and their copies, viz. ideas of imagination.

For instance, in the *Principles*, Berkeley distinguishes between ideas of sense and imagination (PHK § 30). According to Berkeley, the former do not represent anything at all (PHK § 33). They are not ideas of anything, but the building blocks out of which 'all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth' (PHK § 6) are assembled. That is, they are what the real things are composed of (PHK § 1). Crucially, they do not depend on finite minds for their existence or their order (PHK §§ 29–31). The ideas of imagination, on the other hand, are created by finite minds as the 'images', 'copies', or 'resemblances' of ideas of sense.[21] In PHK § 33, Berkeley states, for example, that the ideas of imagination are the '*images of things* [i.e. ideas of sense] which they copy and represent.' In PHK § 56, Berkeley, moreover, assimilates 'resemblance' with 'image', which, in turn, he uses interchangeably with 'likeness' (PHK § 137).[22] All of which leaves little room for doubt that ideas of imagination are the (mental) representations of ideas of sense. Note that they are images in the wide sense of the Latin *imago*. That is, they are not merely pictorial mental representations but mental replications or re-enactments of all the five (heterogenous) kinds of things we perceive by sense (PHK §§ 1–3).[23]

Berkeley's remarks also suggest that likeness is the mechanism through which ideas of imagination represent. The latter can be further substantiated when considering Berkeley's point that ideas of sight cannot be representations of ideas of touch by 'natural resemblance' (NTV § 144), and that it is a mistake to suppose an 'identity of nature' (NTV § 147) between them (cf. also TVV §§ 47 & 52). Although Berkeley's argumentation in the *New Theory* is limited to ideas of sight, which cannot copy or resemble ideas of touch (NTV §117), it becomes evident in the *Principles* that an 'identity of nature' or 'natural resemblance' cannot obtain between any of the five different kinds of ideas of sense. In fact, as established in the previous subsection, there are differences as far as the specific intrinsic properties of different kinds of ideas of sense are concerned. This entails that far from being identical in their nature, they are specifically heterogenous. When this specific nature is considered, there is no resemblance (the latter is only found on the level of their passive generic make-up). But where do we find natural resemblance or identity of nature, i. e. what do we need to compare in order to discover that it obtains?

Natural resemblance or identity of nature only obtains when there is at least one idea of imagination. In other words, it only obtains when an idea of something is a relata. When I have an idea of imagination, I imagine what it would be like to see the table in my study. If I succeed in imagining this, I will have produced a

21 Cf. also NB 657a; PHK §§ 1, 8–9, 14, 25–27, 87. For more on this, cf. Saporiti 2006, chap. 4.
22 Cf. also NB 684; NTV §§ 44 & 117.
23 Cf. also Saporiti 2011, 171.

mental copy of my former visual sense impression, which copies this impression in virtue of the natural resemblance or identity of nature. That is, my idea of imagination will resemble the original sense impression in all relevant (i. e. represented) respects. This idea of imagination will convey to me what it would be like to now visually perceive the brown colour of my table. Given the close connection between colours and (visual) extension (e. g. NTV § 130), this idea of imagination will even include the rectangular shape of my table, i. e. it will copy the distinct visible parts (cf. NTV §§ 141–143) of my table.[24]

To answer the previous question more explicitly, we can find natural resemblance or identity of nature between an idea of imagination and that of which it is a copy. The latter does not need to be an idea of sense but can be an idea of imagination, as when you try to remember what your memory (i. e. idea of imagination A_1) of something (i. e. idea of sense A) was like. Moreover, it is important to note that whatever naturally resembles is also specifically (and thus by extension also generically) alike. In other words, the (well-made) idea of imagination A_1 recreates in my mind what it would be like to actually perceive the original idea of sense A in mirroring its relevant generic and specific features as closely as possible – i. e. by trying to recreate an almost identical copy of its (generic and specific) nature. But while this can be done almost to a tee, it is important to note that that the idea of 'identity of nature' does not mean that imagination A_1 and the idea of sense A (or of imagination A_2, etc.) are numerically the same or that there are no qualitative differences at all. Berkeley contends that no idea of imagination can ever be as 'strong, lively, and distinct' (PHK § 30) as the idea of sense it copies. Furthermore, an idea of imagination will always be *my idea* (and thus depend on me for its existence) and not the real thing in the world it (originally) represents. Also, some of our ideas of imagination 'barely' represent their originals (cf. PHK 1), (presumably) because they hardly resemble them, as in the case where you forget what the exact eye colour of a deceased loved one looked like. So, when Berkeley speaks of an 'identity of nature', it has to be taken with a pinch of salt to mean that their nature is almost identical in that they resemble each other in all relevant (i.e. represented) respects.[25]

24 It is important to note that understanding ideas of imagination as representations of ideas of sense does not commit Berkeley to a representationalist theory of perception or mind (see Bolton 2008). Even where we have ideas of imagination, they do not always represent by 'natural resemblance' (Letter 9 & 10, 29–31) for this relation of likeness can only obtain between particulars. General ideas, on the other hand, are not images of general natures, but consist rather in an indifferent usage of particular ideas as Berkeley explains (PHK Intro §§ 11–12).

25 For a similar reading of 'identity of nature', see also West 2021, § 3.1.

More concisely, there is a natural resemblance or an identity of nature whenever there is at least one idea of imagination. For instance, there is this type of likeness relation between the idea of imagination A_1 and the idea of sense A which it copies. It also exists between idea of imagination A_1 and other ideas of imagination A_1, A_2, etc., which are re-enactments ultimately derived from the same original idea of sense A. There is, however, no natural resemblance or identity of nature between ideas of the same sense or between different ideas of imagination A_1, B_1, C_1, etc. (representing the ideas of sense A, B, C, etc. respectively). The ideas of imagination A_1 and B_1 may be specifically alike if both are representations of the same kind of idea of sense; and even if they represent ideas of different sense modalities, they are in any case generically alike as well as generically heterogenous with any non-idea.

3 The exact difference between resemblance and representation

The previous section has established that the complexity of Berkeley's notion of likeness has been hitherto underappreciated: it has been overlooked that his remarks warrant at least a threefold distinction between different groups of likeness relations. In this section, I use this threefold distinction to break new ground in Berkeley scholarship (see Bartha's chap. 2 in this volume) by spelling out the exact nature of the difference between resemblance and resemblance-based mental representation. This will be done by establishing the necessary and sufficient conditions for resemblance-based mental representation.

The first thing to note concerning Berkeley's account of resemblance-based mental representation is that it requires at least one idea of imagination to obtain because, according to Berkeley, only they are ideas of something (cf. § 2.3). This entails that this representational relation necessarily requires specific and generic likeness to obtain. After all, it holds for Berkeley that whatever naturally resembles something else is also specifically alike, which becomes evident when Berkeley rejects the notion that ideas of different sense modalities such as sight or touch (NTV § 144) could stand in a representational relation to each other. But with specific likeness comes generic likeness because the former can only obtain between things that are generically alike in the first place. As Berkeley argues, ideas are wholly passive and therefore entirely generically heterogenous to the (always active) minds (PHK § 89), and so ideas cannot be the '[r]esemblance or pattern of any active being' (PHK § 25).

Secondly, it needs to be noted that natural resemblance is not only necessary but sufficient for this kind of representation to obtain. Of course, the idea of imagination A_1 could never represent the idea of sense A if it is not (i) an idea (i. e. generically alike) and (ii) re-enacting the perception of the same sense modality (i. e. specifically alike). However, as we have seen, even more is required for the successful representation of the ideas of sense A. There needs to be a natural resemblance or identity of nature between it and the idea of imagination A_1. That is, the latter needs to be exactly similar in all the relevant or represented aspects. I have pointed out that this does not mean that there are no (numerical or qualitative) differences at all. Rather, it means that whatever is (successfully) represented is (in the best-case scenario) done so in virtue of being exactly similar to what it would be like to have the actual sense impression right now. Thus there cannot be a natural resemblance or identity of nature without there also being this kind of representational relation. After all, ideas of imagination are created with the intent of representing something. That is, they are created as ideas *of* something and if they fail to be ideas of that something, it is because they do not sufficiently resemble it. In other words, they lack a natural resemblance or identity of nature with the original.

The third and final thing to note is that resemblance-based mental representation is uniquely dependent on the mind of a finite perceiver: in virtue of requiring an idea of imagination, it requires a mental act of imagining to obtain. Berkeley argues that ideas of imagination are the product of a mental activity of a given finite perceiver (PHK §§ 28–30), In Berkeley's words: 'I find indeed I have a faculty of imagining, or representing to my self the ideas of those particular things I have perceived and of variously compounding and dividing them' (PHK Intro § 10). This 'faculty of imagining, or representing' seems to consist in a capacity to remember previous sense perceptions (i. e. ideas of sense), which we then can also compound and divide to create new ideas of imagination. In other words, the idea of imagination is created by the finite perceiver as a copy. This last point is important because it allows for an explanation as to why the representational relation is asymmetrical even though likeness relations are symmetrical. For while it is true that the idea of sense A naturally resembles the idea of imagination A_1 and vice versa, the latter is not on the same (metaphysical) footing with the former. After all, the idea of sense A is a divinely created original and the idea of imagination A_1 is created by a finite perceiver with the intention of being a copy.[26]

26 The same holds for the case where idea of imagination A_2 represents idea of imagination A_1 because the former is purposefully created as a copy of an already existing memory (which in this case works as the original to be represented). Thus, my account addresses Bartha's (2022, 5) symmetry concern.

In sum, resemblance-based mental representation necessarily requires an idea of imagination and thus a mental act of imagining as well as a specific and a generic likeness to obtain. Finally, there is natural resemblance or identity of nature, which is not only necessary but sufficient for this kind of representational relation to obtain.

Conclusion

The two goals of this paper were, first, to demonstrate that Berkeley's notion of likeness is more complex than hitherto appreciated, and second, to use this insight to see more clearly the difference between likeness and resemblance-based mental representation by spelling out the necessary and sufficient conditions for this kind of representation to obtain. I argued that Berkeley's remarks warrant at least a threefold distinction between different groups of likeness relations according to different intrinsic properties: generic likeness (obtaining between ideas in virtue of their passivity and between minds in virtue of their activity); specific likeness (obtaining between the five different kinds of ideas of sense respectively); and natural resemblance or identity of nature (obtaining between at least one idea of imagination and that which it is an idea of).

In the second half of the paper, I have established that resemblance-based mental representation requires natural resemblance or identity of nature, which entails that it necessarily requires an idea of imagination as well as generic and specific likeness. However, I argued that natural resemblance or identity of nature is also sufficient for this kind of representation to obtain because if there is a natural resemblance or identity of nature between two things, there is also a representational relation between them. Nonetheless, this kind of representation is not a symmetrical relation for Berkeley, because one of the relata (the idea of imagination) depends for its existence on a mental act of the finite perceiver.

In sum, by improving our understanding of the complexity of Berkeley's notion of likeness and how the latter relates to (resemblance-based) representation, my interpretation improves our understanding of Berkeley's 'doctrine of signs' in general, shedding further light on a cornerstone of his philosophy.[27]

27 I thank all the participants of this volume for their helpful feedback during our online workshop. Particularly, I would like to thank Bob Schwartz for his critical and constructive comments. The original research for this paper was carried out as a part of my Doc.CH grant by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNFS): http://p3.snf.ch/Project-172060. I thank them for their generous support. This paper is based on my essay "Representation, Resemblance and the Scope of George Berkeley's Likeness Principle", which co-won the Turbayne Essay Prize in 2019. I am indebted to

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the anonymous judges for their valuable criticisms. Furthermore, I want to thank all the participants of the Berkeley Workshop at UW Milwaukee in 2018 for their feedback and, in particular, Michael Jacovides for his helpful comments. Finally, I want to thank Margaret Atherton, John Blechl, Lisa Downing, Patrick Connolly, Katia Saporiti, and Yann Wermuth for their thoughtful comments on earlier drafts of this paper. Last but not least, my gratitude is due to Peter West for his tireless efforts.

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Katia Saporiti

4 Why Berkeley was not a Representationalist

Abstract: Berkeley criticises a specific version of indirect realism, often attributed to thinkers like Locke and Descartes, which says that we do not directly perceive things in the world, but rather *indirectly* perceive them by means of ideas in our minds which represent them. Katia Saporiti expands on that criticism. She argues in detail that Berkeley ought to be considered a realist with regard to sensible things and highlights the importance of his well-known distinction between ideas of sense and imagination in this context. As Saporiti points out, the former, ideas of sense, are not ideas (i. e. representations) *of* anything. Ideas of imagination, on the other hand, *are* representations, but only of particular sensible things. She contends that any thinking that goes beyond these things thus requires the usage of ideas in a way that significantly differs from what a representational theory of mind would assume.

Introduction

At first sight, the philosophy of George Berkeley involves a very simple ontology. Whatever exists is either an idea (something entirely passive) – or a spirit (an active principle). Ideas exist if and only if they are perceived by some mind (spirit) and spirits exist if and only if they perceive ideas.[1] Things become slightly more complicated if one takes into account the different kinds of ideas and spirits which Berkeley distinguishes: for example, ideas of sense and ideas of imagination, on the one hand, and finite spirits and God, on the other. But still, Berkeley does deny the existence of anything but ideas and spirits. He denies the existence of a material substance and of material things. There are no mind-independent things, things which are not themselves spirits and exist without (or 'outside') any spirit. The things we perceive by our senses (sensible qualities like colours, tastes, smells, figures, and consistencies or sensible objects like houses, mountains,

1 For the sake of argument, I shall assume that Berkeleyan minds must have ideas if they entertain thoughts or have volitions. As we shall see later, this assumption may be contested on account of a remark in a letter to Molyneux. But the point I want to make does not depend on the rejection of this assumption.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-007

and rivers) are, according to Berkeley, ideas or collections of ideas.[2] Their existence consists in their being perceived. Regarding the realm of the sensible, to be is to be perceived. *Esse est percipi.* Considering the all-important role ideas play in Berkeley's philosophy and noticing that Berkeleyan ideas (very unlike Platonic ideas and very much like ideas conceived of by other early modern thinkers) only exist within a mind, it is tempting to suppose that Berkeley endorses a representational theory of the mind. But he does not.

Representationalists hold that whoever perceives something – or in any sense conceives or thinks of something – entertains an inner representation of whatever it is that he perceives or thinks of. In what follows I will defend the claim that Berkeley is not a representationalist.[3] This becomes evident if one takes seriously his claim to hang on to the reality of sensible things, on the one hand, and his strict denial of the existence of abstract ideas, on the other. In a nutshell, my story goes as follows: Berkeley endorses realism in his philosophy by means of a distinction between two kinds of ideas: ideas of sense and ideas of imagination. But neither of these two sorts of ideas can justify us in calling Berkeley a representationalist. For Berkeleyan ideas of sense are not representations at all. They do not represent anything. Berkeleian ideas of imagination, on the other hand, are ideas we can only have of particulars which are perceivable through the senses. Thus, any thinking that goes beyond the mere picturing of a particular sensible thing cannot, according to Berkeley, depend on entertaining ideas in a way a representational theory of mind would assume.

Section 1

To refute the objection that his immaterialist hypothesis reduces reality to a kind of dream or fancy, Berkeley, in section 29 of his *Principles*, introduces a distinction between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination. This distinction seems to be ex-

2 How Berkeley's claim that sensible objects are collections of ideas is to be understood correctly is a matter of ongoing debate. At first sight, it seems to have some strange ontological implications. While some scholars would prefer not to attribute these to Berkeley (see Atherton 2020, 64, n.12) and rather speak of collections of sensible qualities than of collections of ideas, I take Berkeley to willingly endorse some strange-looking implications, as will become clear in what follows.

3 Representational theories of the mind in the sense I am concerned with here have been held in early modern times by Descartes and Locke, among others, but are also popular in contemporary philosophy of mind, where they often take the form of so-called computational theories of mind. Fodor's Language of Thought Hypothesis and Burge's ideas on the *Origins of Objectivity*, to name just two, both imply that basic mental entities (which have content or meaning) determine what our cognitive states or processes are about (Fodor 1975, Burge 2010; see Pitt 2022).

haustive. Every idea we may have is either an idea of sense or an idea of imagination. Let us look at these two kinds of ideas in turn. Ideas of sense are produced in us by God. They are not of our own making. They are systematically ordered in a way we can detect. Generally, they are more lively and less dependent on our will than ideas of imagination, which we produce ourselves. Everything perceived by the senses is an idea of sense. And everything perceived by the senses is, according to Berkeley, perceived immediately.

As we learn from the very first section of the *Principles*, the objects we perceive are collections of sensible qualities which we have observed to go together. We take these qualities to be one thing, and to this thing we give one name. Berkeley takes these qualities to be ideas or sensations that cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them (PHK § 3). He also assures us that we cannot perceive anything but our own ideas or sensations.

> For what are the forementioned objects [houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects] but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations. (PHK § 4)[4]

I've explained elsewhere how exactly Berkeley's argument in the first few sections of the *Principles* unfolds, and so I will not dwell on it here.[5] Instead, I want to point out two things. First, Berkeley asserts sensible qualities as well as sensible objects to be *ideas*. Second, Berkeley claims sensible qualities as well as sensible objects to be *perceived immediately*.

It has been argued that Berkeley could not have regarded sensible objects (i. e. collections of ideas) as ideas, for these collections are more than just (unordered) sets of ideas.[6] It's not just any set of sensations that constitutes a sensible object. We are not free to choose which of our ideas we take to be one thing. Rather, in taking several ideas to form one object, we respond to the systematic relations that hold between those ideas – relations that hold independently of us and obey the laws of nature. These relations, it is argued, are constitutive parts of the collections of ideas we hold to be sensible things. But, according to Berkeley, relations are not perceivable. Therefore, sensible objects (Berkeley's collections of ideas) cannot be regarded as ideas. They are constructions from the ideas we immediately perceive. These constructions themselves are not perceivable.

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4 See also DHP 214–215, where we read: 'It is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas, and that no idea can exist unless it be in a mind. […] The things, I say, immediately perceived, are ideas or sensations, call them which you will.'

5 Saporiti 2006, 148–155.

6 E. g. by Desirée Park 1972, chap. II; see also Bracken 1958, 41–53.

This argument against calling Berkeleyan sensible objects ideas is, however, not supported by the text.[7] Nor is it totally convincing. In perceiving something as one individual item, I do not usually perceive the reason why I perceive it as one item. Often, I will not even know of such a reason. According to Berkeley, the fact that we take certain qualities (i.e. some of our sensations or ideas) to be one thing – e.g. an apple – is due to habits and expectations which we develop from early childhood on. These habits and expectations for their part are due to the systematically ordered way in which our ideas of sense occur. To perceive a collection of qualities as one item, one does not have to perceive the relations between these qualities. They are not additional elements of the set of related ideas we take to be one thing.[8]

As regards the second point, it has often been doubted that, according to Berkeley, we perceive sensible *objects* immediately. For the collections of ideas which form a sensible object like an apple comprise more sensible qualities than we perceive. At any given moment we will only immediately perceive a part of the collection of ideas that constitutes the apple. The apple in its entirety is thereby perceived only mediately. But this is unconvincing too. For to perceive only part of an object does not mean failing to perceive the object or perceiving it only indirectly. Most of the times we see only part of the objects we see. If I stand in front of a house, I will *ceteris paribus* see the house, even though I do not see its back (not even indirectly). It would be strange (contradict common sense and our ordinary way of speaking) to insist that we do not, or only indirectly or mediately, see the house.[9] But even somebody who insists for some philosophical reason that we perceive objects like houses, trees, rivers, etc. only indirectly or mediately will have to acknowledge that this is not Berkeley's view. For some of Berkeley's arguments hinge on identifying sensible things with things immediately perceived. Thus, in the first of the *Dialogues* Hylas and Philonous agree upon calling '*sensible things […] those only which are immediately perceived by sense*' (DHP 175). And in the third Dialogue we read:

> Wood, stones, fire, water, flesh, iron, and the like things, which I name and discourse of, are things that I know. And I should not have known them, but that I perceived them by my senses; and things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived. (DHP 230)

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7 See e.g. PHK § 1 for sensible qualities and PHK § 4 for sensible objects being called ideas.
8 I have argued this point elsewhere, see Saporiti 2003.
9 One could try to make sense of the concept of indirect or mediate perception by saying, for example, that somebody who looks at reflections in a mirror or at a photograph indirectly sees the things reflected or photographed. But I do not hold this to be a very promising line of thought either. And, for reasons explained in the next section, this suggestion is of no help if we are trying to understand Berkeley's concept of an idea of sense.

Berkeley holds (contrary to Descartes or Locke) that we do immediately perceive the things we ordinarily believe and claim to see, hear, feel, taste and smell. They include both sensible qualities and sensible objects. According to him, our knowledge of sensible objects is not mediated by something that differs from sensible objects by being immediately perceivable. The two claims that, first, we perceive only our own ideas and sensations and, second, that we perceive houses, mountains, rivers, and the like are compatible within Berkeley's theory. But the reason why they are compatible is not that we perceive the former (our ideas) directly and the latter (sensible objects or collections of ideas) indirectly. The reason is that our ideas are part of the collections of ideas that constitute the sensible objects we perceive. And indeed, someone who only perceives part of an object can often and by the same token be said to perceive the object.

Section 2

Berkeley wanted to refute scepticism, which he believed to threaten science and religion. Therefore, it is of some importance to him that we really perceive the things we perceive immediately. Any theory of perception that claims otherwise and introduces further entities as the only ones of which we can be said to be immediately aware as being involved in perception lies open to the sceptic's attack. For there will be no way of directly comparing what we are immediately aware of with something we are not immediately aware of. According to representational theories of perception, we perceive apples, mountains, rivers, houses, etc. only mediately. In sense perception, these mind-independent entities cause ideas in us which represent their causes to us. But mediation can go wrong, misrepresentation is possible. If from whatever we are immediately aware of in perception we must draw conclusions as to the existence and nature of the objects perceived, the question will always remain whether our conclusions are justified. Representational theories of perception play into the hands of the sceptic, who claims that we can never know for sure about the nature and existence of mind-independent entities we perceive with our senses.

> Colour, figure, motion, extension and the like, considered only as so many sensations in the mind, are perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived. But if they are looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then are we involved all in scepticism. We see only the appearances, and not the real qualities of things. What may be the extension, figure, or motion of any thing really and absolutely, or in it self, it is impossible for us to know, but only the proportion or the relation they bear to our senses. Things remaining the same, our ideas vary, and which of them, or even whether any of them at all represent the true quality really existing in the thing, it is out of our reach to de-

> termine. So that, for aught we know, all we see, hear, and feel, may be only phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with the real things, existing in *rerum natura.* All this scepticism follows, from our supposing a difference between things and ideas, and that the former have a subsistence without the mind, or unperceived. (PHK § 87)

By developing an account of immediate or direct perception, Berkeley hopes to disarm the sceptic. He declares perceivable things to be ideas because he believes that we have immediate and complete knowledge of our own ideas. Ideas of sense do not represent the things we perceive. They just are the things we perceive. It is the supposition of a twofold existence of things – as they are in themselves outside the mind and as a representation in the mind – which Berkeley holds to be responsible for epistemological confusion.

> [...] as to ideas or unthinking things, our knowledge of these hath been very much obscured and confounded, and we have been led into very dangerous errors, by supposing a twofold existence of the objects of sense, the one *intelligible*, or in the mind, the other real and without the mind. (PHK § 86)

Berkeley clearly wants to get rid of everything that stands between us and the things we perceive. According to him, nothing mediates between things perceived and the perceiving mind: no idea, no perception or representation, no mental image which represents the thing perceived to us. There are no mental entities we are immediately aware of in perception while our access to the things perceived is only an indirect one. Berkeleyan ideas of sense must not be thought of as a *tertium quid* which stands between us and the thing perceived.

Further evidence that Berkeley did not want to think of ideas of sense as representations at all is provided by the following entries in his *Notebooks:*

> Of & thing causes of mistake (NB 115)
>
> The referring Ideas to things w^{ch} are not Ideas, the using the Term, Idea of, is one great cause of mistake [...] (NB 660)

To be sure, Berkeley's concept of an idea of sense raises many pressing questions. He maintains that perceivable things are ideas we are immediately aware of in perception and that all we are immediately aware of in perception are our own ideas. Of our own ideas, he believes, we have complete knowledge, and ideas exist if and only if they are perceived. How then, can Berkeley account for a sensible object's being perceived by more than one person, or at different times? How can he explain the continuous existence of sensible things? And how, according to Berkeley, can we ever be wrong in our judgements about the sensible world? How can a sensible thing seem to us to have a quality which in fact it does not have?

And how are we to account for our achievements in the natural sciences? Just how Berkeley deals with these questions, and whether his answers are satisfactory or not, is a matter of ongoing debate. A coherent picture of Berkeley's theory of perception emerges if we take sensible things to be collections of ideas which comprise more than just our own ideas at a given moment.[10] Besides ideas of God, the complete collection (i. e. the whole sensible thing) will contain all the ideas of sense God has produced, produces or will produce in any finite being that has perceived, perceives, or will perceive the sensible thing in question. This may of course sound strange, but perhaps it is just less familiar than the concept of a material substance in which sensible qualities inhere as its *modi.* Be this as it may, no interpretation of Berkeley's writings that declares an idea of sense to be a representation of the thing perceived can be considered adequate. To insist that ideas of sense are representations of a sensible thing perceived could only mean to take them to represent a whole of which they are part. But this would involve a very different sense of 'representation' from the one used in representational theories of perception. Worse, it would obscure one of Berkeley's main targets. Therefore, I believe it is quite misleading to call Berkeley a representationalist on account of his concept of an idea of sense.

The matter appears less tidy if one looks at Berkeley's *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision.* Here, he distinguishes between immediate and mediate (or true) objects of sight. He regards the ideas of touch suggested to the mind by the ideas of sight as *mediate* objects of sight. According to this view, we *indirectly* perceive tangible objects by sight.[11] On this account, the objects we *erroneously* take to be perceivable by sight *and* touch turn out to be 'ideas of sight as connected with those of touch'. They are connected by our imagination because of their constant and systematic covariation. But the account of perception in Berkeley's *Principles* and in his *Dialogues* is a slightly different one. Here, Berkeley does not, as he did in the *New Theory of Vision*, suppose that objects of sight exist outside the mind, and he does not decry the belief that there are ordinary objects perceivable by different senses to be an error. Rather, he insists on being a realist concerning the existence of perceivable objects. Perceivable objects not only exist in our imagination (i. e. as ideas of imagination); they are ideas of sense and they are perceived by us.

10 I have tried to draw such a picture in Saporiti 2003 and to answer some of the aforementioned questions in Saporiti 2008. I suspect that, while coherent interpretations of the relevant aspects of Berkeley's philosophy can indeed be given, they all will have to acknowledge that in the end Berkeley does not gain much of an advantage over the representational realist when it comes to refuting scepticism.

11 NTV §§ 51 & 54.

> First then, it will be objected that by the foregoing principles, all that is real and substantial in Nature is banished out of the world: and instead thereof a chimerical scheme of ideas takes place. All things that exist, exist only in the mind, that is, they are purely notional. What therefore becomes of the sun, moon, and stars? What must we think of houses, rivers, mountains, trees, stones; nay, even of our own bodies? Are all these but so many chimeras and illusions on the fancy? To all which, and whatever else of the same sort may be objected, I answer, that by the principles premised, we are not deprived of any one thing in Nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or any wise conceive or understand, remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever. There is a *rerum natura*, and the distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force. (PHK § 34)

In the *Principles* and the *Dialogues*, it is particularly important to Berkeley that we perceive sensible objects themselves and that we can gain knowledge of them in perception.

Yet another path of insisting on the claim that Berkeleyan ideas of sense are representations opens if one looks at Berkeley's idea of a visual or universal language of the Author of Nature. According to Berkeley's *Theory of Vision*, what we take to be one perceivable object (e. g. a tree) comprises distinct objects of different senses (e. g. a visible and a tangible tree), and the visible tree or features of it will designate (represent, if you wish) the tangible tree, or features of it, respectively.[12] In terms of the language of God, which Berkeley refers to in the *Principles*, the sensible things and ongoings (events) in the sensible world that we regard as causes and effects are, strictly speaking, not causes and effects but rather signs and things signified.[13] But, in this linguistic sense of 'representation', there is no necessary connection between an idea and that which it is an idea of. Ideas of sense, taken as expressions of the visual language or the language of God, are not individuated by what they represent. Therefore, they do not lend themselves to defending any position which takes ideas to be mental items which are caused in us whenever we perceive something and which represent to the mind whatever is perceived. No such position can legitimately be attributed to Berkeley.

Section 3

But what about the ideas of imagination? At first sight, they may seem to deserve being called 'mental representations'. Ideas of imagination, as opposed to ideas of sense, are ideas *of* something. Berkeley calls them images of the things they copy or represent, and he concedes that ideas of imagination, in contrast to ideas of

12 NTV § 147; TVV §§ 40 & 48.

13 PHK §§ 65–66; see TVV § 13.

sense, are ideas in the true sense of the word (PHK § 33). Whenever we imagine or remember something, we form ideas of imagination. It is important to note, though, that whatever an idea of imagination is an idea of, must again be an idea. For there are no things other than ideas and minds within Berkeley's ontology, and of a mind we cannot, according to Berkeley, have an idea. Ideas of imagination, therefore, are ideas of ideas: ideas either of ideas of sense or of ideas of imagination. Still, ideas of imagination clearly are mental representations. Representation in Berkeley's view rests on similarity. The relation between an idea of imagination and whatever it is an idea of is guaranteed by likeness. The reason why an idea of imagination of *x* is an idea, not of *y*, but of *x* is that it is more similar to *x* than to *y*. But ideas of imagination can be like the things they are ideas of just because these things too are ideas. For according to Berkeley, nothing but an idea can be like an idea (PHK § 8). But if Berkeleyan ideas of imagination are mental representations, why not call him a representationalist?

It is doubtful that Berkeley's concept of an idea of imagination makes him a representationalist. For although ideas of imagination, according to Berkeley, clearly are mental representations, there are not many sorts of things we can have these ideas of. We can have ideas of imagination only of particulars – where particulars are numerically one and qualitatively completely determined. We cannot, according to Berkeley, have abstract ideas.[14] We have no ideas of any sort, kind, group, or class of things. We do not have ideas of qualities in general, like green, or of abstract things like love, freedom, justice, unity, or existence. Nor do we have ideas of mathematical or physical quantities – of numbers or of forces. All our ideas of imagination are, according to Berkeley, particular ideas of sensible qualities or objects. As ideas can only be like ideas, we cannot form an idea of God,[15] of the human mind and its operations, of ourselves, or of anybody else. We do not, according to Berkeley, have ideas of relations or of anything which itself is active or involves an action. In short: we do not have an idea of most of the things we think about. But this means that Berkeley is not a representationalist. For the representationalist holds that thinking can be explained in terms of inner representations. According to a representationalist theory of mind, thinking about *x*, for example, involves having an idea of *x*. And it is precisely the fact that

14 Berkeley unfolds his reasons for denying the existence of abstract ideas in the introduction to the *Principles.*

15 God, according to Berkeley, is a spirit, an active principle. No idea can be like God or any other spirit or active principle (as ideas are all passive). And, as ideas of imagination are copies of whatever it is they are ideas of, no idea can be an idea of God. Of God and other spirits and their operations we may, according to Berkeley, have notions, but not ideas (PHK §§ 27 & 89–90; DHP 231–232; see NB 782).

in thinking we have an idea, not of *y*, but of *x*, which is held responsible by the representationalist for our thought's referring to (being about) *x* and not to (being about) *y*. This is the sense in which the content of our thoughts is supposed to be dependent on those mental representations that are entertained by us in the process of thinking.

But, according to Berkeley, if a relation of representation rests on similarity, it can only hold between particulars. That is why there can be no idea of a plurality of things, as for instance of all triangles or of the triangle in general. While an idea of a triangle may be similar to all triangles, it cannot be *equally* similar to all of them. For that to be possible it would have to be excluded that the idea is more similar to one triangle than to others. If it resembled one triangle to a higher degree than another one, it would not represent them both but rather this one and not the other. It would be an idea, not of that triangle, but of this one. If it did not resemble one triangle more than another one, it would not be the idea of a triangle. The same degree of similarity between a given idea and all triangles can obtain only if the idea is not an idea of a triangle. An idea of a square figure, for instance, could in *this* sense resemble all triangles to the same degree: that it is the idea of a (particular) geometric figure delimiting a surface by straight lines. In the manuscript version of Berkeley's introduction to *Principles* this consideration plays an important role in his criticism of the doctrine of abstract ideas. In this introduction Berkeley writes immediately after having observed that ideas represent things in a way very different from the way words represent things other than themselves:

> Whence it follows, that an idea is not capable of representing indifferently any thing or number of things it being limited by the likeness it beares to some particular existence, to represent it rather than any other. The word Man may equally be put to signify any particular man I can think of. But I cannot frame an idea of man, which shall equally represent & correspond to each particular of that sort of creatures that may possibly exist. (*Manuscript Introduction* to PHK, *Works* II, 129)

It is impossible that an idea is equally similar to all human beings and at the same time less similar to all non-human entities than to all human beings. That is why there cannot be an idea of a human being in general. Only particulars can stand in a relation of representation based on similarity – and such particulars are numerically one and qualitatively completely determinate.

In the context of our question whether Berkeley's views amount to some kind of representationalism, it is interesting that Berkeley seems to have held the view that, unless we were able to use a language, we would not be capable of making mental reference to objects as belonging to specific kinds or sorts or classes. According to Berkeley, the thoughts of a being without a language could treat nothing but particulars.

> Of great use & [...] Importance to Contemplate a man put into the World alone wth admirable abilitys. & see how after long experience he would know wthout words. Such a one would never think of Genera & species or abstract general Ideas. (NB 566)

> That Man [a Solitary Man] shall have a constant train of Particular Ideas passing in his Mind. Whatever he sees, hears, imagines, or any wise conceives is on all hands, even by the Patrons of Abstract Ideas, granted to be particular. [...] It is true, the Knowledge of Our Solitary Philosopher is not like to be so very wide and extended, it being confin'd to those few Particulars that come within his own observation. (*Manuscript Introduction* to PHK, *Works* II, 141)

Thus, for Berkeley no need arises to explain mental reference to things of a kind independently of linguistic reference to such things. As regards all collections of particulars, the intentionality of thought seems, according to him, ultimately due to our ability to make linguistic reference to things belonging to such collections. But even though Berkeley probably held this view, even though he rejected the so-called cognitivist thesis (often attributed to Locke) that every linguistic expression must stand for an idea, and even though he denied that general terms stand for abstract ideas (because he did not believe in abstract ideas), he nonetheless strove to explain in which sense ideas can be general. And again, his explanation makes it very clear that the content of our thoughts does not depend on our ideas.

Section 4

In Berkeley's opinion, the generality of ideas rests on our ability to *construct* a certain kind of representational relation between an idea and the things belonging to a given sort. It is by using ideas in a certain way that we succeed in establishing a kind of relation between these ideas and things of a given sort, and this relation is conceived as resembling that between sign and object signified. Berkeley holds that, in the same way as linguistic expressions, ideas acquire generality and come to function as representations of things belonging to various specific sorts of things by virtue of the fact that we use them as signs for those sorts of things. Signs, however, are according to Berkeley arbitrary and conventional, and their relation to the things signified by them is a relation which does not rest on an alleged similarity between signs and what they may signify.

A particular idea can be used as a sign for things belonging to various, and perhaps even indefinitely many, kinds. A consequence of this is that the content of our thoughts cannot depend on those ideas that we may entertain in the process of thinking. In Berkeley's view, one and the same person may, for example, be conceived of as a representative of all human beings or of all fair-haired women or of all physicians. Thus, the question whether our relevant thoughts refer to human

beings in general or to fair-haired women or to physicians cannot solely depend on an idea of ours. What we think of depends on how we make use of a particular idea as a sign. This is the sense in which we are meant to read Berkeley's claim that every general sort of knowledge (and every general thought) concerns signs. General ideas are signs.

It often happens that commentators underestimate the bearing of Berkeley's claim that, basically, all our ideas are particular ideas. Berkeley differs from Locke, for instance, in not holding that everything that in some sense may become an object of conscious thought is an idea. We do not have ideas of everything we may think of or direct our propositional attitudes to. As soon as our thoughts are directed towards matters different from particulars, we are, strictly speaking, not having ideas of what our thoughts are about.

Asked by Molyneux whether he believed it possible to think without entertaining ideas, Berkeley replied that in his view this was indeed possible: 'You desire to know my Thoughts, […] whether We can reason without Ideas […] I answer, that We may very well, and in my Opinion often do, reason without Ideas […]' (Letter 9). To the extent Berkeley believes that we may talk and think about many things of which we have no ideas he is not to be regarded as a representationalist.

As we cannot, according to Berkeley, have an idea of God, we cannot have ideas of the mysteries of Christianity either.[16] On the other hand, no one would want to claim that in Bishop Berkeley's view we are incapable of believing in the Resurrection, the Holy Trinity, or the Immaculate Conception because every mental activity or state essentially involving conceptual content (or, in brief, every cognitive process or state) consists in having ideas. Berkeley did not believe that we cannot think of *x* without having an idea of *x*. Those mental entities which are called 'ideas' by Berkeley, and which can justly be regarded as mental representations of the things they are ideas of, are by no means the determinants of the content of our thoughts. This, then, is the sense in which Berkeley was not a representationalist.

Conclusion

Consequently, Berkeley seems to be committed to the view that ideas play a less important, or rather, a very different role in thinking than the doctrine of repre-

16 See fn. 19; in *Alciphron* Euphranor explains how a man 'may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, […] although he does not frame in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of trinity, substance, or personality' (AMP 7.8, 297).

sentationalism suggests. According to Berkeley's account, it is not only possible for us to think about particulars of which we have no ideas (e. g. God, or ourselves), but it is for us to decide whether to render, or to abstain from rendering, what we are thinking about more vivid by means of ideas – e. g. by visualising certain perceptible particulars. Imagining and thinking are different matters, and Berkeley does not believe that every act of thinking involves an act of imagination. Thought may or may not be assisted by imagination. A passage where Berkeley's way of distinguishing between mere imagination and thinking, between the faculties of imagination and understanding, and between the imaginable and the thinkable becomes particularly clear can be found in the seventh dialogue of his *Alciphron.* There he writes: 'Now, it is certain we imagine before we reflect, [...] Hence it is natural to assist the intellect by imagination, [...] We substitute things imaginable for things intelligible' (AMP 7.13, 306).

As I have argued, Berkeley does not hold a representational theory of perception, nor does he subscribe to a representational theory of the mind. The central assertion of these theories is the claim that whenever we perceive something, or think of or about something, we have a mental representation which by its own nature presents to the mind that of which it is a representation. Even though in some cases, i. e. when we imagine, dream, or hallucinate to perceive something, we do in fact, according to Berkeley, form an idea of the very thing we imagine, dream or hallucinate to perceive, it would be misleading to call Berkeley a representationalist. For, in his view, it is only of perceivable particulars that we have these mental representations. To be sure, we may find other forms of representation in Berkeley, such as his doctrine of a language of vision or his theory of cause and effect as sign and thing signified, or his account of general ideas. What these have in common, though, is that they do not, according to Berkeley, rest on necessary connections between representation and what is represented. What is represented is not determined by the idea representing it.

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Peter West

5 Is There Anybody Out There? Berkeley's Indirect Realism About Other Minds

Abstract: Berkeley's realism about sensible things is the starting point of Peter West's chapter, in which he addresses a possible inconsistency in Berkeley's epistemology: he rejects indirect realism about sensible things but defends indirect realism when it comes to the existence of other minds. Berkeley's view is that we do not know other minds directly, like we know our ideas, but indirectly: via certain ideas which *signify* them. This account of knowledge of other minds looks structurally similar to the account of knowledge of external things (the indirect realist account) that Berkeley rejects on the grounds that it leads to skepticism. Should Berkeley's own views lead him to reject indirect realism about other minds too? West provides reasons for thinking that Berkeley *can* consistently defend this account despite his criticisms of representationalism elsewhere.

Introduction

Berkeley maintains that while we cannot gain direct knowledge of the existence of other minds, we nonetheless perceive "signs and effects" (DHP 233) which inform us of their existence. This seems to commit Berkeley to an indirect realist account of knowledge of (the existence of) other minds. This seems noteworthy given that indirect realism (about *material objects*) is the view that Berkeley attributes to his materialist opponents and criticizes. Thus, the following interpretative question arises:

> Can Berkeley consistently endorse indirect realism about other minds while rejecting indirect realism about material objects on the charge that it leads to skepticism?

Versions of this interpretative question, and the implicit objection to Berkeley that lays behind it, have been raised by Jonathan Bennett (1971), Lorne Falkenstein (1990), and Melissa Frankel (2009). According to Bennett, the outlook is not good for Berkeley: his position commits him to skepticism about the existence of other minds. Meanwhile, Falkenstein and Frankel have argued that Berkeley can avoid this skeptical conclusion but need not appeal to knowledge of our own mind to do so. Against both interpretative claims, I argue that by appealing to knowledge of our own mind, Berkeley's account of other minds can avoid the skepticism that he thinks materialist indirect realism leads to.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-008

Just as (according to Berkeley) materialists claim that we can only gain indirect knowledge of mind-independent, material objects via our ideas, Berkeley similarly maintains that we can only gain indirect knowledge of *other minds* via ideas. Broadly speaking, then, Berkeley's epistemology of other minds mirrors his opponent's epistemology of material things. The interpretative question raised above is pressing because Berkeley argues that indirect realism about material objects inevitably leads to skepticism concerning their existence. As he puts it, if "[ideas] are looked on as notes or images, referred to *things* or *archetypes* existing without the mind, then we are all involved in skepticism" (PHK § 87). He thinks there is something wrong with indirect realism: it fails to provide an account of how we do in fact gain knowledge of the existence of certain objects. On this basis, one might worry that if Berkeley is an indirect realist about *other minds*, then, by his own lights, his view must lead to skepticism about *their* existence. In other words, it looks like Berkeley's objection to indirect realism about material objects undermines his own indirect realism about other minds.[1]

However, in this chapter, I argue that while there *are* significant similarities between the materialist's epistemology of material objects and Berkeley's epistemology of other minds, there is also an important difference that ensures he can criticize the former (on the charge of leading to skepticism) while endorsing the latter. Berkeley's concern with indirect realism about material objects is that we could never *verify* that our ideas accurately represent what we take them to represent. We can never get around the "veil of ideas" and confirm that things are as they seem since *all* our knowledge of them is gained via ideas *in the first instance.* Consequently, we have no prior knowledge of them with which to compare our ideas. In the case of minds, however, Berkeley's view is that we do have prior knowledge: the direct access we have to our own mind. This means that, when it comes to other minds, we can get around the veil of ideas since there is at least one instance in which we can see what's on the other side of that veil: the case of our mind. For this reason, I argue that Berkeley can consistently endorse indirect realism about other minds while rejecting indirect realism about material objects (henceforth: "materialist indirect realism") on the ground that it leads to skepticism.

In section one, I provide some background to Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds, laying the groundwork for the interpretative claims that follow. In section two, I show that Berkeley is an indirect realist about knowledge of other minds. For Berkeley, we gain knowledge of other minds indirectly by perceiving

1 This could also be cashed out as a concern about the consistency of Berkeley's own view (rather than an interpretative concern). However, I will show that both worries can be alleviated.

certain collections of ideas (such as human bodies and instances of language-usage) that allow us to infer their existence. Finally, in section three, I explain why Berkeley thinks that indirect realism about material objects leads to skepticism and why this does not undermine his endorsement of indirect realism about other minds.

1 Berkeley on Other Minds

In his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Thomas Reid claims that Berkeley's idealism leads to solipsism. In Berkeley's system, he writes: "What I call a father, a brother, or a friend, is only a parcel of ideas in my own mind" (Reid 1785, 168). As Reid understands Berkeley, it follows that since "to exist" means "to be perceived" then it must follow that other people exist by being perceived. This would entail that other people exist only in the mind. One can imagine Reid reminding us that, after all, for Berkeley a thing's *esse* is *percipi* (PHK § 5). But readers familiar with Berkeley's ontology will be aware that this is an oversimplification of his analysis of the term "exist." In fact, Berkeley maintains, "exist" can mean one of *two* things. On the one hand, for a sensible thing to exist is for it to be perceived. On the other, for *a mind* to exist is for it *to perceive.* As he puts it in the *Notebooks*, *esse* is "percipi *or percipere*" (NB 429, my emphasis).[2] And in the *Principles:*

> *Thing* or *Being* is the most general name of all; it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing in common but the name, viz. *spirits* and *ideas.* (PHK § 89).

Reid's objection only gets off the ground if "exists" applies univocally (and means "to be perceived") to ideas and minds. Since that is not Berkeley's view, Reid's objection is unsuccessful.[3] However, Reid's concern does raise questions about *knowledge of* the existence of other minds in Berkeley's system – since they are not the kinds of things that can be perceived (PHK § 2).

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2 The notebook entry reads: "[e]xistence is percipi or percipere" (to be is to be perceived or to perceive) to which Berkeley adds "or velle i:e. agere" (to will, i. e., act) (NB 429).

3 Berkeley was clearly aware that such objections were likely to be leveled at him and thus has the materialist Hylas raise a similar concern in *Three Dialogues:* "to me it seems that, according to our own way of thinking and in consequence of your own principles, it should follow that you are only a system of floating ideas, without any substance to support them" (DHP 233). Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds, in the *Three Dialogues,* is presented as a response to that objection.

Berkeley's view is that we do not perceive minds but rather "signs and effects indicating distinct finite agents like ourselves" (DHP 233).[4] He explains, "we do not see a man, if by 'man' is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do" (PHK § 148). "Man", here, does not pick out a body, but a mind. Berkeley's point is that (pace Reid's reading) people (or strictly, their minds) are not the kinds of things we perceive (like ideas) but the kinds of things we know indirectly *via ideas.* As he puts it:

> I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas that inform me there are certain particular agents like my self, which accompany them and concur in their production. Hence the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge of my ideas, but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs. (PHK § 145)

This passage raises two questions. First, *why* does he take knowledge of other minds to be indirect (or "mediate" as Berkeley puts it), not direct? Second, what exactly does indirect knowledge of other minds consist in?

In response to the first question, Berkeley's view is that we do not have direct access to other spirits because we cannot directly perceive them. Since, for Berkeley, ideas *just are* the things we directly perceive (e. g., PHK § 7), this means that we cannot directly perceive minds. He thus writes: "it is manifestly impossible there should be any such idea [of a mind or spirit]" (PHK § 135). This impossibility is premised on his claim that minds and ideas cannot possibly resemble one another; ideas are intrinsically passive while minds are intrinsically active (PHK § 25). Berkeley thinks that the passivity of ideas – which can be proven by "a bare observation" of them[5] – means that they cannot be "the resemblance or pattern of any active being" (PHK §§ 25–27). Berkeley's view seems to be that since "there is nothing in them [ideas] but what is perceived" (PHK § 25), ideas could not possibly have any properties in common with spirits (which are not perceived, but rather perceive) – meaning, in turn, they could not resemble one another.[6] The distinction in kind be-

4 In this chapter, I focus on Berkeley's account of other finite *human* minds. There are interesting interpretative questions one might ask about Berkeley's views concerning non-human animal minds, but I leave that aside here (for a discussion of Berkeley on non-human animals, see Charles 2010).

5 See Cummins 1990 for a discussion of *why* Berkeley accepts this claim.

6 In West 2021, I argue that for Berkeley, likeness between two things consists in their having some intrinsic properties in common. This would explain why ideas and spirits cannot be alike, since they have no properties in common. See Manuel Fasko's chapter in this volume for an in-depth discussion of Berkeley's account of likeness relations.

tween ideas and minds, plus the claim that only an idea can resemble an idea (PHK § 8), means that, for Berkeley, ideas could not resemble minds. The more implicit claim at play here is that ideas can only be *of* (i. e., can only represent) things they resemble,[7] meaning that we cannot have ideas of minds.

On the question of what indirect knowledge of other minds consists in, Berkeley provides at least two possible answers. In the *Principles*, Berkeley's comments suggest that he thinks it is perceiving a human body that informs us of the existence of another mind (see Falkenstein 1990, 438). He writes:

> When therefore we see the colour, size, figure, and motions of a man, we perceive only certain sensations or ideas excited in our own minds; and these being exhibited to our view in sundry distinct collections, serve to mark out unto us the existence of finite and created spirits like our selves. (PHK § 148)

His claim here is that all the ordinary objects that we perceive in the world around us are collections of ideas (PHK § 1): a human body is no different. However, Berkeley's view is that there is something about the collection of ideas that we call a human body that warrants inferring the existence of another mind. One reason that Berkeley might think the perception of a human body allows me to infer the presence of another mind is that *I have a human body.* In other words, I perceive a collection of ideas which I take to be a human body, which thus marks out the existence of a mind like myself. Such perceptual experiences "mark out" the existence of spirits like us because *we too* have an intimate relationship with a collection of ideas we describe as a "human body."[8] This seems to be Berkeley's line of reasoning in the *Principles*; we see bodies that resemble our bodies and, by analogy, assume that we are in the presence of minds "like our selves" (PHK § 148). It is also worth noting that Berkeley mentions the "motion" of such "sundry distinct collections" (PHK § 148), which is what informs us that said entity is *animate* – like ourselves. However, this does not seem like a particularly reliable criteria since motion is not exclusively exhibited by entities like ourselves (as Descartes' skeptical worries about automata disguised as humans emphasizes).

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7 See Dávid Bartha's chapter in this volume for discussion of whether (and if so, why) Berkeley accepts the implicit claim that representation requires resemblance. For a contextual explanation of why (according to the authors) Berkeley accepts this claim, see Fasko and West 2020.

8 As Tom Stoneham pointed out to me, Berkeley could (in a manner similar to, e. g., the Lockean indirect realist) appeal to the *structure* or *patterns* of ideas as evidence of the existence of other minds. As Stoneham put it (in a set of comments on this chapter), my experience of my *own* agency reveals "that there are certain patterns in experience which provide evidence for particular, individual, finite minds." As we will find, language-usage might be one example of such "patterns in experience."

Given that the motion of a human body could, in principle, be mimicked by something without a mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that in *Alciphron* Berkeley takes a somewhat different approach. There, in the fourth dialogue, the titular figure and free-thinker Alciphron states:

> I have found that nothing so much convinces me of the existence of another person as his speaking to me. It is my hearing you talk that, in strict and philosophical truth, is to me the best argument for your being. (AMP, 4.6)

Berkeley's point here, which may be a development of (rather than an outright break with)[9] his comments in the *Principles,* is that language-usage is the best evidence of another mind *like ourselves.* It is worth noting that Alciphron is one of the antagonists of the dialogue which might raise prima facie questions about whether what he says expresses *Berkeley's* view. However, the way that Euphranor (one of Berkeley's spokespeople) responds indicates that this inference from language-usage to the existence of other minds is one that Berkeley wants his readers to accept. In other words, Alciphron is right about this inference (even if Berkeley thinks he is wrong about other matters).[10] Consequently, Berkeley's view seems to be that (as Alciphron puts it) language-usage is evidence of "an intelligent, thinking, designing cause" (AMP 4.7).

While the specific details vary across the two texts, Berkeley's general point remains the same: we gain knowledge of the existence of other minds by means of "the intervention of ideas" (PHK § 145). In the first case (the *Principles*), ideas of "colour, size, figure, and motions of a man" mark out to us the existence of another mind. In the second (*Alciphron)*, it is the perception of sounds or writing (or other instances of meaningful language-usage) that does the job. One thing that may already be clear is that the knowledge we have of our *own* mind is going to play an important role in justifying this account of knowledge of other minds. *I* have a body which moves in certain ways and *I* use language. Thus, Berkeley thinks, when I perceive collections of ideas that constitute *other* bodies or *other* instances of language-usage, I quite naturally take these ideas as evidence that I

9 This might serve as a clarification of his claims in the *Principles* (maybe the relevant "sundry distinct collections" of ideas are those that talk) or a development of his position.

10 Euphranor uses the claim that language-usage is evidence of the existence of another mind to argue for God's existence. Both Alciphron and Euphranor agree that language-usage is evidence of "an intelligent, thinking, designing cause" (AMP 4.7). Euphranor then argues that God "speaks to men by the intervention and use of arbitrary, outward, sensible signs, having no resemblance or necessary connexion with the things they stand for and suggest." So clearly Euphranor's (and in turn Berkeley's) argument for God is premised on the claim that language-usage is a sign of the presence of another mind.

am in the presence of another mind. I return to this issue in section three, having outlined Berkeley's indirect realist account of knowledge of the (existence of) other minds in greater depth.

2 Indirect Realism about Other Minds

In this section, I show that Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds is structurally similar to the indirect realist account of knowledge of material objects that he rejects – similar enough, that is, to warrant the concern I raised at the outset of this chapter. The worry, in short, is that Berkeley might be adopting an inconsistent position by rejecting materialist indirect realism (due to its skeptical implications) while defending indirect realism about other minds.

Berkeley attacks the indirect realism he thinks is inherent in Locke's view that we move from the perception of collections of ideas that "go constantly together" to the existence of a material substance or substratum "wherein they do subsist, and from which they do result" (*Essay*, II.XXIII.1). As Berkeley sees it, on a view like Locke's, ideas are "notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind" (PHK § 87).[11] Further, Berkeley claims that this means:

> We see only the appearances, and not the real qualities of things. What may be the extension, figure, or motion of any thing really and absolutely, or in itself, it is impossible for us to know, but only the proportion or relation they bear to our senses. (PHK § 87)

Similarly, in the *Three Dialogues*, Philonous claims that on such a view, one can only have a "relative notion" of a material substance; that is, "you conceive it not otherwise than by conceiving the relation it bears to sensible qualities" (DHP 197). The epistemology that Berkeley is attacking here is indirect realist; it is one where we only gain indirect (or "relative") knowledge of material (or "real") objects via ideas in the mind that represent them.[12]

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11 This might well be an oversimplification of Locke's position. Berkeley seems to think that for Locke, knowledge via ideas involves a one-to-one correspondence between a simple idea and its object (either a material thing, or a quality of a material thing). But it may well be the case that for Locke, it is the *structures* or *patterns* exhibited by collections of ideas that we perceive that informs us that the material world must also exhibit such structures or patterns. It is unclear whether the likeness principle (PHK § 8) would be successful in refuting such a view. Thanks to Tom Stoneham for emphasizing this point.

12 For the purposes of this discussion, I leave aside the question of whether Berkeley was right to attribute this view to Locke. Yolton 1984 & 1996 argues that Locke is *not* an indirect realist. For a wider discussion of Locke's theory of representation, see Ott 2012.

As far as Berkeley presents materialist indirect realism, a perceiver has direct knowledge only of their ideas which, in turn, provide us with indirect knowledge of material objects because the ideas, Berkeley thinks, exist in the mind alone (PHK § 5). For instance, one might indirectly perceive a material object like the sun by perceiving ideas of sensible qualities like a certain shape, motion (or lack thereof), size, light and colors, and warmth. Again, on Berkeley's presentation of the view, these ideas bear a relation of resemblance to the properties of the material object (here: the sun) (PHK § 8).[13] This relation of resemblance ensures that these ideas represent the sun and grounds the fact that, by directly perceiving the ideas of the various qualities, the perceiver *indirectly* perceives the sun. In this way, as Berkeley understands the materialist position, a perceiver gains indirect knowledge of material substances via the ideas that represent them.

However, as we have seen, Berkeley argues that this position inevitably leads to skepticism: the material world is hidden behind a "veil of ideas." Since he maintains that any view which leads to skepticism should be rejected,[14] he thus concludes that materialist indirect realism is untenable. I have suggested that a concern arises because of similarities between this view (which Berkeley rejects) and his own epistemology of other minds. Indeed, I think the textual evidence quite clearly commits Berkeley to indirect realism about other minds. Let us return, again, to *Principles* § 145:

> From what has been said, it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits, otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas that inform me there are certain particular agents like my self, which accompany them and concur in their production. Hence the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as is the knowledge of my ideas, but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs. (PHK § 145)

13 It is a much-discussed issue *why* Berkeley thinks that mental representation is grounded in a relation of *resemblance* between ideas and objects (and also why he attributes this view to his opponents). The question is all the more puzzling given the fact that there is evidence that Locke thinks that it is a *causal* relation that grounds mental representation *(Essay,* II.XXIII.1). For a discussion of why (a) Berkeley seems to think representation requires resemblance and (b) why he also seems to attribute that view to representationalists such as Locke, see Carriero 2003; Hill 2011; Fasko and West 2021; Dávid Bartha's chapter in this volume.

14 In the Introduction to the *Principles,* Berkeley writes: "[w]e should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach" (PHK, Introduction § 3). This, I take it, is his justification for the claim that any view that leads to skepticism should be rejected.

This passage quite explicitly commits Berkeley to the view that we gain knowledge of the existence of other minds via our perception of certain ideas. As we saw previously, it is the perception of ideas constituting human bodies and language-usage (cf. AMP 20) that, he thinks, convince us that we are in the presence of another mind. Thus, in both the account of knowledge (of the existence) of material objects that Berkeley rejects and the account of knowledge of other minds that he endorses, we have direct knowledge of our ideas alone. We are able to gain indirect knowledge (of material objects in the former case, of other minds in the latter) only by virtue of the fact that ideas and their objects bear a certain relation with their objects.

In the case of materialist indirect realism, Berkeley takes that relation to be one of *resemblance.* But Berkeley's likeness principle (PHK § 8) entails that such a relation, between an idea and a material object, could not really exist. Thus, he maintains that if materialist indirect realism were true, we could not actually gain knowledge that those objects exist. In Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds, however, it is not a relation of resemblance that allows us to gain indirect knowledge,[15] but rather one of *causation.*[16] The movement of human bodies, including language-usage, is caused by other minds.[17] Thus, when I perceive

15 It is worth pointing out that resemblance *does* play some role in Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds (indeed, as I will argue in what follows, that role is a crucial one). *Notional* knowledge, which is the kind of (non-ideational) knowledge we have of other minds – and involves "understand[ing] the meaning of the word [mind]" (PHK § 140) – also seems to depend on their being a resemblance or analogy between my own and other minds. That is, I know the meaning of the word 'mind' because other minds are *like* my own. But that resemblance is not one between an idea and its object (e.g., a mind) since ideas cannot possibly resemble minds (e.g., PHK § 25). Rather, as I will argue, it is a resemblance between my own mind and other minds that *allows* me to infer (according to Berkeley) that certain ideas (e.g., those constituting instances of language-usage) must have been caused by other minds like myself. Note also that even though Berkeley (pre-empting Hume) denies the existence of genuine causality between things in nature, he does allow that minds are genuine causes (of ideas). Thus, the view I am attributing to him here (that some ideas must have been caused by other minds) is consistent with his views on causation. Many thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me on these points.

16 There are ongoing interpretative debates about human causal agency in Berkeley. It remains contested whether human minds *efficiently* cause their own bodily movement, whether they do so with the concurrence of God's causal activity (McDonough 2008), or whether God is the *only* genuine causal agent – in which case, Berkeley is an occasionalist (e.g., Pitcher 1981, Lee 2012). I sidestep these debates here since, I take it, in terms of our everyday experience (and regardless of the correct metaphysical analysis of things), Berkeley's point is that I *seem* to be able to volitionally control my body, and so too do other human minds.

17 It is worth noting that for Berkeley, nothing at all could be caused except a mind – since ideas are intrinsically passive entities (e.g., PHK § 27). In the context of Berkeley's worldview, then, this move is intended to rule out that human bodily movement is caused by the mind of God.

human bodies or language-usage, I can infer that I am in the presence of another mind. Even though the relation doing the work here differs, there remains a clear *structural* similarity: in both cases, it is posited that ideas and their objects (either material objects, or other minds in the case of Berkeley's view) bear a relation such that, via our ideas, we can gain indirect knowledge of those objects. In both cases, that is, we start with direct knowledge of our ideas and infer, based on the relevant kind of relation, that something exists *beyond* those ideas – something of which we can be said to have *indirect* knowledge.

As I have suggested, this similarity looks like it might be problematic for Berkeley. If indirect realism leads to skepticism, then doesn't indirect realism about *other minds* also lead to skepticism? In the next section, I show that Berkeley's epistemology of other minds can avoid this objection.

3 Indirect Realism without Skepticism

3.1 Berkeley's critique of materialist indirect realism

In both the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley claims that skepticism arises as a result of a philosophical mistrust of the senses whereby "we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived" (DHP 167). This is particularly clear in *Principles* § 87, where he claims that if ideas are "looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then we are all involved in skepticism." Berkeley thus establishes a link between the indirect realist view that ideas are "images" of mind-independent "archetypes" (material objects) and skepticism. What seems to particularly trouble Berkeley about the materialist indirect realist position is the implication (that he derives from it) that we can never know with certainty that our ideas represent what we take them to represent (or indeed anything at all).[18] In other words, Berkeley works on the assumption that if we cannot know with certainty that our ideas are accurate representations of material objects, then we cannot be said to have gained knowledge (at all)

18 One might question whether Berkeley was really committed to such a strong account of the necessary conditions for knowledge (i. e., knowing with certainty that what we appear to "know" is true). Yet, as I have emphasized, in PHK § 87 Berkeley moves from the claim that our ideas are "images" of material objects to the view that "we are all involved in skepticism." Further, when discussing knowledge of a subject via a portrait or statue (discussed below), Berkeley maintains that *we could not know* that the portrait or statue was representing (i. e., providing knowledge of) its subject, without "reason and memory" (DHP 203–204). The evidence thus suggests that (whether we think it is plausible or not) his epistemology is quite a radical one.

of material objects (even indirectly) via ideas.[19] In this subsection, I explain why Berkeley thinks this follows from materialist indirect realism. In the following subsection, I show why this charge does not apply in the case of Berkeley's epistemology of other minds.

Berkeley uses an analogy involving statues to demonstrate that if his materialist opponents are right then we cannot be certain that our ideas accurately represent their objects. In the *Three Dialogues,* Berkeley's spokesperson Philonous points out that there is a difference between (i) seeing a statue of Caesar *as a representation* of Caesar and (ii) simply seeing it as "some colours and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole" (DHP 203–204). Philonous goes on to explain that the difference lies in the fact that "reason and memory" pertaining to prior knowledge of Caesar are required in order to know that the statue is indeed *of Caesar.* His point here is that prior knowledge, or "reason and memory", makes for the difference between a *presentation* of colours and figures and a *re-presentation* of a person, a tree, or some other object. This is similar to Kenneth Winkler's (1989, 21) claim that, for Berkeley, perceiving smoke will not "impart a conception" of fire but is rather a "sign" of it.

It is worth noting that Berkeley seems to be responding here to Locke's talk of "real knowledge." Locke claims that "wherever we are sure those *Ideas* agree with the reality of Things there is certain real Knowledge" (*Essay,* IV.IV.18). But Berkeley's point is that we could never possibly know that our ideas "agree with the reality of Things" and thus – given his view that we cannot be said to gain knowledge via ideas unless we *know* those ideas accurately represent their objects – that we could *never* be said to have "real knowledge."[20] In the *Three Dialogues,* Philonous explains to Hylas (who is defending Berkeley's presentation of the Lockean position):

> It is your opinion, the ideas we perceive by our senses are not real things but images or copies of them. *Our knowledge therefore is no farther real, than as our ideas are the true representations of those originals.* But as these supposed originals are in themselves unknown, it is impossible to show how far our ideas resemble them, or whether they resemble them at all. We cannot therefore be sure we have any real knowledge. (DHP 246, my emphasis)

Philonous' point here is that *no knowledge* could be "real knowledge," if Hylas is right, because in order to discern whether an idea "agrees with the reality of its object" (to use Locke's terminology), we would need to determine whether that

19 This commitment will be important in the next subsection, when I consider the charge that Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds leads to skepticism.

20 For more on Berkeley's response to Locke's claims about "real knowledge," see West (2023).

idea is a "true representation." But since, Berkeley thinks, representations are "images or copies" of things (DHP 246), the relevant relation would need to be one of resemblance. In turn, this raises the problem of trying to identify a resemblance relation between an idea and its object; the latter of which, according to Hylas (and Locke), we can never be acquainted with *except* via the idea that purportedly represents it. Thus, Berkeley maintains, if we accept materialist indirect realism "we are thrown into the most hopeless and abandoned skepticism" (DHP 246).

Again, the (implicit) premise that we cannot be said to *know* something indirectly via a representation of it, such as an idea, unless we know with certainty that the representation is an accurate one is crucial for Berkeley's case here. Were it not for this premise, a material indirect realist could maintain, and perhaps even stipulate, that we *do* gain knowledge of material objects via ideas which represent them *because that is just how representation works.* But Berkeley's reasoning puts strict limits on whether or not a representation can be said to provide us with knowledge. On his view, we can only be said to gain knowledge via a representation if we have prior knowledge that the representation is *of* what it appears to be of.[21] For Berkeley, we can only work our way backwards from direct knowledge of both a representation and the thing represented to indirect knowledge of other objects via direct knowledge of similar representations (but of course, for a materialist indirect realist, there is no "working back" from direct knowledge of material objects). For example, I could only plausibly be said to know that a statue of Caesar actually represented Caesar, if I had some prior *direct* knowledge of Caesar.[22]

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21 A defender of materialist indirect realism might respond that this undermines the point of knowledge via representations in the first place: we would not need to posit indirect knowledge via representations if we could gain direct knowledge of their objects. But that seems to be precisely Berkeley's point: claims about knowledge via representations depend on our having prior knowledge *without* them, so an epistemology on which we gain knowledge *in the first instance* via representations will inevitably lead to skepticism.

22 Note that this raises questions about whether, on Berkeley's view, we can ever (given that Caesar is not around to be directly perceived anymore) gain knowledge of Caesar – or any other past figure, fact, event, or object. It seems as though it is this kind of consideration that leads Hume to conclude that all our speculations about the past (and the future) depend upon the sentiments that give us our ideas of necessary connections between certain events and objects. Since my aim is to identify what Berkeley's view is, rather than whether it is plausible, I leave aside further discussion of this issue. It is also worth noting that while *in principle* we could have prior, direct knowledge of Caesar (or, at least, a contemporary of Caesar could have), in the case of matter there is, per definition, no possible *direct* knowledge available – since, as Berkeley understands, material objects are imperceivable by their very nature (e.g., PHK § 4). Perhaps *in principle* prior knowledge is what Berkeley is really interested in.

3.2 Avoiding skepticism

The implicit premise outlined above is crucial to answering the question: does Berkeley undermine his own account of knowledge of other minds by adopting a position that, elsewhere, he argues leads to skepticism (namely, indirect realism)? Several commentators (Bennett 1971, Falkenstein 1990, Frankel 2009) have raised the concern that Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds commits him to skepticism about their existence (i. e., the view that we cannot know with certainty that they exist). Jonathan Bennett (1971, 220), for example, claims that "Berkeley's difficulties [concerning knowledge of other minds] are astonishingly like Locke's." More specifically, he claims that "Berkeley's treatment of spiritual substance has a deep structural feature which brings it under the same axe as the Lockean substratum theory" (1971, 213) and that:

> it seems plausible to say that if I am to have any disciplined theoretical use for a given classificatory term [such as "another mind"], I must know what it would be like to encounter something to which the term applies (1971, 215).

As we saw above, this is precisely the point that Berkeley makes about material objects: I must have some prior, direct knowledge of what they are like ("what it would be like to encounter them," in Bennett's words) if I am to gain indirect knowledge of them through ideas – but I cannot, according to the materialist indirect realist. However, Bennett claims that the very same objection applies to Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds, which are known only via their "signs and effects" (DHP 233).

Other commentators have attempted to show that Berkeley can resolve this difficulty. Lorne Falkenstein argues that whereas (at least as Berkeley understands the view) materialist indirect realism depends on there being a relation of *resemblance* between ideas and objects, in the case of other minds it is a *causal* relation that does the work.[23] As Falkenstein reads Berkeley, the only plausible cause of certain ideas – specifically, those (that are not caused by ourselves) "which exhibit a degree of irregularity, inconstancy of purpose, greed, stupidity, and sheer perversity," which could not possibly have been caused by "a wise benevolent being" (1990, 438) – is other finite spirits. On Falkenstein's reading, based on this causal claim, we make a further *explanatory claim:* "the existence of other minds gives

23 Again, I take it that Falkenstein's reading is consistent with various interpretations of Berkeley's account of human causal agency – perhaps the causal relation is one of efficient causation, or perhaps it is one of occasional causation. The relevant point, it seems to me, is that *insofar as our everyday experience is concerned,* we "cause" our bodies to move.

us a plausible and likely means of accounting for our ideas of animated bodies" (1990, 434).

Melissa Frankel also notes that materialist indirect realism, which Berkeley rejects, looks "structurally analogous to the indirect experience of other minds that Berkeley seems to be proposing" (2009, 388). Frankel then voices the same objection that I set out to address: that, as she puts it, "[i]ndirect experience of other minds should be ruled out in the same way that indirect experience of the world is" (2009, 390). In light of this concern, like Falkenstein, Frankel argues that Berkeley's claims about knowledge of other minds should be understood as *explanatory* claims. She writes: "the existence of *minds* actually constitutes a good explanation of certain experiential facts" (2009, 392). On this basis, Frankel claims, Berkeley maintains that we can be said to *know* that other minds exist insofar as we can posit their existence in order to explain our perception of certain ideas.

However, I think both attempts to solve Berkeley's problem of other minds fail to take notice of the underlying crucial premise outlined above. To avoid skepticism, for Berkeley, we must have *prior* knowledge that our representations are indeed representations of *what we take them to be of.* Both Falkenstein and Frankel develop interpretations of Berkeley on which we, effectively via a process of elimination, work out that the only cause of certain ideas could be other finite minds. That is, on this line of reasoning, it follows that certain ideas are not caused by me and could not have been caused by God – and so must be caused by other (finite) minds. Falkenstein (1999, 432), in particular, is keen to avoid attributing to Berkeley the view that knowledge of our own mind serves as the basis of our knowledge of other minds. The problem is, though, that without recourse to our own mind, there is no sense in which we can be said to have the kind of prior, direct knowledge that Berkeley thinks indirect knowledge requires. On both Falkenstein and Frankel's readings of Berkeley, then, his epistemology of other minds *does* look dangerously similar to Locke's account of material substances on which we "suppose" their existence in order to identify a causal *explanation* for the perception of certain ideas (*Essay,* II.XXIII.1).

However, Berkeley's remarks on the relation between ourselves and other minds suggest an alternative account of how knowledge of other minds works – and, most importantly, an account on which we *can* be said to have prior, direct knowledge on which our *indirect* knowledge is based. In the *Dialogues,* Philonous states: "My own mind and ideas I have an immediate knowledge of; and by help of these, do mediately apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas" (DHP 231–232). *Pace* Falkenstein and Frankel, this remark clearly indicates that the direct knowledge of my own mind and my ideas plays a role in my coming to know – or, at least, coming to know that it is possible that – other minds exist.

Falkenstein claims that Berkeley's view is that our direct knowledge of our own mind helps us come to know what other minds are *like*, but not of their existence. As he puts it: "to use analogy in order to imagine or form a notion of other spirits is one thing, to establish the actual existence of such imagined entities is quite another" (Falkenstein 1990, 432). This seems like the right way of interpreting a claim such as the following from the *Principles:* "we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which is in that sense the image or ideas of them" (PHK § 140). But the remark above from the *Dialogues* is not about "imagining" what they are like but is, explicitly, about establishing their existence (or the possibility of their existence).

Berkeley's appeal to the fact that, as he sees it, we have "immediate knowledge" of our own minds is crucial to understanding why his account of knowledge of *other* minds does not, at least by his own lights, lead to skepticism in the way that he thinks materialist indirect realism does. Materialist indirect realism and Berkeley's epistemology of other minds *are* structurally similar. However, Berkeley's emphasis on prior knowledge makes it clear that there is something missing in the case of indirect knowledge of material objects – namely, prior, direct knowledge of them – that *is not* missing in the case of other minds. Consider the following questions that Philonous asks Hylas:

> I would therefore fain know, what arguments you can draw from reason for the existence of what you call "real things" or "material objects". Or whether you remember to have seen them formerly as they are in themselves? or if you have heard or read of any one that did [?] (DHP 204–205)

And:

> pray show me what reason you have to believe in their existence, or what medium you can possibly make use of to prove it either to mine or your own understanding. (DHP 205)

Berkeley takes these to be unanswerable questions for his opponents. He points out that according to materialist indirect realism, material objects cannot be the objects of direct knowledge.

However, Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds is different because I *do* have direct knowledge of the relation between a mind and its ideas. I have direct knowledge of myself as a perceiver and of the relationship between myself and the ideas I perceive. That is, I *do* have "reason and memory" pertaining to prior, direct knowledge of the fact that certain ideas are indeed caused by a mind. Our knowledge of the relationship between ideas and minds, crucially, has the kind of foundation that our knowledge of the relation between ideas and material objects lacks. As a result, when "I perceive several motions, changes,

and combinations of ideas", this "inform[s] me there are certain particular agents like my self, which accompany them and concur in their production" (PHK § 145). Conversely, as Berkeley sees it, in the indirect realist account of material objects, ideas do not really "inform me" of the existence of anything except themselves. He writes:

> they do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived, like to those which are perceived. This the materialists themselves acknowledge [...] I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute), that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them. (PHK § 18)

Since ideas can exist and be perceived even when the material things which they are taken to represent do not (e.g., when we are dreaming), it follows that, in such instances, ideas do not represent any material things at all. In which case, Berkeley argues, we cannot be certain that our ideas *ever* represent material things. But that is not the case with our experience of the relationship between ourselves and the ideas which we cause, such as our own bodily movements or our language-usage. We have direct knowledge of this relationship which, in turn, provides us with reasonable grounds to "refer" similar collections of ideas "to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as effects or concomitant signs" (PHK § 145). Frankel (2009, 390) maintains that arguments from analogy fail because it is impossible to *compare* my own mind with another. She claims that the "traditional" argument from analogy treats the relation between my mind and another mind as analogous to the relation between an idea and a material thing. But that is not the kind of comparison that Berkeley requires. For Berkeley, it is the relation between *my mind* and *the ideas I cause* that is analogous with the relation between an idea and a material thing. As such, it does not follow that "[i]ndirect experience of other minds should be ruled out in the same way that indirect experience of the [material] world is" (Frankel 2009, 390).

Conclusion

I have argued that despite Berkeley's rejection of materialist indirect realism, on the basis that it leads to skepticism, he can consistently endorse indirect realism *about other minds.* Gaining knowledge via a representation (such as an idea), Berkeley maintains, requires prior knowledge that it is an *accurate* representation of its object. In other words, we need some basis on which to infer that there is indeed a relation (whether it be one of resemblance or one of causation) between an idea and its object. In the case of ideas of material objects, Berkeley argues that

there is no such basis. According to materialist indirect realism, the *only* knowledge we have of material objects is indirect. We cannot verify that our ideas stand in the right kind of relation to them. However, in the case of knowledge of other minds, Berkeley argues that we do have prior knowledge: we have direct experience of the fact that our own actions produce ideas of human bodily movement and language-usage. Consequently, we *do* have a basis on which to infer that when we perceive other instances of human bodily movement and language-usage, we are in the presence of another mind.[24]

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24 Thanks to Kenny Pearce, Manuel Fasko, and Tom Stoneham for comments on various iterations of this chapter, to participants of the workshop session for this volume for insightful comments and discussion (and their own contributions which provided great inspiration), and Pink Floyd for the title.

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Margaret Atherton

6 Does Berkeley Have a Theory of Meaning?

Abstract: Margaret Atherton asks the provocative question whether Berkeley has a theory of meaning. Commentators have defended the notion that Berkeley adopts a Lockean 'ideational' theory of meaning, whereby a word is meaningful if and only if it signifies an idea in the mind of the speaker, and various 'non-ideational' readings of his theories of meaning, including precursors to the 'use' theory of meaning made famous by Wittgenstein. Against this trend in recent scholarship, Atherton argues that attention to the context in which Berkeley was writing, along with close textual analysis of the places where Berkeley is said to develop his theory of meaning (especially the draft introduction to the *Principles* and *Alciphron*) reveal that, strictly speaking, it is not right to attribute a 'theory' of meaning to him at all.

Introduction

Is Berkeley the author of a particular theory of meaning, one which had no predecessors or followers in his own day, but which anticipated much more recent approaches to meaning? A case has been made by some Berkeley scholars that the answer to this question is yes. Berkeley has been held to have developed a new theory of meaning, of various forms.[1] This kind of interpretation typically rests on an appeal to two Berkeleian texts. The Introduction to the *Principles of Human Knowledge* is thought to provide the negative side to Berkeley's Theory of Meaning. Berkeley is read as laying out there an account of what meaning is not, by means of an attack on the Lockean or Ideational Theory of Meaning. Much later, in *Alciphron*, Berkeley is found to have put forward his positive non-ideational Theory of Meaning. While over the years, objections to this thesis have been raised,[2] there is one outstanding problem about this storyline that

1 Important sources of this line of thought are: Flew, 1993, 214–224, Belfrage, 1986, 643–649, and Belfrage, Editor's Introduction, 1987, Berman, 1994, Brykman, 2010, 407–413. More recent discussions can be found in Pearce, 2017a, and Fields, 2021a, 2021b 3–13.

2 For example, Williford and Jakapi, 2009, 99–118. See as well, Katia Saporiti (2006, 1227), who says that Berkeley did not put forward a theory of meaning, and Fasko (2021, chapter 4.4), who agrees with her.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-009

has yet to be addressed. While many assume that an Ideational Theory of Meaning, with Locke as its *locus classicus*, was prevalent in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries,[3] there is another alternate theory available that holds that that issues in the philosophy of language were not a significant area of interest in this period. Laurent Jaffro, writing particularly about Locke, reminds us that Locke placed primacy on thought. "This is why," he says, "the Lockean theory of signs is in the first place a philosophy of mind, not a theory of language."[4] And Ian Hacking (Hacking 1975) argues that philosophers like Locke and Berkeley did not have a theory of meaning, but only a theory of ideas. Locke scholars have, in fact to a much larger extent than Berkeley scholars, questioned whether *Locke* held an Ideational Theory of Ideas.[5] What Locke says about signs in the final section of the final chapter of the *Essay* is certainly suggestive. He lists signs as one of three primary and, as he says, natural categories of objects of knowledge, along with things and action, and claims the mind makes use of signs, both with respect to its thoughts about things and actions, and for "the right ordering of them for its clearer information" (*Essay*, IV.XXI.5). Locke here pretty straightforwardly links his use of signs, not to issues of language but to the mind's acquisition of knowledge. I propose to investigate this broader issue about whether Berkeley actually had a novel theory of meaning, focusing particularly on how Berkeley makes use of appeals to signs. I will be asking whether the passages taken to constitute positive and negative arguments about meaning are actually addressed to and motivated by issues of mind and knowledge more congenial to Locke and other thinkers of Berkeley's day. I plan to show that this is an important issue to raise, inasmuch as what I will argue is that a misplaced focus on meaning in these texts has distracted attention from Berkeley's novel account of knowledge.

1 Did Berkeley Attack and Reject a (Lockean) Theory of Meaning

On the view I will be subjecting to scrutiny, the impetus for Berkeley to develop a new theory of meaning stems from his negative argument in the Introduction to the *Principles.* Berkeley, it is supposed, needed a new theory of meaning because he found the Lockean theory of meaning wanting. Locke, it is thought, held that the meaning of a word is given by the idea attached to that word. Berkeley rejects

3 See, for example, Pearce 2022.
4 Jaffro 2013, 132.
5 See, for example, Dawson 2007.

Locke's theory then, first, by supposing that the ideas that according to Locke provide the meanings of words are abstract ideas, and then by showing that abstract ideas are themselves impossible, thus taking Locke's theory of meaning down with them. According to this reading, the purpose of the rejection of abstract ideas, which takes up the largest part of the Introduction, is to provide evidence against the ideational theory of meaning. But my question is whether this account adequately establishes that Berkeley's purpose in writing the Introduction to the *Principles* was to refute a theory of meaning. I will be showing that there is another better and contextually more accurate way of identifying what Berkeley is up to in his Introduction, stemming from his worries about skepticism.

The Introduction falls relatively neatly into three uneven parts. The first, 1–5, establishes the problem that is to be addressed in the book to follow, the second, 6–17, contains the discussion of abstract ideas, and the third and final part puts forward some concluding thoughts about the relation between words and ideas. The general problem that Berkeley initially identifies as the subject of his book falls squarely into territory found frequently among his contemporaries. Berkeley is worried about what he sees as a dangerous skepticism being put about by a particular group of people that he identifies as philosophers. These philosophers' skepticism is fueled by a general distrust of our understanding and cognitive faculties. "It is said," Berkeley writes, "the faculties we have are few, and these designed by Nature for the support and comfort of life, and not to penetrate into the inward essence and constitution of things" (PHK Introduction § 2). Berkeley's diagnosis is that we have made trouble for ourselves in underestimating the nature of our faculties, and that "we have first raised a dust, and then complain, we cannot see" (PHK Introduction § 3). His project then in the *Principles* is to rehabilitate our faculties, by showing that we have been endowed by our Maker with faculties that are entirely adequate to provide us with what Berkeley deems skeptical philosophers have cast into doubt: a knowledge of nature.

Not surprisingly, then, it will turn out that, according to Berkeley, a belief in abstract ideas depends upon misunderstandings about the functioning of our mental faculties. Berkeley's demonstration of this dependence has frequently been found unsatisfying, amounting to a challenge to others to frame an abstract idea, because, he says, *he* can't do so.[6] Berkeley issues challenges of this sort quite often, and apparently expects that trying to meet the challenge will prove to be a learning experience for proponents of abstract ideas, but it has not been

6 This argument has been dubbed by Pearce "the phenomenological appeal" and is discussed by him in Pearce 2017a, 16–22. Pearce cites other discussions of this argument there. See also, Jacovides 2009, 415–429.

clear what it is that Berkeley thinks such proponents have learned. If we look, however, at his discussion of the way in which abstraction is commonly thought to proceed, we will find that Berkeley had quite precise reasons for thinking that attempts at abstraction would fail. While Berkeley discusses several kinds of abstract ideas, the first case he takes up contains the heart of the matter. It is about particular ideas, such as when "there is perceived by sight an object extended, coloured, and moved" (PHK Introduction § 7). Berkeley claims that our initial and particular perceptions are of qualities that, as he says, everyone agrees are qualities "blended all together." People are supposed to be able, thanks to their mental faculties, to separate out from this mixed and blended visual idea "its simple constituent parts," which is to say, a particular extension, a particular color, and a particular motion. Such a person, then, having separated the extension from the color and both from the motion, by "viewing each by it self, exclusive of the rest, does frame the abstract idea of extension, colour, and motion." For Berkeley, abstract ideas are not found by gazing inward, but rather by doing something, namely, abstracting. The process of abstraction we are called upon to follow in order to make abstract ideas is one of separation from a previous mass of qualities. The result we are alleged to produce is an idea, say, of a color that is distinct from any other idea at all, and has nothing in it of extension, motion, or whatever. And since general abstract ideas are compilations of and based on particular ideas, they too require that we are able to perform these acts of separation that are supposed to produce such distinct and exclusive ideas.

In section 10, Berkeley explains why he thinks no ideas will result from performing these acts of separation. Berkeley regards the performance of the kind of separation that the account of abstract ideas demands as impossible. He asserts, for example, that it is "impossible for me to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving" (PHK Intro § 10). The term to focus on is "distinct." What Berkeley is saying here is that it is impossible to frame an idea of motion that excludes and is entirely other than an idea of the body that is moving. This is because motion depends for its existence on the existence of extended bodies. You can't just lift off the idea of motion from the idea of body to get motion without body. Berkeley makes a similar sort of claim in his *New Theory of Vision.* He asks his interlocutor "whether it be possible for him to frame in his mind a distinct abstract idea of visible extension or figure exclusive of all colour: and on the other hand, whether he can conceive colour without visible extension?" (NTV § 130). The operative word here again is "distinct." You can't leave out the idea of color from your idea of visible extension because color is a way of being visibly extended, nor can you peel away the idea of visible extension from your idea of color, because being visibly extended is a way of being colored. Trying to produce ideas of this sort will result in no idea at all because removing the color removes the visible

extension as well. And the same can be said, according to Section 10 of the Introduction, about the feat of framing an idea of motion "which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear." Once you have removed all the ways in which one motion can be distinguished from another, you will have removed all the ways in which motion can exist. You will have no idea left to be what is common to all. Therefore, the directions for framing an abstract idea cannot be followed and so the idea is impossible to produce. It should be noted that while Berkeley explains his findings in the language of introspection, the case he is making is not limited to his personal experience. No one can follow the directions for making abstract ideas and end up with an idea with any content.[7]

The argument I have proposed reflects back quite directly to the concern Berkeley expresses at the beginning of the Introduction that philosophers end up endorsing skepticism because they suppose our understanding is too weak and imperfect to arrive at knowledge of the natural world. The argument Berkeley puts forth is an argument about our thought processes. He is making the claim that those who think that knowledge requires abstract ideas are relying on a faulty picture of the means by which ideas are framed. That is, he is doing philosophy of mind. And I think there is also reason to believe that the problem he is seeking to correct is not a problem in the theory of meaning, but of metaphysics. Abstract ideas, after all, are the sorts of ideas that might be thought to stand for essences, the search for which Berkeley takes to lead to skepticism. And while it is entirely true, as many have pointed out, that Berkeley names Locke as a proponent of abstract general ideas in a letter to Johnson, the example he cites there is not, as it might be, Locke's general idea of a triangle, but instead, that "[Locke] holds an abstract idea of existence; exclusive of perceiving and being perceived" (*Works* II, 293).[8] This again is an issue of distinctness. In his criticism of Locke, Berkeley is referring to his own well-known view that it is impossible to frame an idea of existence that is neither perceiving nor being perceived but distinct from both, i. e., existence in general (see PHK § 5). Berkeley's worry is that a faulty view of mind has led Locke to a faulty metaphysics.

The claim that Berkeley's target was instead a theory of meaning relies heavily on Section 18, where Berkeley writes: "I come now to consider the source of this prevailing notion [about abstract ideas], and that seems to me to be language." The account Berkeley gives of the connection between the belief in abstract ideas and

7 I have given other versions of this argument in Atherton 1987, Atherton 1990, and Atherton 2020.
8 In fact, Locke's complaint about the alleged abstract idea of a triangle, "that it must be neither Oblique, nor Rectangle, neither Equilateral, Equicrural, nor Scalenon" (*Essay* IV.VII.9), echoes Berkeley's own worries.

language does indeed at first glance look like an attack on a Lockean theory of meaning. Berkeley says:

> First then, 'tis thought that every name hath, or ought to have, one only precise and settled signification, which inclines men to think there are certain *abstract, determinate ideas,* which constitute the true and only immediate signification of each general name. And that it is by the mediation of these abstract ideas, that a general name comes to signify any particular thing.

The way Berkeley cites Locke in Section 18, however, is somewhat surprising. He does not quote the kind of passage from the *Essay* that many do in this context, for example where Locke speaks of names "becoming general which are made to stand for general ideas" (*Essay* III.I.3). Instead, he refers to a later passage from the *Essay* 3.6.39, where Locke has a more complicated point to make. The presence of different words, he says there, like "watch" and "clock" or "man" and "changeling" leads us to believe falsely that these words stand for different species or kinds of things, which are supposed to differ essentially one from another. Berkeley picks up on what Locke has identified as an error here that because people mistakenly believe that names have a fixed and determinate meaning, they come to suppose that the name stands for a single abstract idea. Berkeley is not condemning Locke for holding that general words stand for general ideas; rather he is joining Locke in condemning those who think words stand for *determinate* ideas, which leads to metaphysical confusion, that we know fixed essences in nature. Berkeley's own position seems to be that, while it is true that without general names, philosophers would never have been misled into thinking there were abstract ideas that capture determinate essences, in fact, we have no difficulty using general names to stand for any number of particular ideas. There is no danger in supposing that words stand for ideas, so long as we recognize that they stand for many particular ideas, and not some mysterious abstract idea. In the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley does not seem to be particularly exercised about theories of meaning. In the brief mention we find, he is merely substituting particular ideas for the problematic abstract ideas that general terms stand for. In the Introduction, there is nothing to suggest that Berkeley sees the need for alternate theories of meaning. It is abstract ideas themselves, and their role in accounts of knowledge that is bothering Berkeley, and not theories of meaning.[9]

9 Manuel Fasko has pointed out to me that Berkeley's revisions to his Manuscript Introduction removed the discussions of language on which some of the accounts of Berkeley's Theory of Meaning have relied. As will be seen, and as Fasko also points out, the same can be said for Berkeley's revisions to *Alciphron.*

It is true that in the remaining sections of the Introduction, Berkeley does have some things to say about the relation between words and ideas, and it is true that Berkeley does, in Section 20, make the point, which crops up in more detail elsewhere, that words can perform some functions without the intervention of ideas. This remark is sometimes read as a gesture towards a non-ideational theory of meaning, but the conclusion he draws here is just that there is no need to fill in the gap with problematic abstract ideas. The ultimate lesson about language he draws from the discussion of abstract ideas is the point with which he began: that words can mislead and therefore, speaking of a reader, he says:

> I entreat him to make my words the occasion for his own thinking, and endeavour to attain the same train of thoughts in reading, that I had in writing them. By this means it will be easy for him to discover the truth or falsity of what I say. He will be out of all danger of being deceived by my words, and I do not see how he can be led into an error by considering his own naked, undisguised ideas. (PHK Introduction § 25)

The point of these final passages, it seems to me, is not to encourage the study of words without ideas, or to look for other ways in which words can be meaningful, but rather to stress that there is no tight or necessary connection between words and ideas. Words can perform some functions without an intermediate idea and ideas can convey thoughts sometimes more usefully without intervening words. Berkeley does express concerns here about the relationship between words and ideas, and in particular, he is worried about the way in which we can be abused by words. But his focus is on removing the trap by exposing the faulty metaphysics we are led into by a belief in abstract ideas, and for this project he does not need a new theory of meaning.

In sum, Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas is not an attack on a theory of meaning. He not only does not offer a new theory of meaning; he does not appear motivated to take any position on a theory of meaning at all. He no more endorses a Lockean theory of meaning than he rejects it. Berkeley does think we can be misled by language into thinking we can do things with our ideas that in fact cannot be done. But what Berkeley is aiming at is a better theory of our mental faculties, one that does not assign to them the task of producing an idea that is actually impossible to frame. On my reading, Berkeley's target in raising the matter of abstract ideas is in fact exactly as he said it was, namely the skepticism that at the beginning of the *Introduction* he finds philosophers fall into when they fail to generate the abstract ideas their metaphysics calls for.

2 Does Berkeley Put Forward a Positive Theory of Meaning in *Alciphron?*

I have proposed that Berkeley's concerns in the Introduction to the *Principles* are not focused on a theory of meaning, and so do not provide a motive to read Berkeley as seeking to replace one theory of meaning with a different one. But of course nothing would prevent Berkeley from going on to develop a theory of meaning for other reasons, and so the various claims that Berkeley put forward a non-ideational theory of meaning in *Alciphron* still stand.[10] We need to start afresh and ask does Berkeley put forward a positive theory of meaning, an emotive or a non-cognitive or an operational or a use theory of meaning in *Alciphron?* As the variety of names for Berkeley's allegedly new theory of meaning should convey, there is no general agreement about its nature. In rough outline, however, the picture is that Berkeley does not think ideas are or are not always what confers meaning to words, and so something else instead must do the job. As before, I do not take it as my task to criticize or to refute any particular interpretation here, but instead to ask if Berkeley conceives it to be his task to develop an alternative theory of meaning in *Alciphron* or if is he instead primarily interested in other matters than the means by which words mean? Indeed, it must be acknowledged that in *Alciphron*, Book VII Berkeley talks as much about signs and what they signify as about words and what they mean. I will be pursuing this matter in arguing that, in the end, as was the case for the Introduction to the *Principles,* Berkeley's concerns are largely about the mental processes that lead to knowledge.

Alciphron itself is a substantial work, whose full title reads: *Alciphron: or The Minute Philosopher. In Seven Dialogues. Containing an Apology for the Christian Religion, against those who are called Free-Thinkers.* It is a work in Christian Apologetics, often quite polemical, developed in large part to refute what Berkeley took to be the dangerous and atheistic doctrine that morality exists independent of theism, and consists largely although not exclusively in a conversation between Alciphron, a free-thinker and Euphranor, who functions as Berkeley's spokesperson.[11] The part of *Alciphron* that is relevant to the controversy over Berkeley's theory of meaning is relatively brief and is found in the first fifteen sections of the final

10 See Footnote 1 for some sources of these claims.

11 There are a few other interlocutors who appear in the course of the book, but these are the two main speakers and the important ones in this portion of *Alciphron.*

book, Book VII.[12] The discussion is framed by a comparison, introduced by Alciphron, between the word "grace," a religious concept, and the word, "force," central to the natural philosophy of the time. Alciphron indubitably makes the point that he has no idea of grace, although he has a good idea of force, and so it certainly looks as though commentators may be right that a key issue of this piece of *Alciphron* concerns an ideational theory of meaning. But before looking in more detail at Alciphron's grace/force comparison, I want to push a little harder at the nature of the question Alciphron is raising. I will suggest that, instead of a question about meaning, Berkeley is still interested in the matters that formed the motivation for the *Principles* concerning the skepticism he describes in the Introduction and the nature of our mental faculties that lead to knowledge, and that, in those places where Alciphron appears to be putting forward an ideational theory of meaning, what is actually at stake is a theory of knowledge.

It is important to note, first of all, that Alciphron's opening speech in Dialogue VII clearly focuses on issues of knowledge. He says that all the evidence that has been brought by Berkeley's spokespeople about the empirical value of religion is irrelevant because "religious assent or faith can be evidently shown in its own nature to be impracticable, impossible, and absurd" (AMP 7.1). Faith is the source of assent to religious propositions, and Alciphron is going to show that such assent is impossible. One reason for this impossibility, Alciphron holds, is that:

> He who really thinks hath a train of ideas succeeding each other and connected in his mind; and when he expresseth himself by discourse each word suggests a distinct idea to the hearer or reader. (AMP 7.2)

While ideas are mentioned in this sentence, Alciphron's conclusion has nothing to do with a theory of meaning. He says that most people just don't think: "their minds are rather stored with names than ideas, the husk of science rather than the thing" (AMP 7.2). This remark sounds much closer to a claim that we are abused by words into supposing we are thinking, and not that we are using a faulty theory of meaning. Finally, Alciphron sums up in a manner that strongly supports the interpretation I am putting forward. He says:

> Though it is evident that, as knowledge is the perception of the connexion or disagreement between ideas, he who doth not distinctly perceive the ideas marked by the terms, so as to form a mental proposition answering to the verbal, cannot possibly have knowledge. No more can he be said to have opinion or faith, which implies a weaker assent; but still it

12 Sections that, moreover, underwent significant revisions between the second edition, which was published like the first in 1732, and the third edition, which did not appear until 1752. Book VII concludes with an account of free will.

> must be to a proposition, the terms of which are understood as clearly, although the agreement of the ideas may not be so evident, as in the case of knowledge. (AMP 7.3)

Berkeley is putting into play here not a Lockean theory of *meaning*, but a Lockean theory of *knowledge* (*Essay* IV.I.2). What we should anticipate, then, if this is right, is not a novel theory of meaning, but rather a theory of knowledge that rejects the claim that knowledge requires necessary connections in the agreements and disagreements found to hold between ideas.[13]

3 The Grace/Force Argument: Introduction

Alciphron does make his case against the possibility of religious knowledge by contrasting the theological term 'grace' with the scientific term 'force.' Or rather he alleges that people think there are ideas attached to 'grace' when they confuse it with 'force,' which Alciphron regards as thoroughly intelligible. Berkeley's argument here is complex. He is going to show that while the concept of 'force' is intelligible, it is not because we have a distinct idea of force, and that, when we grasp how it is we understand 'force,' we will see that we can understand 'grace' in the same way. There is a great deal that has to be unpacked in this argument, but let me first say something about these two concepts that will be helpful to keep in mind. The first is that it should be no surprise that Berkeley introduces 'force' as one term in this comparison. 'Force' was of course a central concept in contemporary mechanics, and is also a concept that was highly controversial. Berkeley has already discussed this controversy in his earlier *De Motu* of 1721, where he also introduces his solution to the controversy. So Berkeley already has a leg up in making this comparison, insofar as he already has a well-developed position about force. It is important to recognize as well that grace plays a role in philosophical theology that is similar to the one played by force in mechanics. As Berkeley says, "*Grace* is the main point of the Christian dispensation" (AMP 7.4). What Berkeley is referring to here is a tradition that divides human history into different divine dispensations. He is living in the Christian dispensation, which follows upon the Judaic dispensation as chronicled in the Old Testament. The Christian era is distinguished by grace, which enters into human history with the coming of Jesus Christ. The concept of grace has proved controversial throughout this Christian history. Berkeley mentions here a number of earlier participants, but the con-

13 Needless to say, interpreting *Locke's* theory of knowledge has proved to be as controversial as his theory of meaning.

troversy has by no means abated. Grace in its operation involves two different kinds of entities, first, God, since as Alciphon says, grace is "the gift of God, as coming by Jesus Christ" and second, Christians, who "are said to be heirs of grace, to receive grace, grow in grace, be strong in grace, to stand in grace, and to fall from grace" (AMP 7.4). The presence or absence of grace is important for human moral conduct and its consequences. The problem that arises and that generates controversy is how to understand God's free and unconditioned conferral of grace while allowing for humans' unconditioned freedom to act, upon which moral responsibility depends. Place too much weight on God and you put in doubt human freedom to act; place too much weight on humans, and you diminish God's role. It is clear that the grace/force comparison is carefully chosen because it allows Berkeley to apply what he has already worked out with respect to force to explain the concept of grace. But it is also clear that an adequate explication of grace is central to the Christian apologetics that guides *Alciphron.* It is also plausible to suppose that Berkeley thinks he has a real solution to the theoretical problems surrounding grace, rather than merely a solution to the meaning of the term.[14]

4 The Grace/Force Argument: Signs and Knowledge

In the third and final edition of *Alciphron*, Euphranor picks up directly on Alciphron's claim that the word 'grace' denotes an impossibility.[15] He says that it will be worthwhile to look at what is in fact possible to do with words, or signs, since he points out, words are signs. In the long paragraph that follows, Berkeley gives an account of several different uses of signs. The first use of signs Euphranor mentions concern cases where signs are used in carrying out some operation. Eu-

14 That Berkeley had already been thinking about his solution to the problem of grace is shown in a reference he makes to grace in a sermon preached at Leghorn in 1714: "that most excellent & divine grace of charity is in itself not so easily comprehended as it is defined by its effects" (*Works*, vol. VII, 30.). This passage is quoted by Jones 2021, 206. Jones also includes reference to a passage about saving grace that Berkeley included in an anthology of improving writings, *The Ladies Library.* See Jones 2021, 191.

15 In the first and second editions, Berkeley included three sections summarizing his position on abstract ideas. It seems plausible that he came to think his anti-abstractionism about number in the subsequent section was intelligible without the summary material. I am therefore following the practice of Luce and Jessop in citing Berkeley's section numbers as they appear in the third edition, rather than that of Jaffro et al. (2010), who reproduce the second edition and include in the text the omitted paragraphs.

phranor gives two examples. First, he says that counters can be used as a substitute for values in a card game. Berkeley is presumably thinking of a gambling game, in which counters are used to record bets, wins, and losses.[16] During the course of the game, counters can be manipulated according to the rules of the game, without calling to mind the monetary values for which the different counters are substituted, although at the end of the game, players must re-substitute the values originally agreed upon for the counters. The second example also concerns money. I can calculate sums concerning money, as when I balance my checkbook, keeping in mind only the rules of arithmetic, without linking each operation to ideas of the dollar amounts for which the figures are a substitute. Again, I will arrive at a new set of figures, to which I will have to substitute the idea of a dollar amount if I am to spend my money wisely. Berkeley is calling to our attention that I can conduct operations on signs using appropriate rules without making any use of or even calling to mind the things or ideas for which the signs are substitutes, and that I thereby arrive at new knowledge about what the signs signify, when I translate the signs back into their significations.

Berkeley generalizes from these examples to claim that

> A discourse, therefore, that directs how to act or excites to the doing or forbearance of an action may, it seems, be useful and significant, although the words whereof it is composed should not bring each a distinct idea into our minds. (AMP 7.5)

It is important to notice here that while Berkeley is linking signs with actions, his examples are not those in which the sign might be said to mean the action, like the red light of a stop light that commands a driver to stop, or the word "Run!" in the presence of a bear.[17] But rather, these accounts, as underlined in the examples of the counters or the calculations, concern areas in which operations governed by rules linking signs give rise to knowledge on the basis of which agents adopt subsequent action. In these specific examples of Euphranor's, Berkeley is identifying familiar cases where operating on signs can result in knowledge that informs action, and knowledge moreover that does not depend upon necessary agreements and disagreements between ideas. Euphranor can be understood to be casting doubt on Alciphron's basic claim that knowledge depends upon necessary connections between ideas.

Euphranor's next case of words or signs is that, not of operations, but of their agents. This is again particularly significant with respect to Alciphron's example of

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16 He was however not thinking of the game most familiar to us today, poker, which had not yet been invented.

17 This is actually bad advice to someone confronted by a bear, I have been led to believe.

grace, because, as Alciphron himself notes, grace is different from corporeal force, since it concerns the operations of a spiritual entity, God, acting on other spiritual entities, human minds. Euphranor is pointing out that I do understand words that stand for active spirits and their operations, even though I do not and cannot have passive ideas about them. Here he says:

> I understand what is signified by the terms *I,* or *myself,* or know what it means, although it be no idea, nor like an idea, but that which thinks, and wills, and apprehends ideas, and operates about them. (AMP 7.5)

It is helpful to take this claim here in the context of Berkeley's clarification in *Three Dialogues*, where he writes:

> I know or am conscious of my own being; and that I myself am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas. (DHP 233)

Like Philonous there, Euphranor here is claiming that we have knowledge of agents like ourselves through our awareness of our own acting on our ideas, but this knowledge does not depend on ideas.[18]

Euphranor has given two examples of occasions when words or signs signify without connecting to ideas, that of the operations of agents, and that of agents themselves. He concludes with a general claim "that words may be significant, although they do not stand for ideas" (AMP 7.5) and provides a diagnosis of why this truth has so often been missed, the same diagnosis provided in the Introduction to the *Principles.* It is the doctrine of abstract ideas that is at fault. Euphranor sets out to dismiss the common opinion expressed by Alciphron that "every substantive name marks out and exhibits to the mind one distinct idea separate from all others" (AMP 7.5). In this case, Berkeley has Alciphron consider the example of number, and Alciphron promptly fails miserably to arrive at a distinct idea of number separate from all other ideas. Berkeley has, however, in earlier accounts of number in the *Principles* provided an understanding of how numbers work that might clarify Alciphron's failure. Right at the beginning of the *Principles*, in section 12, Berkeley makes the point that numbers are not passively received ideas of qualities of things, but rather as he put it there, they are "creatures of the mind." Numbering is an operation of the mind, in quantitatively ordering arbitrarily chosen

18 See also DM § 21, where Berkeley writes: "the sentient, percipient, thinking thing we know by a certain internal consciousness." Other important passages can be found at: PHK § 139 and especially PHK § 89.

groups of things. "Thus," he writes, "the same extension is one or three or thirty-six, according as the mind considers it with reference to a yard, a foot, or an inch" (PHK § 12). Later, in PHK §§ 119–122, Berkeley makes the further point that numerical ordering has been expressed in more than one symbolic notation. Different people will use different systems, they will conceptualize numbers differently to express the same mathematical truths, and we can choose one system over another on grounds of utility since none of them says anything about the nature of number. Given this understanding of numbering, it is no surprise that Alciphron is found confessing that he is unable to "abstract the idea of number from the numerical names and characters, and all particular numerable things" (AMP 7.5) since, in Berkeley's eyes, if we have a proper understanding of numerical names and characters, we understand they are just ways of ordering numerable things, and so clearly numbers cannot exist exclusive of numerable things. Euphanor concludes this section claiming that while there are no distinct ideas of numbers, they are nevertheless useful in the management of our affairs. As he has shown in the earlier example of doing sums, they are ways in which we can come to know important truths about the quantities of things. Euphranor has made his final case about numbers here in terms of abstract ideas, but there is actually a two-pronged case to be made. Negatively, numbers are not abstract ideas, but positively the use of numbers is a particularly useful example of operations of the mind that yield true propositions.

5 The Force/Grace Argument: A Sub-problem—Knowing Force

Sections 6 and 7 provide the nub of the argument about force and grace. Section 6 runs through a quick summary of the argument of *De Motu* about force in order to conclude that "we shall find it as difficult to form an idea of force as of grace" (AMP 7.6). Section 7 argues that just as we can assert true propositions with respect to the concept of force, so it is possible with respect to grace. These two sections, however, present a serious difficulty for Berkeley scholars.[19] Berkeley's solution to the problem of how we can assert propositions about force without having an idea of force as he lays it out in *De Motu* is most often read as putting forward a kind of

19 Kenneth Pearce raises this issue, but as a problem for Berkeley, in Pearce 2017b, 458–483. It should be noted that this objection rests on a specific version of instrumentalism. There may well be other theories that can be called instrumentalism that are closer to Berkeley's own account.

instrumentalism. Force is a fictive device we use in arriving at laws about moving bodies. But a parallel solution along these lines to the matter of grace just will not do. First, as should be obvious, few people and certainly no theist in Berkeley's day would accept the claim that grace is a mere fictive device, useful for drawing conclusions or for promoting moral actions. Second, many scholars who accept this particular instrumentalist picture are not at all clear about the inferences the concept of grace can lead to. David Berman, for example, writes:

> Thus talk of grace has the tendency to produce good habits and piety; original sin can deter men from committing an evil deed, and a future state is likely to produce good habits and a salutary sense of one's unworthiness. Religious mysteries are pragmatic; they are justified by their utility. (Berman 1994, 205–206)

Berman fails to explain, however, the means by which grace or talk of grace is supposed to produce good habits. Pearce has also pointed out that in discussions of the beneficial results of grace, there are often use/mention confusions. It is never clear whether "grace" refers to some principle coming from God that whooshes in good habits, or whether, as Berman has it, it is "talk" of grace that has these good effects.[20] Finally, we can ask, are all good habits due to grace, or if only some, how do we identify those that are connected to grace? To deal with these matters, it is going to be necessary to revisit Berkeley's account of what is going on with force in more detail than he provides in *Alciphron* to see if there is an interpretation that can successfully carry over to grace.

Before turning to Berkeley's earlier account of force, however, there are one or two points that come up in Section 6 that will be useful to keep in mind. In response to Alciphron's certainty that we have an idea of force, Euphranor issues one of Berkeley's challenges to frame an idea. The details of this challenge are quite specific:

> Euphranor: And yet I question whether every one can form a distinct idea of force. Let me entreat you, Alciphron, be not amused by terms: lay aside the *word* force, and exclude every other thing from your thoughts, and then see what precise *idea* you have of force.
> Alciphron: Force is that in bodies which produceth motion and other sensible effects.
> Euph: Is it something distinct from those effects?
> Alc: It is.
> Euph: Be pleased now to exclude the consideration of its subject and effects, and contemplate force itself in its own precise idea.
> Alc: I profess it is no such easy matter. (AMP 7.6)

20 Pearce 2017b, 476.

This passage is frequently glossed as there is no idea of force, but it is important to observe that Berkeley is again talking about a *distinct* idea. He asks whether it is possible by a process of mental separation to frame an idea of force that excludes "body, time, space, and motion, and all its sensible measures and effects," (AMP 7.6) and the conclusion is that, under these circumstances, we can't produce an idea of force in its own nature or as it is in itself. This result is not at all the same as arguing that force does not exist or that it is a mere fiction. There may be a way of conceptualizing or coming to have knowledge of force by other means than having distinct ideas.

In fact, of course, in the preceding section Berkeley has just finished arguing that there are ways of knowing and things known that do not depend upon the agreement and disagreement of distinct ideas, in particular spirits and their operations. Berkeley has also pointed out, with respect to these spirits and their operations, that there are cases, in particular that of numbers, in which we make cognitive progress through relations among sign systems, which are designed to be informative but not to reveal anything about the nature of that which the signs signify. The presence of this example, coming right before the discussion of force and grace suggests that Berkeley is not intending his remarks to convey that the term, force, lacks meaning, but to draw some conclusions about what is going on when we come to have knowledge of force and grace.

In fact, the immediately preceding discussion of numbers provides a template for Berkeley's account of force. Negatively, as was the case with numbers, Berkeley argues there is no distinct idea of force, independent of "sensible measures and effects." But his positive account of force can be seen to have parallels with what he says about number as well.[21] The positive account of number rests on the claim that numbers are "creatures of the mind," that is, we have to do something, employ mental operations, in order to be able to express the numerical ordering of things. Exactly the same can be said about force. Consider something Berkeley says about force in DM § 67:

> For all forces attributed to bodies are mathematical hypotheses, just as are attractive forces in planets and the sun. But mathematical hypotheses have no stable essences in the nature of things, and they depend upon the notion of the definer.

It's the word "notion" I want to pick up on here, the word Berkeley introduced to describe a way of knowing that is not by way of the passive reception of an idea. When natural philosophers develop laws of motion, of action and reaction, or of

21 For more on Berkeley's positive account of force, see Peterschmitt 2008 19–31, Peterschmitt 2003, 184–197, and Atherton 2022.

attraction, they are doing something. They are observing that similar relations exist among bodies, in various and different circumstances. Relations, according to Berkeley, are known by way of notions, because relating is an operation of the mind, as is spelled out in PHK § 142: "It is also to be remarked, that all relations including an act of the mind, we cannot so properly be said to have an idea, but rather a notion of the relations or habitudes between things."[22] The mathematical hypotheses that Berkeley has referred to in DM § 67 are not fictions or mere tools, but expressions of a relation observed to exist between bodies, which permit quantifying the order observed to exist between two corporeal events.[23] Terms like "force" or "attraction" are signs picking out sets of similar regularities, but they are not indicators of some underlying cause. Disputes about whether it is the same motion or a different motion that follows the impact of one body on another are as irrelevant to the truth of the laws of motion as would be disputes about Roman or Arabic notation to the truth of numerical calculations. However conceptualized, laws of motion employing the concept of force are true of body in the concrete: "One body loses motion, the other acquires it" (DM § 68). Berkeley is showing how we can extend our knowledge of nature through such laws. In identifying force as a mathematical hypothesis, Berkeley was not introducing a strange new fictive entity. "Force" can be recognized as an old friend in Berkeley's philosophy, as a kind of notion, which in this case allows us to extend our knowledge by recognizing the presence of similar relations in disparate phenomena.

6 The Issue of Grace

With this understanding of how Berkeley is using the word "force" in mind, it is possible to make progress on the way he is taking the parallel case of "grace." Alciphron is presumably wrong when he characterizes "grace" as "an active, vital ruling principle, influencing and operating on the mind of man, distinct from every natural power or motive" (AMP 7.4). However we are to understand "grace," it will not be distinct or independent of the concrete circumstances in which grace functions. Since "grace" is a concept that links God on the one hand, and humans on the other, the word "grace" picks out a relation between things, and not a principle or property belonging to one thing or another. It will also be useful to keep in mind, as has been mentioned previously, that grace is con-

22 I am grateful to Manuel Fasko for stressing the importance of this passage.

23 Clearly, there is a great deal more to be said about Berkeley's account of relations than I have room for here; it is a topic well worth exploring.

sidered to be a concept central to *Christianity*. This means that the God who figures in the relation of grace is specifically the Trinitarian God of the Christian era, following the coming of Jesus Christ. It further means that the humans who enter into the relation of grace are limited to believing Christians. While those who are not Christians may certainly be moved to perform good and moral actions, they will not be acting in grace, and their actions will have no consequences for the ultimate salvation of their souls. Recognizing the unfortunately exclusionary nature of grace is necessary for understanding how an orthodox theologian like Berkeley would understand the concept of grace.

We can dismiss the fear that grace is some sort of fictive tool allowing humans to reach conclusions of an unspecified sort. But how grace actually functions in Berkeley's eyes is not entirely clear and the little he specifically says is sufficiently vague to permit the equally vague formulations among scholars. Berkeley, having had Euphranor claim that there are many known truths about force, has him offer the following analogy:

> If there are queries, disputes, perplexities, diversity of notions and opinions about [force], so there are about [grace] also: if we can form no precise distinct idea of the one, so neither can we about the other. Ought we not therefore, by a parity of reason, to conclude there may be possibly divers true and useful propositions concerning the one as well as the other? And that grace may, for ought you know, be an object of our faith, and influence our life and actions, as a principle destructive of evil habits and productive of good ones, although we cannot attain a distinct idea of it, separate or abstracted from God the author, from man the subject, and from virtue and piety its effects? (AMP 7.7)

What many have taken from this passage is that Berkeley holds that grace is a spur to action through emotive means.[24] But this reading is problematic. For one thing, this active, emotive reading seems somewhat one-sided. All the action is on God's part, and we humans are merely reactive. What is needed, then, is an account of grace that provides active roles for both God and humans.

Section 7 ends with a question about whether grace can be an object of faith, and while the term "grace" does not recur, I believe a positive answer to this question can be found in the section immediately following this one. Euphranor points out that it has already been agreed that the "mind of man" can assent to propositions concerning signs even when they do not pick out distinct ideas. The conclusion he draws concerns the doctrine of the Trinity, the mystery that lies at the heart of the Christian conception of God.

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24 Recall the earlier quotation from David Berman 1994, 205–206.

> Whence it seems to follow that a man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, if he finds it revealed in Holy Scripture that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are God, and that there is but one God, although he doth not frame in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of trinity, substance, or personality; provided that this doctrine of a Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier makes proper impressions on his mind, producing therein love, hope, gratitude, and obedience, and thereby becomes a lively operative principle, influencing his life and actions, agreeably to that notion of saving faith which is required in a Christian. (AMP 7.8)

Berkeley here reminds us that attempts to frame abstract ideas concerning the metaphysics of the Trinity are inappropriate, and he can presumably expect his readers to be familiar with the various theological disputes to which such attempts can lead. He directs us instead to the names of the different relations God bears to humans, marked out by the names Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. We will thereby come to believe such propositions as we are created through the unconditioned love of the Father, we are redeemed from original sin through Christ, and we will be sanctified or saved through the Holy Ghost. Believing such propositions concerning God's relations with us will govern our actions, supported by such appropriate emotions as hope and obedience. It is the assent to these propositions whose content lays out God's relation to us that constitute what is called "saving faith." When Christians assent to and act on these propositions through trust in a loving God, they become candidates for salvation. The human contribution to the relation of grace just is their faith, which is to say, their assent to the propositions about God's grace. Grace, as described here, is a reciprocal relation in which both humans and God have roles to play. This is a picture of grace that can't be represented by ideas abstracted "from God the author, from man the subject, and from virtue and piety its effects" (AMP 7.7, as quoted above) but it also, through the notion of saving faith, shows how grace is indeed an object of faith. Finally, because grace like force describes a relation, it is an instance in which cognition is advanced, but not through the agreement and disagreement between ideas.[25] It should be clear that Berkeley's concern has been with whether grace can be the object of a cognitive attitude toward propositions and not with whether the word "grace" has a meaning. As before, Berkeley's focus has been on the way in which a misleading search for abstract ideas can direct us away from the knowledge or faith that can be provided in the case of relations like force and grace.

25 It should be noted that the similarities between force and grace should not be taken too far. Grace does not, as Berman thought, explain good habits, as force explains the behavior of moving bodies. Grace is a state of the soul, and if it explains anything, it is which souls will be saved.

7 Signs and Knowledge

Berkeley has answered the challenge he issued through Alciphron. We have just as good grounds, and the same kind of grounds for assenting to propositions concerning grace and religious mysteries, as we do to the propositions of natural philosophy, like those about force. He concludes this discussion with some remarks about signs. The final matter we need to take up, then, is, in what he says about signs, is Berkeley enlarging on a theory of meaning or is he supporting a theory of knowledge? It is certainly significant that Berkeley opens this last part of the section we have been looking at with a question of Alciphron's, one that turns into a discussion of knowledge. Why is it, Alciphron wonders, that the more people become knowledgeable, the more "they dwindle in faith?" (AMP 7.11). Euphranor's answer to this question allows Berkeley to talk about the nature of knowledge. Euphranor proposes that the problem of dwindling faith is not due to increased knowledge, but rather to "an ignorance of what knowledge is" (AMP 7.11). Berkeley has provided himself with an opportunity to explain what knowledge is or how it works.

Berkeley begins his account of knowledge with what he says is the clear case, the assent of the mind to propositions in the case of general or universal knowledge.[26] In a long but important paragraph he writes:

> To trace things from their original, it seems that the human mind, naturally furnished with the ideas of things particular and concrete, and being designed, not for the bare intuition of ideas, but for action and operation about them, and pursuing her own happiness therein, stands in need of certain general rules or theorems, to direct her operations in this pursuit; the supplying which want is the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences. Now, these rules being general, it follows that they are not to be obtained by the mere consideration of the original ideas, or particular things, but by means of marks and signs, which, being so far forth universal, become the immediate instruments and materials of science. It is not, therefore, by mere contemplation of particular things, and much less of their abstract general ideas, that the mind makes her progress, but by an apposite choice and skillful management of signs: for instance, force and number, taken in concrete, with their adjuncts, subjects, and signs, are what every one knows; and considered in abstract, so as making precise ideas of themselves, they are what nobody can comprehend. (AMP 7.11)

Knowledge, we read here, begins with the particular and concrete but it doesn't end there. To suppose that knowledge can be derived, as Berkeley says, from contemplation of ideas, and especially abstract general ideas, is a dead end. Instead, we achieve generality or universality through the use of signs. Signs are the

26 In the passage below, Berkeley references such knowledge, as was customary at the time, as "science."

means by which the mind operates with ideas to bring about what progress in knowledge requires, general rules or theorems, on the basis of which we are able to act to achieve happiness. We have a picture here of knowledge which is ultimately practical, where practice rests on general principles, discovered or expressed by means of signs. Unpacking this picture ultimately rests on an understanding of Berkeley's theory of signs, which appears to be what takes us from the contemplation of particulars to progress in the knowledge on which practical action depends.[27]

This stress on the importance of signs is not at all new in Berkeley's thought. It emerges, for example, as a central notion in *Principles of Human Knowledge*, in some discussions that are useful for disentangling the material in *Alciphron.* The most elaborate statement occurs in PHK § 65, which concludes an account of why bodies contain inward mechanical parts. In another long but important paragraph, Berkeley explains that the connection we discern among our ideas is far from random, yet it

> does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified.* The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it. In like manner, the noise that I hear is not the effect of this or that motion or collision of the ambient bodies, but the sign thereof. Secondly, the reason why ideas are formed into machines, that is, artificial and regular combinations, is the same with that for combining letters into words. That a few original ideas may be made to signify a great number of effects and actions, it is necessary they be variously combined together: and to the end their use be permanent and universal, these combinations must be made by *rule,* and with *wise contrivance.* By this means abundance of information is conveyed unto us, concerning what we are to expect from such and such actions, and what methods are proper to be taken, for the exciting such and such ideas, which in effect is all that I conceive to be distinctly meant, when it is said that by discerning the figure, texture, and mechanism of the inward parts of bodies, whether natural or artificial, we may attain to know the several uses and properties depending thereon, or the nature of the thing. (PHK § 65)

Berkeley is telling us here that ideas are signs, as, for example, visual ideas of fire, and they call to mind other ideas, such as pain on approaching fire. We extend our knowledge, not just by discerning necessary connections between ideas, but also when arbitrarily connected ideas regularly occur together. The knowledge that is gained when an idea signifies other ideas is, importantly, *fore*knowledge. We are not faced with a confusion of ideas to contemplate, but in connecting ideas together, we learn what to expect. For this learning or progress in knowledge to occur, it

27 Berkeley's theory of signs provides far more areas of exploration than I have touched on here. A good place to start is with Winkler 2005. See also Jones 2021, chap. 12.

is important that ideas go constantly together, that they regularly recur, or, as Berkeley says here, be made by rule. Because our ideas are regular, they can serve as signs to provide universal knowledge, so that we come to know what to expect and to adjust our conduct accordingly. The reason why signs of this sort are linked to action is not because signs themselves spur us to action, but because signs provide us with foreknowledge, by means of which we guide our action to achieve happiness.

In the passage in *Alciphron* we have been looking at, Berkeley describes the knowledge we come by through the use of signs, not as empirical generalizations, like those mentioned in the *Principles* passage, but as general rules and theorems. Berkeley does, however, move on in the *Principles* to discuss a broader range of knowledge, more similar to that of force and number that have been the focus here in *Alciphron.* In PHK § 105, Berkeley describes how the knowledge of natural philosophers is distinctive. It consists, he says,

> [O]nly in a greater largeness of comprehension, whereby analogies, harmonies, and agreements are discovered in the works of Nature, and the particular effects explained, that is, reduced to general rules, see *Sect. 62*, which rules grounded on the analogy and uniformness observed in the production of natural effects, are most agreeable, and sought after by the mind; for that they extend our prospect beyond what is present, and near to us, and enable us to make very probable conjectures, touching things that may have happened at very great distances of time and place, as well as to predict things to come; which sort of endeavour towards omniscience, is much affected by the mind. (PHK § 105)

Berkeley here is focusing on the way that natural philosophers are able to extend human knowledge beyond the sort of training we all receive from the regularities of our ideas of the empirical world. Taking matters in their own hands, they search out further similarities and analogies, on the basis of which they can formulate laws of greater generality.[28] Such laws generate predictions that extend the propositions to which these philosophers can assent into further hitherto unexamined areas. These are the means by which they produce the propositions about force Berkeley describes as true in *De Motu* and *Alciphron*, and about attraction, the case discussed in the *Principles.*

In *Alciphron*, Berkeley follows up his initial account of what knowledge is like with a further discussion of number. Here he is stressing the point he has just made in the previous paragraph that knowledge is gained through "an appropriate choice and skillful management of signs" (AMP 7.11), but he is also echoing his own discussion of arithmetic in the *Principles.* In AMP 7.12 and in PHK § 121, Berkeley describes a kind of genealogy of the development of numerical notation, from

28 For more on Berkeley's use of analogies, see Fasko 2021.

names indicating a quantitative order, to various systems of marks, and culminating, explicitly in the *Principles*, with Arabic notation, "wherein by the repetition of a few characters or figures, and varying the signification of each figure according to the place it obtains, all numbers may be most aptly expressed" (PHK § 121) so that, as the passage in the *Principles* sums up, we can calculate any numerical relation with the use of signs.

> For these signs being known, we can by the operations of arithmetic, know the signs of any part of the particular sums signified by them; and thus computing in signs (because of the connexion established betwixt them and the distinct multitudes of things, whereof one is taken for a unit), we may be able rightly to sum up, divide, and proportion the things themselves that we intend to number. (PHK § 121)

This is the same point that is being stressed in AMP 7.12. There Berkeley says:

> I imagine one need not think much to be convinced that the science of arithmetic, by its rise, operations, rules, and theorems, is altogether conversant about the artificial use of signs, names, and characters. These names and characters are universal, inasmuch as they are signs. The names are referred to things, the characters to names, and both to operation. The names being few, and proceeding by a certain analogy, the characters will be more useful, the simpler they are, and the more aptly they express this analogy. (AMP 7.12)

As in the *Principles,* Berkeley is pointing out that operations of arithmetic are operations on relations of sign to sign. The sign relations are artificial and constructed with an eye to ease of use. They do not therefore reflect anything about the nature of numbers. Berkeley has mentioned some of this earlier in AMP 7.5. In this later passage, he explicitly points out that the names of numbers ultimately refer to things and reflect, he says, an analogy, presumably of the quantitative relations that are reflected in these names. Berkeley actually added a sentence to the final edition of *Alciphron* emphasizing the importance of relations to the signs in use. He wrote:

> The signs, indeed, do in their use imply relations or proportions of things; but these relations are not abstract general ideas, being founded in particular things, and not making of themselves distinct ideas to the mind, exclusive of particular ideas and their signs. (AMP 7.12)

In cases like arithmetic, the rules governing sign-to-sign operations are artificial and designed for ease of use in calculations, but what the calculations are used for is to express relations among particular things.

Berkeley concludes his account of numerical operations by proposing that very similar explanations will be found to apply for all other sciences, which, as he subsequently adds, "will be found conversant about signs as their immediate

object, though these in their application are referred to things" (AMP 7.13). By the end of this paragraph, Berkeley feels able to sum up with the opinion that

> I am inclined to think the doctrine of signs a point of great importance and general extent, which, if duly considered, would cast no small light upon things, and afford a just and genuine solution of many difficulties. (AMP 7.13)

From Berkeley's very beginnings, signs have figured largely in the theory of knowledge Berkeley developed. In the *New Theory*, he shows that it is the relation that visual signs bear to other tangible ideas that explains how we learn to see spatial properties of things. In *Alciphron*, Berkeley is following up on a case he had originally made in the *Principles*, first, that we learn via signs what else further we may come to expect, and second, that as natural philosophers in search of knowledge, we can enlarge and extend our knowledge through more and more general laws holding among things. In both cases, we don't just have ideas, but we use our ideas to extend our knowledge by recognizing relations among ideas. Here in *Alciphron*, Berkeley engages specifically in exploring the kind of knowledge natural philosophers arrive at when they exploit relations among things in a deliberate and self-conscious manner. He uses his account of what happens when arithmetic notation is developed to show how in general knowledge is advanced by choosing and substituting signs that are useful for our purposes. Berkeley is picking up here on a claim about the importance of analogy in explaining the success of Arabic notation, and he is using this point to give a general account of how we go about developing knowledge.

> Nothing, I say, is more natural, than to make the things we know a step towards the those we do not know; and to explain and represent things less familiar by others which are more so. Now, it is certain we imagine before we reflect, and we perceive by sense before we imagine: and of all our senses the sight is the most clear, distinct, various, agreeable, and comprehensive. (AMP 7.13)

On this basis, Berkeley points out that we extend and communicate our knowledge by "figures, metaphors, and tropes" and by "models and diagrams." A straight line that can stand for any straight line can also be used to represent "time, velocity, and other things of very different natures" (AMP 7.13).[29] As he did in the *Principles*, Berkeley is showing that our skill as knowledge makers rests on the capacity to set ideas in relation to one another. Berkeley's demonstration of the value of signs is in terms of the kind of knowledge that can be gained, and the way in which our mental faculties, in particular, the capacity for uncovering novel relations, can

29 See also the account of analogy in AMP 4.21.

be exploited in the growth of knowledge. It is, I think, highly significant that in this passage Berkeley names the imagination as the faculty that, in the search for knowledge, stands between the senses and the reflective reason, the same faculty that he introduced in the very first sentence of the *Principles* as the one responsible for forming further ideas. To be sure, Berkeley does suppose that the reason why natural philosophers seek to gain knowledge is ultimately to benefit human action, and he has no patience with purely speculative inquiry, but he does suppose that action requires knowledge of a kind we can be shown to be equipped to provide. Berkeley concludes this paragraph with unadulterated praise for the "doctrine of signs" but it seems that his doctrine of signs doesn't stray very far from Locke's own description: "to consider the Nature of Signs, the Mind makes use of for the understanding of things, or conveying its knowledge to others" (*Essay* 4.21.4). Berkeley, like Locke, thinks that signs are used for understanding and knowledge, but, it would seem, he does not endorse Locke's limited definition of knowledge, as concerned with the agreement and disagreement of ideas.

Conclusion: Berkeley Has a Theory of Knowledge and Not a Theory of Meaning

I have been arguing that Berkeley's account of the use of signs in *Alciphron* is in the service of a theory of knowledge in which signs either call to mind ideas or, via sign-to-sign relations, ultimately culminate in ideas. I am not, however, thereby alleging that according to Berkeley ideas are the vehicle that confers meaning on signs. In a passage in the final portion of this piece of *Alciphron*, often quoted by those supporting alternative theories of meaning, Berkeley lists a number of things signs can do. Here is the part of the paragraph that is most often quoted:

> Thus much, upon the whole, may be said of all signs:–that they do not always suggest ideas signified to the mind, that when they suggest ideas, they are not general abstract ideas: that they have other uses besides barely standing for and exhibiting ideas, such as raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of that happiness which is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that sets rational agents at work […](AMP 7.14)

If Berkeley's primary purpose in working through the examples of force and grace was to introduce a theory of meaning with respect to these terms, then it would be reasonable to suppose that Berkeley's remarks here about the wider uses of signs would be support for his alternative theory of meaning, whether it be a use or an

emotive theory or whatever.[30] But if, as I have been arguing, Berkeley's focus is not on meaning at all, then his claim that signs can do other things besides suggest ideas may be quite benign. As Kenneth Williford and Roomet Jakapi point out, there is no reason to suppose that the many other things that Berkeley mentions that signs can do all confer meanings on signs.[31]

Nevertheless, it is certainly worth asking exactly what Berkeley thinks he is pointing to in his final paragraph. Is there a conclusion he wants his readers to draw? I think it will be useful to have the rest of the first sentence of this final paragraph before us:

> that signs may imply or suggest the relations of things; which relations, habitudes, or proportions, as they cannot be by us understood but by the help of signs, so being thereby expressed and confuted, they direct and enable us to act with regard to things: that the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always, the imparting or acquiring ideas, but rather something of an active operative nature, tending to a conceived good: which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such idea to the mind: for instance, the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of a negative square, hath its use in logistic operations, although it be impossible to form an idea of any such quantity. (AMP 7.14)

In talking about "relations, habitudes or proportions," Berkeley is recalling language he used to explain how it is we are able to make and assent to true propositions using the concept of force, which in turn is how he justified assent to propositions about grace.[32] It grounds Berkeley's epistemic theory that refutes, let us remember, Alciphron's original reason for arguing for a disanalogy between force and grace. Alciphron, it will be recalled, rests his claim on *his* theory of knowledge, based on the agreement or disagreement among ideas. Berkeley's remarks about the varied things that signs can do besides stand for ideas is part of a refutation of *this* account of knowledge which requires mental propositions linking distinct ideas. And, indeed, it has been a theme of Berkeley's work, starting with the *New Theory*, that insisting that knowledge consists in necessary connections between ideas leads philosophers to suppose the presence of ideas that no one is aware of having. This final paragraph we have been looking at leads to Ber-

30 It is worth noting that the various things that Berkeley says signs can do doesn't point directly at any particular alternative theory.

31 Williford and Jakapi 2009

32 For another account of Berkeley's theory of force in *Alciphron*, which also stresses the importance of relations, see Luc Peterschmitt 2010, 413–422.

keley's alternative account of knowledge, which, I have pointed out, is not only to be found in *Alciphron*, but has been developing throughout his writing.

Let me return finally to my original question: Does Berkeley have a theory of meaning? My answer at this point is a qualified no. Berkeley was certainly interested in the relations between words and ideas, both when they did and when they did not obtain, as well as relations between ideas and words, words and signs, signs and ideas, and signs and signs. It is true that these relations are relevant to what words mean. Nevertheless, Berkeley's interest in these relations did not lie in hammering out a theory of meaning, or pinning down a specific vehicle for meaning. His primary motivation was to understand how these various relations could help or hinder the acquisition of knowledge. In the Introduction to the *Principles*, he was concerned that a mistaken belief that a word stood for a single distinct idea could be misleading and result in skepticism. In *Alciphron*, following upon an account of how knowledge is acquired, his focus is on how the relation between these various entities can help to extend knowledge. Seeking to locate a theory of meaning in these texts can obscure the epistemic enterprise Berkeley was engaged in and mislead his readers about his real motivations.[33]

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33 I would like to thank Robert Schwartz, Manuel Fasko and Peter West for their careful reading and helpful suggestions for this paper.

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Keota Fields

7 Berkeley On the Meaning of General Terms

Abstract: Keota Fields develops an original interpretation. Against "non-ideational" interpretations of Berkeley's theory of meaning, which entail that words need not signify ideas at all to be meaningful, Fields argues that, for Berkeley, the meaning of a general term is all the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by that term. This reading respects Berkeley's rejection of the existence of abstract ideas but comes up against two problems. First, in places, Berkeley's remarks suggest that a general term's meaning is a single, particular idea that it signifies. Second, Berkeley also maintains that a word like "good" can be meaningful to a language-user even if does not signify any ideas at all. To address these problems, Fields appeals to Berkeley's theory of mediate perception, arguing that some terms *mediately* signify ideas beyond those they *immediately* pick out.

Introduction

George Berkeley famously rejects abstract ideas in the Introduction to his *Principles.* Abstract ideas are an "abuse of language" and a chief source of philosophical error (PHK Intro § 6). Berkeley replaces abstract ideas with his own theory of general terms. According to Berkeley, "a word becomes general by being made the sign, not of a general idea but, of many particular ideas," (MI 17 [127]).[1] General terms indifferently signify multiple particular ideas (PHK Intro § 11; MI 32 [135]).

Yet when he turns to analyze sentences like "Socrates is a man," Berkeley suggests that the meaning of such sentences is constituted by a single idea – in this case, the idea of Socrates (MI 17 [127], 34 [136]).[2] It seems that the particular

1 Section numbers in MI follow those in Bertil Belfrage's (1987) Doxa edition. Page numbers in brackets refer to those in volume 2 of *Works.*

2 One might have the following worry about reliance on unpublished manuscripts as authoritative sources of Berkeley's considered views. Since Berkeley chose not to publish those manuscripts, he may have rejected or doubted views expressed therein – particularly when views expressed in unpublished works conflict with views expressed in published works (see Roberts 2007, 7). This worry is particularly acute with respect to Berkeley's *Notebooks*, since Berkeley seems to assert views there that he rejects later – both in the *Notebooks* themselves and in published works (although for a rebuttal to claims that Berkeley contradicts himself, see Daniel 2021, 3–7). I do not share this interpretative worry with respect to the MI for two reasons. First, unlike the *Notebooks*,

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-010

ideas indifferently signified by "man" play no role in constituting the meaning of the general term in that sentence, or in the meaning of the sentence as a whole. To make matters worse, when discussing a biblical passage about heavenly rewards, Berkeley says that the general term "good thing" does not signify any ideas in finite minds at all. Yet Berkeley insists that this general term is meaningful, suggesting that for Berkeley some meaningful general terms are idea-less.[3] It therefore seems, despite what Berkeley says elsewhere, that the meaning of a general term and the meaning of a sentence containing a general term are *not* constituted by indifferently signifying multiple ideas.[4]

I argue that this tension is merely apparent, and that Berkeley's considered view is that the meaning of a general term is constituted by the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by that term. The apparent tension in Berkeley's texts emerges from two challenges confronting Berkeley's theory of general terms.[5] One challenge is to explain how a hearer can know the meaning of the speaker's words if the ideas signified by those words are private, and so imperceptible to the hearer. Another challenge is to explain how "good thing" is meaningful despite failing to signify ideas in finite minds.[6] As I read Berkeley, he meets both challenges by applying his own distinction between immediate and mediate perception to his indifferent signification theory of general terms. In the challenging cases just described, the hearer mediately perceives ideas signified by a general term even if that term fails to signify any of the hearer's ideas.

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which Berkeley never intended to be published, the MI is a *manuscript* drafted for publication – complete with corrections and edits, intended as instruction for the printer, on the *verso* pages. Second, not only do significant portions of the MI appear in the PHK Intro; but I cannot identify any place where the MI appears to contradict the PHK Intro. Rather, the MI seems to include expositions of arguments included in PHK Intro, supporting examples to illustrate those arguments, and discussions of related issues that, for reasons lost to history, Berkeley simply decided not to include in the published version. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this issue.

3 I borrow the phrase 'idea-less' from Williford (2003, 272).

4 Defenders of this interpretation include Williford and Jakapi (2009), Roberts (2017), and Pearce (2017).

5 I have carefully avoided applying the phrase "theory of meaning" to Berkeley. I speak here only of Berkeley's theory of general terms; and I take it that MI and PI make it abundantly clear that Berkeley *has* a theory of general terms (although the details of that theory are up for debate). The only place where I refer to a "theory of meaning" in the present work is in reference to Locke's theory, which I point out that Berkeley rejects (at least in part). In the present work, I wish to remain neutral on the question of whether Berkeley has a theory of meaning.

6 Berkeley confronts this challenge throughout his philosophical career. He considers it in MI of 1709 and PHK Intro of 1710; but engages with it extensively in AMP of 1732. In the latter work, Berkeley expands the challenge to include how terms like "grace" and "force" can be meaningful for finite minds despite failing to signify ideas in those minds.

1 Indifferent Signification

According to Locke, the abstract idea of a triangle is composed of determinables, which can be exemplified in a variety of ways by particular determinate features (*Essay* IV.vii.9; see PHK Intro § 13). Among those determinable features are lines and angles, which are exemplified by particular lines of various lengths and particular angles of various degrees, respectively. Particular ideas of triangles exemplify the abstract idea of a triangle by exhibiting determinate features exemplifying the abstract idea's determinable features. Berkeley presents three arguments against Locke's theory of abstract ideas.

First, Berkeley thinks that the mind cannot perceive ideas with undetermined features. Such features are imperceptible by definition. But even if the mind could perceive an idea with imperceptible features, that idea couldn't resemble any particular idea with determinate features (PHK § 8). Berkeley seems to think that a particular idea exemplifies an abstract idea only if determinate features of the former resemble determinable features of the latter. Since a perceived determinate feature cannot resemble an "invisible" undetermined feature, there's no sense in which any particular idea of a triangle could resemble the abstract idea of a triangle. Thus, no particular idea of a triangle could exemplify the abstract idea of a triangle.

Second, the abstract idea of a triangle must resemble *all* of the particular ideas that exemplify its determinable features. Resemblance is a symmetric relation: If *x* resembles *y*, then *y* resembles *x*. Therefore, if a particular idea resembles an abstract idea, then that abstract idea also resembles that particular idea. Consequently, an abstract idea resembles each of the particular ideas that exemplify it. But there's no guarantee that those particular ideas resemble each other. If those particulars do *not* resemble each other (as Locke says in the passage cited above), then the corresponding abstract idea must have contradictory features. But the mind cannot perceive an idea that is "contradictory" and "inconsistent."[7]

Third, Berkeley thinks that "an impossibility cannot be conceiv'd,"[8] and that God cannot make contradictions actual (MI 14 [125]).[9] The implication is that

7 See MI 20–21 [129–130]; PHK Intro §§ 9–10.

8 Thomas Holden (2019) argues that Berkeley does not hold that inconceivability entails impossibility. One might worry that the present reading conflicts with Holden's view. It doesn't. I have only said here that Berkeley thinks that *impossibility entails inconceivability*, which is a different entailment from the one that Holden discusses.

God can create anything that does not include a contradiction; and that finite minds are capable of perceiving (or conceiving) anything that does not include a contradiction. But God cannot make an object that is not fully determinate, or which has contradictory features. Thus, not only is it impossible for such an object to exist; but finite minds are incapable of perceiving or conceiving of such things.

As mentioned above, Berkeley replaces abstract ideas with his own indifferent signification theory of general terms. But Berkeley also seems to say that the meaning of sentences containing general terms is constituted by the one idea signified by the name in that sentence rather than by multiple ideas. The implication is that the general term in that sentence is meaningful although it does not signify multiple ideas. Consider an extended passage where Berkeley analyzes the meaning of the sentence 'Melampus is an animal'. Berkeley writes that the meaning of that sentence is constituted by *one* idea:

> I perceive it evidently in my self that upon laying aside all thought of the words 'Melampus is an animal' I have remaining in my mind *one naked and bare idea viz that particular one to which I give the name 'Melampus'.* (MI 34 [136], my emphasis; punctuation modernized)

Berkeley writes in this passage that the same particular idea of Melampus is signified by both the subject and predicate of that sentence. In that case, it seems that the meaning of that sentence is constituted by one particular idea of Melampus without the help of the other particular ideas indifferently signified by "animal". Assuming that the meaning of a sentence is composed of the meanings of its constituent terms, Berkeley's analysis suggests that the meaning of "animal" when used in that sentence is not constituted by any of the other particular ideas indifferently signified by that term.

Immediately after this passage, Berkeley rehearses the reasoning used to show "how men might first have come to think there was [an abstract] general idea of animal" (MI 35 [136]). That reasoning takes the form of a dilemma. On one horn of the dilemma, suppose that "animal" signifies the same idea signified by "Melampus." In that case, the sentence is a tautology. But "Melampus is an animal" is clearly not a tautology because it is informative. On the other horn of the dilemma, suppose that "animal" signifies the idea of some particular animal other than Melampus. In that case, the sentence is contradictory (e.g., "Melampus is Fido," where Fido is not Melampus). But the sentence is not contradictory. We are supposed to conclude from this dilemma that "animal" cannot signify any particular

9 I suspect that Berkeley's point is that God cannot manifest contradictions, since that's what would be required in order for God to make a contradiction actual. For discussion, see Winkler (2005, 143) and Pearce (2017, 26).

idea at all in "Melampus is an animal"; and that therefore it must signify an abstract idea. Berkeley writes: "In like manner we may be able with a little attention to discover how [abstract] general ideas of all sorts might at first have stolen into the thoughts of men" (MI 35 [137]). One might worry that such reasoning applies to Berkeley's claim that the meaning of "Melampus is an animal" is constituted by the particular idea of Melampus. For Berkeley seems to say that "animal" signifies that idea exclusively, in which case the sentence is a tautology. One might also take this dilemma as evidence that for Berkeley, the meaning of "animal" is not constituted by signifying ideas, but is constituted in some other way.[10]

To see how Berkeley addresses these worries, consider another passage exactly similar to the Melampus passage. There, Berkeley analyzes the sentence "Socrates is a man":

> when I say the word 'Socrates' is a proper particular name, and the word 'Man' an appellative or general name, I mean no more than this, viz that the one is peculiar & appropriated to one particular person, the other common to a great many particular persons, each whereof has an equal right to be called by the name 'Man'. (MI 17 [127] – punctuation modernized)

Taken together, the 'Socrates" and "Melampus" passages suggest the following analysis. General terms indifferently signify multiple particular ideas. The particular idea for which the name "Melampus" stands is also one of the multiple particular ideas indifferently signified by the general word "animal." Thus, the same idea is signified in different ways by different words in that sentence. That's why Berkeley says that the meaning of "Melampus is an animal" is constituted by a single idea.

But although "animal" signifies the idea of Melampus in the sentence "Melampus is an animal," the meaning of "animal" is not constituted by that idea *functioning as a particular idea.* Rather, the meaning of "animal" in that sentence is constituted by the particular idea of Melampus *functioning as a general idea.* Berkeley says that a particular idea "becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (PHK Intro § 12). He thinks that one idea can represent others either by resemblance or by suggestion (see NTV § 9, TVV § 39, quoted below).[11] When one idea represents others through sug-

10 For a defense of this reading, see Pearce (2017, 33–36). The "other way" proposed by Pearce is in terms of operative meaning, or use. Readings of Berkeley as committed to an operative theory of meaning, or a use theory of meaning, are discussed in section 3.

11 Berkeley uses the word "represent" and its cognates in two different senses. In one sense, *X* represents *Y* by resembling *Y* (NTV § 144; PHK § 33). In another sense, *X* represents *Y* by signifying *Y*, but without resembling *Y* (see NTV §§ 143 & 152, where Berkeley says the visible ideas represent tangible ideas despite arguing at NTV § 117 that they cannot resemble each other). Throughout, I have used "represent" in a way that is neutral between these two senses. I set aside the question

gestion, the result is mediate perception. The difference between perceiving the idea of Melampus functioning as a particular idea in the subject position and perceiving the very same idea functioning as a general idea in the predicate position is exactly the same as the difference between seeing particular light and colors and seeing distance by means of those light and colors. In both cases, the latter encodes information not included in the former.

As I read Berkeley, "animal" indifferently signifies the particular idea of Melampus in that sentence. That particular idea functions as a general idea in the predicate position by representing the other particular ideas indifferently signified by "animal." Those other ideas are mediately perceived by means of the immediately perceived idea of Melampus. Collectively, they constitute the meaning of "animal." Berkeley writes that "there is in truth an homonymy or diversity of significations in every name whatsoever except only the proper names" (MI 31 [135]). That diversity of significations is mediately perceived by means of a particular idea functioning as a general idea. But when the particular idea of Melampus is uniquely signified by a name, it does not represent any other particular ideas.

Berkeley's distinction between the idea of Melampus functioning as a particular idea when signified by a name, and the same idea functioning as a general idea when signified by a general term, allows him to avoid the dilemma discussed earlier. The sentence "Melampus is an animal" is informative because "Melampus" and "animal" have distinct meanings – one particular idea for "Melampus"; and that same particular idea representing multiple other particular ideas for "animal." Although the particular idea of Melampus is immediately perceived in that sentence, when that idea functions as a general idea it becomes the means by which other particular ideas signified by "animal" are mediately perceived. Berkeley thereby avoids the result that "Melampus is an animal" is a tautology. That sentence also avoids being contradictory because the same idea that is uniquely signified by "Melampus" also functions as a general idea when indifferently signified by "animal." When functioning as a general idea, the idea of Melampus represents ideas of Fido, Sparky, Lucky, etc. But the result is not that the sentence "Melampus is an animal" is synonymous with "Melampus is Fido" or "Melampus is Sparky." Since those latter sentences contain only names, and not general terms, their meaning is constituted by *two* distinct particular ideas, both of which are functioning exclusively as particular ideas. And since there is no idea in "Melampus is Fido" that functions as a general idea, that sentence cannot be synonymous with "Mel-

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of whether signification is distinct from representation. For further discussion, see Bartha and Fasko's chapters in this volume.

ampus is an animal" in Berkeley's view. A similar analysis applies to "Socrates is a man."

2 The Problem of Communication

The dilemma just described, and which Berkeley rejects, is not the only argument for the indispensability of abstract ideas that he must confront. Locke argues that abstract ideas are necessary in order to solve an epistemic problem about language and other minds. Ideas are private and cannot be perceived by other minds. In that case, how can one person make her ideas known to another?[12] Locke argues that language solves this problem by allowing one mind to indirectly perceive ideas in other minds. This indirect perception begins with a directly perceived "sensible mark" or utterance produced by the speaker. That utterance signifies exactly one of the speaker's ideas (*Essay* III.ii.2).

Locke then claims that in addition to immediately signifying an idea in the mind of the speaker, her word "secretly" signifies an idea in the mind of the hearer. The immediate and secret significations of a word are "precisely the same" idea in each mind – i. e., exactly similar ideas (*Essay* III.ii.4). Let's call this Locke's resemblance condition. When the resemblance condition is satisfied, the hearer has good reason to believe that the content of the speaker's thought is one idea rather than another, or none at all. That's because the secret signification of a word is an internal representation of the speaker's idea in the hearer's mind. Thus, a hearer can indirectly perceive a speaker's thought by directly perceiving the speaker's utterance and directly perceiving the secret signification of that utterance in the hearer's mind. (That secret signification is an idea resembling the speaker's idea.) Observable evidence that a discourse satisfies the resemblance condition includes the transmission of knowledge and the ability to coordinate action through language. One can hardly learn from another if teacher and pupil "speak different languages," as Locke puts it (*Essay* III.ii.4). Likewise, a team effort is unlikely to succeed if teammates fail to communicate.

Locke also thinks that a word must immediately signify exactly one idea in the speaker's mind, and secretly signify exactly one idea in the hearer's mind. Let's call this Locke's uniqueness condition.[13] Locke argues that if the uniqueness and resemblance conditions aren't satisfied, various "abuses" of language result (*Essay*

12 See *Essay* III.ii.1.

13 See *Essay* III.i.2 & III.ii.2–4. Berkeley rejects Locke's uniqueness condition at PHK Intro § 18.

III.x). These include using words without meaning, and using words ambiguously or equivocally.

A special problem emerges for a general term like "animal." Even if the uniqueness condition is satisfied, there's no guarantee that particular ideas in different minds signified by the same general term will resemble each other. Suppose that Maya's particular idea of an animal is of a scorpion; and that Grace's particular idea is of a hawk. In that case, Grace does not know what Maya's word "animal" means. There is no internal representation of Maya's idea in Grace's mind because her particular idea does not resemble Maya's particular idea. Locke concludes that uniqueness and resemblance require that Maya and Grace each have exactly one abstract idea signified by the general term "animal"; and that their abstract ideas resemble one another in determinable features (*Essay* III.iii).

Berkeley agrees with Locke that ideas are private and "cannot of themselves be brought into the view another." He also agrees that "discourse & communication" solve this problem by "[instituting] sounds to be the signs of [the speaker's] ideas," as well as ideas "raised in the mind of the hearer" (MI 19 [128]). Yet Berkeley's insistence that abstract ideas are psychologically impossible entails that Locke's uniqueness condition cannot apply to general terms. It cannot be the case for Berkeley that a general term signifies exactly one idea, the way that a name signifies exactly one idea in each mind, because the inevitable result would be an abstract idea. Indifferent signification allows Berkeley to explain the signification of general terms without committing to the existence of abstract ideas.

But Berkeley's indifferent signification theory raises the question of resemblance between sets of particular ideas in different minds. There's no guarantee that the particular ideas in one mind that are indifferently signified by a general term exactly resemble the particular ideas indifferently signified by that same term in another mind. Suppose that the set of particular ideas in Maya's mind indifferently signified by "triangle" includes only equilateral and right triangles; but that Grace's set includes only scalene and obtuse triangles. In that case, Grace lacks an internal representation of Maya's set of particular ideas. Grace cannot indirectly perceive Maya's ideas, and will not know what Maya's word "triangle" means.

As I read Berkeley, he addresses this concern by rejecting Locke's resemblance condition. As mentioned earlier, Berkeley claims that one idea can represent another either by resemblance or by suggestion. One of Berkeley's examples of mediate perception involves knowing the private or "invisible" emotions of other minds by means of immediately perceived ideas (NTV § 9). He goes on to argue that suggestion or signification (he often uses these terms interchangeably – see TVV § 39, quoted below; also NTV § 144) is the mechanism through which ideas,

emotions, and states of other minds are mediately perceived by means of an immediately perceived idea.

Importantly, Berkeley claims that mediate visual perception occurs between ideas that cannot resemble each other. Colors do not resemble textures (NTV § 103). Yet, visual sensations suggest tangible ideas to the imagination "for no other reason, than barely because they have been observed to accompany them" (NTV § 65). In a later work, Berkeley expands his explanation of how one idea comes to signify or suggest another:

> Ideas which are observed to be connected with other ideas come to be considered as signs, by means whereof things not actually perceived by sense are signified or suggested to the imagination… in general, all signs suggest the things signified, there being no idea which may not offer to the mind another idea which hath been frequently joined with it. In certain cases a sign may suggest its correlate as an image [i. e., through resemblance], in others as an effect, in others as a cause. But where there is no such relation of similitude or causality, nor any necessary connection whatsoever, two things, by their mere coexistence, or two ideas, merely by being perceived together, may suggest or signify one the other, their connexion being all the while arbitrary; for it is the connexion only, as such, that causeth this effect [i. e., that one idea signifies the other]. (TVV § 39)

Berkeley lists several ways in which "frequently joined" perceptions can signify or suggest each other. These are resemblance, cause and effect, and simply being perceived together. I claim that for Berkeley, the association of two perceptions as cause and effect explains mediate perception of ideas in other minds by means of perceptions in one's own mind. Such mediate perception occurs even when the relevant perceptions in different minds do not resemble one another.

To see why, consider Locke's claim that the transmission of knowledge is evidence that a discourse satisfies the resemblance condition. Berkeley agrees that transmission of knowledge is evidence of speaker meaning, despite rejecting abstract ideas (see PHK Intro §§ 15–16, 21). Suppose that Maya is teaching Grace geometry. Maya's demonstrations are operations on her own particular ideas of triangles (see PHK Intro §§ 12, 16). As a result of her lessons, Grace comes to have particular ideas of triangles. Grace's particular ideas are indifferently signified by the word "triangle", as are Maya's particular ideas. But none of Grace's ideas exactly resembles any of Maya's ideas of triangles. Nevertheless, Grace's ideas are effects of Maya's ideas. Of course, Berkeley doesn't mean that one idea has the power to produce another.[14] Nor does he mean that one idea determines or necessitates the other. Berkeley simply means that one idea is regularly succeeded by another in a law-like way, and so they are associated as cause and effect (see

14 See PHK § 25.

PHK §§ 32, 62, 64). That association is sufficient for one perception to suggest the other. But perceptions associated as cause and effect needn't resemble each other. Consequently, Grace's ideas can suggest Maya's ideas, and vice versa, without Grace's ideas resembling Maya's ideas.

3 Idea-less General Terms

Berkeley explains the meaning of general terms without resorting to abstract ideas in part by rejecting Locke's uniqueness and resemblance conditions. But there is another challenge confronting Berkeley's theory of general terms. That challenge prompted Berkeley to reject Locke's theory of meaning between 1707 and 1708.[15]

In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley disparages "those philosophers" like Locke, "[who] tell us every pertinent word hath an idea which never fails to accompany it where tis rightly understood" (MI 44 [140]).[16] But in his earlier *Notebooks*,[17] and a paper presented in 1707,[18] Berkeley adopts Locke's theory. Berkeley changed his mind when confronted with a theological challenge. As Berkeley puts it in the *Manuscript Introduction:*

> We are told that the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him are such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive. What man will pretend to say these words of the inspir'd writer are empty and insignificant? And yet who is there that can say they bring into his mind clear and determinate ideas of the good things in store for them that love God? (MI 36 [137]; see also PHK Intro § 20)

Locke's theory implies that the biblical passage Berkeley references is meaningless, since the words "good thing" do not signify ideas in the reader's mind. Whereas Locke has a way out of this difficulty – Locke can claim that the passage signifies abstract rather than particular ideas – Berkeley's rejection of abstract ideas makes this passage problematic for him (as discussed below, Berkeley thinks that even God cannot have abstract ideas). Nevertheless, Berkeley insists that the passage is meaningful, although he concedes that the words "good thing" do not signify *any* particular ideas in the reader's mind.

15 For discussion, see Belfrage (1985, 1986).
16 See also AMP 7.2 [287–288].
17 See NB 378 and 696.
18 "Of Infinites," (*Works* IV, 235–236).

Several commentators have concluded from this passage and others that Berkeley has a theory of operative meaning.[19] On those readings, operative meaning is not constituted by ideas. Rather, operative meaning is constituted by the actions, passions, emotions, or dispositions raised in the hearer by an utterance. An evaluation of those readings is beyond the scope of this chapter. For present purposes, I do not deny that Berkeley has a theory of operative meaning. However, I claim that operative meaning does not constitute the meaning of general terms for Berkeley.

Consider an extended passage in the *Manuscript Introduction* where Berkeley rehearses the process by which the term "good thing" accomplishes its operative ends without signifying particular ideas in the reader's mind. Berkeley begins by noting that in ordinary circumstances the word "reward" signifies "an idea of the particular good thing proposed for a reward," such as payment for one's labor. That idea is perceived together with a disposition to fulfill "those conditions on which [the reward] is to be obtained" and a desire to please whomever promises that reward (MI 37 [137]). Since the word, the idea of a specific payment, the disposition, and the desire to please are all perceived together,[20] Berkeley's account of how one perception becomes a sign for another implies that any of those perceptions can signify any of the others.

Berkeley thinks that the same process occurs in the case of "good thing" as used in biblical passages to refer to inconceivable rewards. He says:

> Thus there having grown up in his mind a customary connexion between the hearing that proposition and being dispos'd to obey... the injunctions that accompany it, methinks it might be made use of, tho' not to introduce into his mind any idea marked by those words "good thing" yet to incite in him a willingness to perform that which is requir'd of him. (MI 37 [138])

Returning to the example discussed above, suppose that your employer has a particular idea of a payment for your labor in her mind, but you lack any such idea (perhaps because she hasn't told you how much you will be paid). Nevertheless, you perceive the word "reward" together with your disposition and your desire. That word becomes a sign for those other perceptions without signifying any idea in your mind. Likewise, your perceptions of your own disposition and desire

19 See Williford (2003), Roberts (2017), and Pearce (2017, chapters 1 and 2) for overviews of such readings.

20 Strictly speaking, Berkeley thinks that finite minds cannot have ideas of desires and dispositions, insofar as the latter are mental activities (PHK §§ 25, 27). But Berkeley does think that finite minds can have notions of these activities (PHK § 89). Since notions are perceived (in Berkeley's broad use of perceive in terms of conscious awareness), an idea of a payment and notions of a desire and a disposition can be perceived together.

may suggest your employer's idea of your payment. In that case, you have an internal mental representation of the meaning of your employer's utterance, although your perception is not an idea and does not resemble your employer's idea. As a result, you understand the meaning of your employer's utterance despite lacking an idea in your own mind signified by that utterance or resembling the speaker's idea.

Berkeley thinks that the same happens with "good thing" as used in biblical passages. The reader perceives the phrase "good thing" together with their dispositions, emotions, desires, or other perceptions. That phrase becomes a sign for those perceptions without signifying any idea in the reader's mind.[21] Berkeley concludes that "general names are often used in the propriety of language without the speaker designing them for marks of ideas of his own which he would have them raise in the understanding of the hearer" (MI 37 [138]). The utterance "good thing" needn't signify an idea in the reader's mind in order for her to understand its meaning.

One might object that the problem of mental privacy presents a special challenge for my reading of Berkeley. In the case where an employer has a particular idea of a payment but the worker does not, the worker cannot perceive the employer's idea of a particular payment. Consequently, although the employer's idea and the worker's disposition are both signified by the word "reward," the worker does not perceive all of these things together. Without being perceived together, there's no mechanism through which the worker's disposition can become a sign for the employer's idea. In that case, the worker's disposition cannot become an internal representation of the employer's idea. The result seems to be that the worker doesn't know what the employer means by "reward."

In other words, the objection proposes a particular instance of the more general problem of other minds discussed earlier. The worker's idea of a reward cannot become an internal representation of anything at all unless it is a sign for whatever that idea represents. And Berkeley says that one idea becomes a sign for another idea by "merely" perceiving the two ideas together (TVV § 39). But the worker cannot perceive ideas in other minds. Thus, the worker cannot perceive an idea in her mind together with an idea in the employer's mind. In that case, it's

21 I take it that the sense in which the present interpretation is compatible with interpretations in terms of operative meaning is as follows. According to the latter interpretations, a word signifies passions, dispositions, etc. in the mind of the hearer without signifying ideas in the hearer's mind. The present interpretation agrees that the employer's utterance signifies passions, dispositions, etc. in the hearer's mind without signifying any of the hearer's ideas. But on the interpretation defended here, those passions, dispositions, etc. are the means by which the hearer mediately perceives an idea in the speaker's mind signified by the speaker's utterance.

unclear how the worker's idea ever becomes a sign for (or an internal representation of) the employer's idea.[22]

Similarly, suppose that the meaning of the phrase "good thing" is constituted by divine ideas, and that none of the finite minds reading that phrase has ideas signified by it. Even if that phrase produces cheer and fervor in the reader's mind that the reader can perceive, it seems that the reader's cheer and fervor cannot become a sign for the divine ideas signified by "good thing," because the reader never perceives her cheer and fervor together with divine ideas. In that case, the reader's fervor cannot become an internal representation of the divine ideas that constitute the meaning of that phrase. Consequently, the reader doesn't know what the biblical phrase "good thing" means. But Berkeley insists that the phrase is both meaningful and understood by the reader.

In reply, recall that in TVV § 39, being perceived together is not the only way for one idea to become a sign for another. Berkeley also says that ideas can signify each other if they are associated as cause and effect. The ideas that are associated as cause and effect needn't be perceived by the same mind. The employer's idea of a particular payment is associated as the cause of the worker's disposition. The worker's disposition signifies the employer's idea because it is the effect of that idea. Consequently, the worker mediately perceives the employer's idea of a particular payment by means of immediately perceiving her own disposition. The worker's disposition thereby functions as an internal representation of the employer's idea, allowing the worker to grasp the employer's meaning.

As I read Berkeley, a similar analysis applies to "good thing." Roomet Jakapi (2002a, 2002b, 2007) argues that for Berkeley, biblical passages are indirect divine speech mediated through "inspired" human writers; and that Berkeley thinks that God does not speak nonsense. This explains why Berkeley insists that "good thing" is meaningful. But Berkeley also claims that even God cannot have abstract ideas since it is impossible "that such a power [of forming abstract ideas] should be in the most perfect and exalted understanding" (MI 11 [124–125]). The implication is that God has particular ideas of heavenly rewards, although finite minds cannot perceive similar ideas. Since "good thing" is a general term, Berkeley's theory of general terms suggests that it indifferently signifies multiple particular divine ideas of heavenly rewards. The challenge is to explain how finite minds can

22 One might worry that Berkeley's MI is inadequate as a source of Berkeley's definitive ideas considering that, although it is drafted for publication, it was not published and Berkeley preferred to set aside many of its examples. I do not share that worry for two reasons. First, I have drawn Berkeley's reply to the objection raised above from TVV § 39 rather than MI. Second, Berkeley discusses the problem of other minds in his published works – e. g., PHK § 145, AMP 6 – when he discusses inferences to the existence of other minds. I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this worry.

know the meaning of that general term despite being incapable of perceiving the divine ideas signified by it.

That explanation is implied by Berkeley's example of an employer promising payment to a worker, combined with his principle that perceptions can signify each other if they are associated as cause and effect. Finite minds cannot perceive the multiple particular divine ideas indifferently signified by "good thing," just as the worker cannot perceive the employer's idea of a particular payment signified by "reward." Nevertheless, the divine ideas signified by "good thing" cause in finite minds "a chearfulness and zeal and perseverance in well doing" (MI 37 [138]).[23] Just as the worker's disposition signifies the employer's idea because it is the effect of that idea, a finite mind's fervor signifies divine ideas of good things because the former is the effect of the latter. Thus, a finite mind's fervor suggests divine ideas to that finite mind, just as the worker's disposition suggests the employer's idea of a particular payment to the worker. For this reason, an inspired writer needn't seek to "mark out to our understandings the ideas of those particular things our faculties never attain'd to." The writer need only use "good thing" "to incite in [the reader] a willingness to perform that which is requir'd of him" (MI 37 [138]). The reader mediately perceives the meaning of "good thing" by means of immediately perceived effects incited by those ideas, without immediately perceiving the particular divine ideas indifferently signified by that term.

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23 It might be that the divine ideas are the distal causes of human zeal and fervor, and the general term is their proximate cause. Likewise, the employer's idea of a particular payment might be the distal cause of the worker's disposition, whereas her word 'reward' is its proximate cause.

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Todd DeRose

8 Natural Causes and Berkeley's Divine Language Hypothesis

Abstract: Todd DeRose raises the question of how best to understand causation in nature, given Berkeley's commitment to the view that the only *true* causes are minds. DeRose points out that in contemporary discussions it is generally accepted that causation relations are asymmetric. It is not clear how this might square with Berkeley's view that "causes" and "effects" in nature should properly be understood as "signs" and "things signified." DeRose argues that such a relation ought to be construed as *semantic*. The relation between a "cause" and its "effect," that is, is akin to the relation between a word and its *meaning*. This, DeRose argues, explains how such a relation can, in fact, be seen as asymmetrical.

Introduction: Berkeley's Semiotic Theory of Natural Causes

Berkeley's stance on the metaphysics of causation is uniquely precarious. This is because he is *selectively* a realist and an anti-realist about causal relations in different domains. On the one hand, he believes unqualifiedly in the real causal power of minds (both human and divine)[1] and, moreover, that the only notion of causation we have comes from the immediate observation of our own volitions. On the other hand, he repeatedly denies that such causal relations ever obtain between sensible bodies or natural events and denies even that causal relations are the purview of scientific inquiry.

The most common interpretation is to attribute to Berkeley a roughly-Humean view of natural causes. On projectivist views such as Hume's, our causal talk is non-referring. Because there are no relations of necessary connection between phenomena (or at least, none to which we have epistemic access), the function of causal talk is merely to report the various patterns of psychological association

1 While Berkeley is careful to distance himself from the occasionalism of Malebranche (according to which God is the only true efficient cause), it is not entirely clear whether finite spirits (such as human beings) have the power to produce ideas in the minds of other spirits (as God does) or only to produce ideas in their own minds (via the imagination). My purposes here do not require me to settle this interpretive difficulty.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-011

that we have acquired from experience.[2] Philosophers and scientists err when they perniciously project the surface grammar of causal talk into the external world.

A Humean theory of natural causes coheres well with Berkeley's empiricist leanings. It also has the advantage that similar anti-realist theories have been expounded and improved upon in the centuries since. Modern projectivists such as James Woodward, Hue Price, and Don Garrett, whom I will (perhaps ungraciously) lump together as "Neo-Humeans," have done much to make such theories respectable. The problem, however, is that Berkeley *does* believe that our natural causal talk refers – just not to what we might have thought.[3] He writes that "the connexion of ideas does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified.* The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it" (PHK § 65). Thus, although we speak with the vulgar when we say that the fire caused the burning, there is still a genuine relation between the fire and the burning that our vulgar speech tracks: the relation of signification.[4]

Unfortunately, the semiotic theory of natural causes in PHK § 65 is a non-starter, at least if many normal causal propositions are to retain their truth-values. Signification relations and (ostensible) causal relations do not appear to be structurally isomorphic, let alone intersubstitutable *salva veritate.* The main reasons for

2 As Hume puts it, "necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; [it] is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects, and from effects to causes, according to their experienced union" (*Treatise* 1.3.14).

3 "The text does not provide adequate support for the attribution of fictionalism to Berkeley, since Berkeley seems to hold that these 'inaccurate expressions' are true *when correctly interpreted.* [...] He is not suggesting that these claims, as ordinarily interpreted in plain language, are entirely false and that the linguistic reform we should implement is to regard them as mere figures of speech" (Pearce 2017, 163–164).

4 On some interpretations, Hume's theory of causation is also semiotic rather than projectivist (see Hamid 2015 and Kail 2010 for discussion). Accordingly, there are potential Humean solutions to the problems I raise for semiotic theories (which would avoid any need for the semantic theory I propose). While it is beyond the scope of this paper, my view is that most of the Humean "improvements" to the semiotic theory are incompatible with Berkeley's overall philosophy (for a few exceptions, see footnote 14 below). First, Hume's theory has naturalistic ambitions and appears to exclude miracles from the start (see *Treatise* 1.3.12), or at least to make reliable miracles indistinguishable from laws of nature. Second, Berkeley is emphatic that signification relations are instituted by Providence and obtain independently of our grasp of them. This is evinced by the Molyneux Man who, when first made to see, is presented with visual signs – which do indeed signify – without yet knowing what they signify. This is inconsistent with an approach like Hume's that makes signification a matter of individual psychology (see *Treatise* 1.3.14). Third, Berkeley unlike Hume holds that there are some genuine efficient causal relations – namely the mental causation of each natural event by God or other minds – involved in every sequence of natural events.

this are well documented. One has to do with the asymmetry of causal relations: the fact that "either cause or effect can function as the sign or the designatum in the relation considered [implies that] the relation of signification is not simply a translation for what we term a 'causal' relation."[5] Another has to do with spurious correlation: "Many spatio-temporally contiguous phenomena where one type of event is considered the 'sign' of another type are not considered causal sequences. The darkening of the sky is a sign of rain but is not a 'cause' of rain any more than the weather forecast."[6]

Jonathan Dancy and Kenneth Pearce both have what is, in my opinion, the right instinct: update the *semiotic* theory of natural causes to a *semantic* theory of natural causes. Doing so retains the spirit (if not the letter) of Berkeley's view, namely that relations between causes and effects are linguistic relations. While an update of this sort is more a matter of rational reconstruction than contextualist interpretation, I believe it reflects the development we already see within Berkeley's works from his *doctrine of signs*[7] to his *divine language model.* According to the DLM, the natural world is structured in ways characteristic of a discourse in an artificial language like English – complete with a lexicon, syntax, compositional grammar, morphology, and the like. Berkeley develops the DLM with apologetic aims (in AMP 4), but once armed with the DLM, there is no good reason why Berkeley – in the context of causation – could or should not have helped himself to a more expansive repertoire of linguistic relations than mere signification relations.[8]

My purpose here is to show why a semantic theory of natural causes can overcome the difficulties the semiotic theory faces. After critiquing Dancy and Pearce's respective analyses, I provide my own. I then discuss the various ways natural events could acquire semantic properties in the first place (consistently with Berkeley's metaphysics). Finally, I show how a semantic theory coheres with Berkeley's statements about the objects of science in the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron.*

5 Brook 1973, 24–25.

6 Brook 1973, 25. See also Pearce 2017, 184–185: "If Berkeley's world is to exhibit the kind of structure that common sense and Newtonian physics take the world to exhibit, then these two relations [co-instantiation and physical causation] must be distinct."

7 The DOS states that ideas of sense come to represent other ideas of sense merely through their repeated or habitual conjunction in experience: "not by similitude, nor yet by inference of necessary connexion, but by the arbitrary imposition of Providence, just as words suggest the things signified by them" (see NTV § 77 and AMP 4.10).

8 As Dávid Bartha points out (2022, personal communication), the project of understanding natural causation in terms of the DLM presupposes that the DLM encompasses *all* the senses, not just vision (since there are relations of natural causation between non-visual phenomena). I have defended this presupposition in DeRose 2023b.

I regard this "update" of Berkeley's theory of causation as valuable for two main reasons: a) it moves us one step closer to understanding Berkeley's entire philosophy of science in terms of the DLM, and b) it has the potential, in combination with certain contemporary views on the epistemology of testimony, to provide a novel response to Hume's problem of induction.[9]

1 Dancy and Pearce on the Semantic Theory of Causes

To address the problem of spurious correlation, Pearce writes the following:

> We can begin to respond to the problem of possible misinterpretation [of co-instantiations as physical causes] by observing that a language can be correctly described in more than one way. The rules followed by speakers of a language are not themselves linguistic entities and may be given more than one equally correct linguistic expression. Furthermore, as the phrase 'equally correct' suggests, this sort of 'correctness,' for Berkeley, comes in degrees. Correctness is largely constituted by successful prediction. (Pearce 2017, 185)

Pearce goes on to analogize the different ways in which language may accurately represent reality to the different ways (e.g., differences in style or perspective) in which a painting may accurately represent its subject. I am willing to grant that truth, for Berkeley, is a graded notion and that Pearce's "matching" theory of truth can account for the truthfulness of our ordinary-language claims about physical bodies with respect to object-individuation and object-classification. As Berkeley repeatedly claims, we as finite spirits have significant latitude in how we can group our ideas into objects and types of objects. However, I cannot grant that this theory accounts for the truthfulness of our ordinary-language claims about physical causation. It seems that if our theory commits us to "the weather forecast caused the rain" being a *somewhat correct* proposition or a *merely differently-styled portrait* of atmospheric phenomena, something has gone wrong. I am un-

9 *Anti-reductionism* in the epistemology of testimony is the view, pioneered by Tyler Burge, that recipients of testimony have a default or *a priori* entitlement to believe the contents of said testimony (at least when there is no independent reason to doubt the reliability of the source). See Lackey 2006 and 2008 for extensive discussion. If one natural event can be an assertion (and thus testimony) in the divine language that another will occur, then it may be possible to infer effects from causes without the mediation of an inductive process (which avoids a justificational circularity or regress). I develop this response to the problem of induction in the fourth chapter of DeRose 2023a.

willing to deny, as Pearce appears to,[10] that such propositions are false *simpliciter*. Yet if correctness is largely constituted by *successful prediction*, then we would have to say that this proposition is at least somewhat correct. After all, we make predictions of weather based on the weather forecasts we see on TV with a high rate of success. That there may be other propositions (such as "the humidity and falling barometric pressure caused the rain") which are *much more* correct, and which let us make predictions with an *even higher* rate of success, does not avoid the problem.

In short, I can accept Pearce's analysis for the main purpose he intends it – explaining the truth-conditions for ordinary talk pertaining to the construction, identification, and classification of sensible bodies – but not for explaining the truth-conditions for ordinary talk pertaining to causal relationships. Lexicography in the language of nature is his focus because a) the ontological status of sensible bodies (as real entities or mere "quasi-entities") is the prevailing issue in his book, and b) the analogy of lexicography gives us a compelling way of understanding Berkeley's account of perceptual illusion.[11] We should not, however, too quickly group causal talk with law/force talk under the heading of *syntax*.[12] The analogy of syntax for Newton's laws of motion is apt insofar as these laws govern how sensible bodies (words) can be combined and ordered in experience, and to the extent that we encounter deviations from these laws our experience is not well formed (as when we encounter a Penrose Staircase or Escher-diagram, which represent nomologically impossible object-relationships). It is unclear, however, that the analogy is apt for causal relations. Nothing seems uninterpretable or self-defeating about the thought "smoke, but maybe no fire." Likewise, smoking failing to cause lung cancer in a particular case may be surprising, but it is hardly unintelligible or paradoxical in the way that a real-world Penrose Staircase would be.

Pearce does leave the door open – in principle – to "the combination of a semantic view of causes with a syntactic view of laws" (2017, 190). He points out that such a combination could resolve an apparent tension between the claims "(1) that causes signify their effects, and (2) that laws of nature are grammar rules" (ibid.). This is not, however, the developed view he provides:

> When one has the visual orange sensations of the fire, one engages in an activity of parsing this experience. Thus one groups the fire sensations together into one object (word), and one implicitly takes it to be related to the other objects around it in a certain way. For instance,

10 See Pearce 2017, 166 & 188–189.

11 See Pearce 2017, 186–187.

12 As Pearce here does: "our talk about bodies aims to capture the lexicon of this language, and our talk about causes, laws, and forces aims to capture its syntax" (Pearce 2017, 204).

> one takes the fire to be *burning* the wood. This relation between the fire and the wood is a syntactic one. One does not perceive the burning. Rather, one perceived the fire and the wood, in close proximity, each undergoing certain transformations. In this way the notion of burning is like the notion of force. It is a notion one uses to construe the objects of one's experience as related in certain ways and this construal is part of the process of interpretation, which leads to prediction. Parsing the situation properly, so that we regard the fire as burning the wood, leads us to predict that the wood will turn to ash, and for this reason we say that the fire *causes* the wood to turn to ash. (Pearce 2017, 192)

Once again, *successful prediction* is doing the heavy lifting. Our causal talk is simply an extension of the same structuring of our experience that we do when we group sensible ideas into enduring objects, and the truth and falsity of this talk is to be measured by the same standard of usefulness for making predictions.[13] If we wish instead to go through the door Pearce leaves open to a semantic account of causes, as given the problem of spurious correlation I think we must, then we must first recognize that treating *sensible bodies* as the causal relata is almost certainly the *wrong* thing to do. We can see this if we take seriously the thought that sensible bodies are the *words* in the language of nature. Words certainly have semantic properties, but until they are appropriately compounded into larger linguistic units (e.g., complete sentences) they remain relatively impoverished in terms of the content they can convey. Likewise, merely the billowing orange percept of a fire in isolation (just like hearing someone shout "Fire!" in isolation) tells me little about whether and when to expect sensations of heat unless accompanied by an interpretable context of other objects and their spatio-temporal relations. In some contexts, such as when the billowing orange percept is situated within the four corners of an LCD screen, I should not expect any related sensations of heat at all. Even if I parse the situation improperly and *do* expect such sensations, and even if such sensations then occur (perhaps someone in another room adjusts the thermostat at the right moment), we should not then say that the fire caused the heat because fire is a sign of heat and my prediction was successful. Billowing orange percepts may indeed remain a *sign* of heat (simply in virtue of their habitual conjunction in experience), but when that sign occurs within the context of an LCD screen my total present experience *simply does not mean* that heat is immanent. And unless the billowing orange percepts are part of a total experience that *does* mean that heat is immanent, it would be wrong ever to identify them as the cause (even when speaking with the vulgar) of whatever sensations of heat I may go on to have.

13 See ibid., 204.

This suggests we should analyze ostensible causal relations in terms of the semantic content of sensible scenes/events rather than the semiotic content of sensible bodies. There is no need to suppose, however, that *all* relations between natural events where one event has as part of its content that the other event obtains license corresponding causal talk. Following Hume, so far as Berkeley can, our causal talk should at least respect spatio-temporal ordering:[14] if the experience of lingering smoke can have as part of its content *that there was a fire at such-and-such location* we should not say that the smoke caused the fire, but rather the opposite. Regardless of the details of these basic constraints, the Berkeleyan solution to causal asymmetry is the same: semantic representation is asymmetrical, and so an account of natural causation in terms of semantic relations can preserve the cause-effect asymmetry. Causes and effects are no more interchangeable than words and meanings, or than sentences and the propositions they express.[15]

To retain our ordinary causal talk, we need more than that it is useful. We need it to supply links of mutual intelligibility between natural events. Such intelligibility, however, need not involve a complete scientific or metaphysical explanation of one in terms of the other. Hearing someone say "I wish to depart tomorrow" renders more intelligible their subsequent departure, even for someone who knows nothing of the reasons for this wish and even if verbal reports of one's intentions/dispositions are not always followed by events matching the content of these reports. In the same way, perceiving a fire co-located with wood renders more intelligible the subsequent appearance of ashes, even for someone who knows nothing of the chemistry of combustion and even if such fires sometimes are not followed by ashes. Winkler, I believe, articulates the right desiderata:

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14 Hume calls the appropriate spatial relation between cause and effect "contiguity" and the appropriate temporal relation between cause and effect "succession" or "priority" (see *Treatise,* 1.3.2–6). He regards both as essential for a causal relation to obtain. The third relation essential for a causal relation to obtain is "necessary connexion" (ibid.), which Berkeley cannot endorse in the psychologistic form that Hume describes (as it is reducible to the imaginative and inferential dispositions of individual humans that result from observing "constant conjunction"). Note that Hume briefly mentions a fourth causal principle that Berkeley *can* adopt without issue: "The same principle cannot be both the cause and effect of another; and this is, perhaps, the only proposition concerning that relation, which is either intuitively or demonstratively certain" (*Treatise,* 1.3.6).

15 Katia Saporiti and Peter West (personal communication, 2022) have both raised the point that mere signification relations may be capable of asymmetry already, either in virtue of a conventional asymmetry or in virtue of an inferential asymmetry. Incorporating a psychological/behavioral layer into the signification relation itself is how I understand Hume's approach, which I do not think is an option open to Berkeley for reasons earlier discussed. Furthermore, there are passages where Berkeley indicates that mere constant conjunction is a sufficient condition for signification (such as TVV §§ 39 & 68). I thank Evan Sommers for pointing out these passages to me.

> What Berkeley needs is a non-arbitrary connexion which is not natural or necessary in the sense at work in Locke and Malebranche. He needs a connection that will allow for the understanding of an event even if it would not allow for its a priori anticipation (Winkler 1989, 129).[16]

There are few candidate relations with a chance of striking this delicate balance. The one Dancy argues for is the relation of *semantic necessity:* "to restore the sense of a necessary connexion, [we want]: that given A, *it cannot be understood but that B should happen* (or should have happened or whatever)" (unpublished manuscript, 3 emphasis mine). The relation of semantic necessity holds between A and B just in case the complex statement "A and it will not B" is *uninterpretable*, having no consistent truth-conditions. The reason that semantic necessities do not turn causal inference into an *a priori* matter is that uninterpretable statements are possible: "It is not a truth of logic that God can be interpreted at all, let alone on every occasion. It is perfectly possible that God should work miracles, and thus render the past and the future to that extent uninterpretable" (ibid., 15). Miraculous events may be uninterpretable in the same way that "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously" is uninterpretable (that is, due to semantic incoherence).[17] God is not lying in such cases, because the events in question – since they lack truth-values – cannot be false.

While semantic necessity may indeed play a role in characterizing Berkeleyan miracles, my own view is that it is a needlessly (and problematically) strong relation on which to base natural causation. My reason, in a slogan, is that *something can be rendered intelligible without its negation thereby being rendered unintelligible.* Consider the following passage:

> The future event is the truth-condition (or among the truth-conditions) for the present one, conceived as an utterance, and the present one is among the truth-conditions of the future one. But it would not be sufficient to go on from here and say that since the first event, properly understood, effectively says that the second one will happen, then since God is the author of the first one, the second one will in due course occur *if he sticks to his word.* For that relationship obtains between more ordinary promises and their execution, and nobody would call the relation between promise and execution a necessary relation, even if it is a broad sense formal or logical. All we would have is that if this event is true, that one will happen (ibid., 14).

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16 Or as Dancy glosses it, "The links between distinct events must be links of mutual intelligibility, which are not so tight as to undermine the a posteriori nature of causal inference" (unpublished manuscript, 3).

17 Alternatively, miracles might correspond to other types of incoherence, such as the morphological incoherence of a random string of letters.

In short, Dancy is claiming that relations of mere semantic *denotation* (rather than *necessity*) are insufficient to restore a sense of necessary connection between natural events.[18] I would tend to agree. Winkler's desiderata, however, do not require us to restore a sense of necessity; only understanding/intelligibility. Dancy is right that "Berkeley's denial of necessary connexions in the natural world is *compatible* with the existence of such necessities as the hermeneutic approach to science makes available" (emphasis mine), and some natural events (such as miracles) may indeed have the features Dancy describes. Many surprising or incongruous natural events, however, do not: for as I said before, there is nothing obviously uninterpretable or self-defeating about statements like "smoke, but maybe no fire." For intelligibility, we need only restore the sense that, given A, B *should* happen – not that it somehow must. Denotation is enough to give us this sense, and there are still ways to avoid divine deception. Here is one way, as a first approximation:

> Event A is a $\text{cause}_{\text{physical}}$ of event B if A is an utterance in the language of nature that asserts that God will, ceteris paribus, $\text{cause}_{\text{mental}}$ B (and B then does occur).

As far as I am concerned, adding some such *ceteris paribus* clause is enough to deflect theological concerns about the semantic denotation strategy. There is no reason that we must conceive of these utterances in the language of nature as *unqualified promises*, with all the moral baggage this brings. Likewise, a declarative sentence easily can *mean* something false without being an *assertion* of falsehood, depending on the surrounding context of other sentences. To take an overly simple example:

> *Author's Preface:* "What follows is a work of fiction."
> *Chapter One:* "It was a dark and stormy night."

If the night referred to was, in fact, *not* dark and stormy, then a reader who neglected the preface might be induced to a false belief – but to count this against the moral character of the author would be absurd. In the same way, we might encounter any number of expressions in the language of nature which "in themselves" represent the world falsely but are not part of a false representation of the world. Suppose a fire is not accompanied by sensations of heat because it is in a substance that combusts at low temperatures. Were we to attend to other

18 By "denotation," I mean the following relation: X denotes Y if a) Y is part of the semantic content of X and b) X represents Y as true. Assertions are the most obvious example of locutionary acts which denote, but there may be other sorts of locutionary acts which denote (such as warnings).

parts of the discourse of nature (such as those indicating the chemical composition of the substance), we might rectify any errors we have made. If there is a problem of divine deception even in such cases as this, then the problem is in no way particular to Berkeley. We are left with an account of misperception in terms of the failure to interpret/attend to surrounding linguistic context, which coheres nicely with what Berkeley says of perceptual illusion:

> Thus in the case of the oar, what he immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked; and so far he is in the right. But if he thence conclude, that upon taking the oar out of the water he shall perceive the same crookedness; or that it would affect his touch, as crooked things are wont to do: in that he is mistaken. [...] But his mistake lies not in what he perceives immediately and at present (it being a manifest contradiction to suppose he should err in respect of that) but in the wrong judgment he makes concerning the ideas he apprehends to be connected with those immediately perceived: or concerning the ideas that, from what he perceives at present, he imagines would be perceived in other circumstances. (DHP 238)

A further extension of the denotation strategy is to account for the correlation-causation distinction using the connotation-denotation distinction. Dark clouds might be part of a divine utterance which connotes impending rain, inasmuch as it inclines us to expect rain or makes rain conversationally salient in our discourse with God. Such an utterance, however, does these things without *representing as true* the content that it will rain in the way that an assertion (or other locutionary act that denotes) represents its content as true. If natural causation is limited to cases where God makes assertions (as, perhaps, when God gives us well-formed perceptions of humidity and falling barometric pressure), then a semantic theory of natural causation can avoid the problem of spurious correlation.[19]

Having explained how my positive view differs from those of Pearce and Dancy, I will now discuss a) what is required for a natural event to acquire semantic content in the first place, and b) why Berkeley may have had more than mere signification relations in mind when thinking about natural causation.

19 Here I am expanding upon a speculative thought from Dancy: "Natural events are to be seen as having the sort of meaning that linguistic utterances have, which in Grice's terms would be non-natural meaning. We might even go so far with Grice as to suppose that these natural events have a non-natural meaning in virtue of their expression of Gricean communication-intentions on the part of God" (Dancy 2014, 5–6).

2 Semantic Content: Primitive or Derivative?

I have outlined some of the key advantages a semantic approach to causation has over a semiotic approach, but we have not yet explored how a natural event could be a vehicle for semantic content in the first place. From a contemporary perspective, it might seem that any such approach rests on a category mistake.

Dancy advocates an interpretation of Berkeley according to which our ideas have *intrinsic* intentionality and – given Berkeley's idealism – there is no distinction between semantic content and the vehicles of said content. He writes:

> For Berkeley, if the world is essentially idea, it is surely capable of being essentially semantic. So even if materialism unsurprisingly enshrines the supposed need for a non-semantic 'base,' this has little to say to any view that Berkeley might or might not have held. (unpublished manuscript, 13)

I am not opposed, in principle, to ideas having primitive intentional properties. In fact, I find persuasive the arguments of Thomas Reid and Edward Feser that without at least *some* such properties (what Reid calls "natural signs" and Feser calls "formal signs")[20] there is both the threat of vicious regress and difficulty in explaining language acquisition. However, I am opposed to Dancy's reason for thinking that *all* ideas must have this sort of intentionality. He states that we must avoid a non-semantic base-layer/vehicle for semantic content because of the constraints of a hermeneutic philosophy of science:

> This two-layer approach would effectively undermine the linguistic model of natural significance. For if there is a non-semantic layer, there needs to be a science of that layer, and if so our account of the sort of understanding generated by scientific explanation at that level cannot be the sort of hermeneutic understanding that Berkeley was trying to work with. (ibid., 9)

The reason this is a mistake is that it presupposes the wrong relation between the manifest and scientific images within Berkeley's DLM. Roughly speaking, Dancy interprets microscopic events as the "words" in the language of nature and macroscopic events as the larger expressions (the "sentences") composed from them. This follows from his conception of scientists as fluent speakers who, having grasped the compositional grammar of a language, are able to decompose utterances into their component words: "the significance of an entire 'natural event' is a function of the significances of the micro-events which are its parts, in a way that science helps us to unpack" (ibid., 4–5). As I have elsewhere argued, however, it is *sen-*

20 See Feser 2013, 28 and Van Cleve 2006, 54–55.

sible bodies which are the words in the language of nature, and scientific acumen corresponds to *literacy* rather than *fluency* in this language.[21] The hermeneutic character of science is thus preserved without requiring us to abandon the "two-layer approach." Just as words can be composed of letters which are themselves semantically inert, so can sensible bodies be composed of ideas which are themselves semantically inert.

If the intentional/semantic properties of natural events are not primitive, then how do they acquire them? I do not intend to provide a single, decisive account, but to show that Berkeley has viable options. His idiosyncratic metaphysics do restrict the range of viable options, but less so than we might think. Moreover, since Berkeley's idealism already commits him to the natural world being composed entirely of mental things, it is no great leap to extend existing theories of *mental* content to the content of natural events.

Any "picture theory" based on resemblance between representations and the things represented is a non-starter. Besides the weaknesses inherent in such theories, Berkeley is emphatic that God's utterances in the language of nature do not acquire their meanings through similarity relations:

> God speaks to men by the intervention and use of arbitrary, outward, sensible signs, having no resemblance or necessary connexion with the things they stand for and suggest [and] by innumerable combinations of these signs, an endless variety of things is discovered and made known to us. (AMP 4.7).

Some causal theories of mental content are plainly incompatible with Berkeley's metaphysics. For example, Fodor's Asymmetric Dependency Theory – which uses relations of fundamental causal dependence to distinguish content-determining causes from non-content determining causes – presupposes exactly the sort of inherent structure in the world that Berkeley is at pains to deny. No ideas or events depend on each other, fundamentally, but only upon the arbitrary imposition of Providence. More generally, any theory on which a mental state X has as its content those things that are most direct or efficient in causing X would presuppose the very causal relations we are hoping to explain semantically.

Etiological theories, which explain the content of mental representations in terms of the adaptational/evolutionary benefits of using those representations, could work for Berkeley. In fact, Berkeley emphasizes how the divine language is aimed at our survival and well-being. For example:

21 DeRose 2021, 19–20.

> We are taught and admonished what to shun, and what to pursue; and are directed how to regulate our motions, and how to act with respect to things distant from us, as well in time as place. (AMP 4.7)
>
> This gives us a sort of foresight, which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. Without this we could not know how to act any thing that might procure us the least pleasure, or remove the least pain of sense. (PHK § 31)
>
> For this end the visive sense seems to have been bestowed on animals, to wit, that by the perception of visible ideas (which in themselves are not capable of affecting, or any wise altering the frame of their bodies) they may be able to foresee (from the experience they have had, what tangible ideas are connected with such and such visible ideas) the damage or benefit which is like to ensue, upon the application of their own bodies to this or that body which is at a distance. Which foresight, how necessary it is to the preservation of an animal, every one's experience can inform him. (NTV § 59)

The main reason an etiological theory might still struggle is that if the relevant adaptations must have a *history of selection*, and if *selection for* is a causal notion, we may have let natural causes sneak in through the back door. Berkeley might sidestep this problem by having a mind do the selecting (as God sustains the regular concurrence of our mental representations with their corresponding benefits and detriments), but I set this aside for now.

Teleosemantic theories, which are based on the *function* of a mental representation – such as its "information carrying" function or the function of registering the presence of its object – are compatible with Berkeley's system as long as *function* is stripped of any efficient-causal associations. Fortunately, such theories allow the detachment of functional roles from causal roles. One thing can have the function to indicate another *either* because one is a reliable cause of the other *or* because there is a third thing which is a reliable common cause of both. In Berkeley's system, this common cause would most likely be God – who "explaineth himself to the eyes of men by the sensible intervention of arbitrary signs; so as, by compounding and disposing them, to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects [and] informing and directing men how to act" (AMP 4.12). God's utterances are clearly intended to have an information-carrying function – and Berkeley does not think that the statement "God does X by means of Y" implicates Y in any real causal activity.

The main difficulty for teleosemantic theories is that if the notion of function is stripped of any efficient-causal associations it then becomes more difficult to solve the functional indeterminacy problem – the problem of *which* of the many functions attributable to a mental representation are content-determining. One solution is to rely on the intentions of the speaker to fix the content-determining functions, in this case the intentions of the divine agent who produces natural events. For example, something like: Event A is a $\text{cause}_{\text{physical}}$ of event B if A is an utterance

in the divine language with the intended function to indicate to finite spirits that B will, *ceteris paribus*, occur (and B then does occur). Of course, any appeal to divine intentions would seem circular if our goal were to "naturalize" content. That is, even if we have a satisfactory account of how the content of natural events derives from divine intentions, there is still the question of where God's mental states – including God's intentions – get their content. Fortunately, however, shifting from the content of natural events to the content of divine mental states gives Berkeley more options. This is a) because *volitions* in Berkeley's system, being modes of a mental substance, can have real causal power (unlike mere ideas of sense), and b) because the traditional divine attributes allow even a ham-fistedly simple causal covariance account to explain the content of divine mental states. For obvious reasons, the probability of there being a cat, given either that God *intends that there be a cat* or *represents there being a cat*, is 1. The standard problems for causal theories of content, such as patterns of reliable misrepresentation, concepts tokened from false instances, or causal intermediaries between the representation and its object(s) are simply irrelevant for the mental states of a being supposed to sustain the entire universe through the immediate operation of its will.[22]

3 Textual Support for a Semantic Theory of Natural Causes

As indicated at the outset, I take the development in Berkeley's works from the *doctrine of signs* to the *divine language model* as sufficient justification for using the DLM to remedy the philosophical shortcomings of the DOS. Beyond this, however, I find in AMP 7 (especially 7.13–14) the strongest textual evidence that Berkeley's mature theory of natural causes may not have been a semiotic theory.[23] He certainly lacked some contemporary linguistic concepts and distinctions, but he was evidently aware that there are different "levels" of linguistic representation. We should not, therefore, dismiss a linguistic account of causal relations merely on account of the shortcomings of the semiotic theory.

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22 Whether a version of the disjunction problem (e.g., for God's concepts of triangularity and trilaterality) could still arise is something I have not yet considered.

23 Katia Saporiti (personal communication, 2022) has pointed out that Berkeley's original theory of natural causes may not be a semiotic theory either. This is a possibility I welcome, although I find PHK §§ 64–65 ambiguous in this regard. Perhaps the ambiguity of these passages between a semiotic reading and a semantic reading explains why Berkeley did not feel the need to revise them after the publication of *Alciphron* in 1732.

By AMP 4, it is already clear that the DLM is based on a more expansive repertoire of linguistic relations that includes, but is by no means limited to, mere signification relations:

> Language and all other signs agree in the general nature of sign. But all signs are not language: not even all significant sounds, such as the natural cries of animals, or the inarticulate interjections of men. It is the articulation, combination, variety, copiousness, extensive and general use and easy application of signs that constitute the true nature of language. (AMP 4.12)

So far so good, but we do not yet have a specific reason to understand causation in terms of this more expansive repertoire. This is where AMP 7 comes in:

> Having granted that those signs may be significant, though they should not suggest ideas represented by them, provided they serve to regulate and influence our wills, passions, or conduct, you have consequently granted that the mind of man may assent to propositions containing such terms, when it is so directed or affected by them, notwithstanding it should not perceive distinct ideas marked by those terms. (AMP 7.8)

Propositions, which *contain* signs that stand for ideas, can have meanings we apprehend without attending (either implicitly or explicitly) to the significanda of these component signs. Assent, which has a *proposition* as its object, is a matter of higher-order behavioral dispositions and not a matter of beliefs of the form *significans X, therefore significandum Y.* Even more striking, once we recognize this, is Berkeley's statement about the sciences:

> If I mistake not, all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about signs as their *immediate* object, though these in the application are referred to things. (AMP 7.13, emphasis mine)

"Mediate" and "immediate" are important technical terms for Berkeley, meaning that his qualification of the above claim with *immediate* is no accident. Unlike at PHK 65, where he says that natural science is conversant about signs (rather than causes), natural science is conversant only partially about signs. Saying that signs are the immediate object of science suggests that science can be conversant about things other than signs as *mediate* objects. For comparison, see what Berkeley says about mediate and immediate *perception:*

> In reading a book, what I immediately perceive are the letters, but mediately, or by means of these, are suggested to my mind the notions of God, virtue, truth, etc. (DHP 1.74)

> We do, indeed, perceive [trees, houses, people, rivers] by the faculty of sight. But it does not follow from thence that they are the proper and immediate objects of sight, any more than

> that all those things are the proper and immediate objects of hearing which are signified by the help of words or sounds. (AMP 4.10)

Thus, the claim that science is conversant about signs as its immediate object is no more restrictive of the content of science than the claim that reading has letters as its immediate object is restrictive of the content of a book. When scientists, vulgarly speaking, make statements about causal relations between natural events, these statements are typically true (or false) in virtue of relations other than signification relations – for "that barely considering their ideas [letters] in concrete is not the method to advance in the respective sciences is what every one that reflects may see" (AMP 7.11).

Conclusion

In speaking the natural world into being, Berkeley's God does not merely give us signs as to what we should expect or do. Berkeley's God *instructs, informs, teaches, admonishes, and directs* us in what to expect or do.[24] Insofar as the job of science, according to Berkeley, is to aid us in the hermeneutic effort to discern what to expect and to do, the "causal" relations it discovers and formalizes are best understood as the relations of God's utterances to their content.

This update to Berkeley's theory of causation has significant epistemological implications. This is because it makes it possible, in principle, for our perceptual experiences of certain events to provide testimonial evidence to the truth of their contents. While the exact definition of "testimony" is a matter of contemporary debate, there is consensus regarding the dependence of testimony on public languages and communities of interpreters. Testimony must, at a minimum, be a speech-act which presents propositional content to its recipients. An animal that lacks characteristically linguistic abilities may be able to *communicate information* using various kinds of signals, but it cannot *testify.* Accordingly, if we understood the natural world in purely semiotic terms (as an orderly system of signs and symbols) rather than in semantic terms (as a rationally articulated discourse), then it would seem not to contain testimony.

Fortunately for those who accord to testimony a special epistemic status or role, there is good reason to understand the natural world in semantic terms. In contrast with Reid, whose views allow him to understand testimony as a species of perception (and so perhaps ground the epistemic basicality of testimony in

24 See AMP. 4.7 and 4.14.

the epistemic basicality of perception), Berkeley's views allow him to understand perception as a species of testimony (and so perhaps ground the epistemic basicality of perception in the epistemic basicality of testimony).

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Lauren Slater

9 Reading the Signs of my Body: Berkeley and Descartes on Signs and Sensations

Abstract: Lauren Slater brings together Berkeley's doctrine of signs with Descartes' thoughts on signification, language-use, and the relation between the mind, body, and sensations. She argues for thinking that by holding up Berkeley and Descartes' accounts of sign-usage alongside one another, new insights into both thinkers' views on how the mind and the world are connected via sensation can be revealed. The chapter begins by noting Berkeley's objection to what he characterises as Descartes' 'geometric' model of perception in NTV. However, over the course of this chapter, Slater demonstrates that Berkeley's own position is not as far from Descartes' own view as he might think and argues that while Berkeley may have gone further in arguing that the natural world is *literally* a language spoken to us by God, Descartes also seems to develop a theory in which God instantiates a semantic relation between our sensations and what they mean.

Introduction

In this chapter, I'll suggest that Berkeley was not alone in advocating for something like the divine language hypothesis. I suggest that Descartes too held the idea that visual sensations form a kind of language instituted by God. Interestingly, Berkeley purposefully sets his own account of visual perception apart from Descartes', suggesting that the Cartesian 'geometrical' account of vision cannot adequately explain experiences of distance, size, and shape (NTV §§ 23–24). Berkeley attributes to Descartes the view that such experiences involve conscious geometrical calculation, for instance 'men judge of distance by the angle of the optic axes' (NTV § 42). He disputes this kind of view in strong terms, asking: 'I appeal to anyone's experience whether, upon sight of an object, he computes its distance by the bigness of the angle made by the meeting of the two optic axes?' (NTV § 12). Instead of this geometrical model, Berkeley proposes a *linguistic* account of visual sensation, whereby: 'the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature' (NTV § 147). Here, I suggest that, in fact, Descartes' and Berkeley's accounts of vision are strikingly alike. I'll argue that both figures held that visual sensations form a kind of divine language, although for reasons motivated by very different metaphysical problems.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-012

In order to show this, I first look at the ways in which geometry applies to Descartes' account of visual sensation. In sum, Descartes' *physiological* account of visual sensation can be described in geometric terms, but his *psychological* account of visual sensation cannot. Having looked at where geometry applies in Descartes' account, I move on to discuss what a 'linguistic' account of sensation entails. Berkeley seems to believe that he is making a major departure from the Cartesian geometrical account by introducing his linguistic alternative.[1] I suggest that, instead of setting these two accounts as alternatives to each other, Berkeley's and Descartes' accounts of visual sensation both deserve to be called 'geometric' *and* 'linguistic'.

Finally, having established that Descartes and Berkeley are both thinking about the psychology of visual sensation in linguistic terms, I consider their reasons for doing so. I argue that both philosophers use this linguistic account to solve very different metaphysical problems. I suggest that it is significant that both philosophers, with their radically different metaphysical systems and problems, find their answers in language.

1 Geometric Optics & Descartes' Physiology

First, I will look at where geometry features in Descartes' account of sensory perception. I'll begin with a passage from the *Sixth Replies* wherein Descartes describes three grades of sensory response, since it helps us to determine where geometry might be applied:

> [W]e must distinguish three grades of sensory response. The first is limited to the immediate stimulation of the bodily organs by external objects; this can consist in nothing but the motion of the particles of the organs, and any change of shape and position resulting from this motion. The second grade comprises all the immediate effects produced in the mind as a result of its being united with a bodily organ which is affected in this way. Such effects include the perceptions of pain, pleasure, thirst, hunger, colours, sound, taste, smell, heat, cold and the like, which arise from the union and as it were the intermingling of mind and body, as explained in the *Sixth Meditation.* The third grade includes all the judgements about things outside us which we have been accustomed to make from our earliest years – judgements which are occasioned by the movements of these bodily organs. (*Sixth Replies*, AT VII 436–437, CSM II 295).[2]

1 Scholars, such as Atherton, set the 'geometrical' and 'linguistic' accounts apart. See: Atherton 1990, 200.

2 René Descartes, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, vol. I & II (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). *Sixth Replies*, CSM II 295.

Grade 1 concerns the purely physiological process that gives rise to sensations: external objects impact the body and set up motions in the nerves, resulting in a pattern of motion in the nerves in the brain. Grade 2 concerns all the 'immediate effects' that result in the mind, which are our sensations, sensory perceptions or sensory ideas.[3] Grade 3 concerns the judgments that we make about external objects on the basis of these sensory perceptions. Later, Descartes notes that these judgements 'depend solely on the intellect', even though he includes them as a grade of sensory response (*Sixth Replies*, AT VII 436–437, CSM II 295).

One way in which Descartes' account of sensation might qualify as geometrical is if we had grade 2 perceptions of features like size, shape, position and distance by having grade 2 perceptions of angles and lines. This seems to be the kind of view that Berkeley attributes to Descartes.[4] In this section, I will aim to show that Berkeley mistakes Descartes' account of the *physiology* of vision for a *psychological* account of what the mind sees.

Berkeley discusses 'geometric optics', the theory of vision that he attributes to Descartes, in a few different places across his corpus.[5] In *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (NTV), he describes 'those lines and angles, by means whereof some men pretend to explain the perception of distance', and he asks: 'I appeal to anyone's experience whether, upon sight of an object, he computes its distance by the bigness of the angle made by the meeting of the two optic axes?'[6] A little later on in the NTV, Berkeley describes this geometric position further:

> ...that, by altering the disposition of the eyes, the mind perceives whether the angle of the optic axes or the lateral angles comprehended between the interval of the eyes and the optic axes are made greater or lesser; and that accordingly, by a kind of natural geometry, it judges the point of their intersection to be nearer or father off. But that this is not true I am convinced by my own experience, since I am not conscious that I make any such use of the perception I have by the turn of my eyes. And for me to make those judgements, and draw those conclusions from it, without knowing that I do so, seems altogether incomprehensible. (NTV § 10)

3 When discussing Descartes' account, I will use these terms interchangeably to refer to the sensory content [pains, smells, colours, etc.] that we are immediately conscious of.

4 Other scholars such as Maull also attribute this kind of view to Descartes. See, for example: Maull 1978.

5 Berkeley likely had Issac Barrow's *Optical Lectures* (1667), William Molyneux's *Treatise of Dioptrics* (1692), and Nicholas Malebranche's *De la recherche de la verité* (1674) in mind too, on whom Descartes was a significant influence.

6 George Berkeley, *Berkeley: Philosophical Writings*, ed. Desmond M. Clarke, 1 edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

Berkeley is critical of the idea that a subject could (visually) perceive distance through a calculation of lines and angles between the eyes and external objects. Berkeley seems to think that Descartes is positing some judgement of these angles as part of the perception of distance. Berkeley dismisses this understanding of distance perception in part because we are not immediately conscious of any such judgement or calculation of angles. He refers to this account as 'natural geometry', which is a term that Descartes uses himself.[7]

However, this doesn't seem to be the account that Descartes gives. I'd like to suggest that (i) Descartes is not using the term 'natural geometry' to mean what Berkeley thinks it means, and (ii) Descartes thinks of distance perceptions (and sensory perceptions of size, shape and position) as related to but not *perceived through* the lines and angles of the optic axes. The optic axes have a role to play, but this is a grade 1 role, not a grade 2 role.

First, let's consider the sense in which Descartes is using the term 'natural geometry'.[8] In discourse six of the *Optics*, he begins the relevant passage by talking about the position of objects: 'As regards position, we perceive it by means of our eyes exactly as we do by means of our hands' (*Optics*, AT VI 134, CSM I 169). By this, he means that our perceptions of the positions of objects are stimulated in the same way as our other sensory perceptions (of colour, texture, and so on), that is, through motions in the nerves of the body. This could be motions in the nerves of the hands and arms (as when we touch some object) or motions in the nerves of the eyes (as when we see some object), and so on. All of the nerves find their origin in 'the tiny parts of the brain', where they are 'ordained by nature to enable the soul not only to know the place occupied by each part of the body it animates relative to all the others, but also to shift attention from these places to any of those lying on the straight lines which we can imagine to be drawn from the extremity of each part and extended to infinity' (*Optics*, AT VI 134–135, CSM I 169). There need to be enough ever-so-slight changes in the brain to correspond to the variety in our sensory experiences. The geometry of the gaze is what makes these tiny differences.

The blind man example is brought in to illustrate this point. Since, in this discourse, Descartes is concerned with vision in particular, the blind man's hands are meant to be analogous to the eyes and his sticks are meant to be analogous to the 'optic axes' (the straight lines of vision from each eye). As the blind man moves his arms (and thus his sticks), certain changes in his brain occur depending on what resistance he meets and at what location on the sticks. 'Similarly', Descartes says,

7 *Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 170: 'as if by a natural geometry'.

8 He uses this term in the *Optics* and the *Treatise on Man*.

'when our eye or head is turned in some direction, our soul is informed of this by the change in the brain' (*Optics*, AT VI 135, CSM I 169). Descartes is keen to make it clear that the perception of the position of an object is not had because an *image* emitted from that object has made its way to the soul somehow. Rather, the physical aspect of the process can be entirely explained with reference to the motion in the nerves, and the fact that they are 'ordained by nature' to make the soul have certain sensory perceptions (*Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 169).

Descartes then moves on to discuss distance perception. He begins by stating that, as with perceptions of position, distance perceptions also do not rely on images emitted from objects (*Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 170). He goes on to list a few factors that contribute to perceptions of distance: the shape of the eyes, the relation between the eyes, the lines of vision or optic axes, and the distinctness or indistinctness of the shape seen (*Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 170). Descartes tells us explicitly that, ordinarily, we 'do not reflect' upon the movements and the changes of shape that our eyes undergo (*Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 170). That is to say that we are not aware of the movement of the eyes, apart from when we reflect upon it (as we do when we are considering how vision works).[9] Again, it is only because the movements of our eyes cause tiny particular changes in the brain that we have psychological *awareness* of different sensory ideas (at grade 2).[10] He then draws the analogy with the blind man very explicitly:

> In the second place, we know distance by the relation of the eyes to one another. Our blind man holding the two sticks AE and CE (whose length I assume he does not know) and knowing [*sachant*] only the distance between his two hands A and C and the size of the angles ACE and CAE, can tell from this knowledge, *as if by a natural geometry*, where the point E is. And similarly, when our two eyes A and B are turned towards point X, the length of the line AB and the size of the two angles XAB and XBA enable us to know where the point X is. (*Optics*, AT VI 137–138, CSM I 170)

There are a few terms in this passage that may seem a bit incongruous with what has been said so far. First, that the blind man has *knowledge* of the distance between his hands and of the angles between his hands and his sticks. Note that the term used in the original French (*savoir*) means 'to know', not so much in a cognitive or intellectual sense (if this had been the sense that Descartes wanted to convey, perhaps he may have chosen '*connaître*'), but rather in the sense of

9 See §1.44, The Passions of the Soul (AT XI 361–362, CSM I 344) for a passage on how we do not will our eyes to change shape.

10 See the end of Discourse 4, Optics: AT VI 113–114, CSM I 166.

Fig. 1: Figure of the blind man from Descartes' *Optics*'.

'to be aware of'.[11] It is much easier to accept that the blind man can be *aware of* the rough distance between his hands or the rough angle of his sticks, but far more difficult to understand how he could be said to *know* the distance or the angles in an intellectual sense. Indeed, earlier in the passage Descartes presumes that he does not know the length of his sticks ('whose length I assume he does not know [*ignore*]' (*Optics*, AT VI 137, CSM I 170.)) It would be odd of Descartes to think that the blind man does not know the length of his sticks, but does know the size of the angles between the sticks. Similarly, it is a bit outlandish to suppose that we *know* the distance between our eyes, or the size of the angles between our eyes and objects that we see 'naturally' – that is, without the use of a ruler or protractor. It is far more consistent to read Descartes as saying that we have a kind of bodily awareness of this, rather than a conscious, cognitive knowledge of these lengths and angles. This seems to be what he wants to call 'natural geometry'.

If we read Descartes in this way, we ought to conclude that his 'natural geometry' properly applies only to the body (grade 1), rather than the mind (grades 2 and 3). The components of the physical visual system embody natural geometrical relations which allow for fine-grained changes in the brain, which account for the differences in our sensory perceptions in the mind. But these physical geometrical relations are not perceived by the mind. Hatfield argues along similar lines, concluding that the physical processes of the body 'constitute geometrical operations that might approximately be called a "natural geometry."'[12] The blind man is intended to represent the eyes and the optic axes in order to illustrate the *physical* processes involved in visual perception. In fact, the *Optics* as a whole is intended to

11 Hatfield agrees: 'The outcome of natural geometry is described more as a phenomenal awareness than the product of judgement' (Hatfield 2015, 173).

12 Hatfield 2015, 181. Hatfield describes the pineal gland as part of a geometrical mechanism.

describe 'light and light-rays; [...] the parts of the eye [...] and how vision comes about' with the stated aim: 'to show how they can be aided by the inventions' of telescopes, microscopes, and so on (*Optics*, AT VI 81, CSM I 152). The aim of the *Optics* was not to give an account of mental reasoning about the things that we see, but rather to give a scientific, physical account of vision.

Berkeley seems to mistake Descartes' *physical* account of vision for a *psychological* one. He ascribes to Descartes the view that *minds* perceive lengths and angles in order to calculate distance ('the *mind* perceives whether the angle of the optic axes or the lateral angles comprehended between the interval of the eyes and the optic axes are made greater or lesser') and goes on to reject this account on the grounds that he is completely unaware of ever having perceived distance through angles and lengths in this way (NTV § 10). This is what Berkeley calls 'natural geometry' – and he seems to think that, for Descartes and others who subscribe to a 'geometrical' account, this belongs at grade 2 or 3, since we are supposedly *conscious* of it.

Descartes did not mean to suggest that we have grade 2 sensory perceptions of the angles and lines between our eyes and objects, or the corporeal figures in the brain. The relation between the mind and the physiological eye and brain is causal (or at least quasi-causal);[13] it is not a relation of perception. Descartes is quite clear that the mind does not look at the corporeal figures in the brain 'as if there were yet other eyes within our brain with which we could perceive' them (*Optics*, AT VI 130, CSM I 167). If Descartes had meant to explain how the *mind* perceives, he would probably have referred to *ideas* of lines, angles, and so on, but we find no such reference in the *Optics.*

For Descartes, if something is perceived by the mind, then it is an idea.[14] Since his use of the term 'idea' departs from the standard notion of an 'idea' as a sensory or imagined image, he repeats his definition of the term multiple times in his replies, letters, and so on. He writes: 'I have frequently pointed out that I use the term "idea" to apply to what is established by reasoning as well as anything else that is perceived in any manner whatsoever' and 'I am taking the word "idea" to refer to whatever is immediately perceived by the mind' (*Third Replies*, AT V II 181 & 185, CSM II 127 & 130). So, when Descartes talks about the mind's perceptions, we can expect that he will be talking about ideas. In light of this, we ought to review the passages from the sixth discourse of the *Optics* and see if Descartes is talking about *ideas* of lengths and angles, or merely referring to lengths and angles as a part of his description of the physical visual system.

13 We might characterise this as occasional causation. See: Nadler 1994.

14 Here, Berkeley and Descartes agree. See: PHK §§ 1–5.

Descartes refers to sensory perceptions in the *Optics*, but he does not refer to perceptions *of* the various lines and angles between the eyes and objects. In fact, at multiple points Descartes describes the mind or soul at a kind of remove from the physical status of the eyes, for example: '[A]s we adjust the shape of the eye according to the distance of objects, we change a certain part of our brain in a manner that is ordained by nature to make our soul perceive this *distance*' (*Optics*, AT VI 138, CSM I 170, emphasis mine). Here, Descartes tells us that the soul perceives the *distance*, not the shape of the eye. The shape of the eye is involved in the process, since changes in the shape of the eye result in changes in the brain which, according to nature's ordination, result in different ideas occurring in the mind, but the shape of the eye is not in the *idea* – that is, the shape of the eye is not perceived by the mind.

Likewise, for the blind man, we find that his soul is not concerned with the position of his sticks or his arms, but only the position of the external objects immediately near to him – and he can 'determine the places they occupy without in any way knowing or thinking of those which his hands occupy'(*Optics*, AT VI 135, CSM I 169). Since the blind man's hands are analogous to eyes, we can take from this that one's soul needn't have any immediate awareness of the position of the eyes in order to know the positions of the external objects with which one is concerned.[15]

I've considered Berkeley's reading of Descartes: that he subscribed to a 'geometric optics', according to which the mind perceives the lengths and angles created between the eyes and external objects in order to calculate distance and po-

15 There is one more passage from the Optics which deserves our attention. Descartes considers a subject with only one eye. The subject is able to successfully generate the perceptions of distance, size and shape by 'changing the position' of the single eye. Descartes explains: 'And this is done by a mental act which, though only a very simple act of the imagination, involves a kind of reasoning quite similar to that used by surveyors when they measure inaccessible places by means of two different vantage points' (AT VI 138, CSM I 170). Descartes' description of this process as a 'mental act' similar to the 'reasoning' used by surveyors presents a problem for my reading, since he is deliberately describing this process as a mental one, rather than a purely physiological one. Nevertheless, I think we have good reason to think that this is a special case, in which our physiology is compromised and the mind 'intervenes' to compensate. In order to have perceptions of distance, the pineal gland needs to be stimulated in a specific way. If we only have one working eye, we are required to ensure that that eye is doing the work of two eyes – by changing the position of the single eye, remembering the perception of the previous position, and imagining a blending of the two perceptions – in order to stimulate the gland in the right way. Since this is not all happening automatically at grade 1, we have to actively and consciously imagine the coming together of two sensory perceptions. However, this is not the usual case: 'Ordinarily', Descartes says, all this happens 'without our reflecting upon it.' And so I don't think this is reason enough to reject my reading of what occurs in the ordinary case.

sition. I have aimed to show that Berkeley mistakes Descartes' account of the physiology of vision for an account of what the mind sees. The mind does not perceive lengths and angles – that is, it does not have *ideas* of lengths and angles – but rather, because the optic nerves cause different patterns of movement in the brain, different sensory ideas arise. The grade 2 sensory ideas are perceived by the mind – but the grade 1 movements of the nerves, the position and shape of the eyes, the angle of the optic axes, and so on are not.

Berkeley, if he had understood Descartes' *Optics* in this way, would have likely agreed with him. In TVV Berkeley writes:

> [A]lthough to talk of seeing by tangible angles and lines be direct nonsense, yet, to demonstrate from angles and lines in feeling to the ideas in seeing that arise from the same common object, is very good sense. If by this no more is meant, than that men might argue and compute geometrically by lines and angles in optics, it is so far in carrying it in any opposition to my Theory, that I have expressly declared the same thing. (TVV § 31)

In this passage, it seems that Berkeley is entirely willing to accept geometrical descriptions, apart from when they are applied to 'ideas in seeing'. So, insofar as Descartes did not mean to apply geometry to our sensory ideas (grade 2), but only to physiological processes (grade 1), it seems that they agree.

Likewise, Berkeley writes:

> To explain how the mind or soul of a man simply sees is one thing and belongs to Philosophy. To consider particles as moving in certain lines, rays of light as refracted, or reflected, or crossing, or including angles, is quite another thing, and appertaineth to Geometry. To account for the sense of vision by the mechanism of the eye, is a third thing, which appertaineth Anatomy and experiments [...] But the former theory is that which makes us understand the true Theory of Vision, considered as a faculty of the soul. (TVV § 43)

Again, we have Berkeley distinguishing between matters of the soul – how we see, or how we come to have sensory ideas of sight – and matters of geometry and anatomy – refraction of light, the mechanism of the eye, and so on. I take all of this to mean that Berkeley would have essentially agreed with Descartes (accounting, of course, for their very different metaphysical positions). Geometry is relevant when thinking about the laws of refraction (which is one of Descartes' principal concerns in the *Optics*) but not relevant when thinking about visual sensations from a first-person view.

2 Berkeley's Linguistic Account of Visual Sensation

So what does Berkeley propose as an alternative to the supposed 'geometrical' model? In the TVV, Berkeley articulates this principle: '*Vision is the Language of the Author of Nature*' (TVV § 38).[16] Vision should be understood like a language because the connections between the 'terms' (or signs) of the language of vision and what they signify are arbitrary. He begins: 'A great number of arbitrary signs, various and opposite, do constitute a language', and he goes on to make the comparison with visual and tangible sensations: 'in fact, there is no more likeness to exhibit, or necessity to infer, things tangible from the modifications of light, than there is in language, to collect the meaning from the sound' (TVV § 40).

What Berkeley is saying here is that the relation between what we understand from a spoken phrase (the meaning) and the sound that constitutes the spoken phrase is in some ways akin to the relation between something we see and something we touch.[17] That is, these relations are arbitrary. We might have used a spoken word other than 'pig' to provoke the idea of such a creature in the hearer; there is no *necessary* connection between that sound ('pig') and the idea. Rather, they are connected arbitrarily according to our invented language conventions. So, Berkeley wants to say the same of the language of vision. There are no necessary connections between visual signs and what they signify, like ideas of touch.

Berkeley intends here to build on his earlier work, the *New Theory of Vision*, in which he spends a lot of time establishing that ideas of sight and ideas of touch are heterogeneous. So, since there are no common objects of sight and touch, and since the connections between ideas of sight and ideas of touch are arbitrary, we ought to understand that vision functions like a language.

In the NTV, Berkeley poses several problems for himself that he goes on to try and solve. First, if ideas of sight and ideas of touch are heterogeneous, then why do we call tangible shapes by the same names as visible shapes? Berkeley answers with a comparison with language. He writes: 'we can no more argue a visible and tangible square to be of the same species from their being called by the same name, than we can that a tangible square, and the monosyllable consisting of six letters whereby it is marked, are of the same species because they are both called by the same name' (NTV §140). Just as it is customary to call written

16 Berkeley added the term 'author' in the last two editions of the NTV (1732) (§ 147). This provides further support for the reading that God is communicating through the language of nature.

17 For discussions on Berkeley's analogy with language, see Fasko 2021, Pearce 2017, and Turbayne 1963.

words and the things that they signify by the same name (even though they are not the same sorts of things), so too is it customary to call visible shapes by the same name as tangible shapes. Further, just as written words are not of interest to us in their own right but only interesting because of what they signify, visible signs are not intrinsically valuable but valuable because of the tangible objects that they signify. Atherton summarises Berkeley's conclusion: 'What vision is for is to stand for nonvisible objects.'[18]

If vision is a language instituted by the author of nature, then what is its purpose? Why do we need these visual signs to signify nonvisual objects? Berkeley's answer, in part, is that this language is designed to instruct us on how to preserve ourselves. He writes:

> Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude that the proper objects of vision constitute a universal language of the Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It is by their information that we are principally guided in all the transactions and concerns of life. (NTV § 147)

So, the purpose of the language of vision is to guide us in keeping our bodies safe and healthy, and regulate our actions so that we can achieve our aims.

Berkeley's own view – that vision is a language to be understood so that we might best direct our actions – is contrasted with the views of Descartes, Malebranche, and other subscribers to 'geometric' optics.[19] As we have seen, Berkeley attributes to them the view that seeing distance, size and shape are matters of working out geometrical calculations, rather than matters of recognising associations between visual signs. However, I have suggested that Berkeley gets Descartes wrong on this count. I'd now like to explore the ways in which their accounts of the psychology of vision are strikingly similar.

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18 Atherton 1990, 196.

19 Here, I refer to Malebranche's view that the human eye is like a 'camera obscura' in that it receives external light through the pupil, which then projects an image onto the retina at the back of the eye. This image is then transmitted to the brain. See: Nicolas Malebranche, Malebranche: *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, ed. Nicholas Jolley and David Scott (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), and Book Two of *Malebranche: The Search after Truth*, ed. Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, Revised ed. edition (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

3 Berkeley, Descartes, and Linguistic Theories of Sense

I have suggested that Berkeley gets Descartes wrong by ascribing to him a theory of vision that involves making geometrical calculations. I'd now like to draw out a positive account of Descartes' theory of vision (and, in his case, sensation generally). I will argue that Descartes also presents a linguistic account of sensory experience, although one that is different from Berkeley's in important respects. I'll go on to explore what Descartes' account has in common with Berkeley's.

3.1 Descartes and the Language Analogy

As explained above, Descartes describes three 'grades' of sensation: (1) the physiological, (2) the 'immediate effects' in the mind (our sensory experience), and (3) the judgments that we make regarding external objects on the basis of that sensory experience. Of course, there is an obvious question about how exactly the physical motions in the body bring about non-physical effects in the mind; a question that has puzzled readers of Descartes for more than four hundred years.

Descartes, famously, doesn't provide a very philosophically robust answer to this question. However, he does draw an analogy multiple times across his corpus that gives us a way of understanding the relation between the body and the mind during sensory experience.[20] This is the analogy with language. In an important passage from *The World*, he writes:

> Words, as you well know, bear no resemblance to the things they signify, and yet they make us think of those things, frequently even without our paying attention to the sound of the words or their syllables. Thus it may happen that we hear an utterance whose meaning we understand perfectly well, but afterwards we cannot say in what language it was spoken. Now if words, which signify nothing except by human convention, suffice to make us think of things to which they bear no resemblance, then why could nature not also have established some

20 As well as these passages quoted below, see Principles, AT VIIIA 320–321, CSM I 284, and *Passions of the Soul*, AT XI 368–369, CSM I 348. (This passage from the *Passions of the Soul* makes a slightly different use of the language example. Here, words are compared to sensory ideas, and their meanings are compared to passions. The relation between sensory ideas and passions is like the relation between words and their meanings in that these relations are formed through habit and can be changed. This is, of course, a different use of the language example. The only point I wish to highlight is simply that Descartes says that the movements in the brain are 'ordained by nature' to give rise to certain sensory perceptions.)

> sign which would make us have the sensation of light, even if the sign contained nothing in itself which is similar to this sensation? [...] by the same token it is our mind which represents to us the ideas of light each time our eye is affected by the action which signifies it. (*The World*, AT XI 4, CSM I 81)

He also draws this analogy between the process of sensory experience and language in the *Optics:*

> We must take care not to assume – as our philosophers commonly do – that in order to have sensory perceptions the soul must contemplate certain images transmitted by the objects to the brain; or at any rate we must conceive the nature of these images in an entirely different manner from that of the philosophers. [...] We should, however, recall that our mind can be stimulated by many things other than images – by signs and words, for example, which in no way resemble the things they signify. (*Optics*, AT VI 112, CSM I 165)

Here, Descartes explicitly distances himself from the (somewhat caricatured) Aristotelian view that we sensorily experience objects due to those objects somehow transferring or 'transmitting' images of themselves to the mind. Instead, he asks us to think about how words, when heard or read, stimulate the mind to form an idea of the thing signified by the word, even though that word bears no resemblance to that object. We ought to think about the pattern composed by movements in the brain like a word, instead of an image.[21]

In the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes also uses the terminology of 'signs':

> Every time this part of the brain is in a given state, it presents the same *signs* to the mind, even though the other parts of the body may be in a different condition at the time. [...] For example, when the nerves in the foot are set in motion in a violent and unusual manner, this motion, via the spinal cord, reaches the inner brain, and there gives the mind its sign for having a certain sensation, namely the sensation of pain in the foot. (*Sixth Meditation*, AT VII 86, my translation.)

From these passages across these major works, it is clear that Descartes thought that this analogy with words and signs was useful for explaining the relation between the body and the mind during sensory experience. He encourages us to think about the various patterns of nerves in the brain as like signs or words. These brain 'words' are 'ordained by nature' to stimulate the corresponding sen-

21 Perhaps the most important difference between words and images is the way that each represents their contents. Words do not represent by resemblance. There is a great deal to say about this, which I cannot do justice to here. See: Winkler 1989, 21.

sory ideas within the mind.[22] In line with Descartes, I suggest that we should understand the relation between brain 'words' and sensory ideas to be akin to the relation between words of a language and their meanings: sensory ideas should be thought of as the meanings of brain signs.

An obvious question arises for this view of how brain signs and sensory ideas become associated with or connected to each other. Descartes thinks that this connection is instituted by God (or nature). He uses the phrase 'ordained by nature' multiple times to describe how the motions in the brain give rise to the sensory ideas in the mind. By 'nature', Descartes means that God has set things up this way.[23]

Now arises the question of why God would create such a system, whereby motions in the brain are connected to sensory ideas in a way similar to the way that words are connected to their meanings. The answer here is almost identical to the one that we saw from Berkeley earlier. God has devised such a system – the best possible system – for preserving the health and well-being of the human being (*Meditation* VI, AT VII 87, CSM II 60). In the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes writes:

> For the proper purpose of the sensory perceptions given me by nature is simply to inform the mind of what is beneficial or harmful for the composite of which the mind is a part; and to this extent they are sufficiently clear and distinct. *(Meditation* VI, AT VII 83, CSM II 57.)

God connects body and mind through a system of meaning in order to keep us safe and healthy. Far from the geometric account that Berkeley ascribes to Descartes, it is becoming clear that Descartes had a psychological theory of vision (or, sensory perception in general in his case) that is grounded in connections that should be described as linguistic, rather than geometric. I'll now move on to consider the ways in which Descartes' and Berkeley's accounts are similar.

3.2 Comparing the Accounts of Descartes and Berkeley

I'd like to suggest that there are several points upon which Berkeley and Descartes can agree:

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22 Descartes repeatedly uses this phrase "ordained by nature" – see: Optics (AT VI 130, CSM I 167), Passions of the Soul (AT XI 368–369, CSM I 348), The World (AT XI 4, CSM I 81).

23 See: Meditation 6, AT VII 80, CSM II 56. "For if nature is considered in its general aspect, then I understand by the term nothing other than God himself".

(1) that God communicates information about what is helpful and harmful through our sensations[24]
(2) that linguistic terms do not resemble what they signify (and that this is a significant part of the analogy)
(3) that linguistic terms bear no necessary connection to what they signify (and that this is a significant part of the analogy)
(4) that God is the institutor of the language of sensation.

First, as we have already seen, both Descartes and Berkeley clearly recognise that the purpose of our sensations is to preserve our health and well-being. In the *Sixth Meditation*, Descartes explains that the sensations produced in the mind are 'most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man' (*Meditation* VI, AT VII 87, CSM II 60). In a strikingly similar passage, Berkeley writes:

> Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude, that the proper Objects of Vision constitute the Language of the Author of Nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our Actions, in order to attain those things, that are necessary to the Preservation and Well-being of our Bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It's by their Information that we are principally guided in all the Transactions and Concerns of Life. (NTV § 147)

On this point, then, Berkeley and Descartes agree.

On to the second point of comparison. As we have seen, Descartes and Berkeley both draw an analogy with language in order to explain the process of sensory perception. At the points at which they draw this analogy, they both stress that one of the key aspects of the comparison with language is the feature of non-resemblance. Berkeley writes: '[L]anguages and signs of human appointment; [...] do not suggest the things signified by any likeness or identity of nature, but only by a habitual connection that experience has made us to observe between them' (NTV § 147). Here, Berkeley draws attention to that fact that words do not resemble what they signify. Rather, they are related because of a 'habitual connection' that is established through our experience. It is the same for our perceptions. For example, a visual perception of an object with jagged edges is a sign for a tactile perception of sharpness not because there is any similarity or resemblance between these perceptions, but rather because they have become connected in our experience – like the way in which words become connected to the objects they signify.

24 For Berkeley, visual sensations.

Likewise, Descartes regularly stresses the point of non-resemblance. For example, in the *Optics:* 'our mind can be stimulated by many things other than images – by signs and words for example which in no way resemble the things they signify' (*Optics*, AT VI 112, CSM I 165). It is a key part of the explanation of the process of visual sensation that the patterns in the brain are like words *insofar as* they do not resemble what they signify.

Of course, Descartes and Berkeley are using the analogy with language in different ways by comparing different things to words/signs. For Descartes, the comparison is between words/signs and patterns of movement in the brain. The sensory ideas that result in the mind are like the meanings of those brain signs. For Berkeley, the sensory idea is compared to the word/sign, and it signifies other sensory ideas. Nevertheless, they are both using this analogy with language to highlight non-resemblance between whatever corresponds to the sign or word and whatever corresponds to the meaning or what is signified.

In addition, both Descartes and Berkeley hold that words/signs and their meanings/what is signified are not connected by necessity – and this is also a key feature of the explanation of sensory perception. As we see in the quote from Berkeley above, he stresses that words (and, therefore, terms of the 'language of vision') 'do not suggest the things signified by any likeness or *identity of nature*'.[25] As Atherton summarises: 'If vision works like a language, then the visual signs do not represent through resemblance or necessary connections but instead by means of contingent connections established in experience.'[26] God hasn't made it so that necessary connections exist between, for example, visual sensations and tactile sensations. Rather, we learn of their contingent connection through experience.

In Descartes, we don't find anything quite as explicit. However, I think there is good reason to think that Descartes thinks the connections between brain signs and sensory ideas to be 'conventional', rather than necessary. For one thing, he doesn't describe the connections between nerve patterns in the brain and sensory ideas within the mind as necessary connections. Further, he gives an example in the *Optics* that suggests that the body might be in some state whilst not provoking the usual sensory idea: 'For when the soul is distracted by an ecstasy or deep contemplation, we see that the whole body remains without sensation, even though it has various objects touching it' (*Optics*, AT VI 109, CSM I 164). Here, we see a situation in which the body, and therefore the brain, is in some particular state being touched by various objects. However, since the soul is distracted, no sensory ideas

25 My emphasis.

26 Atherton 1990, 200.

result. It seems, then, that it is not *necessarily* the case that particular body state X gives rise to particular sensory idea Y, even if it usually does (we are to assume that the mind usually has some set of sensory ideas when these objects touch the body – when it is not distracted).

However, even if the brain can be in some state without necessarily giving rise to the corresponding sensory idea, that isn't to say that the connection between that brain state and that sensory idea isn't 'necessary' in that it couldn't have been connected to some other sensory idea (in this case: that brain state couldn't give rise to any other sensory ideas apart from that particular one). On this point, Descartes is quite clear. In the *Sixth Meditation*, he writes:

> My final observation is that any given movement occurring in the part of the brain that immediately affects the mind produces just one corresponding sensation; and hence the best system that could be devised is that it should produce the one sensation which, of all possible sensations, is most especially and most frequently conducive to the preservation of the healthy man. (*Meditation* VI, AT VII 87–88, CSM II 60).

Now, if any brain state has *one* particular corresponding sensation, does that mean that the connection between them is necessary in that it couldn't have been otherwise? Just after this passage above, Descartes goes on to say:

> It is true that God could have made the nature of man such that this particular motion in the brain indicated something else to the mind; it might, for example, have made the mind aware of the actual motion occurring in the brain, or in the foot, or in any of the intermediate regions; or it might have indicated something else entirely. (*Meditation* VI, AT VII 88, CSM II 60–61)

It seems that the connections between brain states and sensory ideas are not *necessary* in that they couldn't have been otherwise. Descartes acknowledges here that they could have been otherwise. However, they are set by God for the purpose of keeping us healthy. My suggestion, in line with Descartes appeal to the analogy with language, is that we ought to think about this like we think about the way in which words are connected to meanings. It's true that any word might have had a different corresponding meaning. The word 'circle' might have been connected with an idea of a square, for example. There is no necessary connection between words and their meanings. However, the institutors of the language decide the connections for a particular purpose – to be able to effectively communicate.

There is one other passage of interest on this point. In the *Passions of the Soul*, Descartes talks about the way in which the soul can master the passions. He writes:

> It is useful to note here, as already mentioned above[27], that although nature seems to have joined every movement of the gland to certain of our thoughts from the beginning of our life, yet we may join them to others through habit. (*Passions of the Soul*, AT XI 368–369, CSM I 348).

A little later, he gives the example of being caught off-guard by something unpleasant in a dish you are eating and enjoying. This experience might mean that you can no longer eat that dish without feeling repulsed. A new connection between that dish and a feeling of repulsion has been created. Descartes takes this as evidence that we might forge new connections between the movements in the brain and our passions. I raise this only because I think it suggests a certain flexibility in the relationship between the body and the mind for Descartes. In any case, this kind of view seems incompatible with the idea that there are necessary and law-like connections between movements in the brain and experiences in the mind.

This leads us nicely on to the final point of comparison between Descartes and Berkeley: that God is the institutor of the language of sensation. Berkeley, as we have seen, refers to the institutor of the language of vision as the 'Author of nature'.[28] In the following passage from the *Principles*, Berkeley explains that our sensations come to us in an order that testifies to the goodness of the Author of nature. He writes:

> The ideas of sense [...] have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not excited at random, as those which are the effects of human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, the admirable connexion whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. (PHK § 30)

Further, in a later section of the *Principles*, Berkeley quotes a passage from Acts 17 to refer to the Author of nature as 'that supreme and wise spirit, "in whom we live, move, and have our being"' (PHK § 66). These passages make it quite clear that by 'Author of nature', Berkeley intends to refer to God.

As explained above, Berkeley believes that the language of vision is put in place by God in order to preserve the well-being of our bodies, amongst other things. God is the institutor of this language and maintains the connections between the signs and the things signified: the visual with the tactile, and so on. As we have seen, the connections are not underpinned by a relation of necessity or resemblance for Berkeley. So instead, God, as creator of the language system, preserves the meanings of the signs.

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27 A reference to Article 44.

28 See earlier footnote 16.

Likewise, Descartes makes it quite clear in the passages quoted above that God is the institutor of the language-like connections between brain signs and sensory ideas. In this passage from T*he World* mentioned above, Descartes writes:

> [I]f words, which *signify nothing except by human convention*, suffice to make us think of things to which they bear no resemblance, then *why could nature not also have established some sign* which would make us have the sensation of light, even if the sign contained nothing in itself which is similar to this sensation? (*The World,* AT XI 4, CSM I 81, my emphasis)

In this passage, it seems to be particularly important to Descartes that words 'signify nothing except by human convention', and he goes on to rhetorically ask: 'why could nature not also have *established* some sign?' (*The World,* AT XI 4, CSM I 81). Here, the suggestion is that nature (or, more accurately, God – since he equates the two) establishes these signs, much like human beings do when they establish words that signify particular things. In this passage, it seems key that Descartes chooses to use the example of words, rather than other kinds of signs. It is key because words are *established* signs – and Descartes wants to say that the same is true of the motions in the material world: they are *established* (or given/constituted) signs for the sensory ideas that we experience.

Descartes also uses this phrase 'ordained by nature' in the *Optics.*[29] The nerve movements in the brain are 'ordained by nature' to make us have the sensory perceptions that we have (*Optics*, AT VI 130, CSM I 167). Again, Descartes is keen to emphasise that the motions in the matter have been *ordained* or *established* to serve some particular role.[30]

4 Berkeley, Descartes, and their Respective Metaphysical Problems

I argued that, contrary to the claim that Berkeley is making a radical departure from the Cartesian geometrical account of vision, Berkeley and Descartes both have a linguistic account of visual sensation. I'd like to end by reflecting very briefly on why both of these figures adopt a linguistic account. I suggest that they each have different problems to solve, generated by their drastically different metaphysical systems, but that they both manage to 'solve' or dissolve these problems by making this appeal to language. I'll consider these in turn.

29 Optics, AT VI 130, CSM I 167.

30 See too: *Passions of the Soul*, AT XI 368–369, CSM I 348.

Let's begin with Berkeley. Berkeley's ontology is slim: it consists only of passing ideas and perceiving minds. Ideas are pure sensations, and they are constantly being replaced by new ones. Berkeley describes ideas as 'fleeting' and 'variable' (DHP 205 & 245–246). These ideas are meant to be the building blocks of our reality – the world that we perceive – but what is responsible for the building of these blocks? How is it that sensations constantly occur together (e.g. the visual sensation of water and the tactile sensations of coldness and wetness)? And why do we perceive causal regularities in nature (e.g. why is our visual sensation of one billiard ball moving and impacting another followed by a visual sensation of that other ball moving)? This is to ask; how does the perceived world get its structure? And what is the nature of that structure?

Pearce suggests that, in answer to this puzzle, Berkeley turns to the divine language hypothesis: the structure of the perceived world is a linguistic or grammatical structure.[31] For Berkeley, our visual sensations are terms of language (either literally or metaphorically), and that means that we can understand the structure of reality as a linguistic or grammatical structure. Our fleeting sensations (that are terms or parts of terms in the language) become combined and ordered according to the laws of nature (the 'grammar manual' of the language).

Descartes does not have this structure problem because his metaphysical system includes a mind-independent physical reality. The kind of view that Descartes has (that Berkeley rejects) is something like this: sense perceptions, or sensory ideas, are occasioned by independent objects that exist outside of our minds. Our sensory ideas, then, provide us with a representation of this mind-independent, physical reality. Berkeley, of course, rejects this view and holds instead that there is no mind-independent physical reality – so he is left with this structure problem.

So, what is Descartes' metaphysical problem? Descartes describes mind and body as two distinct substances with distinct natures or essences: 'extension in length, breadth and depth constitutes the nature of corporeal substance; and thought constitutes the nature of thinking substance' (*Principles part 1*, AT VIIIA 25, CSM I 210). Descartes tells us in the synopsis to the *Meditations* that the natures of mind and body are 'not only different, but in some way opposite'.[32]

We must add to this Descartes' apparent commitment to a causal likeness principle.[33] At various points, Descartes seems to commit himself to the idea that effi-

31 Pearce 2017.

32 *Meditations*, AT VII 13, CSM II 9–10.

33 Some scholars have interpreted the causal likeness principle to mean that a cause must be as perfect (or as real) as its effect. This interpretation allows for the possibility of an effect being quite

cient causal relations can only exist between things that are *alike* (insofar as they can share modes/properties). In the *Conversation with Burman*, Descartes asserts: 'It is a common axiom and a true one that the effect is like the cause' (*Conversation with Burman*, AT V 156, CSMK III 339–340). This likeness or similarity principle is suggested in the Third Meditation, where Descartes takes it to be 'manifest from the natural light' that there is 'at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause.' (*Third Meditation*, AT VII 41, CSM II 28). Descartes goes on to rhetorically ask: 'For where, I ask, could the effect get its reality from, if not from the cause? And how could the cause give it to the effect unless it possessed it?' (*Third Meditation*, AT VII 41, CSM II 28). These passages strongly suggest that 'efficient and total' causes pass on properties or features to their effects. That is: efficient causation involves something being transferred from cause to effect.

Put this all together and we arrive at a problem: given the total heterogeneity of mind and body and Descartes' commitment to the causal likeness principle, how can we say that these two substances causally interact with each other? Specifically, how can states of the body cause certain states of the mind (as they seem to when we have sensations)?

Descartes thought that this analogy with words and signs was useful for explaining the relation between the body and the mind during sensory experience. He encourages us to think about the various patterns of nerves in the brain as like signs or words. These brain 'words' are 'ordained by nature' to stimulate the corresponding sensory ideas within the mind. Descartes suggests that we should understand the relation between brain figures and sensory ideas to be akin to the relation between words of a language and their meanings: sensory ideas should be thought of as the meanings of brain figures. This gives us a practical way of understanding the connection between mind, brain, and world in sensory experience, whilst maintaining that there is no efficient causal relation between body and mind.

I'd like to end with a brief and undeveloped reflection on why Berkeley and Descartes make such similar appeals to language to explain very different metaphysical problems. My suggestion is that both thinkers are making use of the fact that language is so familiar to us. It is so intuitive that we often forget how mysterious it is. Without necessarily needing a detailed metaphysical explanation of *how* language works, we know *that* it works and how to use it. Thus, it is extremely useful as an explanatory tool – especially to explain something abstract,

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dissimilar to its cause, just as long as it is does not possess more reality than its cause. See, for example, Loeb 1981, 140. I am inclined to agree with Cottingham 1990 on this.

complex and unfamiliar: like mind-body relations and the structure of an ideal reality. By making this comparison between Descartes and Berkeley, we can fit them both into a pattern of explanation with the familiarity of language at its core.

Conclusion

I have argued, against Berkeley, that Descartes does not hold that geometrical judgements are part of our sensations at grade 2. This means that Descartes' account of visual sensation is not geometrical in a way that is opposed to Berkeley's linguistic account. Rather, we should conclude that Descartes' physiological account of visual sensation is consistent with a psychological account that is linguistic in a similar way to Berkeley's own. In fact, Berkeley himself seems to combine a geometrical 'physiological' account with a linguistic psychological account.[34] Finally, I have argued that the psychological accounts of Descartes and Berkeley bear significant similarities, suggesting that Berkeley was not alone in proposing something like the Divine Language Hypothesis. Finally, I have suggested that both Descartes and Berkeley appeal to language, at least in part, to solve problems generated by their radically different metaphysical systems. By reflecting on their shared solution to very different problems, we can begin to understand the merits of language as an explanatory tool.

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34 Of course, there are clear and important differences between Descartes and Berkeley on this point. For one thing, the 'physiological' means something quite different for Berkeley. However, setting aside the obvious differences between the metaphysical commitments of Descartes and Berkeley, we can say that Berkeley is happy to accept that thinking about light moving in certain lines/refraction/etc. belongs to geometry (see TVV § 43).

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Clare Marie Moriarty

10 Mathematics: Signification and Significance

Abstract: Clare Marie Moriarty emphasises the role the doctrine of signs plays in Berkeley's philosophy of mathematics. Moriarty demonstrates how important it is to look at what might typically be seen as the 'fringes' of Berkeley's philosophical corpus. His philosophy of mathematics, much celebrated but disproportionately under-represented in Berkeley scholarship, is an area where the doctrine of signs, and semiotics more generally, play a crucial role. Thus, part of Moriarty's aim is to show how far-reaching the doctrine of signs is in Berkeley's oeuvre. But Moriarty's aim is also to establish a relation of significance that goes in the other direction. Her thesis is that properly understanding Berkeley's doctrine of signs is virtually impossible without an appreciation of the influence and impact of developments in his thoughts concerning mathematics.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to provide a survey of the relationship between Berkeley's thinking on mathematics and the 'Doctrine of Signs'. Given that Berkeleyan mathematics is something of a niche subject, I begin with a bibliography, explaining the sources of Berkeley's mathematical material and offering occasional contextual observations that situate the relevant ideas and their motivations. As the existence of this volume attests, Berkeley's whole oeuvre is shot through with insights grounded in matters of signification and semiotics. His mathematical thinking is no exception and often it represents a special case that provides insight on the functioning of the broader scheme. My goal is two-directional: to give an account of how signs play a role in Berkeley's philosophy of mathematics and to suggest that mathematical cases play a key role in the development of Berkeley's semiotics and his understanding of the central place of signs in his philosophical system. I argue that understanding Berkeley's thinking on signs is almost impossible without an appreciation of the chronological and theoretical impact of his changing thinking on mathematics.

In my treatment, I look at a canonical (though exegetically imperfect) statement of Berkeley's views on arithmetic and geometry given in the 1710 *Principles of Human Knowledge* and largely re-iterated in the 1734 re-publication. I supplement the interpretation of that material with insights from Berkeley's formative

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-013

philosophical writing in the years 1707–1709.[1] I use Berkeley's discussion in the queries to *The Analyst* to reflect back on Berkeley's views on the mismanagement of mathematics and the central role misinterpreting signs played. I conclude by explaining the significance of the foregoing to the views on signs and language in *Alciphron,* the most pronounced discussion of that material. But before I begin, let me spell out a caveat.

The issue of the development of Berkeley's philosophy of language is a source of rich scholarly exchange, most recently in nuanced and rigorous work by Kenneth Pearce, Keota Fields and others.[2] For the purposes of this paper, I endeavour to keep my interpretation of the trajectory of Berkeley's linguistic thought as modest and minimally controversial as possible. Three things I take for granted are: (i) that in parts of the *Notebooks* and in 'Of Infinites', he signals a strong commitment to the diktat that a word's meaning is to be understood in terms of the idea it signifies or represents, and that, where such ideas are lacking, words are to be treated with suspicion, at least *in most cases.* (ii) I also take it for granted that in Dialogue VII of *Alciphron* Berkeley has (the character) Alciphron voice this view, and the related account of knowledge as perception of agreement or disagreement between ideas, as a reason to reject religious knowledge (and even faith, which still requires some assent). Finally, (iii) Euphranor's response to Alciphron involves a de-centralisation of idea-signification and a promotion of a subtler view of language as a more active phenomenon that is not solely about the signification of ideas. Collectively, I take these three points to support an interpretation of Berkeley's views on language according to which, in his very earliest writings, he supported a view of language which at the very least *emphasised* idea-signification, and, by the time of *Alciphron,* saw an *emphasis* on the more practical aspects of language – articles which 'influence the lives and actions of men' (AMP 7.15) – as vital to his broader philosophical agenda.[3]

1 Unless specified otherwise, references to Berkeley's writing are to *Works.* Citations give a (short) title and page or section number in the relevant volume. However, when referring to Berkeley's *Arithmetic Demonstrated Without Euclid or Algebra* and *Mathematical Miscellanies,* I refer to the translations by G. N. Knight included in Sampson's edition of Berkeley's works (Berkeley, 1897).
2 See particularly Fields 2021 and Pearce 2017 and 2022, and Margaret Atherton's chapter in this volume.
3 I set out my own view of the relationship between the linguistic philosophy of *Alciphron* and that of *The Analyst* in Moriarty 2018.

1 Mathematical Bibliography

Assessing Berkeley's mathematical writing involves a drawing together of (i) brief or focused discussions in general texts and (ii) more sustained discussions in dedicated texts. We find shorter mathematical passages in the *Essay Towards a New Theory of vision* (1709), *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), *De Motu* (1721), *Alciphron* (1732), and *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733). Thus, almost every major text includes some significant mathematical rumination.[4]

The texts that are devoted to mathematics, at least ostensibly, are unusual in various ways. The mathematical catalogue includes two short treatises and an essay (all c. 1707), then *The Analyst* (1734), and two 1735 replies to respondents to *The Analyst: A Defence of Freethinking in Mathematics* ('DFM') and *Reasons for not Replying to Mr. Walton's Full Answer* ('RNR'). The two 1707 treatises receive scant treatment in the literature, being regarded as immature works that shed little light on Berkeley's better-known philosophical contributions – according to Sampson, they 'cannot be said to have any value other than the author's name gives them' (Berkeley 1897, 2). 'Of Infinites' ('OI') receives more scholarly attention, but is argued from a philosophical standpoint that Berkeley seems to reject in later work. The remaining three (*The Analyst* and the two 1735 follow-ups) are rhetorically charged texts which see Berkeley use mathematics as a forum in which to conduct pointed investigations of the contemporary idea of rigour and intellectual respectability.

Mathematics was a dominant focus in Berkeley's early writing. His notebooks are dense with mathematical content and the impression conveyed is one combining considerable mathematical literacy with marked philosophical caution.[5] Much of what Berkeley has to say about mathematicians is negative: mathematicians are 'ridiculous […] to despise sense' (NB 317), they 'cannot find any thing corresponding w'th their nice ideas' (NB 330) and 'had they not been Mathematicians they had been good for nothing' (NB 375). There is also an emerging sense of Berkeley's recognition that numerous distinctive elements of his own positive philosophical sys-

4 Opinions will vary on which texts are major and how much mathematics constitutes a discussion, but I am exempting *Passive Obedience* from the major texts list, and I judge the brief (though interesting) mathematical commentary in *Siris* to be insufficient to qualify as significant discussion.

5 See: NB 292, NB 313, NB 317, NB 368, NB 370–376, NB 385, and NB 768.

tem are at odds with the increasingly influential Newtonian ideals of the day.[6] Naturally, Berkeley regards any changes to mathematics necessitated by his immaterialism and anti-abstractionism as improvements to the domain, but he understands that some parts of the mathematical landscape may have to be cropped. Berkeley offered the following cost-benefit analysis:

> The Philosophers lose their Matter, The Mathematicians loose their insensible sensations,[7] the Profane their extended Deity Pray wt do the Rest of Mankind lose, as for bodies &c we have them still. N.B. the future Philosoph: & Mathem: get vastly by ye bargain. (NB 391)

The notebooks show that Berkeley lamented what he regarded as a failure on behalf of mathematicians to consider the epistemic and metaphysical implications of their theories. But equally there is optimism in the form of hopes for mathematical reform. In 1707, Berkeley published *Arithmetic Demonstrated Without Euclid or Algebra* ('AWE'), and *Mathematical Miscellanies* ('MM'). The first, as the title suggests, is an account of arithmetic on its own terms, without appeals to geometry or algebra for theoretical grounding. *Mathematical Miscellanies* is more philosophical and includes musings on the abolition of the radical sign (√) and an explanation of an algebraic game Berkeley has devised to encourage young people to develop their inference skills and thereby cultivate 'a capacious intellect, a sagacious genius, a sound judgement' (MM, 57). It also conveys enthusiasm for the applications of mathematics in civil affairs and for rational training by mathematical means.

Berkeley presented 'Of Infinites' at a November 1707 meeting of the Dublin Philosophical Society.[8] It interrogates the coherence of the notion of infinity used in mathematics and metaphysics from the perspective of Locke's 'idea theory of meaning'.[9] Berkeley had twice included a strict statement of Locke's view as an axiom of his own forthcoming system in the notebooks. Given Berkeley's ultimate rejection of a dogmatic and global version of the idea theory (and the centrality of that rejection to his thinking about signification), 'Of Infinites' is an important transitional text.[10]

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6 See Grabiner 2004 for an explanation of the authority of mathematics in the Newtonian context (taking Colin Maclaurin as a case study) and Schliesser 2018 on empirical approaches in the wake of 'Newton's Challenge'.

7 Here Berkeley refers to his proposal that geometry be reconfigured with a foundation in *minima sensibilia* in place of zero-dimensional points.

8 Jones 2021, 54–57.

9 See, for example, Kretzmann 1968.

10 See Belfrage's account of the 'descriptive approach' in Berkeley's early philosophy (Belfrage 1986, 321–324) and his original description of the early Lockean standpoint in his early 'Commen-

Following these freshman efforts, there are sections of note on mathematics in the NTV and PHK (and naturally the PHK treatment finds echoes in the DHP).[11] The mathematical discussion in these works might be characterised as Berkeley's attempts to acknowledge tensions between his own programme and aspects of popular mathematical consensus (e.g. geometric understandings of visual depth perception in NTV and the infinite divisibility of geometric extension in the PHK). The PHK discussion is clearly (at least in the 1710 edition) an abridged treatment of a topic that Berkeley planned to return to in a later text more fully dedicated to mathematics and natural philosophy.[12] Nonetheless, that the expository mathematical sections survive without major alteration in the 1734 edition suggests that he stood by them a quarter of a century later, and in a year that saw Berkeley undertake a lot of mathematical thinking.

Berkeley's major work of physics, *De Motu,* argues for a natural philosophy that operates in a different spirit than that of the newly dominant mathematical style epitomised by Newton and those applying his methodology. *De Motu* imposes a boundary between the mathematical principles of physics and the proper work of metaphysics. A key premise of the argumentative strategy is that we misunderstand the nature of science (and mathematics) by misapprehending the way meaning works in scientific language: 'In the pursuit of truth we must beware of being misled by terms which we do not rightly understand. That is the chief point' (DM § 1).

The next substantial discussions of mathematics occur in *Alciphron,* a work of Christian apologetics, published in response to issues raised in recent publications by various freethinking philosophers, or, as Berkeley (wanting to emphasise their 'nice', narrow focus) called them, 'minute philosophers'. The principal mathematical content occurs in Dialogue VII, where mathematics arises as an important part

tary' (Berkeley & Belfrage, 1986). For discussion of the idea theory in light of Berkeley's views on reasonable assent to scripture, see Fields 2021.

11 The discussions in the NTV are less concerned with mathematical signification and focus more on what Berkeley regards as a lamentable confusion of mathematical analysis with psychology of vision. Cartesians regarded visual distance perception as a process involving active and ongoing applications of geometry. Berkeley regarded this as a confusion of an available post-hoc description of the physics of vision with the issue of how individuals actually see (which for him involved an integration of immediate perception of a two-dimensional visual array and mediate perception via various organised sensations). For discussion, see Atherton 1990 and Lauren Slater's chapter in this volume.

12 The PHK as we now know it was initially published as 'Part 1'. For discussion of the evidence for this view in the text of the 1710 edition of the PHK and the notebooks, see Jessop's 'Editor's Introduction' (PHK, 5–7).

of a general discussion of language and Berkeley's correctives to a Lockean account that he treats as the dominant theory among minute philosophers.[13]

His most sustained mathematical writing is in *The Analyst.* The titular mission is to conduct a comparative examination of the rigour of recent developments in analysis in light of contemporary criticisms of the intellectual respectability of various religious concepts. However, though the majority of the writing in *The Analyst* is devoted to criticism of a mathematical technique, Berkeley's purpose is rhetorical. His hope is to show that mathematics – famed for its rigour and clarity and often the venerable side of comparisons with the (allegedly wanting) intellectual respectability of religion – contains logical errors and stands in need of the same kind of pragmatic vindications for which religion is routinely criticised. Berkeley was no opponent of pragmatic vindications and argued fervently for their importance in the final dialogue of *Alciphron,* so, with this in mind, it bears repeating that the exegetical status of *The Analyst* is complex, and it should not be read as a plain statement of a Berkeleyan mathematical philosophy.[14] The same caution applies to the 1735 sequels. The pointed questions in the *Queries* section that conclude *The Analyst* offer philosophical insights that are more quintessentially Berkeleyan and are a better guide to Berkeley's positive thoughts in that period than the conclusions that might be drawn from the calculus critiques.

Berkeley's attitudes to mathematicians and mathematical approaches to philosophy are often unusually ideological and his concerns are often rooted in anxieties about rising secularism. Over the course of his career, Berkeley increasingly regarded philosophy which esteemed mathematics as supreme among the disciplines as at odds with theological approaches, and his discussions of mathematics often see these concerns surface without warning.[15] Consider what may well be his first published words: 'I perceive and regret, that most votaries of mathematical science are blindfolded on the very threshold' (AWE, 4). Already in this earliest work, Berkeley's use of the term 'votaries' gives us a sense of his worry that mathematics is becoming the religion of an increasingly secular educated class.

13 Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) uses the idea-representation demand to argue against the intelligibility (and thus permissibility) of certain religious doctrines.

14 Note that in his follow-up to *The Analyst* he describes his position as *A Defence of Freethinking in Mathematics.* Even in mathematics, Berkeley should not be considered a proponent of freethinking, so the title should be seen to flag some sense of a departure from his own philosophical agenda. See Moriarty 2018.

15 Examples of the kind of esteem Berkeley had in mind would include philosophical systems that used mathematical methodology (e. g. Spinoza's *Ethics*) or those that praised mathematical consensus as immune to philosophical concern (e. g. Baxter's *Enquiry*).

2 Mathematical Signs

2.1 Early Works

For Berkeley, early discussions of language begin invariably with Locke, and though much of Berkeley's early engagement is negative, it is testament to his regard for the Lockean system that his own linguistic ideas are worked out via a process of deciding which parts of Locke to keep and which to jettison.[16] Both the *Manuscript Introduction* ('MI') and the *Principles Introduction* begin with Locke's *Essay.* They agree on an understanding of language founded primarily in its communicative role and on the issues arising from the mismatch between a world of particulars and a system of language that needs generality to describe reality usefully. Naturally, general signification is more theoretically demanding than particular.

Linguistic considerations are in good supply in the notebooks and two early examples show the proximity of linguistic recommendations and mathematical considerations. When Berkeley recommends Lockean caution to avoid linguistic misuse,[17] the key example is mathematical:

> Axiom. No reasoning about things whereof we have no idea. Therefore no reasoning about infinitesimals.
>
> Nor can it be objected that we reason about Numbers wch are only words & not ideas, for these Infinitesimals are words, of no use,[18] if not suppos'd to stand for Ideas.
>
> Much less infinitesimals of infinitesimals &c.
> Axiom. No word to be used without an idea. (NB 354–356)
>
> No reasoning about things whereof we have no ideas therefore no Reasoning about Infinitesimals.
> No word to be used without an Idea. (NB 421–422)

16 For discussion of the background of Berkeley's linguistic thinking, see Pearce 2017, 8–29, and Bolton 1987.

17 I refer to what Locke describes as the 'first and most palpable abuse' of language, 'the using of Words, without clear and distinct *Ideas;* or, which is worse, signs without any thing signified' (*Essay,* III.X.1) and the first remedy: 'take care *to use now word without a signification,* no Name without an *Idea* for which he makes it stand' (*Essay,* III.XI.1). See Belfrage 1986 for a nuanced interpretation of tensions in the early texts.

18 It is noteworthy that even in the phase in which he is committed to the idea principle as an axiom, he appears to suggest that there may be some exemptions surrounding usefulness.

In roughly the same period, Berkeley uses similar insights in his presentation to the Dublin Philosophical Society. Berkeley laments that violating Locke's principle is 'very common with writers of fluxions':

> They represent, upon paper, infinitesimals of several orders, as if they had ideas in their minds corresponding to those words or signs [...] 'Tis plain to me we ought to use no sign without an idea answering it; & 'tis as plain that we have no idea of a line infinitely small, nay, 'tis evidently impossible there should be any such thing, for every line, how minute soever, is still divisible into parts less than itself; therefore there can be no such thing as a line *quavis data minor*[19] or infinitely small. (OI, 235–236)

By the time of the PHK, this dictum has been scrapped and replaced with a more quintessentially Berkeleyan approach to general term signification:[20]

> It is one thing for to keep a name constantly to the same definition, and another to make it stand every where for the same idea; the one is necessary the other useless and impracticable. (PHK Introduction § 18)

Again, the chosen elucidatory example is mathematical. Berkeley uses a triangle to show that Locke's theory runs into difficulty with geometric objects, where for the general term 'triangle' to serve as the sign of the right kind of idea, that idea would need to contain some mutually inconsistent qualities:[21]

> What more easy than for any one to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is here given of the general idea of a triangle, which is, *neither oblique, nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once?* (PHK Introduction §13)

At crucial points in the philosophy prior to the PHK Berkeley argued as though all (categorematic) words must signify an idea. This suited an agenda he had to argue against recent examples of what he regarded as theoretical excesses in mathematics, and at a time when his interest in mathematics was at its most acute (that of the publication of MM and AWE). In 'Of Infinites', Berkeley drew attention to the debates between Leibniz (and his mathematical coterie) and Bernard Nieuwentijt[22]

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19 'Less than any given [line].'

20 For a more nuanced account of the interplay between the views on word-meaning and cognitive language-use between 'Of Infinites', the *Manuscript Introduction,* and the *Principles Introduction,* see Belfrage 1986.

21 He has already used the geometer's conception of the line as instructive in §12.

22 Bernard Nieuwentijt (1654–1718): Dutch philosopher, theologian and mathematician, best known for *The Religious Philosopher* (1718).

over the correct handling of higher-order infinitesimals. It's clear that Berkeley also believed at that point that both Leibnizian and Newtonian accounts of calculus could do without infinitesimals and points to where both Leibniz and Newton implied the same.

Another concept bears consideration in Berkeley's early discussions of words that lack ideas: God. Of course, the semantics of words like 'God' and those describing religious mysteries are always going to be a delicate matter in the system of a careful philosopher and doctrinaire bishop,[23] but it is not clear how comfortably the following sits with the entries flanking the inadmissibility of infinitesimals above: 'Absurd to Argue the Existence of God from his Idea. we have no Idea of God. tis impossible!' (NB 782). A related discussion occurs in the *Manuscript Introduction,* where Berkeley uses scripture to push against the Lockean theory:

> But farther to make it evident that words may be used to good purpose without bringing into the mind determinate ideas, I shall add this instance. We are told that the good things which God hath prepared for them that love him are such as eye hath not seen nor ear heard nor hath it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive. What man will pretend to say these words of the inspir'd writer are empty and insignificant? And yet who is there that can say they bring into his mind clear and determinate ideas of the good things in store for them that love God? (MI, 137)

2.2 The Positive Account

The account of mathematical signification that occurs in the PHK emerges from discussions in the PHK Introduction and then returns in the main part of the work. The treatment in the main text begins with an acknowledgement that much of what Berkeley has said, in laying out the core tenets of immaterialism, may strike the reader as conflicting with contemporary science. Berkeley's view – that, in natural philosophy, immaterialism actually clarifies what is valuable in that endeavour – is laid out in §§ 101–117. He proceeds in a similar spirit in broaching mathematics in §§ 118–134.

23 See Flage 2018 for a discussion of how these two self-conceptions impact Berkeley's willingness to attribute omnipotence to God, and Flage 1987 for an account of Berkeley's introduction of notions. See Fields 2021 for a recent account of scriptural and theological meaning in Berkeley's system.

2.2.1 Arithmetic

Berkeley begins his discussion of arithmetic by suggesting that – despite its renowned clarity and certainty of demonstration – if 'in [mathematicians'] principles there lurks some secret error, which is common to the professors of those sciences with the rest of mankind' mathematics cannot be 'supposed altogether free from mistakes' (PHK § 118). Berkeley believes that secret errors have indeed pervaded mathematical history, and it will come as little surprise to discover that these errors are attributed by him to the acceptance of the doctrine of abstraction. This is made clear in the *Manuscript Introduction:*

> It were an endless as well as an useless thing, to trace the Schoolmen, those great masters of abstraction, and all others whether ancient or modern logicians and metaphysicians, thro' those numerous inextricable labyrinths of errour and dispute, which their doctrine of abstract notions seems to have led them into. What bickerings & controversys, and what a learned dust has been rais'd about those matters and what mighty emolument and advantage has been deriv'd to mankind are things at this day too clearly known, to need to be insisted on by me. (…) The contagion thereof has spread throughout all the parts of philosophy. It has invaded and overrun those usefull studys of physic and divinity, and even the mathematicians themselves have had their full share of it. (MI, 133)

The abstraction he has in mind is nominally that in Locke's *Essay*, but Berkeley believes it extends back through much of the history of Western philosophy. The legacy of the doctrine of abstraction and metaphysical materialism contribute to a version of mathematical platonism that Berkeley regards as dominant in scholarship of the period:[24]

> *Arithmetic* hath been thought to have for its object abstract ideas of *number.* Of which to understand the properties and mutual habitudes is supposed no mean part of speculative knowledge. The opinion of the pure and intellectual nature of numbers in abstract, hath made them in esteem with those philosophers, who seem to have affected an uncommon fineness and elevation of thought. (PHK § 119)

Arithmetic, for Berkeley, is a formal language whose signs are tokens – tokens of the kind he will come to use as exemplars when explaining words in human language that do not represent ideas, and even, the conceptual underpinnings of systems of money where currency is not backed by rigid intrinsic value.[25] The version

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24 I discuss this connection further in the 'Synthesis' and 'Conclusion'.

25 The insight that money can function perfectly well without being constituted by (or even representing) a certain value in physical resources is one example of a general enthusiasm for disrupting historically understood notions of meaning and value where the novelty resides in his under-

of this language we get in the PHK is of a practice born out of history and a kind of prudential necessity. Thus, he begins by 'taking a view of arithmetic in its infancy':

> It is natural to think that at first, men, for ease of memory and help with computation, made use of counters, or in writing of single strokes, points or the like, each whereof was made to signify an unit, that is, some one thing of whatever kind they had occasion to reckon. Afterwards they found out the more compendious ways, of making one character stand in place of several strokes, or points. And lastly, the notation of the Arabians or Indians came into use, wherein by the repetition of a few characters of figures, and varying the signification of each figure according to the place it obtains, all numbers may be most aptly expressed which seems to have been done in imitation of language, so that an exact analogy is observed betwixt the notation by figures and names, the nine simple figures answering to the nine first numeral names and places in the former, corresponding to denominations in the latter. (PHK § 121)

Our ancestors needed a language for communicating about aspects of their lives that involved multiplicities and moved from a system where repeatable individual marks were used to one of generalised characters. With the addition of some internal rules and connectives, these generalised characters developed into a powerful formal language. The evolution described is one from a practice of referring to particular quantities by means of a useful system of shorthand to a generalised symbolic language with a set of rules for switching between different parts of the syntax. Arithmetic consists in the signs that mark out potential particular quantities and the system of 'contrived methods' (PHK, § 121) that facilitate our performing operations that take us from one part of the system to another appropriately related part.[26]

The ontology suggested is interestingly anticipated in AWE. In seeking to provide an account of arithmetic without reference to geometry or algebra, Berkeley introduces the substance of arithmetic as follows:

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standing of the functioning of signs. See Query 23 of *The Querist:* 'Whether money is to be considered as having an intrinsic value, or as being a commodity, a standard, a measure, or a pledge, as is variously suggested by writers? And whether the true idea of money, as such, be not altogether that of a ticket or counter?' and Query 35: 'Whether power to command the industry of others be not real wealth? And whether money be not in truth tickets or tokens for conveying and recording such power, and whether it be of great consequence what materials the tickets are made of?' (*The Querist,* 106–107). For further discussion, see Clarke 1989 and Caffentzis 2000.

26 The cost of the sophistication of mathematics is that the language itself is important to understand in order to perform calculations: 'There will be no difficulty in writing and expressing the largest numbers, if due attention be given to what has been just laid down, an acquaintance with which will also afterwards be of the greatest importance; for nature itself teaches us the way of working arithmetical questions on the fingers, but there is need of science to perform these operations accurately, with respect to greater numbers' (AWE, 8).

> There are nine numeral signs 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, employed with the cypher (0) for expressing unlimited classes of numbers. The whole of this contrivance depends on the value of these signs increasing in tenfold proportion. (AWE)

The remainder of the introduction to AWE gives further technical detail of numerical signs. Berkeley then moves to rules for basic arithmetical operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication, division, finding roots, squares etc.…), then instructions for alligation and mathematical progressions. The text ends without any discussion of the independence of arithmetic. What can be inferred is that, even at this very early stage, Berkeley is confident enough in his thinking about mathematical ontology to suppose that all there is to 'demonstrating arithmetic' is explaining the signage and the various operation rules. In explaining why his work is 'of less size' than other treatments of arithmetic, Berkeley remarks that: 'I have been very brief, both as regards precept and example, in explaining the 'wherefore' of operations, on which writers on arithmetic are, in general, very tedious: and yet this brevity, as I hope, has not caused any obscurity' (AWE, 4). The brevity is ultimately explained by a philosophical understanding of arithmetic that bottoms out ontologically in signs and combination rules.

Mathematical Miscellanies contains another insight into Berkeley's preoccupation with mathematical notation. In 'On Surd Roots',[27] he appeals for a notational improvement on the radical sign '√' and suggests that surd roots be expressed using Greek letters (corresponding to the Latin characters representing the relevant powers), rather than in the notational complex of radical and power, which he compares to the vulgar expression of a fraction (as against a decimal). He judges the compound nature of radical notation to be 'at variance with the forms used in other processes' (MM, 41) and regards it as likely to lead to confusion in instruction. This reaction to difference in the functioning of mathematical notation illustrates Berkeley's sensitivity to the centrality of transparent formal notation to the mathematical endeavour.

Returning to the PHK, Berkeley explains that arithmetic is about signs and not abstract objects. A 'standing analogy' (PHK § 121) between numeral names or signs and multitudes (as they exist in their various particular instantiations) allows us to perform more complex operations:

> For these signs being known, we can by the operations of arithmetic, know the signs of any part of the particular sums signified by them and thus computing in signs (because of the connexion established betwixt them and the distinct multitudes of things, whereof one is

27 'Surd' is an archaic term for an irrational number in the form of a root of some number (e.g. $\sqrt[3]{2}$) or expression involving such a number.

> taken for an unit) we may be able rightly to sum up, divide, and proportion the things themselves that we intend to number. (PHK § 121)

As in the discussion of abstraction to general ideas in the PHK Intro, Berkeley blames this problematic abstraction for the popular view that *abstracta* are the referents of numerical notation. On Berkeley's account, arithmetic is (historically and developmentally) derived from consideration of multiplicities of particulars, but at a functional level it is discursive of signs. There is a kind of indirect reference to particular multiplicities, but this is functionally subservient to the direct reference of arithmetic, which is to the components of the language. He summarises the view (again hinting at a more extensive treatment in later work):

> I shall not at present enter into a more particular dissertation on this subject but only observe that it is evident from what hath been said, those things which pass for abstract truths and theorems concerning numbers, are, in reality, conversant about no object distinct from particular numerable things, except only names and characters; which originally came to be considered, on no other account but their being *signs,* or capable to represent aptly, whatever particular things men had need to compute. (PHK § 122)

Berkeley's view of arithmetic is sophisticated and goes against the broad trends of mathematical understanding at the time.[28] Caution should be exercised when comparing early modern views to those of the principal schools of twentieth-century philosophy of mathematics,[29] but, it is important to note just how close Berkeley's arithmetical ideas take him to cornerstone tenets of mathematical formalism. Indeed, Berkeley is Michael Detlefsen's emblematic historical example when raising the distinctive referential element of formalist mathematics:

> The fourth and perhaps most distinctive component of the formalist framework was its advocacy of a nonrepresentational role for language in mathematical reasoning. This idea reached full consciousness in Berkeley. Being particularly impressed with algebraists' use of imaginary elements, he came to the general view that there are uses of expressions in reasoning whose utility and justification is independent of the (semantic) contents of those expressions. (Detlefsen 2005, 237).

The anthropological element of Berkeley's perspective is also interesting. Arithmetic emerged from historical human practices and changed somewhat with innovations in numeral notation that increased its expressive power. This insight helps to

28 Compare, for example, Wallis 1685.

29 The role of mathematical logic in the latter debates often makes comparisons anachronistic. See Robles 1989.

motivate a strongly pragmatist element that pervades Berkeley's views: mathematicians focus too much on highly speculative extrapolations from a system founded in practical utility. For him, the contemporary appetite for highly speculative mathematics was misdirected: 'Hence we may see, how entirely the science of numbers is subordinate to practice, and how jejune and trifling it becomes when considered as a matter of mere speculation' (PHK § 120). He lamented what he saw as undue focus on endless speculative extensions of mathematics over shrewd practical applications of settled mathematics.

The expressive power of mathematical notation facilitates extrapolations whereby mathematicians can easily speak of syntactically legitimate entities that are completely untethered from multiplicities as we find them in experience. This not only applies to mathematical ideas that we don't *in practice* come into contact with (e. g. very large numbers), but ones that we could not *in principle* encounter or conceive. Hence, the following remark on negative roots in *Alciphron:* 'the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of a negative square, hath its use in logistic operations, although it be impossible to form an idea of any such quantity' (AMP 7.14). Despite the impossibility of conceiving of an object such that, multiplying it by itself produces a negative number, the complexity and interrelatedness of the mathematical system means that it may sometimes be fruitful to have signage for such a concept, in case it plays some kind of useful intermediary role in mathematical problem-solving. So long as such a sign might be regarded as an 'instrument to direct our practice' (AMP 7.14), it is acceptable as a part of the language.

2.2.2 Geometry

Berkeley begins his discussion of geometry with a declaration on the proper object of the discipline: 'From numbers we proceed to speak of *extension,* which considered as relative, is the object of geometry' (PHK § 123). His second sentiment concerns what he takes to be a fatal flaw in both the popular and academic understandings of geometry: the assumption that finite extension is infinitely divisible:

> The *infinite* divisibility of *finite* extension, though it is not expressly laid down, either as an axiom or theorem in the elements of that science, yet is throughout the same everywhere supposed, and thought to have so inseparable and essential a connexion with the principles of and demonstrations in geometry, that mathematicians never admit it into doubt, or make the least question of it. And as this notion is the source from whence do spring all those paradoxes, which have such a direct repugnancy to the plain common sense of mankind, and are admitted with so much reluctance into a mind not yet debauched by learning: so is it the principal occasion of all that nice and extreme subtlety, which renders the study of *mathematics,* so difficult and tedious. (PHK § 123)

Thus, Berkeley's philosophy of geometry originates in normative and corrective insights. Mathematicians (he supposes) believe their subject matter to be abstract extension (or abstract magnitude), whereas Berkeley believes the proper object of geometry must be actual, empirical extension. The first three queries attached to *The Analyst* underline this disconnect between mathematical practice and Berkeley's preferred philosophy of mathematics:

> *Qu.* 1 Whether the object of geometry be not the proportions of assignable extensions? And whether there be any need of considering quantities either infinitely great or infinitely small?
> *Qu.* 2 Whether the end of geometry be not to measure assignable finite extension? And whether this practical view did not first put men on the study of geometry?
> *Qu.* 3 Whether the mistaking the object and end of geometry hath not created needless difficulties, and wrong pursuits in that science? (*The Analyst,* 96)

This insight is emphasised at length in the notebooks: '[e]xtension without breadth i. e. invisible, intangible length is not conceivable tis a mistake we are led into by the Doctrine of Abstraction' (NB 365a) and just before a series of comments about the unassailable wrongheadedness of contemporary mathematicians.[30]

The negative substance of Berkeley's account of the infinite divisibility of finitude is important pretext for understanding his positive account of geometrical demonstrations, since his account is focused on the idea that mathematicians misunderstand the reference of their terms and fail to see what the items of their theories stand for. Just as many working on arithmetic err in believing the proper referents of mathematical language to be numerical abstracta, geometers equally go wrong in attributing this role to abstract extension (PHK, § 125) and universal ideas (PHK, § 126).

Berkeley's understanding of geometric reference is more nuanced. To begin with, individual terms serve as signs for multiple particulars variously:

> [T]he particular lines and figures included in the diagram, are supposed to stand for innumerable others of different sizes: or in other words, the geometer considers them abstracting from their magnitude: which doth not imply that he forms an abstract idea, but only that he cares not what the particular magnitude is, whether great or small, but looks on that as a thing indifferent to the demonstration. (PHK § 126)

30 The notebooks also touch on the undemonstrated nature of infinite divisibility ('In Geometry it is not prov'd that an inch is divisible ad infinitum' (NB 247)) as well as the distinction between particular lines and the geometers' conceptions of them ('Particular Determin'd lines are not divisible ad infinitum, but lines as us'd by Geometers are so they not being determin'd to any particular finite number of points. Yet a Geometer (He knows not why) will very readily say he can demonstrable an inch line is divisible ad infinitum' (NB 261).

Thus, lines in diagrams (and the associated notation) do not refer to the abstract form of a line, but rather, to any and all particular lines, irrespective of their specific lengths, positions, orientations, etc.

> [H]ence it follows, that a line in the scheme, but an inch long, must be spoken of, as though it contained ten thousand parts, since it is regarded not in it self, but as it is universal ; and it is universal only in its signification, whereby it represents innumerable lines greater than it self, in which may be distinguished ten thousand parts or more, though there may not be above an inch in it. (PHK § 126)

What geometry seeks to do is establish truths about all extended objects that fall under a certain definition. To achieve the generality required, it must understand its exemplars as representing every possible object of the right class. This generality can produce a conflation in practitioners' understandings with abstract generality, but Berkeley believes this is mistaken. Douglas Jesseph explains Berkeley's geometrical philosophy in terms of 'representative generalisation' (Jesseph 1993). On this view, mathematical terms can have divided reference; one idea can function as proxy for many others of a suitably similar kind. Jesseph considers Berkeley's framing in the *Principles Introduction* as fundamental: 'an idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort' (PHK Introduction § 12).

A failure to understand how representation works in geometrical proofs leads people to attribute to the sign (the drawn line used in a geometrical proof) properties considered as maximal for the sake of facilitating a maximally general representation: 'It is necessary we speak of the lines described on paper, as though they contained parts which really they do not' (PHK § 128). Since, at least in principle, any particular line represented by the line in the proof could be just a little longer, we treat the representative line as though it has as many parts as possible so that the conclusions we yield using it will fit the full, broad class of possible particular lines. 'Men not retaining that distinction in their thoughts, slide into a belief that the small particular line described on paper contains in it self parts innumerable' (PHK § 127).

Thus, this centrepiece of Berkeley's views on the wrongheadedness of contemporary mathematics boils down to an issue of signs and the misunderstanding of their functioning. And, for Berkeley, myriad confusions arise from the initial one. An understanding of physical space guided by this mathematical understanding of extension has disastrous consequences for Berkeley's system.[31] Further, if we can

31 See Moriarty 2023 for a discussion of Berkeley's concerns about John Keill's mathematical ontology.

legitimately speak of a finite line containing infinitely many real parts then will each of those parts not contain just as many parts again? For Berkeley, it's difficult to see how this could ever be an instrumentally valuable assumption. Once we are into this level of abstract consideration, the views on either side of the debates start to look strange: it's either infinitely small measures with an infinity of parts or infinitely small measures with newly prohibited powers.[32] As an example of the paradoxical consequences of this level of abstractionism, we might consider the following characterisation of the Banach-Tarksi paradox – the proof (via the axiom of choice) that any two spheres of different radii are equivalent under finite decomposition:

> [The proof] seems to be patently false if we submit to the foolish practice of confusing the 'ideal' objects of geometry with the 'real' objects of the world around us. It certainly does seem to be folly to claim that a billiard ball can be chopped into pieces which can then be put back together to form a life-size statue of Banach. We, of course, make no such claim. Even in the world of mathematics, the theorem is astonishing but true. (Stromberg 1979, 151)

Of course, Stromberg showcases an acute awareness of the differences between ordinary objects and those of mathematics, but one can easily summon the Berkeleyan spirit to wonder about what sense of 'ideal' the mathematics of the axiom of choice has achieved.

To sum up, as we can see from Berkeley's account of arithmetic in the PHK, much of the disagreement with contemporary mathematics (for which he achieved his mathematical fame) is understandable in terms of the doctrine of signs and its applications to mathematical language. Mathematicians and mathematical philosophers have produced a universe of extraordinary mathematical signs by extrapolating from a system born out of practical need and ease of communication. The relationship between arithmetical notation and the kind of multiplicities that we consider at a very basic level (small integers) suggest certain kinds of correspondence between mathematical notation and the empirical world: a 'standing analogy' (PHK, § 121), as Berkeley puts it. Given an overly simplistic understanding of mathematical language, sophisticated technical constructs of mathematics (like imaginary numbers) can appear to be the same kind of thing, as, say, a small multiplicity. This creates an expectation that parts of experience correspond to those signs too, and this plays a role in confusing people about the nature of reality.

Likewise, in geometry. According to Berkeley, a desire for a maximally general system of representation has produced a misunderstanding about the nature of ex-

32 Berkeley refers to the Leibnizian calculus as against Bernard Nieuwentijt's restricted calculus ontology in *Analysis Infinitorum.* (Nieuwentijt, 1695)

tension. That confused relationship between sign and signified continued as contemporary mathematics expanded to produce what he seems to have regarded as an increasingly flawed mathematical landscape.

3 The Analyst

The queries to *The Analyst* provide an interesting summary of Berkeley's philosophy of mathematics. Unsurprisingly, they are all in the interrogative form, but we can be confident of the prescribed answers. Berkeley's project in *The Analyst* – later described by him as an exercise of 'freethinking in mathematics' (DFM, 1735) – is to show that mathematics is guilty of the same kinds of potentially suspicious language-use that religion is routinely accused of. In this sense *The Analyst* targets a subset of those addressed in *Alciphron.*[33] The arguments in the body of the text are now well known; Berkeley alleges that calculus commits a mathematical equivocation (which he classifies as a '*fallacia suppositionis*', whereby the same sign is attributed a zero and non-zero value simultaneously) and he elaborates on its unscientific consequences for the method. Berkeley begins his philosophical queries by questioning the broader philosophical scheme assumed by contemporary mathematics – particularly interrogating the wisdom of the popular understanding of geometric extension. His explanation of what he regards as mathematical confusion is immediate and resides in mathematicians misunderstanding the role and functioning of signs in their theories:

> *Qu.* 6 Whether the diagrams in a geometrical demonstration are not to be considered as signs, of all possible finite figures, of all sensible and imaginable extensions or magnitudes of the same kind?[34]

Issues raised in *De Motu* over the understanding of the references of mathematical terms in statements of mathematical physics also return. In *De Motu,* Berkeley had cautioned that the unusual semantics of mathematics must be remembered when dealing with applied mathematics in natural philosophy, since 'mathematical enti-

33 A classical antagonist here is John Toland, whose *Christianity Not Mysterious* criticised Christian mysteries and the '*Divines*' who tell us '*we must adore what we cannot comprehend*' (Toland 1997, § 1). Lord Bolingbroke is also interesting on this score on account of his response to Berkeley's parity of reason arguments likening the case for the semantic legitimacy of 'grace' (the Christian mystery) and 'force' (as it appears in early modern mechanics) (Bolingbroke 1993).

34 Recall that his first three queries addressed the dominant, but, as he saw it, mistaken view of the proper object of geometry.

ties', at least as Platonists understand them, 'have no stable essence in the nature of things; and they depend on the notion of the definer' (DM § 67). These issues are important in the treatment of mathematical physics:

> The traditional mathematical doctrines of the infinite division of time and space have, from the very nature of the case, introduced paradoxes and thorny theories (as are all those that involve the infinite) into speculations about motion. All such difficulties motion shares with space and time, or rather has taken them over from that source. (DM § 46)

In *The Analyst,* Berkeley re-emphasises the need for a nuanced understanding of signification:

> *Qu.* 26 Whether mathematicians have sufficiently considered the analogy and use of signs? And how far the specific limited nature of things corresponds thereto?

While Berkeley thinks the only prudent way to understand the infinite divisibility of a line is as an agreement to proceed as though, in principle, there is no limit on how small the relevant line might be, a claim made crudely absolute for practical purposes is interpreted as a statement of metaphysical truth. Considering the similarities between semantic issues in mathematics and those in theology, we see Berkeley draw issues of religious and mathematical signification together again:

> *Qu.* 55 Whether those philomathematical physicians, anatomists, and dealers in the animal œconomy, who admit the doctrine of fluxions with an implicit faith, can with a good grace insult other men for believing what they do not comprehend?

4 Synthesis

As the bibliography shows, mathematics was a topic to which Berkeley returned throughout his life. His mathematical interest was particularly acute in the years in which he conceived his philosophical system, and his understanding of mathematical notation certainly shaped the way he came to understand the flexibility and possibilities of linguistic signification more generally. It was in the period between the publication of Berkeley's three early mathematical texts and that of his *Principles* that Berkeley transitioned from a semantic view approaching Locke's (or at least a caricature of it)[35] on which meaningful language must be

35 See Belfrage's note of caution: 'I follow the common way among Berkeley scholars of referring to a certain, rather primitive, theory of meaning as "Lockean". It should be carefully noted, however, that, in this sense, John Locke was no Lockean.' (Belfrage 1986, 320)

grounded in possession of the appropriate ideas to a position according to which languages may include words that represent no clear idea(s). Recently, Tom Jones, picking up on a thread initially pursued by David Berman (1994), has suggested that responses to Berkeley's delivery of 'Of Infinites' at the Dublin Philosophical Society may have been crucial in pushing him towards a more nuanced account of meaning:

> Between 1707 and 1709, Berkeley came to see that there are some kinds of thinking in which it is beneficial to work with signs that do not refer to ideas [...] The possible reaction of other members of the Philosophical Society to Berkeley's paper has been presented as a moment of considerable importance to his intellectual development. William King and Peter Browne were probably both present at the meeting to which Berkeley read his paper. They both believed it possible to talk meaningfully of infinite qualities and to use terms to which no idea corresponds: if we say that it is meaningless to talk of God's being infinitely wise because we have no idea of infinity, we do so at considerable cost to the grounds for piety and religious awe. (Jones 2021, 56–57)

Jones shows how Berkeley's early position can be re-framed to resemble that of John Toland, whose *Christianity not Mysterious* used popular, Lockean insights to make trouble for elements of revealed religion. Jones also suggests that Berkeley's semantic evolution may equally respond to Anthony Collins' conjecture that being above or beyond reason is the same as being contrary to it.[36] Berkeley explicitly derides Collins in his writing for the *Guardian* in 1713, and there is good reason to believe that he saw him as something of an archetype of freethinking sentiment.[37]

Alciphron's final dialogue provides an extended articulation of Berkeley's views on idea-signification in language,[38] and, as is appropriate for a text where Euphranor, the key philosophical protagonist,[39] is a farmer-philosopher, the account is deeply rooted in practical matters. In this account of language in *Alciphron*, these comparisons of mathematical and religious conceptual semantics re-emerge. Though Berkeley's ultimate philosophy of language is in some sense available in the *Manuscript Introduction* and the PHK more generally, it is really in *Alciphron* where we see this proto-pragmatist account of word meaning put to work in its proper motivational context. What began as an austere (and indeed axiomatic) Lockean commitment, transitioned through a phase of acknowledging

36 Collins 1707, 41–42, and Jones 2021, 58.

37 See Taranto 2010.

38 See Pearce 2017, 54–67, for an account of the dialogue's semantic conclusions.

39 Berman 1993, 10.

important exceptions to idea-representation in signs into one where, according to Euphranor, ideas may barely feature:

> [T]he true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always, the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather something of an active operative nature, tending to a conceived good: which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such idea to the mind. (AMP 7.14)

Sophisticated language use, like mathematics, doesn't require appeal to ideas at every turn. And the immediate example illuminating this thinking is algebra:

> For instance, the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of a negative square, hath its use in logistic operations, although it be impossible to form an idea of any such quantity. And what is true of algebraic signs is also true of words or language, modern algebra being in fact a more short, apposite, and artificial sort of language, and it being possible to express by words at length, though less conveniently, all the steps of an algebraic process. (AMP 7.14)[40]

Directly after this canonical statement, Berkeley presents numerous idea-eluding concepts of mathematics ('the nature of the angle of contact, the doctrine of proportions, (…) indivisibles, infinitesimals, and divers other points' (AMP 7.15)) as examples of transcendent concepts we might reject on idea-representation grounds but must permit on pragmatic ones, so long as they continue to assist us in our endeavours. And this tolerance for mathematical speculations licenses a parity argument on behalf of similarly semantically demanding religious items:

> And, from a parity of reason, we should not conclude any other doctrines which govern, influence, or direct the mind of man to be, any more than that, the less true or excellent because they afford matter of controversy and useless speculations to curious and licentious wits: particularly those articles of our Christian faith which, in proportion as they are believed, persuade, and, as they persuade, influence the lives and actions of men. (AMP 7.15)

What I have suggested began as a comparative consideration (between the special semiotic requirements of mathematical and spiritual terms) in the early work is now a fully-fledged parity argument pursuing a more nuanced understanding of how signs for religious mysteries function on the back of mathematical and scientific ones. In the run-up to presenting an account in which idea-representation may

40 McGowan's (1982) initial discussion of Berkeley's views on the Doctrine of Signs begins with this passage, and when Winkler (2005) summarises his treatment of the topic in Winkler (1989), he begins similarly.

barely feature in meaningful domains of discourse, Berkeley uses cases from mathematics and physics to demand a similar exemption for religious mysteries.

The exegetical and biographical evidence suggests that mathematical considerations and comparisons were a major driver of Berkeley's semantic novelty.[41] In the early years they provided a clear example of the limitations of the idea theory of meaning and the view that terms needed any external reference whatsoever. In the mature work, they presented palatable and popular companion concepts in his linguistic defence of cherished religious concepts. Mathematical thinking drove important semantic insights and at numerous important turns we see Berkeley use mathematical examples side by side with religious ones to make his case.

Issues arising out of mathematical signification also help to explain a strained trajectory in Berkeley's thinking about the role of mathematics in philosophy. In his earliest philosophical musings in the mathematical *Miscellanies,* Berkeley's enthusiasm for mathematical applications and innovations in human endeavours can come across as unbridled. On the benefits of mathematics, he says:

> But what are those fruits which you extol? To enumerate them, mathematics in all their extent; the arts and sciences, advancing civil and military affairs, should be reviewed. For through all these is diffused the wonderful power of algebra. It is styled by all, the great, the wonderful art, the highest pinnacle of human knowledge, the kernel and key of all mathematics; and, by some, the foundation of all sciences. And, indeed, how difficult would it be to assign the limits of algebra, when it has latterly extended to natural philosophy and medicine, and daily sets about the most valuable arguments. (MM, 57)

This public enthusiasm accompanied private concerns about mathematicians' handling of their subjects and ambitious ideas about overhauling many aspects of traditional mathematics in his notebooks. In the *Principles,* he makes some gestures towards the modifying of problematic aspects of mathematics. One conspicuous response to the suggestions in the PHK came from mathematical enthusiast Andrew Baxter, whose *Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* ridiculed Berkeley's anti-sceptical claims and made much of his hopes for mathematical reform:[42]

> We may farther observe that it doth not great honour to his new scheme, (…) that it forces the author to suspect, that even Mathematicks may not be very sound knowledge at the bottom. (…) A man ought to have a vast deal of merit, and to have obliged the world with surprising

41 There is a comparison to be made between Berkeley and one of history's most significant philosophers of mathematics, Gottlob Frege, whose thinking about arithmetical denotation in 'Function and Concept' represented the beginning of the linguistic intuitions that guided his more general linguistic insights.

42 Baxter was a secondary target of *The Analyst* and is the likely target of the criticism in § 50.

> discoveries, to justify his attacking these sciences at this rate; or rather no merit possible can warrant it. (Baxter 1733, 298)

The Analyst responds both to those who are critical of religious language and those who worship mathematics, but it's clear that by the 1730s, Berkeley's hopes for mathematically guided public ventures has been much dampened. In his view, mathematicians have committed themselves to a disastrous combination of anti-empiricism and semantic confusion. Additionally, they deride any thinking that strays from the mathematical mainstream.

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested that Berkeley's overriding frustration with mathematics is the recognition of a failure in mathematicians to understand what he took to be the nature of their subject – one grounded in a failure of their grasp of the nature and functioning of mathematical signs. This disconnect between Berkeley's normative conception of mathematical philosophy and the popular understanding of the day meant that Berkeley ultimately couldn't find much enthusiasm for human endeavours guided by mathematics.

Berkeley began with grand hopes for mathematical applications, coupled with optimism about disabusing his mathematical readership of the damaging mathematical ideas he took them to possess. Upon seeing the apparent impossibility of mathematical reform, and the reputational danger to one's work of speaking out against mathematical orthodoxy, Berkeley's later work is punctuated with dismay on this topic. The subject that held the best hopes for sharpening the intellect in the *Miscellanies* is, by the time of *The Analyst,* a corruptor of good thinking:

> *Qu.* 38 Whether tedious calculations in algebra and fluxions be the likeliest method to improve the mind? And whether men's being accustomed to reason altogether about mathematical signs and figures doth not make them at a loss how to reason without them?
>
> *Qu.* 57 Whether from this and other concurring causes the minds of speculative men have not been borne downward, to the debasing and stupifying of the higher faculties? And whether we may not hence account for that prevailing narrowness and bigotry among many who pass for men of science, their incapacity for things moral, intellectual, or theological, their proneness to measure all truths by sense and experience of animal life?

Thus, for Berkeley, what began in an optimistic sense of the possibilities of reforming mathematical excesses and applying that modified subject to the important social projects of the day terminated in a great pessimism over the scope for math-

ematical applications and a dim sense of practitioners' ability to think independently and in a metaphysically serious way.

A nuanced understanding of the evolution of Berkeley's thinking on signs that overlooks the chronological and theoretical impact of his thinking on mathematics is impossible. Considerations of mathematical signification revealed the inadequacy of a strict idea theory of meaning and forced Berkeley's hand in his pivot towards a bolder, more flexible understanding of language that accommodated both precious scriptural items as well as more abstruse mathematical ones. He continued to develop that theory over the course of his philosophical maturation, and by the time of his philosophy in the 1730s we see him wield it as a weapon against what he saw as an overly rigid philosophical approach to religion that would ultimately destroy it.

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Tom Stoneham

11 The Future State and the Signs of Desire

Abstract: Tom Stoneham introduces an argument found in Berkeley's essays on the immortality of the soul. This argument can be sketched out like so: all human appetites can (possibly, at least) be satisfied; there is a human 'appetite for immortality'; thus, the appetite for immortality can (possibly) be satisfied. Stoneham introduces two objections to this argument, one which Berkeley is likely to have anticipated and one which draws on more contemporary insights. Stoneham then argues that Berkeley has the resources to overcome both objections. In putting forward this defence of Berkeley's argument, Stoneham's chapter offers novel insights into the role that sign-usage plays in his account of natural desires. As Stoneham reads him, Berkeley sees natural desires as signs of future experiences in roughly the same way that visual experiences serve as signs of tactual experiences in NTV.

Introduction

Berkeley wrote a series of twelve anonymous essays for Richard Steele's *Guardian* during the spring and summer of 1713. The newspaper itself was short-lived and thus, as it turned out, most issues contained at least one essay by Berkeley. They are short and light in style (and often tone), while maintaining the moral seriousness of a young scholar and clergyman. Most address views Berkeley finds widespread in literary society which he takes to, directly or indirectly, encourage irreligion. But while addressed to those views, the expected readership appears to be more sympathetic to Berkeley's orthodox Anglicanism and piety.

In this chapter I look at an argument for the immortality of the soul that Berkeley sketches in the first of his *Guardian* essays: 'The Future State'. The argument points forward to a theme which runs through the essays: applying a normative concept of 'proper' or 'natural' to human desires. As stated, the argument is subject to two objections, which I call the Epicurean Objection and the Instrumental Objection. It is historically plausible that Berkeley would have been aware of the Epicurean Objection, and I propose that his theory of natural versus fantastical desires is intended in part to address this. The Instrumental Objection, however, is one Berkeley or his contemporaries are unlikely to have anticipated. Despite this, I suggest in the second half of the paper that Berkeley in fact had the philosophical resources to mount a response to it. This response involves arguing that natural desires function as signs of future experiences in (almost) the same way

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-014

that that visual experiences function as signs of tactual experiences – as Berkeley had argued in the *New Theory of Vision* (1709).

1 'The Future State'

Berkeley's first essay for the *Guardian*, entitled 'The Future State' (*Works* VII, 181–184), was published on the first Saturday after Easter and takes the Christian message of that festival as its theme, aiming to give 'grounds to expect a future state' which do not presuppose even the existence of a Deity. As such it takes up the challenge he set aside at the start of his sermon 'On Immortality' five years earlier and uses 'the unassisted force of reason' to attain 'knowledge of eternal life' (*Works* VII, 10).

Berkeley's statement of the argument is characteristically brief, but unfamiliar enough to most scholars to be worth quoting in full:

> Let the most stedfast unbeliever open his eyes, and take a survey of the sensible world, and then say if there be not a connexion, an adjustment, an exact and constant order discoverable in all the parts of it. Whatever be the cause, the thing itself is evident to all our faculties. Look into the animal system, the passions, senses, and locomotive powers; is not the like contrivance and propriety observable in these too? Are they not fitted to certain ends, and are they not by nature directed to proper objects?
>
> Is it possible then that the smallest bodies should, by a management superiour to the wit of man, be disposed in the most excellent manner agreeable to their respective natures; and yet the spirits or souls of men be neglected, or managed by such rules as fall short of man's understanding? Shall every other passion be rightly placed by nature, and shall that appetite of immortality, natural to all mankind, be alone misplaced, or designed to be frustrated? Shall the industrious application of the inferior animal powers in the meanest vocations be answered by the ends we propose, and shall not the generous efforts of a virtuous mind be rewarded? In a word, shall the corporeal world be all order and harmony, the intellectual discord and confusion? (*Works* VII, 181).

We can unpack the argument thus:

1) Everything in non-human nature is observably 'fitted to certain ends', including passions and appetites.
2) An appetite 'designed to be frustrated' would violate 'order and harmony'.
3) Human appetites are no exception.
4) Humans have an 'appetite of immortality'.
5) So humans should expect immortality.

Hume's 'Of the Immortality of the Soul' casts doubt on 4), noting 'With how weak a concern, from the original, inherent structure of the mind and passions, does

[man] ever look farther [than the present life]?' (*Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, 592), and explaining 'our horror of annihilation' as 'the effect of our general love of happiness' (*Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, 598). However, Hume is, of course, writing in an epistemological tradition which makes it problematic how anyone could acquire the very idea of a future state without revelation (see, e.g., John Toland's 'The History of the Soul's Immortality among the Heathens' in his *Letters to Serena* (1704)) even though the existence of pre-Christian religions shows it to be possible. The second half of 'The Future State' is addressed to free-thinkers who dismiss the relevance of the future state to their current choices because of its unintelligibility, and Berkeley elsewhere argues that we can 'be affected with the promise of a good thing though we have not any idea of what it is' (PHK Intro § 20). However, there are two other more specific objections to the argument that Berkeley does need to address.

1.1 The Epicurean Objection

The Epicurean holds that after death there can be no happiness or unhappiness, no satisfaction or frustration of desires. This objector grants premises 1) to 3), at least for the purposes of argument, and thus that in general you can infer from there being a human appetite for something to that thing being humanly attainable, but claims that the desire for a future state is a special case. If Epicureanism is possible, the argument is invalid.

To see why, note that for any given desire, there are three possible outcomes: the desire is satisfied by the object of desire being achieved; the desire is frustrated by the object of desire not being achieved; the desire is extinguished by the subject changing their preferences. If there is no future state, then the desire will never be satisfied. However, nor will it be frustrated, since death will simply extinguish it. Unlike other desires which may be extinguished by changes of circumstance, this one has a temporal dimension that entails it can only be satisfied after an event – death – which extinguishes it. The desire for a future state is the desire to live after one's death. So at all times before one's death, that desire is neither satisfied nor frustrated because it is a desire for something to happen in the future of those times. However long the present life and whatever events befall us in it, the desire could be neither satisfied nor frustrated: it is a desire for 'jam tomorrow'.

Thus the appetite of immortality, if that means a desire for life after death, would be an exception to the inference from a human appetite to the conditions for its satisfaction. This blocks the inference from premises 4) to 5): if the Epicurean is right and death extinguishes all desires, then the appetite of immortality is

'designed' to be extinguished, not frustrated, and thus does not violate the order and harmony of nature.

1.2 The Instrumental Objection

This objection also questions the validity of the argument, but this time by identifying an equivocation between premises 1) and 2). From the teleological perspective that Berkeley takes on biology, it seems that the end or natural purpose of some desires may be different from the object or event which satisfies them. Their satisfaction conditions are instrumental to their telos. One example might be sexual desire. It seems likely that Berkeley would accept that the telos of sexual desire is procreation, however the desire itself is satisfied by something quite different, only contingently related to procreation and which happens nine months earlier. Thus, one might argue that while the satisfaction-conditions of the desire for immortality are a future state, the purpose or telos of that desire is to motivate moral behaviour in this life. Far from denying that the desire should have that function,[1] Berkeley is surprised and concerned by how ineffective it is (see the sermon 'On Immortality', *Works* VII, 9–15). If it is the case that the appetite of immortality is actually fitted to the end of moral behaviour, then it would be frustrated by immoral behaviour in this life and not by the lack of a future state. This blocks the inference from 1) to 2): if the end of some desires is distinct from their satisfaction-conditions, then order and harmony may not be violated, even if those desires were 'designed to be frustrated'.

In what follows I consider how Berkeley might respond to these two objections. It seems possible that he may have had the Epicurean Objection in mind during the spring of 1713 because we will find the resources for his response in the fourth *Guardian* essay, published less than a month later. To respond to the Instrumental Objection, however, we will have to extrapolate some Berkeleian theoretical tools into a new domain.

1 This is another example of Berkeley having a common starting point with the freethinkers – many of whom took the future state to be a tool of political manipulation – but reaching different conclusions.

2 Natural Pleasures

Berkeley's essay 'Pleasures' is a minor foray into the *cultura animi* tradition, with that distinctive mixture of the theoretical and the practical aimed at producing 'tranquillity and cheerfulness' (*Works* VII, 194).[2] The key theoretical move is a distinction between natural and 'fantastical' pleasures. The former are 'suited to human nature in general' and 'the rewards for the using our faculties agreeably to the ends for which they were given us', whereas the latter have 'no natural fitness to delight our minds' but 'presuppose some whim or taste' (*Works* VII, 193) which will vary amongst different people by chance.

Berkeley individuates pleasures by the desires which, when satisfied, give rise to them, and thus fantastical pleasures are the product of fantastical desires: 'a desire terminated in money is fantastical; so is the desire of outward distinctions' (*Works* VII, 194).[3] Fantastical desires are often aimed at things which are desirable primarily in virtue of being hard to obtain, whereas 'the objects of our natural desires are cheap or easie to be obtained, it being a maxim that holds throughout the whole system of created beings, that, *Nothing is made in vain*, much less the instincts and appetites of animals' (*Works* VII, 194).

Given our interest in the natural desire for a future state, we need to pause and ask what Berkeley had in mind by 'cheap or easie', since the good Christian life needed to attain eternal bliss would not normally described as 'cheap or easie': the demands of charity upon the wealthy may be substantial and even Jesus was tempted. So it is best to think of 'cheap' as meaning 'available to all regardless of wealth'[4] and 'easie' as 'straightforward' in the sense that no special skill or aptitude is required to follow the guidance in the New Testament successfully. Generalising, we can understand 'easie to be obtained' as meaning that it is possible to know how to obtain it in a way which is guaranteed to succeed.

If we apply this thinking to the appetite of immortality, Berkeley could argue that the desire is natural because it does not depend upon a 'whim or taste' which might vary among people: everyone has it. This means that its object must be easy

2 See *Regimens of the Mind: Boyle, Locke, and the Early Modern* Cultura Animi *Tradition*, Corneanu, S., University of Chicago Press, 2011. Corneanu makes no mention of Berkeley in the book, but he obviously shares '[t]he preoccupation with the powers and frailties of the human mind and regimens for attaining its health and virtues' (2011, 46) and his essay on 'Pleasures' is an excellent example.

3 Rather surprisingly, Berkeley goes on to argue that 'he is the true possessor of a thing who enjoys it, and not he who owns it' (ibid., 195), since ownership is a fantastical pleasure. This seems to imply that private property is not natural.

4 Though too much wealth may be a problem: e. g. Matthew 19:24.

to obtain – at least in the sense specified above. However, if there were no future state, its object would be impossible to obtain.

What we see here is a variant on premise 2) which takes us away from whether a desire will be frustrated to the question of whether its object can be (easily) obtained. That provides a response to the Epicurean objection: whether the desire is satisfied or frustrated may well be something which only happens after death, but whether its object is easy to obtain is a feature of the desire here and now in this present life. So, if the desire is natural and present, its object must now be easy-to-obtain (even if it is only actually obtained later); but if there is no future state it is impossible to obtain.

While the tenor of Berkeley's essay suggests that he did think that there were knowable ways of gaining natural pleasures which were guaranteed to succeed, the present dialectic only needs the weaker claim that they are highly likely to succeed. It suffices for the natural appetite of immortality to give us grounds for belief in the future state that the existence of such a natural desire makes it highly likely that those who live a good Christian life will achieve eternal bliss. Of course, if the gospels are false, then the desire will be frustrated, but its naturalness is an argument that such an outcome is highly unlikely. Berkeley can thus respond to the Epicurean by shifting focus from the time when the desire is satisfied or frustrated to the present time when we should – according to his view of natural desires – have the means to seek its satisfaction.

3 The Theory of Signs

Suppose we grant that the theory of natural pleasures that Berkeley adumbrates in the essay on 'Pleasures' provides a response to the Epicurean Objection, we still need a reason to think that the proper end, the telos, of the appetite of immortality is its satisfaction rather than something else. The example of sexual desire having different satisfaction conditions from its telos is an example that early moderns found hard to think clearly about, often trying to distinguish sex-for-pleasure from sex-for-procreation, misogynistically assigning women exclusively to one role or another. Thus, even Montaigne writes with seeming approval:

> Marriage is a bond both religious and devout: that is why the pleasure we derive from it must be serious, restrained and intermingled with some gravity; its sensuousness should be somewhat wise and dutiful. Its chief end is procreation, so there are those who doubt whether it is right to seek intercourse when we have no hope of conception … Zenobia … let [her husband] run wild throughout her pregnancy, giving him permission to begin again only once it was over. There was a fine and noble-hearted marriage for you! (*Essays*, 224)

It seems unlikely, then, that Berkeley or any other early modern philosopher would have been entirely comfortable with the theoretical move underlying the Instrumental Objection. However, there remains an anachronistic, philosophical question as to whether Berkeley's philosophy contains the resources to deal with this objection. The remainder of this chapter addresses that question.

I shall propose that we can find materials to address the Instrumental Objection if we look further afield in Berkeley's philosophy. In particular, we can consider Berkeley's theory of signs, namely that our ideas of sense should be understood as signs in the language of nature,[5] and whether our equally passive natural appetites, often called 'passions', may also be considered signs in the language of nature.

Berkeley's theory of signs is first presented in the *New Theory of Vision* and was expanded and extended throughout his life, particularly in *Alciphron* and the *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, where his focus was explicitly on the application of the theory in debates about religion[6] and science/mathematics.[7] For present purposes it will suffice to reduce the theory to three key claims:

i) The sign-signified relation is arbitrary.
ii) We can only discover a sign-signified relation by experience.
iii) Once we know a sign-signified relation holds, experience of the sign 'suggests' the signified.

The notion of arbitrariness here is not meant to suggest whimsy, but voluntarism (see Bartha 2020) – whether it is God or creatures who create sign systems, they are not constrained by reason to give any particular sign any particular signification. Of course, their purpose in creating those sign systems may entail that some choices are better or worse, but this constraint is pragmatic. For example, even though the move from Roman to Arabic numerals simplifies complex arithmetic, it is still arbitrary (see NTV § 142: *That a visible square is fitter that a visible circle*

5 'Those ideas being in their own nature equally fitted to bring into our minds the idea of small or great, or […]; just as the words of any language' (NTV §§ 64 & 47). For discussion, see, e. g., Winkler 2005, 125–127. See also Stoneham (2013) on whether all of Berkeley's natural sign systems constitute a language.

6 'And being persuaded that the *Theory of Vision* […] affords to thinking men a new and unanswerable proof of the existence and immediate operation of God, and the constant condescending care of his providence, I think myself concerned, as well as I am able, to defend and explain it, at a time wherein atheism hath made a greater progress than some are willing to own, or others to believe.' (TVV § 1)

7 'If I mistake not, all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about signs as their immediate object, though these in the application are referred to things.' (AMP 7.13)

to represent a tangible square). There is nothing in the nature of numbers which requires their representation by one system rather than the other: if anything, it is the nature of the human mind which determines the choice, as we see with the use of base 10 for calculations performed by humans but base 16 for most computing.

For Berkeley, the second claim follows directly from the first, but given that arbitrariness is not whimsy, the inference is a little more complicated. Returning to the case of numbers, to work out what the particular sign 'MMXXII' signifies, someone does not have to have any previous experience of that sign or that signification relation. This is because signification belongs not to particular signs but to the sign-types they token, and those sign-types may be basic in the system – or, alternatively, they may be constructed according to rules from the basic types. It is the signification of basic signs which can only be learned by experience.

This is important because of Berkeley's radical nominalism: assigning tokens to types is the work of the human mind. Where we create the sign system, the typology is done by stipulation or convention, and this may develop over time as practical needs change. Thus in the case of the Roman numerals, we would recognise as tokens of the same sign the letters in a much wider variety of typefaces and handwritings than would the historical Romans: the range of marks which counts as a token of the letter M has expanded greatly in the subsequent millennia.

What then of natural signs? While we may have some access to the semiotic intentions of the author of nature through revelation, that will be – arguably by definition – only in exceptional cases. What then of ordinary, empirical cases? Here our typology of signs is tentative and subject to continual revision in the light of experience and the theories we construct on the basis of, and test in the face of, that experience. For example, take someone who is stung by a wasp. They might think that the size and markings of the wasp identify a type of insect which stings, and thus take those marking to signify the danger of being stung. Consequently, that person would include hoverflies in that sign-type on the basis of similar appearance and thus make a mistake about the language of nature. Hoverflies look like wasps not because they also sting but because they are designed to make their predators believe (act as if) they sting. Biologically unsophisticated humans might fall into that group, but as we develop our knowledge of the insect kingdom, and of the biological determinants of markings, we learn that the type which signifies stinging is not such crude morphology. The whole history of science is, on the Berkeleian view, the construction of theories which construct sign-types which reveal the signification relations chosen by the author of nature.

Berkeley initially presents his theory of natural signs as an explanation of how we see distance; that is, of how vision gives us experience of objects as being at a distance from us. The explanatory desiderata of such a theory of vision require

Berkeley to postulate an involuntary psychological mechanism which, once the relevant signification relations have been discovered by experience, produces in us the idea of the signified when we have the sensation (idea of sense) of the sign. He describes this as 'suggestion' and as well as being involuntary, it also lacks transparency: we are not aware that these signifieds are merely suggested rather than perceived by sense.[8] When I look out of the window and 'see' there is a car parked *in front of* a lamp-post, what I actually see (a car shape and a partial lamp-post shape) suggests the spatial relation. A lamp-post shape and a partial car shape might suggest the opposite spatial relation between the car and the lamp-post.

For the purposes of *The New Theory of Vision*, it is very important for Berkeley that suggestion is not a form of inference. Berkeley often compares it to linguistic understanding: when you hear words in a language you understand, you mind is presented with their meanings involuntarily and opaquely: it seems as if you just hear the meaning.[9] However, this cannot be the only form of experience of signification. Going back to my earlier example, if I had written '2022' you may have had that date 'suggested', but since I wrote 'MMXXII' you probably had to go through a voluntary and transparent process to get to the date. Similarly, a language which you have a partial grasp of will not present its meanings to you involuntarily and transparently, but they are still the same significations that fluent speakers know. And when we come to the scientific understanding of the world, which is also based on the language of nature, this will always be the case. An experienced clinician may be very reliable at on-the-spot diagnosis, but we still think they need to run the appropriate tests before they begin invasive or dangerous treatments.

Thus the phenomenology of suggestion which is so important in the explanation of distance perception and familiar from linguistic fluency is not in fact essential to our ability to learn and make use of natural signs.

4 Desires as Signs?

Can we think of natural desires and appetites as natural signs signifying the objects which will satisfy them? Let us take thirst as the paradigm of a natural appetite and consider this question.

8 For more on suggestion, see the chapter by Fields in this volume.

9 'No sooner do we hear the Words of a familiar Language pronounced in our Ears, but the Ideas corresponding thereto present themselves to our Minds: in the very same Instant the Sound and the Meaning enter the Understanding: So closely are they united, that it is not in our Power to keep out the one, except we exclude the other also. We even act in all respects as if we heard the very Thoughts themselves' (NTV § 51).

When someone feels thirst they have a bodily sensation and ideas of drinks – liquids being consumed – are suggested: a psychological process which is involuntary and opaque brings those ideas to mind.[10] These drinks are the objects which will satisfy the desire. But is this relation one of signification, is it arbitrary and learned only by experience? It certainly does not strike us like that, but then nor does the correlation between visual appearance and distance.

First, it is worth noting that the precise drinks suggested will differ between people. For some it may be a glass of cool water, for others a cup of tea, for other a beer or a fizzy drink. Maybe all these would be equally effective in slaking the thirst, but for each of us only some are suggested and that is clearly a function of our past experience: both in whether we have had experience of that type of drink at all and also whether we have experienced it as thirst-quenching. There are notable cultural differences here on whether warm or cold drinks are experienced as thirst-quenching, even though we know each is equally causally efficacious.

Secondly, certain drinks may be suggested which are not even causally efficacious. The Ancient Mariner bemoaning 'Water, water, every where,/Nor any drop to drink' (Coleridge 1798) is in the situation of his thirst suggesting the idea of drinking the sea-water, but his broader knowledge telling him this will not in fact slake the thirst. Or perhaps he has been a sailor so long that drinking sea-water is counter-suggested, like drinking sand. Either way, it looks like we sometimes have to learn by experience which things in our environment will in fact slake our thirst and which will not. Once we do, ideas of those things will be suggested when we feel thirsty.

Thirdly, it is possible to feel thirst and fail to recognise it for what it is. Parents will know they often need to remind children to drink enough, and this is also a feature of some forms of neuro-diversity.

While these points are not conclusive, they certainly show there is space to argue that the relation between thirst and drinks is arbitrary and learned. One thing we often fail to notice is that when we are thirsty, we are 'thirsty-for' quite a limited selection of the possible drinks which would slake that thirst. One explanation of this would be that the universal object of thirst is the generic drink, 'something wet', and our experience leads us to develop preferences amongst the available options. But equally we might accept there is space to doubt that a newly created Adam who had never had a drink would, on feeling

10 The involuntariness needs some qualification here: I may feel thirsty and have to pause to think what I would like to drink. And that process may result in several candidates, some of which are rejected. This has some parallels to the much less common experience of trying to parse a visual field, to separate foreground and background.

thirst, know to drink a liquid rather than eat a solid (or myriad other options). Hume, for one, would have been committed to denying that, and perhaps Berkeley as well.

However, even if we grant the relation is arbitrary and learned by experience, it is not exactly the same relation as the one that holds between the visual idea of the glass of clear, colourless liquid in front of me and the gustatory idea of drinking it which is suggested to me by the sense-experience. The gustatory idea is a *prediction* of what the liquid will taste like and would turn out to be incorrect if the glass contained not water but vodka. The suggestion would be misleading. In contrast, if instead of vision it is the bodily sensation of thirst which suggests the idea of drinking water, then that is not a prediction of a gustatory experience. If there is no water to drink, just vodka, then my thirst has not been misled but disappointed.

Disappointment suggests that there are still standards of correctness for these ideas suggested by appetites. If, like the Ancient Mariner, our thirst suggests drinking sea-water, and we go ahead to drink sea-water, we will again be disappointed.

This case seems different with fantastical desire, where the first form of disappointment is possible but not the second. Take the example of the desire for money: that can be disappointed by counterfeit bills, which may appear to be but are not in fact the object of desire, like the vodka is not the desired glass of water. But there is no possibility of desiring money and finding out when you get it that it is not in fact the object of your desire, the thing which will satisfy you. (Of course, most people who desire money underestimate how much it will take to satisfy that desire, but that is a different failing.) The connection between a fantastical desire and its object is a priori, but only trivially so. It is stipulated, like the connection between a numeral and a number, but something we must do each for ourselves with each fantastical desire we adopt.

It may seem implausible that no desires or appetites, natural or fantastical, are such that there is a non-arbitrary, a priori knowable internal connection between the desire and what will satisfy it. However, it is part of the Berkeleian theory of signs that the sign-signified relation may be learned so early in life and be so prevalent in our experience, that the sign becomes transparent to the signified. A Berkeleian who is prepared to accept that visual experience is two-dimensional but that the suggested tactual experiences are so deeply engrained in our broader conscious life that it seems three-dimensional may also accept the thesis that desires meet the conditions for being signs of their objects:

> The objects which will satisfy our natural appetites and desires (cause pleasure and avoid pain) are not known a priori but discovered. Once the objects are discovered, the appetites are recognised as natural signs for their objects.

There is one important corollary of this. In the case of perceptual and scientific signs, we learn what they signify by finding those signifieds in our experience and spotting the semiotic relations. Having done this in many cases, we can form the further hypothesis that a given novel experience or other datum is a sign of something, we know not what. Whether we discover what it signifies depends upon many factors, but in so far as we have reason to believe it is a sign, we have reason to believe it is a sign of something and that thing can in principle be discovered. Berkeley's theory of signs is integral to his more general view that the natural world – or at least those bits of it humans can experience – is intrinsically (humanly) intelligible.

The same must apply to desires as natural signs: before we know what they are signs of, and what will satisfy them, we can reasonably conclude that there is something out there that will, i. e. that there is a signification relation to be discovered.

5 The Instrumental Objection

In the last two sections we have drawn upon Berkeley's theory of signs to build the case for thinking that the Berkeleian might argue that natural appetites are natural signs of their objects, those things which will satisfy them. We now need to return to the Instrumental Objection to Berkeley's argument for a future state. This objection was addressed at the premise that the purpose (or telos) of the appetite of immortality would be frustrated if there were no future state – it would be in vain. The objector pointed out that even if the desire could not be satisfied in those circumstances, it may not be in vain if it served some other purpose, such as instilling moral behaviour.

Can the thesis that natural appetites are natural signs of the objects which will satisfy them allow Berkeley to respond to this objection? Not directly, for it does not undermine the potential distinction between satisfaction conditions and telos. But indirectly it might if it allows the Berkeleian to argue that a natural desire must be satisfiable in reality (whatever its purpose or telos). If desires are natural signs, then there must be something they signify, their signified must exist to be discoverable, even if we don't know exactly what it is. How does this apply to the (apparent) appetite of immortality?

Almost everyone who grows up in a society which has a religious culture is taught about the future state at an early age. Usually the first bereavement, even of a pet, is taken as an opportunity to explain that there is a life after death. Even those whose own families do not accept the future state are likely to have been exposed to such an idea. Having thus conceived of it, it is possible then to

desire it. However, this is the process by which we acquire fantastical desires (in Berkeley's parlance), so in claiming that the appetite of immortality is natural, Berkeley is committed to it being present in all people independently of their religious education. This is crucial for him to avoid the freethinkers' charge that the desire arises from our indoctrination into a prejudice by a corrupt priesthood, which really would make it fantastical.[11]

Thus, to frame our question about what this desire is a natural sign of, we need to imagine the desire occurring in a person entirely unexposed to religion. If Berkeley's argument is intended to persuade even someone who lacks a belief in a Deity, it ought to be available to such a purely secular person, and then there will be no concern that it is fantastical. Let us call such a person Edward, after the influential anti-clerical proponent of natural religion, Edward Herbert, Baron Cherbury.

Suppose Edward has a natural appetite and does not yet know what will satisfy it. What would this be like? Perhaps he sees the injustice of cruelty going unpunished, or disease and natural disasters cutting short healthy lives; perhaps on losing childhood innocence he realises that this mortal life is nothing but a veil of sorrow. These are all common experiences which trigger a yearning or want for something better – the desire that this be not all there is to life. We can grant for present purposes that this is a natural appetite: that a blessed few individuals seem to go through life without such feelings of despair at what they see does not show it to be an unnatural response.

That it is a natural appetite allows Edward to infer that something – he knows not what – in his natural environment will satisfy it and he can start the process of discovering what. This claim is not a priori: it is through experiencing the order and harmony of the natural world, which includes us, that we recognise that there is something, yet to be discovered, that will satisfy a given natural appetite. This is an aspect of the 'exact and constant order discoverable in all the parts of [nature]' (*Works* VII, 181 – quoted above), one other aspect of which is the inference from our discovery that the visual ideas we have so far had all signify something beyond themselves, to the conclusion that, when we have a totally new idea, we can take that to be a sign of something though we know not what yet.

Natural appetites, then, become signs for the specific things that will satisfy them, if we can find out what those are. But even before that, they can be signs

11 E. g. 'There arise, indeed, in some minds, some unaccountable terrors with regard to futurity: But these would quickly vanish, were they not artificially fostered by precept and education. And those, who foster them; what is their motive? Only to gain a livelihood, and to acquire power and riches in this world. Their very zeal and industry, therefore, is an argument against them.' (Hume, *Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, 593, punctuation original)

that something in the world will do that. They are signs that there is something 'out there' which we need and prompt us to find out what.

It is a Berkeleian theme that the nature of this future state is unknown. It consists of 'those things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive' (*Works* VII 184). Religious doctrine tells us that our appetite will be satisfied and possibly with infinite pleasures, but also that we cannot now know what those satisfying experiences will be like. The naturalness of the appetite, combined with the recognition that natural desires are signs of their objects, gives us a route to the same conclusion without any religious doctrine, not even belief of a Deity.

The appetite of immortality is the yearning for a better life than the one we experience on a day-to-day basis. While some may seek to find that better life by building a utopia here on earth, such plans do not succeed and deal only with the human and political sources of despair. If (i) there is nothing in this life which will satisfy the desire; (ii) we have good reason to think all natural desires are signs of experiences which will satisfy them; and (iii) that the signification relation holds between things that exist, or more precisely, types of thing which have tokens, then we can conclude that there must be a future state in which that appetite is quenched.

The Berkeleian response to the Instrumental Objection is thus indirect. The objector claimed that the state which it is the purpose of a desire to bring about the satisfaction-conditions of that desire can come apart, as they do in the case of sexual desire. The response we have explored here is to show that, even if the objector is right, we can infer that the satisfaction-conditions for the desire must be of a type of which there are tokens. This is because natural desires can be discovered to be signs of their satisfaction-conditions, so if we have a natural desire, it must signify something which exists. If we grant Berkeley that the appetite of immortality is natural, then we can conclude, on the basis of what we have learned about other natural desires, that it is satisfiable. Since it would be satisfiable only if there were a future state, we can conclude that there is a future state.

Conclusion

We have seen that Berkeley's attempted argument for a future state which doesn't presuppose any religious belief is subject to two objections, the Epicurean and the Instrumentalist. Berkeley's theory of natural pleasures, also adumbrated in the *Guardian* essays, gives him the resources to mount a response to the Epicurean Objection. In contrast, the Instrumental Objection looks anachronistic, drawing as it does upon a separation of satisfaction conditions and biological purpose for de-

sires which early moderns struggled to grasp in the case of sexual desire. Despite that, we have seen how Berkeley does have resources to respond, if he extends his theory of natural signs from the cognitive to the conative.

In the same manner that we can infer that a new perceptual idea is the sign of something, once we have accepted the theory of natural signs, we can also infer that a natural desire is a sign of something. Furthermore, these natural signs in the language of nature are all in principle intelligible to us, so the signified experiences and occurrences must be possible experiences for humans.

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List of Contributors

Margaret Atherton is a Distinguished Professor Emerita at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She works on early modern philosophy, particularly on Locke and Berkeley, and on reclaiming women philosophers. Her most recent book is *Berkeley* published by Wiley Blackwell (2020).

Dávid Bartha graduated from Central European University in 2019 with a doctoral thesis on Berkeley's theological voluntarism. Dávid was recently a postdoctoral fellow at the Humboldt University of Berlin, working primarily on theories of representation in the Cartesian tradition. He has published, amongst other things, on the difference between Berkeley's and Collier's approaches to immaterialism, and the role of the likeness principle in Berkeley's philosophy. In addition to early modern idealism, Dávid has an interest in various other topics (such as imagination and laws of nature) and authors of the period, such as Foucher and Shepherd.

Todd DeRose is an Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Edward Waters University. His main academic interests are in the philosophy of language, the philosophy of religion, and early modern philosophy, with particular attention to George Berkeley's contributions to each of these. Todd received his PhD from The Ohio State University in May 2023. He wrote his dissertation, New Work for Berkeley's Theory of Divine Language, under the guidance of Lisa Downing. Beyond his academic work, Todd is certified in client counselling by the American Philosophical Practitioners Association and in Logic-Based Consultation by the Logic-Based Therapy & Consultation Institute.

Manuel Fasko is a 'Wissenschaftlicher Oberassistent' at the University of Basel. His research focuses on the early modern Irish-British tradition and early modern canon change and expansion, with a particular emphasis on Mary Shepherd. He wrote his dissertation on George Berkeley's conception of nature and the divine language hypothesis, and is mainly interested in Berkeley's metaphysics and the philosophy of mind, particularly issues pertaining to representation.

Keota Fields is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth. His interests lie in the history of modern philosophy, as well as contemporary epistemology and the philosophy of mind. Thus far, his scholarly work has been largely focused on the philosophies of George Berkeley, Mary Shepherd, and related figures (e.g., Locke, Hume, etc.). Within Berkeley scholarship, he focuses mainly on Berkeley's theory of perception and his theory of meaning. In addition to early modern philosophy, he has published contemporary work on the philosophy of perception. Specifically, he is interested in the epistemic consequences of cognitive penetration of perception.

Clare Marie Moriarty is an Irish Research Council Postdoctoral Fellow working in the Philosophy Department in Trinity College Dublin. Her research is typically focused on European philosophy and mathematics in the early modern period. She is equally interested in issues of logic and rigour in the formal thinking of the period and socio-cultural aspects of the growing dominance of mathematical and scientific ways of understanding the world. Recent publications on broader topics include ones on early modern speculative fiction and mathematical pedagogy in 19th-century Irish thinker Oliver Byrne.

Katia Saporiti is Professor for Philosophy and the History of Philosophy at the University of Zurich and author of the book *Die Wirklichkeit der Dinge: Eine Untersuchung des Begriffs der Idee in der Philosophie George Berkeleys.* She received her PhD from Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich and has been teaching philosophy since 1994 (at Universities in Munich, Bielefeld, Berlin and Zurich).

Robert Schwartz is Distinguished Professor Emeritus at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. In addition to papers in the philosophy of science, epistemology, and the philosophy of psychology, he is the author of *Vision: Variations on Some Berkeleian Themes*, *Visual Versions*, *Rethinking Pragmatism: From William James to Contemporary Philosophy*, and *Pragmatic Perspectives*: *Constructivism Beyond Truth and Realism*.

Lauren Slater recently completed her PhD at Birkbeck College, University of London. Her research is focused on early modern philosophy, particularly the philosophy of René Descartes, and the philosophy of mind and language. She is particularly interested in the relation between words and their meanings, and how this relation has been conceived by 17th-century thinkers. Her current research project connects the word-meaning relation to the dualist mind-body relation. She previously worked for the Aristotelian Society, and is also the founder and organiser of the London Cartesian Circle.

Tom Stoneham is Professor and Head of the Department of Philosophy at the University of York. He is President of the International Berkeley Society. He has written about several topics and authors in early modern British philosophy and is currently writing on early 18th-century arguments about the immortality of the soul and Berkeley's theory of education. He is also interested in AI, digital rights and data privacy in 21st-century late capitalism.

Peter West is an Assistant Professor in Philosophy at Northeastern University, London. His research focuses on two areas of the history of philosophy, early modern philosophy and early analytic philosophy, and is grounded in a commitment to expanding the canon of philosophy's history. His early modern work focuses on figures like Berkeley, Cavendish, Shepherd, and Amo. His ongoing project in early analytic philosophy focuses on a generation of women at the dawn of the analytic movement, including Susan Stebbing and Dorothy Emmet.

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https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111197586-015

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