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PHILOSOPHICAL WRITINGS

Selected and edited by
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In a large souls, indeed, we may be said to have an ^{extension} of
Spirit, that is, we understand the meaning of the word, otherwise
we can't well affirm or deny any thing of it. Again, as we conceive
the good that act in the minds of other spirits by ~~their~~ ^{their} ~~own~~ ^{own} ~~power~~ ^{power}
with our own which we supply to the ~~own~~ ^{own} ~~power~~ ^{power} of them,
so we know other spirits by means of our own soul which that souls, in the same
or ~~power~~ ^{power} of them, is like ~~to~~ ^{to} other spirits, if through it that by us
not ~~to~~ ^{to} ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~mind~~ ^{mind} ~~of~~ ^{of} ~~another~~ ^{another}.

MS IN BERKELEY'S HAND

Showing Principles, Sect. 140

From British Museum Additional MS 39304.
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INTRODUCTION

OF Berkeley's philosophical works the two major ones, *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, are here printed with as little omission as possible, in order to leave the lines of his arguing virtually intact. More omissions had to be made in the *Essay of Vision* and *De Motu*, but the main stages of the arguments have been preserved. The latter tract, neglected because Fraser left it in its Latin, is given in translation. The liveliest of the seven dialogues of *Alciphron* has been included almost in its entirety, as an illustration of Berkeley's ethical criticism (he did not work out an ethical system). Just enough room was left for passages of *Siris* that show that in this last phase of his thought he retained the distinctive doctrines of the first. The six writings have been placed in chronological order. In every case the text of Berkeley's last edition has been followed, with the spelling, and occasionally the punctuation, modernised. Omissions, when not evident from the section-numbers, have been indicated by three points. A few of Berkeley's own back-references, to sections which I have had to omit, have been retained in case the reader should wish to consult the full text.

Berkeley's Life and Character

The provenance of genius and talent is usually hard to trace. Berkeley's kinship with the Earls of Berkeley, and with the General Wolfe who stormed Quebec, throws no light on his gifts of intellectual perspicacity, literary grace, moral purity and religious serenity. However these came to him, at least the first two were favoured by the places where he was educated; for

the school he went to at Kilkenny, very near to where he was born in 1685—an Irishman of English stock—had just reared Congreve and Swift ; and Trinity College, Dublin, which he entered in 1700, was a nursery of distinguished minds. Here he rose to a Fellowship in 1707, and within three years precociously published a psychological masterpiece (*Essay on Vision*) and a philosophical masterpiece (*Principles*). In 1709 he was ordained.

In 1713 he left Dublin for London, not returning (except for one brief visit) until 1721. During this period he began his acquisition of that large knowledge of the world which surprises those who approach his writings with the assumption that he was only a cloistered dreamer. In London he was welcomed at Court, and, more congenially, in the literary circles that included Addison, Steele, Pope, Prior, Gay and Swift. For Steele's *Guardian* he wrote a dozen essays, and with Swift formed a lasting friendship. Even in this galaxy he shone, not primarily as a thinker—his philosophical genius was inadequately measured in his lifetime—but as a man of unique charm of character, manner and conversation. His stay in the capital was broken by two visits to France and Italy, the one in 1713-14 as chaplain to a travelling ambassador, the other in 1716-20 as tutor to a young man doing the 'grand tour'. These journeys made him a connoisseur of the visual arts, chiefly of architecture, on which subject he was thereafter occasionally consulted. Of part of the second tour we have his diary, which reveals a quickness, competence and tirelessness of response to all points of natural history, to local customs, old or lovely buildings and their artistic furnishings. On his return from the second tour, besides re-asserting his philosophical interest by publishing *De Motu*, he wrote on a public issue, the sorry business of the South Sea Bubble, an *Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*.

The Bubble, and the similar Mississippi debacle which he had learned of at first hand in France, mark a crucial stage in Berkeley's life. They brought to a head a conviction that the civilisation of Europe had become decrepit and perverse, and gave him the ambition to carry the lamp of godly learning and living from the Old World to the New. He decided to found, and spend the rest of his life in, a college in Bermuda for the Christian education of the colonists and natives of the American mainland. The noble dream, partly expressed in his poem 'America, or the Muses' Refuge',¹ set him the most arduous task of his life, and its failure gave him his greatest agony. To raise the requisite funds he concentrated on two methods—to augment his personal income by preferment to high ecclesiastical office, and to extract a charter and grant from the Crown. He succeeded in the first by becoming Dean of Derry in 1724 (thus ending his Fellowship of Trinity College). As for the second, after years of lobbying he secured, by a miracle of persuasiveness, the approval by Parliament of a grant of £20,000. In 1728 he set sail, with his newly wed wife and a handful of partners in his scheme, landed at Newport, Rhode Island, and there awaited the promised grant. It never came: the Government of Great Britain had yielded to his famous personal charm, and when this was withdrawn, recovered its flinty realism. In 1731 he accepted the inevitable, and returned to England. Yet his stay of two and a half years had not been fruitless for America. In Newport he was long remembered as a superior visitant. He strongly influenced the father of American philosophy, Samuel Johnson, whose *Elementa Philosophica* (1752) is dedicated to him. He stimulated learning by making large gifts of books to Harvard and Yale, which latter still has three scholarships in Classics endowed by him. His advice was

¹ See A. A. Luce, *Life of George Berkeley*, p. 96.

sought in the early shaping of the colleges that were to become the universities of Columbia and Pennsylvania. It was 'in remembrance of one of the very best of the early friends of college education in America' and of his westward look that America's westernmost university-town, facing the Golden Gate, was called Berkeley.

After two years in London, marked by the publication of *Alciphron* (written in Newport), his wandering days ended : in 1735 he was presented to the see of Cloyne, in the south-east corner of Ireland. Here, remote from Court, savants and men of letters, he gave himself for eighteen years to his pastoral cure, his family, and his books, refusing to be drawn from this busy tranquillity into any post of greater social repute. He had just issued *The Analyst* (1734), a critique of the Newtonian method of fluxions, which started a fruitful controversy among the mathematicians. This was followed by *The Querist* (1735-7), in which he showed himself to be both a lover of Ireland and an economist with insights ahead of his day. Some years later an epidemic treading on the heels of a famine diverted his philanthropy to medicine : in the sphere of practice he administered tar-water (which he had learned of while in America) to his family and people, and made the drinking of it a vogue ; and in the sphere of theory he composed his strange and beautiful *Siris* (1744), in which, by meditative transitions, from the pharmacology of tar he passes through cosmological speculations about Aether to a Trinitarian theism.

In the autumn of 1752, permitted by the Crown to leave his see, though forbidden to resign it, he moved to Oxford, to enjoy as a tired man its learned peace. There he died in the following year, and there was buried in the Cathedral.

Berkeley's Philosophy

It is a mistake to approach Berkeley as though he were simply a Lockian trying to improve on his master.

INTRODUCTION

We have to keep in mind, besides Locke, at least Descartes, the Occasionalists, Spinoza, Hobbes, the new physicists and mathematicians, and the 'free-thinking' dilettanti who found in the new science reasons or excuses for breaking the old restraints on thought and conduct. The seventeenth-century thinkers, founding the scientific way of studying Nature, had jettisoned everyday notions, disparaged sense, invented subtleties of method and statement, and proclaimed or implied the doctrine of determinism. Berkeley entered the lists in order to rescue science from its complexities and to deprive it of its materialistic suggestions.

Following a fashion set by Descartes, he undertakes an examination of the cognitive value of the senses. The distinctively contemporary view, among philosophers and scientists alike, was that the objects of sense are wholly within the minds that apprehend them, are the effects of material entities that exist independently of all apprehension, and are—strictly, some of them only—copies of the material entities that produce them. Berkeley rejects all these propositions.

(1) Berkeley cannot bring himself to depart so far from the commonsense attitude as to believe that Nature is destitute of colour and sound. These, he notes, are just as integrally parts of the data of sense as solidity, shape and motion are; are unimaginable apart from the latter, as, indeed, the latter are from them (*e.g.*, colour is extended, and extension coloured); and therefore belong where the rest belong. As for the common contention that they are *peculiarly* relative to the position or state of the perceiver, that is an error of fact. There is no tenable ground for distinguishing the data of sense into an objective group, 'primary qualities', and a merely subjective group, 'secondary qualities' (the current talk of colour and sound as 'really' motion, Berkeley stigmatises as nonsense).

The conclusion is that all *sensa* are cognitively on the same level. Are they all alike, then, copies of a material reality beyond them? Berkeley's answer is that not one of them is: he rejects the representative theory of perception outright. He points out that the supposition of two parallel orders, one of sensed qualities in the sensing mind and one of similar qualities beyond the mind, issues in scepticism; for if, *ex hypothesi*, we are face to face only with the former, we can never verify it by comparing it with the latter, since comparison involves the compresence to the mind of the things compared. He has a further objection, typically expressed as an axiom, namely, that a *sensum* cannot be like anything else than another *sensum*. The seen, *e.g.* cannot be like the invisible, or the heard like the inaudible; yet that they can be is assumed when we suppose *sensa* to be copies of entities that are held to be always beyond the intuition of sense. If the supposed material entities are like the visible, etc., they must themselves be visible, etc., in which event they would be directly presentable to sense, needing no surrogates, no mental representatives or copies. Conversely, if, as the current theory declared, they are not visible, etc., what we do see, etc., cannot represent their nature. The realm of sense, therefore, can have no relation of similitude to anything outside itself. From which the conclusion follows that the realm of sense is itself the corporeal realm, since all corporeal qualities are sensory. To speak of a corporeal world beyond sense is to use words, not to think. The copy-theory is here inapplicable. *Sensa* present simply themselves; they represent nothing; therefore it is meaningless to ask whether they are veracious or fallacious representatives. This is Berkeley's vindication of sense.

But has not Berkeley mentalised the corporeal by bringing it wholly within the mind? Is he not a subjective idealist, and therefore logically a solipsist? Indeed, is not 'in the

mind' his own recurrent phrase? It is; but since the philosophical vocabulary of his day was less developed than ours, we must catch his meaning instead of simply repeating his phrase. In fact, he does not subjectivise *sensa*. (a) These are just what they appear to be; what is seen as colour is colour, and what is seen as extended is extended. Now colour, extension and suchlike *sensa* are plainly not mental. They are the very constitutive properties of the corporeal. To assign them to the mind as parts of its being, as qualifications of its nature or phases of its process, is unthinkable. The mental and the corporeal are radically opposite, incapable of being assimilated to each other. This opposition of mind and body is an explicit, emphatic and basic part of Berkeley's doctrine, repeated in all his philosophical works. (b) *Sensa*, he says, are related to mind not as modes or attributes to substance, but as objects to subjects. They are over against the mind, not parts of it. (c) They are given to us. This also is the plain testimony of experience. Descartes' suggestion, at his sceptical stage, that they might be produced by us, is dismissed by Berkeley as requiring the irresponsible postulation of an occult cause. (d) Reflection on experience forces us to believe that *sensa*, or at least some of them, persist when we are not sensing them. My desk does not vanish when I leave my room; nor does my fire during the night—it passes through the sequence of changes which we call 'dying out'.

That is Berkeley's realism. There is nothing *per quod percipitur* but simply *id quod percipitur*. The sensed is itself the real corporeal world, perception interposing no screen, whether opaque or diaphanous, of mental entities between us and it.

Yet is not this realism excluded by Berkeley's axiom '*esse is percipi*'? Not at all. It does not, indeed, wholly follow from the axiom (but from the givenness, continuity,

and intrinsic difference from mind, of the corporeal), but it is permitted by this. The axiom certainly means that the existence of the corporeal *consists* in being perceived, that the sensory is the sensible, that a colour that cannot be seen, a shape that cannot be seen or touched, is a contradiction in terms : in other words, that the corporeal is by nature a *menti objectum*, essentially tied to mind. It is in order to indicate this bond that Berkeley calls everything sensory or corporeal an 'idea' (*Princ.*, Sect. 39). But it should be noted that the doctrine, because axiomatic, is entirely general. It is not the empirical allegation that each of us in fact enters into relation with the corporeal only by sensations that are his own. This was a commonplace of the day (the situation recently called the 'ego-centric predicament'), and one of the several commonplaces against which Berkeley was arguing. The axiom rests on the objective content of the sensory. It says that the sensory as such is relative to mind as such, not that it is bound to this or that mind. It is intended to express not a psychological fact but an epistemological necessity. This is why he laid it down as an axiom. It has nothing to do with subjectivism.

Consequently it is compatible with his realism. Shape, motion, colour, etc.—the qualities that *define* the corporeal—*entail* a reference to mind. Yet experience shows that when I perceive them they are not relative to me only, not existent for me only. The axiom can be satisfied, then, only by postulating a cosmic perceiver. The corporeal world is a system of objects—truly corporeal, not mental—relative essentially to God's mind, and accidentally to our minds. It exists in virtue of God's awareness of it. Berkeley's epistemology thus culminates in a grand ontological conclusion. *Sensa* force thought to God as their immediate condition ; and as we are always meeting *sensa*, the evidence for God is very ample and very near. This is

a new proof of God. The only earlier epistemological proof was that of St. Augustine, who argued, as a Platonist would, not from *sensa* but from the eternal verities.

(2) So much for one strand of Berkeley's philosophy, separated out for clearness' sake. Another strand, plaited with it, turns on the application of the principle of causality. The principle itself is not questioned, but only the range of its application. What is maintained is that only mind has causal power. In noting that in the corporeal realm nothing more is observed than regular connexion, Berkeley was only reaffirming what the Occasionalists and Locke had said and what Hume was to say again. The only causal power shown in experience is, as Locke had admitted, that of will (we can summon and dismiss images and thoughts, and move our limbs). Therefore, by the sole analogy we have, all corporeal things and changes must be produced—both brought into existence and presented to our minds—by a cosmic mind. This is Berkeley's form of the cosmological proof of God. The passivity of the corporeal, besides being evident in fact, is evident rationally, being implied by the axiom '*esse is percipi*', for 'being perceived' is a passive relation. The connexions among corporeal things are, then, from our finite point of view, merely empirical. No necessity can be discerned in them. They are related not as cause and effect but as sign and thing signified. They can be understood neither causally nor logically, but only teleologically: dependent on the will of God, they are the signs, the language, by which He instructs our expectations, and thereby express His beneficence towards us. 'As if Nature were anything but the ordinance of the free will of God!' is one of the comments which Berkeley made in his note-books. Cf. *Princ.*, Sect. 107 *ad fin.*

(3) A third strand is Berkeley's denial of the very possibility of abstract 'ideas'. We have mentioned that by

'idea' he means anything sensory (and therefore corporeal). Now the sensory, when not being sensed, can only be imagined, not thought. In imagination we can, indeed, abstract within the limits of the sensorily possible ; but when we go beyond these to pure intellection we leave the sensory entirely behind, and therefore cannot present it at all to the mind. Alleged abstract 'ideas' involve one or other of two claims, either that we can think apart what are necessarily bound together in sense, *e.g.* colour and extension ; or that we can form general concepts (universals) of classes of sensory things, *e.g.* triangles. Neither is psychologically possible. Colour and extension cannot be sensed apart and cannot be imagined apart, and outside sense and imagination cannot be apprehended at all. As for the supposed universal triangle, one that is not equilateral, scalene, etc., and has no determinate magnitude, it is just nothing, and is not made something by being called triangle-as-such or triangularity. When particularity is taken from the sensory, all is taken. We have, it is true, general *names*, but these can bring before the mind nothing but one or other, indifferently, of the particular 'ideas' which they denote. The concrete *cannot* be presented abstractly ; it is necessarily the object of sensuous intuition.

Berkeley brings this denial of abstract 'ideas' to bear on the recent theories of an absolute time, an absolute space, infinitesimals, and an absolute motion. These, he declares, are not only not real ; they are simply words. No object corresponding to them can come before the mind : for space is essentially sensory (as Kant also held), and therefore cannot appear when we abstract from its sensory determinations and limits ; and time is but the order of our experiences ; and, space and time being thus relative, motion also is bound to be relative. A wider alleged abstraction, and according to Berkeley the worst of all,

is that which claims to conceive the corporeal in separation from any apprehending mind whatever.

(4) Having considered separately three aspects of Berkeley's total argument, we may now pull them together in order to summarise what he said about matter and mind respectively.

In its negative aspect Berkeley's philosophy is notoriously a denial of 'matter'. He calls those against whom he was arguing 'materialists', and he would approve our calling him an 'immaterialist'. If his terms have proved to be misleading, the fault is not his, for he explained their meaning clearly. Not only he but also his contemporaries meant by 'matter' either corporeal things regarded as existing by themselves, in their own right, beyond sense, independently of all apprehension; or else something that was believed to underlie corporeal phenomena as their substance, point of attachment, or unifying ground and source. Berkeley dismisses both meanings. (a) That 'matter' in the first sense is not a datum was on all hands agreed; all known corporeal properties are *sensa*, and therefore, according to the current view, *sensa* private to each mind. 'Matter', then, is something inferred, epistemologically as the 'reality', and ontologically as the cause, of such allegedly private *sensa*. In neither way, Berkeley argues, can the inference be justified—not in the first way, because *sensa*, being experienced as objective, are real enough in themselves (as he slyly observes, it is sensed, not insensible, bread that feeds us), and because it is self-contradictory to suppose beyond *sensa*, and therefore as essentially insensible, anything that has to be described in sensory terms; and not in the second way, because there is no warrant in experience or in reason for adducing any cause except mind for anything at all (a contention for which there was much contemporary support). (b) In the expression 'material substance'

Berkeley can find no coherent meaning. By definition it is not identical with any or all of the corporeal phenomena (space, colour, etc.) which sense presents to us. It is what 'stands under' these. But this cannot be taken literally, for that which is posited as different from space cannot have a spatial relation to space. It must therefore be taken metaphorically; but then it evaporates into a vague expression like 'some sort of support', or into Locke's frank phrase, 'a something we know not what'. Since this can explain nothing, it can be dropped without loss. It explains nothing because it is nothing, being neither an 'idea', *i.e.* something sensory, nor a 'notion', *i.e.* something mental.

The demand for 'matter' in either sense is due, Berkeley maintains, to our looking in the wrong direction for the explanation of the given world of sense. When we see that the corporeal *means* the perceptible, we connect it essentially with mind, and thereby instantly preclude the first sense; and at the same time we expose the nature of the connexion—that the corporeal requires not a substance to inhere in but only a subject to appear to—and thereby preclude the second sense. Further, 'matter' being denied, the realm of sense cannot be stigmatised as the distorted shadow of it. The world we seem to live in is the world we do live in, being all that it is experienced to be—given to us, independent of us, and composed of everything it appears to contain. We thus get rid, not only of subjectivism, but also of the intermediate nonsense of having to say, for example, that sound is 'really' motion, that 'real' sound cannot possibly be heard, that what is essentially audible is 'really' inaudible. 'Matter', then, does not exist at all. The corporeal certainly does; but in the last analysis as object. In this remarkably original way Berkeley retains the radical distinction of the mental and the corporeal without falling

into dualism; for, while preserving the full corporeality of the latter, he makes it ultimately dependent on the former. He alone among the prominent thinkers of the early period of modern philosophy exposed the absurdity of placing *sensa* of space and colour in the mind, an absurdity because it involves the double howler of mentalising the corporeal and corporealising the mental.

(5) That '*esse is percipi*' is said only of the sensory, the corporeal. The *esse* of mind is *percipere* and *velle*. The corporeal, existing only as object, and manifestly inert, cannot be conceived as ultimate. It is not substantial. The only substance, the only thing that is known as a unity expressing itself variously, as a fount of activity, and as capable of existing in its own right, itself apprehending and therefore not dependent on being apprehended, is mind. The concept of mental substance is both coherent and empirically grounded, so that it is free from the objections that dispose of the pretended concept of material substance. We are bound to posit a mental substance, for 'ideas' do not apprehend themselves or one another, and anyhow we know it directly, each of us in himself, 'by a sort of internal awareness' (*De Motu*, Sect. 21). Other minds each of us knows by analogy—finite minds from their bodily evidence, God by the evidence of that entire corporeal realm which can only exist in relation to a cosmic perceiver. All minds alike, when we think about them, turning them into objects, are, and have to be, thought of as subjects: they are objects accidentally, subjects essentially. As objects they are utterly different from the corporeal—not sensory but sensing, not passive but active, and not extended but spaceless. To mark this distinction Berkeley calls them, when treating them both as objects, 'ideas' and 'notions' respectively. When we bear in mind that 'notion' means any object the content of which is mental, we shall see the sheer oddity of two common