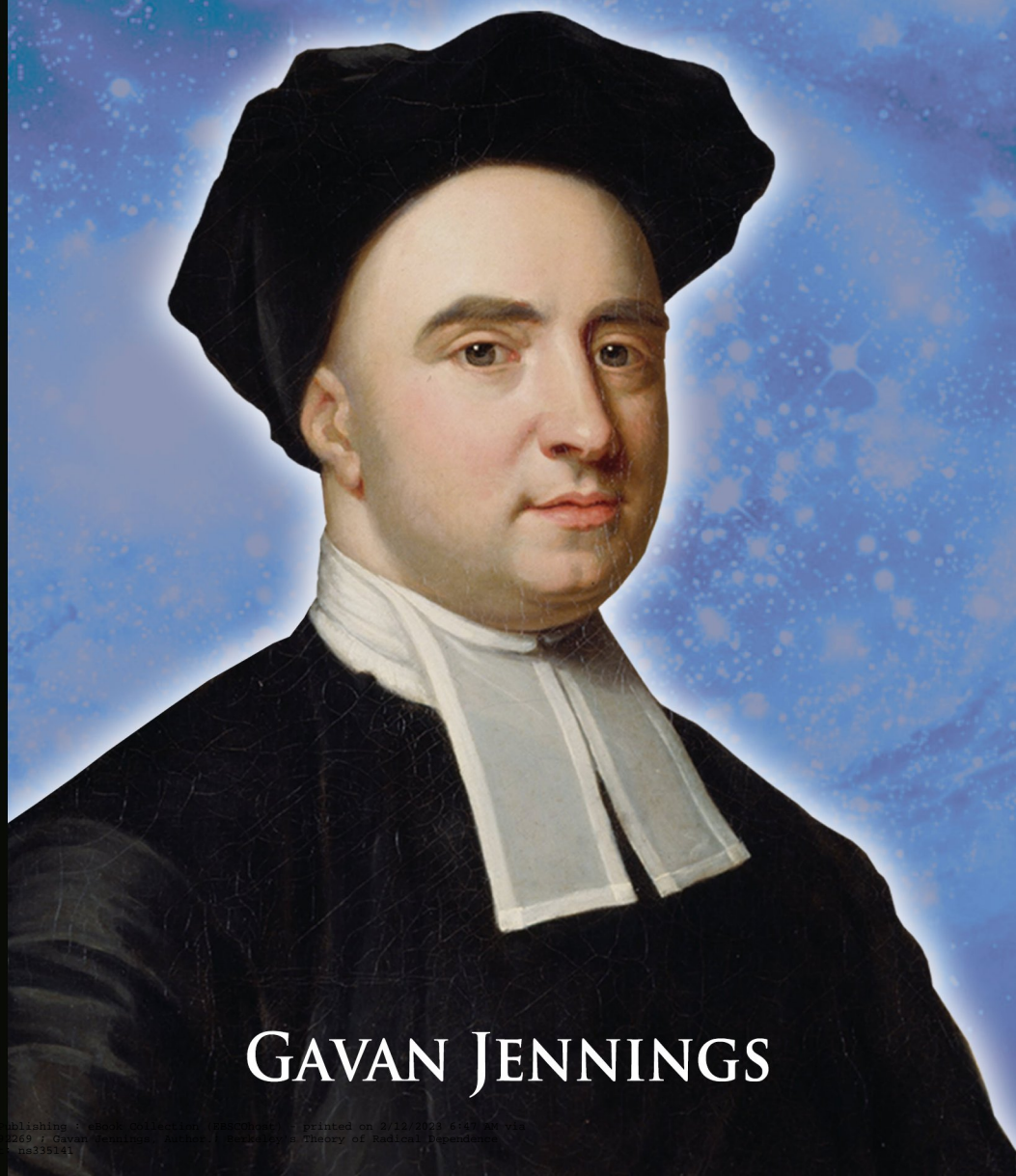


BERKELEY'S

THEORY OF RADICAL DEPENDENCE



GAVAN JENNINGS

Berkeley's Theory of Radical Dependence

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By

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INTRODUCTION

The Age of Reason: an Age of Transition

The life of George Berkeley (1685-1753) spans a period of dramatic transition in the culture of the Western civilisation, a transition which ushers in the Enlightenment and a decisive and seismic shift away from the remnants of the Medieval worldview. Berkeley was keenly aware of, and opposed to the anti-metaphysical spirit of these, the inaugural years of the Enlightenment, and saw clearly the direction in which contemporary thought was moving as we witness in his frequent expressions of dismay at the increasingly materialistic tendencies of the times and the waning of the Christian, or simply theistic, worldview. He was aware too of the decisive role of the new science as well as philosophy in the changes that were taking place. Berkeley was keenly aware that the Enlightenment spirit contained within it certain principles which, while not yet fully explicated, were antipathetic to the Christian worldview that had shaped Western thought, and was clearly motivated by a desire to shore up a theistic worldview against Europe's cultural slide towards deism and atheism.

While European thought in the first half of the eighteenth century could not be said to be overtly atheistic, Berkeley clearly observed the incompatibility of the Age of Reason with the Christian conception of the relationship between God and the world. What rationalism sought was a God who worked within the constraints of man's intelligence: a God to whom all men of differing creeds could subscribe in an age when consensus on theological matters was a rare commodity. While rational speculation about God was promoted by Berkeley, he, unlike deists such as Toland and Collins, does not dismiss the guidance of revelation in forming his philosophical conception of God. His philosophical speculation on God and his relationship with the world is deeply informed by the uniquely Christian notion of creation strictly understood as a free divine action (a necessary creation being incompatible with a transcendent God) in which the world in its totality is produced (thereby being utterly dependent on God). Berkeley also adheres to the traditional Christian conception of the provident and benign relationship of the creator to the created, and to man in particular. Repeatedly, as we shall see, Berkeley

attempts to bring these truths of revelation within the ambit of reason. He tries to show how the doctrines of creation and providence do not belong only within the realm of faith but can also be known by reason unaided by faith. This is not to say that Berkeley was a rationalist: he never attempts to reduce revelation to what is only humanly knowable and in his theological writings never tries to cast doubts on the mysteries of Christianity. On the contrary, Berkeley tends to make little of the difficulties reason encounters in examining theological questions, even going so far, as we shall see, to assert that knowledge of God's existence is more certain even than that of the world around us. While Berkeley defends, philosophically, the notions of creation and divine providence, the rationalists began by denying, explicitly or implicitly, both these doctrines. The first result of this rationalism in natural theology was the deistic denial of the utter dependence of the world on God, both for its existence and for its workings. Christian cosmology's assertion of the world's contingency was eclipsed in his era by the reappearance and growth of cosmologies asserting a self-sufficient universe. These are the cosmologies which either deify the universe (materialism) or reify God (pantheism); and both are incompatible with a Christian God. We will be examining these more closely later, in particular the cosmology of materialism which is of particular importance in the formation and evolution of Enlightenment atheism.

Berkeleian Scholarship

While Berkeleian scholarship has often adverted to the role played by the notion of radical dependence (of the entire world on the divine creative act) in all of Berkeley's thought, its critical importance tends to be overlooked. That Berkeley's philosophical writings combat the materialism of the age is generally acknowledged but rarely contextualised within the long tradition of Christian thought: theological, philosophical and even mystical, which is founded on a cosmology of a creation contingent on a transcendent Creator. As a result arguments of secondary importance, such as those concerning epistemology, are mistakenly prioritised, and even then only examined out of their proper context. At times Berkeley is studied insofar as he provides the link between Lockean empiricism and Humean skepticism. Even the renowned Berkeleian scholar A. A. Luce underestimates the centrality for Berkeley of the defence of Christian cosmology against deism. Marie B. Hungerman is one of those who does indeed recognise what underlies Berkeley's system of immaterialism:

Perhaps Berkeley's basic motive is to clear the way for our acceptance of nature's dependence upon God. The Irish bishop's final view of nature is as the language of God addressed to the human mind. What Berkeley wishes above all is to insure our attention to nature precisely as a set of theistic signs leading men to recognize God and to participate in His providential plan.¹

Indeed all of Berkeley's philosophical work centres on this desire to show that nothing in the natural world, whether it be sheer existence, order, change or any other of the multitude of phenomena found in the world, can be properly explained without recourse to the immediate activity of God. Science may explain sensible phenomena in terms of matter, gravity, or any of a number of such principles, but, for Berkeley, these must be taken as mere schematic representations of phenomena: matter, gravity, etc., are nothing in themselves.

As Stephen R. L. Clark observes in his summation of the role of religion in Berkeley's thought:

There may still be critics who imagine that God only entered his philosophy to fill the gaps between one finite observer's perceptions and the next, or to save his episcopal reputation. The truth is that the works for which he is still chiefly known were written when he was a struggling research fellow at Trinity College, Dublin, but already deeply religious.²

Clarke, correctly in my view, observes that none of Berkeley's writings can be understood without bearing in mind that his motivation is the furtherance of the cause of religion and virtue.

¹ Marie B. Hungerman, "Berkeley and Newtonian Natural Philosophy." PhD diss., Michigan, 1960, 254.

² Stephen R. L. Clark. 2005. "Berkeley on Religion." In *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler, 369-404. New York: Cambridge University Press.

CHAPTER ONE

THE NOTION OF RADICAL DEPENDENCE

Some few, whose Lamp shone brighter, have been led
From Cause to Cause to Nature's secret head;
And found that one first principle must be;
But what, or who, that universal He.

Dryden, *Religio Laici*, 11. 13-16.

Introduction

We must examine the question of the dependence of the world on God by looking firstly at the whole question of creation. This is so because both creation and dependence are really different aspects of the one divine activity of causing contingent beings to exist. What explains the existence of the world at any moment given that the world has not the intrinsic power to exist? Mascall points out that “the existence of a world that is changing and contingent necessitates the existence of a God who is by his very essence changeless and necessary, upon whose creative fiat not merely the world's beginning but its continued existence depends.”³

As a prelude to an examination of the centrality of the doctrine of “Radical Dependence” in the thought of George Berkeley we need from the outset to clarify exactly what is meant by Radical Dependence. At a later stage we shall see how this doctrine pervades Berkeley philosophical writings and must be interpreted as the motivation behind his work. For the moment Radical Dependence will be taken to mean the complete ontological dependence of the whole cosmos on the creative causality of God. It must be realised that though we experience this act as continuous, for it sustains creature through time, it is not to be thought that God renews this act at each successive moment. Were this so then the initial act of creation would not be the same act as that of conservation. God to be one

³ E. L. Mascall, *He Who Is: A Study in Traditional Theism* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1966), 99.

must be identical with all his acts and so the act of creation is identically the act of conserving. God being unchanging is outside of time and so for him the act of creation-conservation is, as it were, instantaneous.

We will begin by examining the historical development from the Greeks onwards of the notion that the world constantly depends on God for its existence. This will be followed by an examination of the great change in thinking on the notion of creation under the influence of Christianity. It is with the Christian thinkers that we first find the notion of creation *ex nihilo* and, therefore, as we shall see, the first identification of creation and conservation, and it is within this tradition that Berkeley belongs.

We will see how the Platonic and Aristotelian cosmologies conceive of the universe as not completely dependent on God's creative action; primarily because the notions of God in these systems do not allow for a creation *ex nihilo* but only for a transformation of pre-existing matter. Subsequently we shall examine the neoplatonic system which mediates the creative causality of God through a "Chain of Being". Avicenna, as we shall see, is the first philosopher who, though not a Christian, realises that true creation and conservation are really one and the same divine act.

The two predominant views of creation have been termed "horizontalism" and "verticalism".⁴ Horizontalism stresses the historicity of creation: the notion that the universe was created at a definite moment in time. Horizontalism tends towards deism in that it neglects God's present activity in the world. Thus the deistic position is that divine causality in the world ceased at a certain point in time, namely when the divine plan was written into the cosmos at the moment of creation.

In verticalism creation is not conceived of as a temporal act but rather as the continuous creative act of God. All causality is attributed directly to the divinity and secondary causality is denied. Verticalism tends towards occasionalism and mysticism. In contrast with the historical universe of the deists there is no duration of the universe in this worldview but rather a succession of re-creations at each instant. Creation is conceived of as being a necessary act of God and in this it conflicts with the freedom of God in Christian theism. We could divide the verticalists into three types: those, such as Spinoza and Hegel, for whom the world proceeds with a logical necessity from the existence of God, those, such as Plotinus, who assert that this necessity is a physical necessity and finally those, such as

⁴ This terminology is taken from Gavin Ardley, "The Eternity of the World," *Philosophical Studies*, Dublin, no. 29 (1982-83): 33-67.

Leibniz, who assert that God, being able to do so, is morally bound to create the world.⁵

Platonic and Aristotelian Cosmology

Of course the Christian conception of creation did not arrive fully formed in the Greco-Roman culture of the first centuries after Christ; it entered into a world with its own clear cosmologies—with which it entered into dialogue and debate. The predecessor cosmologies—the Platonic, Aristotelian and neoplatonic schools of thought—are of importance for us to fully understand Berkeley, and in particular his final work *Siris*.

For Plato the world, or cosmos, has indeed *come into being* “for it is visible, tangible, and corporeal, and therefore perceptible by the senses, and, as we saw, sensible things are objects of opinion and sensation and therefore change and come into being”.⁶ However this coming into being is not comparable with the Christian (and Berkeleian) notion of creation, in fact not even remotely. The Platonic “creator” *demiurgos* is not a creator who brings the cosmos into existence out of nothing; rather the *demiurgos*, representing perhaps the intelligence of God, works on an imperfect and pre-existing material chaos, fashioning phenomena according to eternal archetypes. For Plato there is no creation from nothing—*ex nihilo*, but only the informing of a pre-existing matter by the Forms. Plato seeks to explain the existence of things by referring to the source of their form and intelligibility. He does not account for the existence of the chaos which acts as the receptacle of Forms. As Copleston points out:

In the Platonic Physics, the chaotic element, that into which order is “introduced” by Reason, is not explained: doubtless Plato thought that it was inexplicable. It can neither be deduced nor has it been created out of nothing. It is simply there (a fact of experience), and that is all that we can say about it.⁷

⁵ I have taken this tripartite division from E. L. Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science: Some Questions on their Relations* (London, 1956), 91-92.

⁶ Plato, *The Timaeus* (London, 1965), 40.

⁷ For a more in depth discussion on the role of the *demiurgos* in creation see Frederick Copleston’s *History of Philosophy*, vol. 1 (London, 1954), 247-49.

Existence is to be explained in terms of an abstract property common to all existents, and in which each existent “participates”. This is because Plato saw that

the ultimate philosophical explanation for all that which is should ultimately rest, not within those elements of reality that are always being generated and therefore never really are, but with something which, because it has no generation, truly is, or exists.⁸

Though Berkeley, in his last work *Siris*, speaks of Plato as affirming the complete dependence of the world on God for its existence, this is not accurate. In affirming a substrate on which the *demiurgos* works but does not create, Plato is committed to a world depending on God for its form but not for its very existence.

Despite his reproof of Plato’s notion of participation, Aristotle fails to come to a deeper appreciation of the problem of existence. Aristotle has no theory of creation as such; instead his theory of efficient causality accounts for how the world was set in motion and given form. We can see from his account of the ontological structure of beings that for Aristotle, as for Plato, form is primary. In place of creation *ex nihilo* we have an “eduction” or “drawing out” of forms from matter. Matter is eternal. The Unmoved Mover sets in act a series of moved movers which are responsible for this eduction of forms from matter. “In the universe of Aristotle, therefore, the production of being was essentially the work of motion.”⁹ Divinity, in such a system, is responsible for the being of things only insofar as it inaugurates movement. However, once again, the question of existence has not been adequately dealt with. For Aristotle, to *be* primarily means to be a substance (*ousia*), or that which makes a thing to be what it is. Form gives being to an existent and so, relative to matter, form is act. Being then is absorbed into essence. Matter is the principle of limitation, making a form to be the form of this particular individual rather than of any other. Matter becomes a co-eternal principle with the Unmoved Mover. Which then has priority in being? Are they both to be envisaged as autonomous beings, neither being dependent on the other for its existence? Even if this were Aristotle’s position the fundamental metaphysical problem of the origin of contingent being would still remain unsolved. The existence of contingent beings—beings the essence of which is not to be *simpliciter* but rather to be in a particular way—requires that

⁸ Étienne Gilson, *God and Philosophy* (Yale, 1961), 42.

⁹ Étienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy* (New York, 1960), 186.

there would exist a being, the source of contingent beings, which is being *per se*. Now there cannot be two such beings, the essence of which is to be, for they would have to differ by one having something the other lacked, and of course a being which lacks some aspect of being could not be being *per se*. Therefore if matter is the cause of its own being then it must be by nature and, as a consequence, there could be no other such being, i.e. there could be no God. Aristotle, not grasping that contingent being must depend on a being which is being by nature, has no real understanding of a notion of creation proper: “His metaphysics of being *qua* substance cannot account for being insofar as it is, for when being is viewed from the angle of substantiality its principal act, precisely in that order, is form and not *esse*.”¹⁰ Even if it is argued that Aristotle held act to be prior to potency, ontologically though not temporally so, can it still be maintained that this provides an explanation for existence *qua* existence? Turner holds that the logical conclusion of Aristotle’s metaphysics is that of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*:

The world, he [Aristotle] taught, is eternal; for matter, motion, and time are eternal. Yet the world is caused. But how, according to Aristotle, is the world caused? Brentano believes that Aristotle taught the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, and there can be no doubt that St. Augustine and St. Thomas saw no contradiction in maintaining that a being may be eternal and yet created. The most conservative critics must grant that while Aristotle does not maintain the origin of the world by creation, he teaches the priority of act with respect to potency, thus implying that since the first potency was caused, it must have been caused *ex nihilo*. His premises, if carried to their logical conclusion, would lead to the doctrine of creation.¹¹

However it is meaningless to talk of prime matter existing from all eternity, whether existentially dependent on God or not, since for Aristotle, without form matter is nothing. It appears that prime matter is meant to occupy a position somewhere between being and non-being: pure potency to be. Is this no more than a device to allow being to be treated as a form with respect to matter, leaving matter outside the realm of being proper? Aristotle posits “prime matter” as the co-principle of existence (as *ousia*). But then what is matter; something that is nothing, a nothing that can do something? This conception of creation not only gives a dubious metaphysical status to matter, but is also insufficient to represent God:

¹⁰ Herve Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics: a Genetic Approach to Existential Act* (The Hague, 1970), 11.

¹¹ William Turner, *History of Philosophy* (Boston, 1903), 143.

Aristotle's notion of *ousia* is too much like a Platonic form to represent adequately the Transcendent Being. So long as being, in its primary instance, is conceived as that which is identically what it is, so long as essence or form is viewed absolutely as perfection, and not as limit as well, the range of metaphysics is restricted.¹²

Gilson succinctly argues case against Aristotle's universe being a created one, for "there still remains, in its beings, something which the God of Aristotle could not give them, because He Himself did not possess it [namely being]".¹³ Aristotle's universe existed from all eternity and its God, contemplating himself alone, knows nothing of it. God is the Supreme Mover of the universe insofar as all things are eternally attracted to him but he neither created the universe nor does he exercise any providence over it.

Regarding Plato and Aristotle we can say that both, in failing to provide a solution for the problem of existence, i.e. a cause of existence as such, failed to provide any framework showing the radical dependence of the world on God. Both philosophers saw "created" beings as forms and so the cause of being itself was conceived as a form, but form signifies a limitation on being and as such does not provide an explanation for its own being nor of created beings since, as Parmenides saw, being of itself should be limitless. Forms can explain the existence of other forms but they cannot explain the existence of other beings. In this way neither Plato nor Aristotle developed any notion of the dependence of the world on God. For Plato God only conserves the forms of things but not the whole reality. Aristotle's God begins the process of motion but that completed he has nothing more to do with the production or conservation of the universe; God in this conception is the final cause and in this regard causes the becoming of the universe but not its being. Neither Plato nor Aristotle had a concept of God as creator as understood in a Christian sense:

Plato and Aristotle, in different ways, situated necessity in the self-identity of pure forms: the necessary is the immutable or everlastingly self-identical Nevertheless, metaphysical reflection on the intentional thrust—the *intentio profundior*—of the systems of Plato and Aristotle suggests that unless ESSE subsist in itself (according to the intent of Platonism) or be

¹² S. Mansion, "Les positions maitresses d'Aristote," in *Aristote et saint Thomas d'Aquin*, ed. Paul Moraux (Louvain: Publications Universitaires, 1957): 66–67.

¹³ Étienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto, 1952), 71.

pure existential act (according to the intent of Aristotelianism), we shall never find existential necessity.¹⁴

Neoplatonic and Plotinian Cosmology

Philo (40BC-40AD) tried to harmonize the Old Testament with Greek philosophy. He is important in our examination of the notion of constant creation because, as a Jew, he held the world to be created by a free act of God. He tried to reconcile the Jewish portrayal of God as intimately concerned with and governing this world which He has freely made by an act of His will, with the doctrines of Middle Platonism which recognised a hierarchy of divine beings in which the world is ruled and formed by intermediary divine beings that are lower down the scale of being, whereas the Supreme Good or God is not in contact with this world. Philo opted for the compromise of intermediary powers.

In the system of Plotinus (205-270), creation is conceived of as an emanation of being from the One to the many.¹⁵ The One is above all other beings and all things below the One, including the Forms, are only imperfect replicas of the single Good. Through this notion of creation Plotinus breaks with the impoverished creator of the Greeks and their successors who, until the time of Plotinus, envisaged the creator as being at the head of a hierarchy of beings which differed in degree but not in kind from the rest of reality. Essentially the creator was some kind of primary “thing” dominating over all other things. Where Plato conceives of all the forms as contained in the archetypal Forms, Plotinus’ creator completely transcends all substances. All that can be said of the creator is that he is One, transcending even being.

Plotinus designates this completely transcendent principle as the “One” because all individual things in a multiplicity require a source or a principle from which they spring. If a thing is not one it cannot exist, but rather two or more other things exist “in its place” as it were. Multiplicity presupposes unity: for there to be a multiplicity there must be a multiplicity of individuals. The multiplicity within the universe reveals a unity at its origin. Creation takes the form of an emanation from the One which “overflows” because of its goodness. In emanation Plotinus sees

¹⁴ Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics*, 20-21.

¹⁵ Berkeley’s later work is clearly under the influence of Plotinus. A copy of Plotinus’ *Opera Philosophica* is listed in a catalogue of Berkeley’s library. See R. I. Aaron, “A Catalogue of Berkeley’s Library,” *Mind* 51 (1932): 474.

two moments: the first in which the lower emanates as uninformed potentiality and the second in which it turns back to contemplate the higher and as a result receives form. In the second part of the process the higher reality is form, in the Aristotelian sense, and the lower is matter. In this way the dualism between the Aristotelian eternal co-principles of God and uncreated matter is overcome. In creation by emanation the totality of reality is dependent for its creation on the One. Using the analogy of emanation Plotinus managed to avoid “implicating” God in this world because God loses nothing through emanation (in the same way that one does not lose anything through being reflected in a mirror) and also because emanation is seen as a necessary process, stemming from the very nature of the One. Plotinus does not say that the One is unfree with respect to emanation for the One transcends even freedom. Rist, in his discussion of the necessity of Plotinian emanation, reduces the question to why the One is what it is: “If emanation follows from the One’s nature and the One’s nature is caused by the One’s will, then emanation will be an act of free will and Plotinus will be freed from the shackles of a deterministic universe”.¹⁶

Rist’s point is that there could not be an extrinsic necessity acting on the One, but only an internal, logical necessity following on from the nature the One has, presumably freely, willed for itself. This would appear to amount to the One willing its own necessity, and with it willing the necessity of creation. Rist, however, overlooks the fact that Plotinian emanation, even interpreted in this way, is still not a free act and that Plotinus is committed to pantheism, for, even if the One is free to create its own nature (something which is evidently contradictory in itself), emanation still follows in a necessary way from the One thus constituted—the emanated world is still an outgrowth from the One. Had the One created a different nature for itself, then the world which would emanate from it (presuming that this was part of the alternative nature) would be different from the world that actually exists, but it would nevertheless still be an outgrowth from God. Similarly Plotinus is faced with the task of distancing the One from its effects, i.e. creation, while at the same time allowing that these effects still belong to the One and not to some other cause. Plotinus tries to preserve God’s transcendence by distancing God from the act of creation; emanation alone can leave God untouched by creation. If creation were free God would have to step outside his self-

¹⁶ See J. M. Rist, *Plotinus: The Road to Reality* (Cambridge, 1967), 76. See Chapter 6: Emanation and Necessity.

identity and decide at some point “in time” to create. But, as we have seen, the emanation model of creation, regardless of the interpretations given to it, cannot be separated from pantheism.

The first emanation from the One is that of Thought or Mind. Unlike the One whose knowledge is identical with itself, corresponding to the self-contemplation of Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover, *Nous* contemplates the One and hence contains the duality of knower and known. *Nous* is the divine Mind that knows all things together instantaneously, and so holds the Forms of all individuals. Though *Nous* is identified with the *Demiurgos* of Plato, unlike the latter, it is to be identified with the Forms which are the archetypes of all individual things (a notion that was later to be handed on to the Christian philosophers and theologians). The Soul, corresponding to the World-Soul of Plato’s *Timaeus*, in turn emanates from *Nous*. The World-Soul provides the link between the material and spiritual realms. The phenomenal world does not participate directly in the Forms in *Nous* but only through the mediation of the World-Soul. The World-Soul is divided into a lower and a higher soul, the former taking on the baser function of informing matter. Before the emanation of the material world individual human souls emanate from the World-Soul. These are bound together in the unity of the World-Soul and yet are immortal. Plotinus envisages the whole process of emanation as comparable with the radiation of light proceeding from its source at a central point and gradually merging with darkness furthest from the centre. In this penumbra we find the matter and form of Aristotle; the matter existing only insofar as it is in union with a form. Matter alone is the privation of light. United with some form it has the most tenuous of participations in the One. The Plotinian view of the universe is positive since the universe, as the image of the intelligible, the good, is also good. Plotinus, while holding matter to be the principle of all evil in that it is a privation, opposed the Gnostic thesis that the material universe is evil. Alone matter stands outside the emanation process and has no part of the One.

Plotinus’ universe is radically dependent on the One as its source because the universe is essentially a living whole in which each of the lower levels is the product of a contemplation of higher levels. The whole chain depends on the One, not for an initial impulse, but for continuation in existence. This is a clear example of that view of creation which we have termed “verticalism” for the universe’s radical dependence on “God” is achieved only with the loss of any real distinction between God and his creation. This universe is anything but the mechanical universe of seventeenth-century science: “The philosophy of Plotinus presents us with

a great ordered hierarchical structure of spiritual reality, a cosmos, which though it is static and eternal is no dead mechanical pattern, but living and organic.”¹⁷

We shall see later how, in *Siris*, Berkeley adopts much of Plotinus’ thought. Both men seem to share a distaste for the corporeal world and a love of the purely intelligible immaterial world. There may be another reason why the verticalism of Plotinus is so attractive to Berkeley. For Plotinus, God parcels out his own being to creatures and so, rather than creation *ex nihilo* there is a creative sharing out of himself; where Aristotle has a material substrate Plotinus has God’s own being as the substrate out of which things are made. As a result there is only a difference of degree between God and the universe; the radical dependence in this case is no more than the radical dependence of God on God. In Christian theology this is the kind of dependence that operates between the Father and the Son in the Trinity since the Son is “begotten” of the Father from all eternity. Both are equal and the relationship is in no way a creation. The emanationists such as Plotinus conceive of the world as begotten of God. As we can see the world in the neoplatonic system is a living world, one governed by the divine realism and participating in the world of forms and through them in *Nous* and in God. This world is antithetical to that of the determinists who see all things as governed by fate: the mechanistic predestination of the world’s destiny. In the Plotinian system the difference between all multiple beings and the One is one of degree for there is no essential difference between the Creator and his creation. This is unlike the orthodox Christian system in which God alone is. The Christian God is so transcendent of creation that no terms used to describe creatures can be applied to God in the same sense. The god of Plotinus is not the Christian God as he is “neither the supreme reality nor the ultimate principle of intelligibility”.¹⁸ However we must remember that while this is the logical outcome of Plotinus’s emanationism it was by no means his intention to promote a pantheistic cosmology. Plotinus’ very reason for asserting the necessity of creation was to preserve God from implication in a free decision to create and with it the notion of mutability. Plotinus always maintains, maybe with little justification, that in his system God transcends creation. Plotinus’s influence looms large as an influence on Berkeley in *Siris*; his living universe and Chain of Being, as we shall see,

¹⁷ A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London, 1957), 178.

¹⁸ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 50.

is taken largely from Plotinus as an alternative to the mechanistic universe of the deists.

The system of Proclus (410-485), like that of Plotinus, refers all multiplicity to an underlying unity in the first principle, the *to auto hen*, of which we can only say what it is not, and from which there is an emanation of the *henads*, incomprehensible gods, the *Nous* of Plotinus and so on. In his *Elements of Theology* Proclus divides reality into a series that bridges the distance between the One and the many. The many have come from the One without prejudicing the transcendence of the One. The world is guided by the divine souls and as such cannot be seen as evil. In *Siris* Berkeley will introduce the same kind of mediation between creation and the creator. In conclusion we can summarise the neoplatonic position as follows: the God of the neoplatonists is compelled to create the universe, but although the universe is a necessary emanation from God, his transcendence is protected by placing a series of intermediary links between God and creation; ultimately then, God's action in the world is mediate.

The Cosmology of Avicenna and Averroes

The controversy between Avicenna (980-1037) and Averroes (1126-1198) brings the creation debate to a new level and develops a philosophical framework suitable for the Christian conception of radical dependence. Both thinkers clearly recognise the existential contingency of created realities and as a consequence distinguish between the essence of a thing and its existence, asserting that what a thing is cannot account for the fact that it is. This opens the way for the rejection of the Platonic position that something must merely participate in a Form, or as Aristotle maintains, be a form, in order to exist. Avicenna is the first to see clearly that the formal cause of a thing cannot be its efficient cause. As a result of this insight theories of radical dependence are free to move away from purely "essentialist" explanations of radical dependence which connote a sharing of form, towards an existentialist explanation of creation which, no less than the emanationist systems, allows for radical dependence while retaining the real distinction between God and his creation.

Avicenna has a much deeper understanding of the kind of causality involved in creation. He realises that creation involves a complete causality and is radically different from less complete examples of causality such as generation. Creation alone presupposes no material subject. Creation does not require temporality for its contingency is not temporal but essential. Avicenna distinguishes between the necessary

which cannot not be, and the possible, which can either be or not be, and thirdly the impossible, which cannot be. A nature, while being something that is not a contradiction and so is not impossible, is indifferent to being. Being is accidental to natures and consequently there must be an efficient cause of the being of a thing. There cannot be an infinite series of contingent efficient causes, for the contingency of this chain still implies the need for a cause outside it: a necessary Being that cannot receive its existence from another, but whose essence is identical with its existence. This is the ultimate Being which is necessary through itself. Avicenna is prepared to accept that the attribute of creator is identical with God but asserts that God cannot create something completely unlike himself, in this case matter, and so, like Plotinus, Avicenna turns to an intermediary chain of beings as a buffer between God and base creatures.

Avicenna uses the neoplatonic model of creation as an emanation from the One, through the mediation of Intelligences. As for the neoplatonists this is not a free, but rather a necessary emanation, and so is an eternal process rather than a creation in time as found in the Biblical account of creation. This leads him to the very important insight that creation *ex nihilo* does not imply that at one time there had to be nothing, but rather that creation concerns the ontological structure of created beings.

Avicenna was forced by his theory of cognitional emanation to maintain an eternal and necessary process of creation. For every possible must emanate in existence just as it is necessarily known by the Supreme Being. Accordingly, Avicenna transposed the theologian's consideration of the creature's passing from non-being to existence from the temporal order to the existential structure of things in themselves. The priority became one of nature and not of time.

Here, then, we find in Avicenna an ontological dependence of creatures upon God's knowledge of them. It is God's knowledge of their possibility which brings their emanation into actuality. Avicenna's system, unlike that of Plotinus, allows for a greater distinction between God and his creatures: creatures here are not just the divine nature manifesting itself in a lower form but rather distinct realities composed by God by adding an act of being to a possible essence. The problem here of course is that a possible essence is nothing if it does not exist. God in Avicenna's system is truly creative in that each substance is brought from nothing into existence; the accident of existence does not belong to the nature of any essence and so must be provided by the creator. However such a conception of creation does not result in a providential God because the existence once given to the substance has no further reference to God.

Averroes on the other hand was a thoroughgoing Aristotelian and, as such, for him, to be means to be a substance. He responds to Avicenna by pointing out that existence could not be accidental in things: there are no forms subsisting without existence as would be the case if being were a mere accident. Creation is the eduction of forms from the unproduced and eternal prime matter. We will see later how this distinction between essence and existence is taken up by Aquinas in his consideration of creation.

Christian Cosmology

The opening lines of Judeo-Christian sacred scripture unambiguously establish God as the creator of the universe, and significantly a creator in time: “God, at the beginning of time, created heaven and earth” (Gen.1:1).¹⁹ Throughout the Judeo-Christian tradition the relationship between the world and God is firmly established: the world is radically dependent on God’s creative and sustaining action. The *ex nihilo* character of creation is both implicit in the creation account and elsewhere explicitly asserted when the mother of the Maccabees beseeches one of her sons to “look round at heaven and earth, and all that they contain; bethink thee that all this, and mankind too, God made out of nothing” (2 Mac.7:28). This is the first explicit mention of the *ex nihilo* character to be found in Judeo-Christian writings.

God’s self-subsistence is made quite explicit when God defines himself to Moses as “the God who is” (Exod.3:14). A world which is created by the Christian God will be both contingent and orderly. It will embody regularities and patterns, since its Maker is rational, but the particular regularities and patterns which it will embody cannot be predicted *a priori*, since he is free; they can be discovered only by examination.

Arguably Aristotle represents the culmination of Greek philosophical thinking on God, yet even here we find God portrayed as the aloof unmoved mover; a far cry from the personal God of the Old Testament, and, even more so, from the New:

For the Christian, God is the single and only Absolute Reality. He is the fulness of Being (and therefore of Good, Truth, Beauty, Thought, and Life) who is in Himself everything that relative and derived, created beings are and infinitely more.... As against this Christian idea of a single

¹⁹ All Biblical quotations are taken from the translation by Msgr Ronald Knox, London, 1954.

transcendent Divine Being the pagan Platonists, as we have seen, believed in a Divine World, hierarchically ordered, with a number of eternal beings, all divine but differing in their degree of divinity, and all deriving from a transcendent First Principle.²⁰

Christianity provided philosophers with a conception of creation which provides a rational explanation of the origin of things and posits an intellect at the root of reality (as we find so clearly in Avicenna). The paternal providentialism of the Christian conception of creation also provides a most comforting alternative to an existentially absurd universe which is a random product of chance. Even Thales, though he posits water as the *arche* of reality, saves the personal and providential dimension of reality by asserting, albeit cryptically, that “all things are full of gods”. In the same way we can understand the disappointment of Socrates on discovering that the *nous* of Anaxagoras was not the personal *arche* he had so hoped for, but rather an impersonal principle of reality. With Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover—pure intellect devoid of all desire—the Greeks lost the providential dimension of God’s relationship with man. In the Genesis account of creation on the other hand, we are clearly presented with a supreme God who is at once the principle of all of reality, while remaining a person; in fact he is the person par excellence since man, with his personal interiority, is only an “image and likeness” of divine personal interiority. From the outset the distinction between God and his creation is clear: creation is not an emanation of God’s being into lesser but still divine beings, but is a clear positing of being where before there was nothing. There is the one mind that has ordered all reality and so the one rule pervades the entire universe.

In the Old and New Testaments the providential concern of God for creation, and for man in particular, is continuously asserted. All creation is good and there is nothing that is rejected by God: “All things thou lovest, nor holdest any of thy creatures in abhorrence; hate and create thou couldst not, nor does aught abide save at thy will, whose summoning word holds them in being” (Wis.11:25-26). The cosmos is not a caprice of mercurial deities, nor the product of inexorable mechanical necessity, but is the free gift of a personal God. There is a single, benevolent plan pervading the whole of creation, from the macrocosm to the microcosm, a plan in which all, even apparent evil, conspires for the good. Cosmologies based on chance or necessity preclude all possibility of an intelligent and all-embracing scheme of things. In the Christian cosmology there is no

²⁰ Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, 210.

necessity, nor are there seeds of chaos in matter since matter too has been created directly by God and is permeated with law. The providence of God stretches as far as his causality and so absolutely every being and every event in history belongs within the one plan of creation. Even the sparrows, epitomising insignificance, cannot “fall to the ground without your heavenly Father’s will” (Matt.10:29-30). Divine providence has ordered all things to the glory of God and man, as the sole channel through which material creation can glorify God, occupies a particularly important position in this ordination. When Christianity came to be preached to the pantheistic Gentiles, it became all the more important to stress the unity and omnipotence of the Christian God, and so St Paul asserts that the existence of God can be proved from His creation:

The knowledge of God is clear to their minds; God himself has made it clear to them; from the foundations of the world men have caught sight of his invisible nature, his eternal power and his divineness, as they are known through his creatures (Rom.1:20).

Standing in the Areopagus, St Paul tries to convince the Athenian intelligentsia that God “is not far from any one of us, it is in him that we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:27-28). This phrase is repeated throughout almost all of Berkeley’s works, forming a leitmotif which impresses on the mind of the reader the solidarity of Berkeley’s theories with the Christian notion of providence.

Christian Neoplatonism

The Fathers and the Doctors of the early Church continued to affirm against the pagans that there was a God, against the Gnostics that this God was naturally knowable to all men, and against the Manichaens the goodness of God’s creation. Though the Christian thinkers of the Patristic period and the Mediaeval era adapted neoplatonism to explain the Christian doctrine of creation, they never allowed for a role for intermediary demigods in the functioning of created reality, but maintained the robust monotheism of the Judeo-Christian revelation.

Clement of Rome (c.35-100), for example, presents God as personally involved in the world with no minions being sub-contracted to create, conserve or supervise creatures. Rather creation is directly imbued with divine providence:

The heavens move at His direction and are subject to Him in tranquility. Day and night complete the course assigned by Him without hindering

each other. Sun and moon and the choir of stars revolve in harmony according to His command in the orbits assigned to them, without swerving the slightest. His earth, flowering at His bidding in due seasons, brings forth abundant food for men and beasts and all the living beings on its surface, without reluctance and without altering any of His arrangements.... The great Creator and Lord of the universe commanded all these things to be at peace and in harmony; He does good to all, and more than superabundantly to us who have found refuge in his mercies through our Lord Jesus Christ. To whom be glory and majesty forever and ever. Amen.²¹

Augustine of Hippo (354-430) likewise leaves us in no doubt regarding his conviction that the world proclaims its contingency and creatureliness:

Behold, the heaven and earth are; they proclaim that they were made, for they are changed and varied. Whereas whatsoever hath not been made, and yet hath being, hath nothing in it which there was not before; this is what it is to be changed and varied. They also proclaim that they made not themselves; therefore we are, because we have been made; we were not before we were, so that we could have made ourselves.²²

Augustine writes of divine providence pervading the very matter out of which things are made; for this matter is passed on from smaller to larger animals and regardless of what form this matter takes on, “it is still ruled by the same laws which pervade all things for the conservation of every mortal race.”²³ The ontological contingency of the world is for Augustine a proof for the existence of God, for creatures are completely devoid of the power to preserve themselves in existence,

for the power of the creator, omnipotent and supporting all, is the cause by which every creature subsists. If such power should cease to rule what has been created, all would cease to be and nature would vanish. It is not like the case of a builder of houses. When he has completed the construction, he leaves, and after he has ceased working and has gone away, his work

²¹ Clement of Rome, *The Letter to the Corinthians*, ch. 20 in *The Fathers of the Church*, eds Ludwig Schopp, Roy J. Deferrari, Bernard M. Peebles, Hermenegild Dressler, O.F.M. (Washington: The Catholic University of America, 1962), 26-27.

²² St Augustine, *The Confessions*, 4, in *A Select Library of the Nicene and the Post Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Michigan, 1974), vol. 1, 165.

²³ St Augustine, *The City of God*, 12. From Schaff, vol. 2, 409.

still stands. But the world could not stand, even for a wink of the eye, if God withdrew his ruling hand.²⁴

Though Augustine grasped that *being* can be properly predicated of God alone, when it came to describing existence in philosophical terms he fell back on the Greek identification of being with immateriality, intelligibility, immutability and unity. As a result his ontology is essential rather than existential. Augustine's conviction that the world constantly depends on God to be kept in existence is based purely on theological grounds as he can find no way of asserting a complete dependence of created substance on another, albeit divine, substance. God is still conceived in the Platonic tradition as lying at the head of a hierarchy of substances; God, for Augustine, is the highest because he is pure spirit. God is conceived of as a ruling power.

The philosophical work of John Scotus Eriugena (810-870), a fellow countryman of Berkeley, is strongly influenced by a sense of divine providence. He attempts to translate the Christian notion of providence into philosophical language. Eriugena, in a manner very reminiscent of what Berkeley will term the "Divine Visual Language", speaks of creation as a theophany: creatures are a "speaking of the ineffable". He is strongly influenced by neoplatonism, and while he remains in intention an orthodox Christian, he *de facto* espouses neoplatonic pantheism. Eriugena has two reasons for considering that creation, being a species of motion, must be co-eternal with God: firstly, were it not, making (creating) would be an accident accruing to God; secondly, he considers that a temporal creation would imply a temporal God. Though at times Eriugena expresses his fidelity to the orthodox Christian doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, the general thrust of his thought is towards a creation through emanation:

When we hear that God makes all things, we should understand nothing else but that God is in all things, i.e., is the essence of all things. For He alone truly is, and everything which is truly said to be in those things which are, is God alone.²⁵

Furthermore, Eriugena adopts the neoplatonic doctrine of participation and concludes from it that all things, creatures and the Creator, can be reduced to one. This is the totality of Nature. Eriugena holds that "*praedestinationes*"—exemplary causes of created species—exist in the

²⁴ St Augustine, *Super Gen. 4*, c. 12, n. 22 PL 34, 304.

²⁵ Eriugena, *De Divisione Naturae*, 1, 72.

Word of God.²⁶ Though these archetypes are generated when the Word is generated from the Father, they are logically antecedent to the Word. Just as Berkeley's ectypes participate in the archetypes so too, for Eriugena, creatures participate in the *praedestinationes* which in turn participate in God. Both philosophers have difficulty in maintaining the distinction between these divine archetypes and their creaturely replicas; Eriugena concludes that God is "substantially all that he contains, the substance of all visible things being created in Him".²⁷ Eriugena's pious attempts to give a neoplatonic defence of the Christian concept of providence leads him into the heterodoxy of pantheism.

In response to the philosophically untenable dualism and emanationism of the Arab philosophers, especially Avicenna (980-1037), renewed philosophical attention was given to the notion of creation in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, in particular by Albert the Great (1200-1280), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) and Bonaventure (1221-1274). The first explicit formulation of the Church's teaching on creation came in the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 where it was defined that creation was *ex nihilo, ab initio temporis* and free.²⁸

Bonaventure too clearly follows in the Christian tradition. His notion of conservation is explicated particularly in his *Commentary on the Sentences of Aristotle*. In his *Breviloquium* he speaks of the universe as comparable to a book written by God:

The universe is like a book reflecting, representing, and describing its Maker, the Trinity, at three different levels of expression: as a trace, an image, and a likeness. The aspect of trace is found in every creature; the aspect of image, in the intellectual or rational spirits; the aspect of likeness, only in those who are God-conformed. Through these successive levels, comparable to the rungs of a ladder, the human mind is designed to ascend gradually to the supreme Principle who is God.²⁹

²⁶ Here there is a striking similarity between Eriugena and Berkeley: in his work *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (chapter 3, section 5) Berkeley, clearly under the influence of Malebranche's ontologism, makes a distinction between the archetypal ideas in the mind of God and their ectypal copies: the archetypes serve to overcome the problem of how God conserves creatures that are not perceived by man.

²⁷ *De Divisione Naturae*, 3, 18. Quoted in Copleston, *History of Philosophy*, vol. 2, 125.

²⁸ See Denzinger, *Enchiridion*, 428 (355).

²⁹ Bonaventure, *Breviloquium*, 2, 12, 1, in *The Works of Bonaventure* (New Jersey, 1963), vol. 2, 104.

For Bonaventure, those who are not enlightened by the “brilliance of things created” are blind, and those who fail to discover the First Principle through all these signs” are fools.³⁰ However Bonaventure firmly asserted that it can be known by reason unaided by supernatural revelation that the world had a beginning in time. He stressed the historical view of the world: that each day had its proper place in the calendar from the first day to the day of judgement.

The theme of creation’s radical contingency is not the preserve of Christian theologians and philosophers; the mystic Julian of Norwich (1342-1416) presents a most striking image of creation’s dependence on God’s “making, loving and keeping” in her famous description of the universe as a small ball in the hand of God:

He showed me a little thing, the quantity of an hazel-nut, in the palm of my hand; and it was as round as a ball. I looked thereupon with eye of my understanding, and thought: What may this be? And it was answered generally thus: It is all that is made. I marvelled how it might last, for methought it might suddenly have fallen to nought for littleness. And I was answered in my understanding: It lasteth, and ever shall [last], for that God loveth it. And so All-things hath their being by the love of God ... in this Little Thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it.³¹

Even in the more stolid English philosophical tradition, the conserving activity of God is still affirmed. Duns Scotus (1266/65-1308) makes it clear that the relation of a creature to God as creator and conserver can be said to be the same:

For something that is both conceptually and in reality there is but one essential dependence of the same type upon something conceptually and really the same. But the existence [*existencia*] of a permanent or enduring creature is absolutely the same in creation and conservation, and the supporting term, namely, the divine volition, is absolutely identical both conceptually and in reality: and the relationship not only to the creator but also to the conserver is the same sort of essential dependence. Therefore [there is but one relation of the creature to God as creator and conserver.]³²

³⁰ *The Journey of the Mind to God*, 1, 15, in *The Works of Bonaventure*, vol. 1, 16.

³¹ Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love*, ch. 5.

³² Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures: The Quodlibetal Questions* (Princeton, 1975), 272.

CHAPTER TWO

DEISM

Lo! the poor Indian, whose untutored mind
Sees God in Clouds, or hears him in the wind;
His soul proud Science never taught to stray
Far as the solar walk, or milky way.

Pope, *An Essay on Man, Epistle 1*, 11. 99-102.

Introduction

In general terms deism can be taken as a rejection of the Christian conception of God as a God who both speaks to man through supernatural revelation and who exercises an ongoing providential involvement with his creation. It is useful however, to make a distinction between a more speculative form of deism which produces a cosmology explicitly free of a providential God, and the more practical kind centred on the claim that divine revelation is an impossibility; it is according to Johnson's *Dictionary* (1755) "the opinion of those that only acknowledge one God, without the reception of any revealed religion". This aspect of deism involves the rejection from religion of all that is beyond human reason and with it the validity of supernatural revelation. This in practice results in the substitution of natural religion for orthodox Christianity. Revelation is superfluous as a guide to morality, and, for the more extreme deists, even God is redundant in evaluating the goodness or otherwise of human behaviour. Just as it belongs to natures or Nature to subsist without God, deists hold that likewise the "natural law" exists without need to refer to God: human actions are good insofar as they are in conformity with Nature rather than with the will or plan of God. Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), for instance, stresses the rationality of the natural law, thus "freeing" it from a dependence on God, while at the same time affirming that God is the ultimate foundation of natures and therefore of natural law. Where voluntarists such as Berkeley would assert that an act is right or wrong because of an intrinsic relation to the will of God, Grotius stresses the relation of an act to the intellect of God: once natures have been created, what is good and evil for them is immutably fixed. This could be

interpreted as confining God's freedom since he must act within the constraints of the laws inherent in nature, and, though Grotius did not go this far, it could be construed that nature is a self-sufficient reality without intrinsic relation to God. Such rationalist theories are the precursors of practical deism in that they assert that the moral order would still exist even if God did not exist. Thus the famous deist Shaftesbury can argue that "whoever thinks that there is a God, and pretends formally to believe that he is just and good, must suppose that there is independently such a thing as justice and injustice, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, and true."³³

Although this branch of deism is not of direct relevance to the topic of Radical Dependence it does illustrate the deistic milieu which spurred Berkeley into his voluntaristic pietism. Much of his best known work stems from his opposition to the liberal English theologians of the eighteenth century or the "latitudinarians" as they were pejoratively known. Berkeley's voluntarism springs from a reaction to practical deism. As practical deists tend to assert the subsistence of the natural law, voluntarists tend towards the opposite extreme asserting that just as there are no natures neither is there a natural law; something is good or evil not from some intrinsic quality but rather because God arbitrarily deems it to be so. As a result voluntarists rely almost exclusively on revelation for a knowledge of the moral law. Since the moral law stems solely from the will of God, and not from his intellect, the moral law cannot be deduced from an examination of the nature of creatures but requires that God explicitly reveal his will to man. God has inscribed no plan into nature and so what he wills throughout the course of time alone can be deemed the source of morality. Man's only means of determining the will of God can be through what God directly reveals to man in an explicit act of revelation.

Berkeley's Historical Milieu

Beginning in the sixteenth century with such writers as Montaigne and Charron there was a growing tendency to turn away from the seemingly insurmountable religious controversies and to fall back on the common

³³ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *Characteristics, Treatise IV, An Enquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit*, 3, 1, 2. Edition of 1900, 264. This is parodied by Berkeley's Alciphron: "O nature! Thou art the fountain, original, and pattern of all that is good and wise." *Alciphron*, Dialogue I, *Works*, 3, 62.

ground of reason. England in the years between 1650 and 1750, marked by the decline of Puritanism and the rise of Methodism, found itself ripe for the adoption of the rationalist approach to religion. Theologians and thinkers were weary of the irrationalism of the Puritans on the one hand, with their insistence on a blind acceptance of the content of Scripture, and the “Enthusiasts” on the other hand, claiming to receive direct and constant enlightenment from God. Under the auspices of Herbert of Cherbury, Blount, Toland, Collins, Chillingworth and others, purely rational religion became established as a valid alternative to religion which claimed the need for faith. Though often such thinkers proposed only to show that the tenets of Christianity had rational justification and not that they were reducible to the naturally knowable, orthodox theologians opposed this proposition largely being motivated by the impression that it was very un-Protestant to apply reason to matters religious, or to assert the existence and validity of a religion accessible to reason unaided by revealed supernatural religion.

However the more extreme exponents of this rationalistic thinking held revealed religion and authority in matters of faith to be a shackle on the individual mind, hence the origin of the term “Free-Thinker” in the sixteenth century, a term Berkeley tends to use to denote this kind of deism (whereas he uses terms such as “materialists” and “corpuscularians” to refer to what we have called the speculative deists). Berkeley tends to avoid referring by name to the Freethinkers he opposes—perhaps to avoid giving them free advertising—but we can take Hobbes and Spinoza to be at the forefront of this band in his estimation.

Practical deism encouraged the development of speculative deism in two ways: firstly since practical deism could only arrive at a “philosophical god” and not the personal God of Christianity, the relationship between God and man came to be seen as a peaceful co-existence. With this mere toleration of the existence of God, the Christian notion of God’s providential action pervading the world is lost. In Herbert of Cherbury’s *De Veritate* (1624) for example, God is conceived of as a cosmic cause which is not accessible to man through any personal relationship. Secondly practical deism promoted the exclusion of revelation as a “negative guide” in natural theology.

In contrast to the traditional Christian conception of God as continually and providentially active in the world, speculative deism asserts that, though God exists, he is oblivious to the natural world and to man in particular: God’s involvement in the world is restricted to the work of designing and imparting motion to the universe. Once the blueprint for action had been inscribed into the cosmos, God relegated himself to the

status of a transcendent, detached observer, watching his creation work itself out in accordance with his original design, without subsequent divine intervention. Paradoxically the Christian denial of the necessity of creation and its emphasis on God's freedom in this regard, may have assisted the development of the deistic notion of the absentee divinity. For Christians, God's transcendence of his creation is revealed through his freedom with respect to creation: God was not bound, logically, physically or morally, to create the world and so is completely free with respect to it. Creation is a purely gratuitous overflow of God's goodness. The orthodox Christian position on God's relationship to his creation was clarified and defined by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215:

God ... creator of all visible and invisible things, of the spiritual and of the corporal; who by His own omnipotent power at once from the beginning of time created each creature from nothing, spiritual and corporal, namely, angelic and mundane, and finally the human, constituted as it were, alike of the spirit and the body.³⁴

This dimension of transcendence in God's creativity which Lateran IV sought to clarify (with God creating all things, without mediation and within time, hence by an act of volition not by emanation) is exaggerated by the deists. Their denial of God's conservation of the world leads them to give to matter the status of an uncaused cause. The step is a short one from denying the need for God's conservation of the world to affirming that the causality of God was never needed to bring the world into existence but only to form it. This results in a denial, although often only implicit, of creation *ex nihilo*; instead it is asserted that matter is uncreated.

In order fully to understand the relevance of asserting the uncreated status of matter we must examine the nature of efficient causality. In all instances of efficient causality the effect is similar to the cause or, put another way, the efficient cause acts according to its nature: a hot object will produce heat but not coldness.

In none of the cases of efficient causality accessible to human experience is there ever a creation of a being from nothing: the cause always works on a pre-existing matter and causality is always at the level of altering the form of something already existing. Hence the sculptor works on marble, the carpenter with wood. What then is the efficient cause of the whole being? It is not in the nature of any changeable being (a being with limitation) to produce a being from nothing; being *per se* cannot be

³⁴ H. Denzinger, *Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1957, #428.

the proper effect of changeable being because no changeable and finite being is being by its very nature. A being that is subject to change acquires new qualities or perfections through change; to acquire them it must first lack them and if it lacks them it is missing elements of being. Now for a thing to be by its very nature it must not have any such limitations on its being. It must be concluded that the efficient cause of the very being of a finite thing is a being which by its very nature is, that is, is God in the sense of *Ipsum Esse Subsistens*. God then, being the efficient cause of each being, is most intimately present to them and all things are completely dependent on God as the efficient cause of their being.

When the scientist examines causation in the natural world with a view to discovering the efficient causes of phenomena he can only work on the phenomenal level of changing forms but cannot examine the cause of the complete being. However the tendency of the new scientific outlook tended to identify the efficient cause of matter and its activities with matter itself, thus raising matter to the level of self-subsisting being. This puts God's creative causality on the same level as all other efficient causality; it can be no more than a fashioning of a previously existing substrate.

The New Science

Deism springs largely from the misapplication of the great scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century to philosophical questions. Paradoxically the Christian doctrine of creation which the deists implicitly attack and which Berkeley defends, is largely responsible for the development of modern science.

The growth of modern science only became possible when a sufficient distinction had been made between science and philosophy, leaving each free within the area of its own competence. This done, the natural sciences were left with the task of examining the proximate causes of phenomena: the "how" of things, rather than the ultimate "why" of the universe. In other words science had to examine nature to discover the physical laws governing its activities while ignoring questions of cosmic purpose which belong more properly within ambit of metaphysics and theology. The Greeks had no science worth speaking of because the Greek mind tended to be more philosophical than scientific. They attempted to explain natural phenomena in terms of purpose rather than describing the way in which it occurs; to ask a Greek what causes the tides is to ask him why they occur. They failed to make a distinction between final and efficient causality because they belittled the ability of creatures to exercise true causality. They tended to replace efficient with final causality and so only a god with

some purpose in mind could cause the tides to occur. Where Thales posited water as the material cause of all things and as underlying all change, he also posited that “things are full of gods” in order to account for the fact that change must stem from a will and a purpose. The seventeenth-century scientists had the contrary propensity: once the material or efficient cause of things had been discovered the question was deemed to be answered; “how” was considered a complete explanation and “why” was made redundant. Thus the newly constituted Royal Society established that philosophical explanations had no place in their society, and decided to avoid “the explication of any phenomena where recourse must be had to original causes as not being explicable by heat, cold, weight, figure, and the like, as effects produced thereby”.³⁵

The scientific discoveries of the seventeenth century revealed a complex order pervading all reality: from the macrocosmic level of the order of planetary movements to the microscopic level of the complexity of microbes. The discovery of the overwhelming coherence of the universe and the reality of secondary causality furthered the perennial tendency of the scientific mind to conceive of God in terms of a designer: the divine architect who has laid down the rules according to which the universe would run. As a direct result of the tremendous blossoming of the sciences in this era the main theological problem of the seventeenth century became the definition of God’s power. At a superficial level the discovery that the moon rather than God is directly responsible for tidal action leads to a distancing of God from the natural world. But this leads to deistic conclusions only if the finality or purposefulness in the activities of creatures is rejected, as if the law governing how they act were an explanation of why they act. Of course, as we have already seen, it is not within the terms of reference of science to examine purpose—its correct operation depends on suspending questions of purpose. One of the perennial dangers in any area of specialisation is to take the part for the whole, a snare into which the materialists blithely walked when they claimed that natural things do not act for an end or a purpose. Their activity, the materialists claimed, is completely intelligible in terms of its necessary laws: if a plant always grows from a seed then it does so necessarily and this necessity is a complete explanation of the activity.

Basil Willey makes the claim that the scientific movement produced a climate of opinion

³⁵ Quoted in Ernest C. Mossner, *Bishop Butler and the Age of Reason* (New York, 1971), 30.

in which supernatural and occult explanations of natural phenomena ceased to satisfy, and the universe came more and more to be regarded as the Great Machine, working by rigidly determined laws of material causation. The supernatural, in both its divine and its diabolical forms, was banished from Nature.³⁶

By this he implies that there is a dichotomy between philosophical or occult explanation of reality and the mechanistic model. “Occult” is a term of derision used (by Berkeley among others) to describe the supposed power of substantial forms. Willey, like Berkeley, tends to identify immaterial or formal reality (in the Aristotelian sense) with supernatural “intervention” and with an absence of rigid causality. For Aristotle, however, formal principles are by no means unnatural, nor are they responsible for random causation, but are by definition the determining feature in material bodies. Contrary to the deistic assertions, the discovery of a natural (rather than supernatural) cause of a phenomenon, for example that tides result from the gravitational attraction of the moon rather than from the miraculous intervention of God, does not absolutely preclude God’s involvement in the process: a string of successive causes at the natural level does not amount to the denial of a final cause or purpose as the end of this causality. Nor does it eliminate the possibility of an underlying efficient cause of the very being of things. This is not to say that prior to the seventeenth century there was no conception of determinism at the level of material causality. Causation has since Aristotle been seen as “determined” and this is exactly what the principle of causality means by stating that every effect has a cause. Were this causation not “rigid” then we would be left with the much more problematic conception of miraculous causality since every act of causation would be due to an immediate intervention of God.³⁷

³⁶ Basil Willey, *The Eighteenth Century Background: Studies on the Idea of Nature in the Thought of the Period* (London, 1940), 3-4.

³⁷ Gilson points out that the failure to distinguish between the “necessity” of causal laws and the ability to predict or “determine” future states (“previsibility” as Gilson himself terms it) is the cause of great confusion in contemporary discussions concerning the nature of physical laws. This is particularly true of discussions on Heisenberg’s Uncertainty Principle. This principle does not state that causation is uncertain in the sense of indeterminate, but rather that the corpuscular model of matter is contravened by the behaviour of matter at the sub-atomic level. For further discussions of this point see Étienne Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 321, footnote 1; Andrew van Melsen, *The Philosophy of*

The cosmos

Because of the widespread belief in one transcendent God who had freely and intelligently created the world and kept it in existence, Mediaeval man was not prone to believe in the capriciousness of the world, rather the contrary must be the case since the empirical sciences could not have emerged from this period, as they did, unless the belief in an intelligible world was the norm:

Nature . . . stood for God, not of course in a naturalistic sense, but in the sense made possible by the belief that nature was the work and a faithful symbol of a most reasonable Supreme Being. Therefore nature, in analogy to her Maker, could only be steady and permeated by the same law and reason everywhere. From permanence and universality of the world order followed, for instance, that the same laws of motion were postulated for the earth and the celestial bodies. It also followed that regularly occurring phenomena, such as tides, baffling as they might appear, should not be assigned a miraculous cause. The most important consequence of the permanence and universality of the world order anchored in the Christian notion of the Creator was the ability of the human mind to investigate that order. Such was an inevitable consequence if both nature and the human mind were products of one and the same Creator.³⁸

Such a conception of the cosmos guarantees the intelligibility of the natural world: the scientist had only to understand one universal plan rather than a profusion of designs of disparate gods. The same law as governs the fall of an apple governs the orbit of the moon. The doctrine of creation acts as guarantor of the inference of the universal from the particular. This guarantee allowed Newton to confidently draw up the third of his famous “Rules of Reasoning in Philosophy”:

RULE 3. The qualities of bodies, which admit neither intensification nor remission of degrees, and which are found to belong to all bodies within the reach of our experiments, are to be esteemed the universal qualities of all bodies whatsoever.³⁹

Nature, ch. 7, 216-53 and Stanley L. Jaki, *Science and Creation: From Eternal Cycles to an Oscillating Universe* (Edinburgh and London, 1974) also *The Road to Science and the Ways to God* (The Gifford Lectures 1974-75 and 1975-76) (Edinburgh and London, 1978).

³⁸ Jaki, *Science and Creation*, 278.

³⁹ William Wallace, *Causality and Scientific Explanation* (Michigan, 1972), vol. 1, 206.

Wiley's assertion that Mediaeval man relied on "supernatural and occult explanations of natural phenomena" is more likely to be true of primitive man, with his profusion of anthropomorphic gods lurking behind every natural phenomena, than it is of the Mediaevals.

It was not the valid discoveries of the scientific revolution which produced deism but rather the refusal of the philosophers of the age to admit the validity of the metaphysical method, to respect the legitimacy of the philosophic method. This they did largely because the method of metaphysics does not give the same degree of certainty as that of the physical sciences and mathematics. The New Philosophy would have to work within the strictures of mathematical reasoning while excluding the more intellectually intuitive aspects of philosophy. One of Berkeley's chief concerns, particularly in his later work, is to redress the imbalance caused by the rationalistic conception of philosophical thinking; he tries to reinstate the place of analogical thought and of a more contemplative approach to reality. In particular Berkeley attempts to clarify the respective domains of philosophy and science.

The Christian doctrine of creation implies the contingency of the world: the world, having been freely created, does not exist of necessity nor need it necessarily be the way it actually is. The doctrine of the free creation of the world provided the conditions for the growth of the experimental sciences, for were the world and all its laws necessary, then science would proceed in an a priori and deductive manner rather than in its a posteriori and inductive manner. The appreciation of this contingency has been central to the development of the experimental sciences; by the seventeenth century this Christian view of the universe was well established and provided science with a healthy framework on which to build:

"So far are physical causes from withdrawing men from God and Providence, that contrariwise, those philosophers who have been occupied in searching them out can find no issue but by resorting to God and Providence at the last." In stating this Bacon pregnantly articulated a principal aspect of seventeenth-century scientific work: discoveries of scientific laws represented as many new evidences of the Creator, the Author of every law of nature. From Bacon through Boyle to Newton such was an outlook most firmly adhered to by all scientists of some stature. This unanimity indicated the robustness of that intellectual atmosphere which after several centuries of maturing had finally come into its own. Its self-confidence can be best gauged by the fact that the ancient, cyclic view of an organo-pantheistic universe ceased to loom large on the intellectual

horizon. Its fall into discredit seemed by the mid-seventeenth century to be almost complete.⁴⁰

Newtonian physics

The greatest scientist of the age of New Science was undoubtedly Newton. His investigations presented a model to subsequent scientists and the Newtonian universe became that which philosophers had to justify. The deism of the eighteenth century springs from an attempt to reconcile Newtonian physics with the belief in a transcendent God; the Newtonian laws were almost regarded as the constraints within which God had to work when creating the world just as a craftsman is constrained by the materials with which he works:

God created the primeval matter, with its positions and its velocities, he decreed that it should move in accordance with Newton's laws of motion and gravitation, and the subsequent course of the universe was settled once and for all.⁴¹

Berkeley was a great admirer of Newton but considered certain Newtonian concepts to be very prejudicial to Christian theism and responds accordingly. "It may justly be said that Berkeley's *Principles* is as much a critical commentary on Newton's *Principia* as on Locke's *Essay* or Malebranche's *Recherche*."⁴²

Newton held God to be manifested through nature, and to be omnipresent in nature:

He endures forever, and is everywhere present; and by existing always and everywhere, he constitutes duration and space. Since every particle of space is always, and every indivisible moment of duration is everywhere, certainly the Maker and Lord of all things cannot be never and nowhere.⁴³

⁴⁰ Jaki, *Science and Creation*, 284.

⁴¹ Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science*, 137.

⁴² Jessop, *Works*, 12-13. Berkeley was also deeply involved in the debate over Newton's "fluxions" ie. his differential calculus which was used in bringing continuous quantities; motion and curves, into the realm of mathematical scrutiny. Berkeley's objection to fluxions is on epistemological rather than cosmological grounds; if they are conceded they must lead to scepticism thinks Berkeley. As this debate is solely epistemological we are not concerned with it here.

⁴³ Isaac Newton, General Scholium, *Mathematical Principles* (University of California Press, 1960), 544.

However Newton's conception of God's omnipresence is unusual for he identifies God with space and time. He is also very far from the Christian notion of creation and were it not for his faith he would have no grounds for asserting anything different from the Greeks as regards the creation of the world. Newton describes creation in terms of the production of material atoms. God is envisaged as forming

matter in solid, massy, hard, impenetrable, moveable particles: of such sizes and figures, and with such other properties, and in such proportion to space, as most conduced to the end for which He formed them: and that these primitive particles being solids are incomparably harder than any porous bodies compounded of them; even so very hard as never to wear or break in pieces: no ordinary power being able to divide what God himself made One.⁴⁴

Notably Newton conceives of the "conservation" of creation in completely physical terms: the continuance of matter in existence is due to nothing less than the very hardness of these material particles! Newton shows little appreciation of the intrinsic contingency of created being. We have already seen that the crucial philosophical step in this shift from theism, through deism, to atheism is that matter comes to be seen as the primary element in reality; being comes to created things through the matter from which they are composed. The classical view of the relationship between matter and form was that form is ontologically prior, but the New Philosophy gives matter priority over form. Rather than form, matter is considered to be responsible for the organization of a body. Newton really has no philosophical grounds for asserting that matter was created by God; if matter is "hard enough" to continue in existence without the conserving activity of God it cannot be said to require the act of creation to bring it into being. The action of being is seen as something matter is capable of "engaging in" on its own. The universe depends on God to restore its flagging energy and to rectify any discrepancies that may have crept into the cosmic order. It is proper to matter to exist of itself without the conserving, creative act of God. This view of matter stems from the simple fact that we see matter underlying all change, in particular the most radical change: substantial change. We never see the creation or destruction of matter, an observation that is embodied in the principle of

⁴⁴ *Optics*, bk. 3. (*Isaaci Newtoni Opera Quae Exstant Omnia*, Comm. and illus. Horsley, five vols., 1779-85, vol. 4, 260), quoted in Leslie Paul, *The English Philosophers* (London, 1952), 88.

the conservation of matter. Like the atoms of Democritus, the minute corpuscles composing matter are conceived as being the ultimate constituents of reality. All natural bodies are explicable in terms of the particular patterns of the combination of these elementary bodies precluding reference to the “form” of things. For Newton all bodies are endowed with the properties of extension, hardness, impenetrability, mobility, and inertia but there is none of the purposeful dynamism suggested by “form”.⁴⁵

Newton argued to the existence of God from the need to have a divine mechanic to overlook his mechanical creation and the put right the errors which creep into the system over time; but, as Berkeley was later to point out, the foundations for such a proof are very shallow indeed: these apparent irregularities in nature may yet be found by science really to be part of a regularity more complex than had been previously thought.

There are apparent difficulties in reconciling Newton’s laws of motion with the analysis of motion necessary for the proof of God’s existence. In the first place the first law of motion seems to suggest that the inertia of a body provides a complete explanation of its motion. The second would seem to affirm that mutually attracting bodies are the sufficient explanation of gravitational motion while the third law of motion would seem to exclude the very possibility of an unmoved incorporeal Mover as being the first cause of motion.

Newton himself admitted that there must be a cause of the power of gravity and that he was unable to find it:

Hitherto we have explained the phenomena of the heavens and of our sea by the power of gravity, but have not yet assigned the cause of this power. This is certain, that it must proceed from a cause.... But hitherto I have not been able to discover the cause of those properties of gravity from phenomena, and I frame no hypotheses.⁴⁶

Newtonian mechanism is not to be identified with determinism in the sense of the belief in the rigidity of the principle of causality. These material particles then are seen as the ultimate reality in the Newtonian system and the non-corpuscular realities (the secondary qualities), not being fully quantifiable, are classed as mere chimera because ultimately the physical sciences must reduce everything to quantity. As a result

⁴⁵ For a rigorous examination and qualification of the view that Newton is to be considered a mechanist see Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, ch. 6.

⁴⁶ Newton, *Mathematical Principles*, 546-47.

the world that people had thought themselves living in—a world rich with colour and sound, redolent with fragrance, filled with gladness, love and beauty, speaking everywhere of purposive harmony and creative ideals—was crowded now into minute corners in the brains of scattered organic beings. The really important world was a world hard, cold, colourless, silent and dead: a world of quantity, a world of mathematically computable motions in mechanical regularity.⁴⁷

Newton considered space to be the *sensorium Dei*: a huge sensory faculty which allows God to observe his creation. This doctrine was later to evoke sharp criticism from Berkeley.

The New Philosophy

Deism, though a philosophical position, is intimately connected to science, arising from it as an attempt to provide a philosophical justification for the world of seventeenth century science. The scientific revolution marks the end of the search for metaphysical explanations of reality. No longer would it suffice to give purely intellectual explanations of phenomena: explaining substance in terms of the principles of matter and form, change in terms of act and potency and so on. Science reduced reality to quantity and this reduction was transmitted to philosophy by Descartes. All questions about the natural world were reduced to questions about quantitative change; quantity became the substance of any natural being. Whereas before science was seen as a study divided into two parts: one dealing with natural things in general and a second part in which specific things were examined in greater detail, the new science “placed the accent on intensive specialised investigation, minimised the search for causes, and in its place substituted a methodology based largely on mathematical correlations”.⁴⁸

The confusion of the term “metaphysical” with the term “supernatural” or even “religious” is symptomatic of the eclipse by science of metaphysics in the seventeenth century; increasingly all verification was taken to be empirical verification. It is possible that this tendency has its roots in the Cartesian dichotomy between spirit and matter, a dichotomy which relegates speculative, non-empirical certainty to an “other-worldly” or “metaphysical” domain. Some of the blame for this distrust of

⁴⁷ E. A. Burt, *Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Physical Science* (London, 1932), 236, quoted in Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science*, 8.

⁴⁸ Wallace, *From a Realist Point of View*, 330.

metaphysics has to be apportioned to its distortion by decadent Scholasticism, the kind of learning which seventeenth century philosophers such as Hobbes, Descartes, Berkeley, Malebranche and Leibniz encountered in their early years and rejected.

Where the Greeks had subsumed the natural sciences into philosophy and stifled the growth of the empirical investigation of reality, this new scientific era was marked by the reversal of roles for science and philosophy; the empirical method became dominant and replaced the traditional philosophical method:

Prepared by the research of the great scholastic scientists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, announced and so to speak prophesied by Leonardo da Vinci and by certain Renaissance thinkers, a new mechanics, astronomy and physics triumphed – at the beginning of the seventeenth century – over the explanations of the detailed phenomena taught on the same questions in the name, alas, of the philosophy of Aristotle. A new kind of epistemology, a conceptual instrument of new type was then established in the thought of man. It consisted above all of giving a mathematical reading of sensible things.⁴⁹

What had been known to the Mediaevals as “substances” were now reduced, for the purposes of science, to the accident of quantity. The other more elusive accidents were ignored and essence, being a non-quantitative entity, was excluded from scientific calculations. What Popper calls the “essentialist explanation” of phenomena which appealed to a hidden nature as the source of a things actions, was now taken to be an invalid method in the physical sciences.⁵⁰ Science had to be descriptive of the “observed regularity” of phenomena. As a methodological device this omission of essence was perfectly justifiable. However, in time, when science had arrogated to itself the right to judge on matters philosophical, the “essences” were not only disregarded, but now they were deemed non-existent and the accident of quantity alone came to be judged as solely responsible for the activities of a body. But since quantity of itself is not a principle of action, as nature is, the only possible causal power of such a body is instrumental and locomotive: the ability to pass on movement in space. This is the mechanical model of causation. This shift away from the

⁴⁹ Jacques Maritain, *Science and Wisdom* (London, 1954), 41.

⁵⁰ See Karl Popper, “A Note on Berkeley as Precursor of Mach and Einstein” in C. B. Martin and D. M. Armstrong, eds, *Locke and Berkeley: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London, 1969), 437-49.

proper and common sensibilities to the primary and secondary qualities is symptomatic of the change of outlook, where primary reality is taken to be matter and secondary qualities are seen as subjective constructs of the mind. Berkeley pointed out that it would be far more consequent to treat all reality, primary and secondary, as equally mind dependent.

Mechanism consists in the denial of both the activity and passivity of bodies. Since intrinsic change is impossible, there being no substances, all change must be change of dimension or of place. Since the only change a creature can undergo or cause in another is that of local motion, all the activities and interactions of things are purely mechanical: much the same as cogs moving in a machine. Once substance is reduced to matter, then what were once considered to be substantial forms are reduced to mere patterns formed by matter. When reality is conceived in this way the activity of the world is reduced to the complex interplay of the particles of matter moving according to the laws of motion. God is not involved in the process except perhaps to create matter, establish laws and to impart the motion. Robert Boyle compares such a world to

a rare clock, such as may be that at Strasbourg, where all things are so skilfully contrived, that the engine being once set a-moving, all things proceed according to the artificer's first design, and the motions of the little statue, that at such hours perform these or those things, do not require, like those of puppets the peculiar interposing of the artificer or any intelligent agent employed by him, but perform their functions upon particular occasion, by virtue of the general and primitive contrivance of the whole engine.⁵¹

Perhaps as a result of the esteemed position that “contrivance” held for the thinkers of the Age of Reason, it was widely held that the mechanical model of creation evidenced the greatness of God; the highest compliment of the age was to be called the greatest, most rational artificer. In this vein Berkeley's American colleague Johnson wrote to him asserting that

all the phenomena of nature, must ultimately be referred to the will of the Infinite Spirit, is what must be allowed; but to suppose his immediate energy in the production of every effect, does not seem to impress so lively and great a sense of his power and wisdom upon our minds, as to suppose a

⁵¹ Robert Boyle, “A “Free Inquiry into the Vulgarly Received Notion of Nature”, in M. B. Hall, ed., *Robert Boyle on Natural Philosophy* (Indiana, 1965), 150-53, quoted in P. A. Byrne, “Berkeley, Scientific Realism And Creation”, *Religious Studies* 20 (Spring 1984), 454.

subordination of causes and effects among the archetypes of our ideas, as he that should make a watch or clock of ever so beautiful an appearance and that should measure the time ever so exactly yet if he should be obliged to stand by it and influence and direct all its motions, he would seem but very deficient in both his ability and skill in comparison with him who should be able to make one that would regularly keep on its motion and measure the time for a considerable while without the intervention of any immediate force of its author or any one else impressed upon it.⁵²

Berkeley, in his reply to this letter, points out the shortcomings of the clockmaker God:

It seems to me that the power and wisdom of God are as worthily set forth by supposing Him to act immediately as an omnipresent infinitely active Spirit, as by supposing Him to act by the mediation of subordinate causes, in preserving and governing the natural world. A clock may indeed go independent of its maker or artificer, inasmuch as the gravitation of its pendulum proceeds from another cause, and that the artificer is not the adequate cause of the clock; so that the analogy would not be just to suppose a clock is in respect of its artist what the world is in respect of its Creator.⁵³

Atheism is a natural consequence of deistic thinking; the only further step required is the denial of the initial involvement of God in the whole process of creation and to attribute the existence and activities of creatures to a power proper to matter itself. This attribution to matter of a primordial power “conceives nature in terms of the most rigid necessity, entirely excluding any notion of finality”.⁵⁴ The whole development, order and complexity of the material world is attributed to the nature of matter itself rather than the will and intelligence of God. For the mechanists matter became the god which, like those of Thales, filled all things and accounted for their change.

Cartesian mechanism

It is Descartes who inaugurates the new philosophical tradition in which God is conceived of as the orderer rather than the end of the universe. God is the clock-maker but just as a clock-maker is only the

⁵² Letter from Johnson to Berkeley, #3, September 10, 1729, *Works*, 3, 272-73.

⁵³ Letter from Berkeley to Johnson, #5, November 25, 1729, *Works*, 3, 280-81.

⁵⁴ Fabro, *God in Exile*, 363.

efficient cause of the clock, so too God is only the efficient and not the final cause of the universe. In adopting this position Descartes clearly parts from the traditional Christian cosmology and returns to the shallower Greek conception of God as designer or demiurgos. Descartes takes the creative and conserving God of centuries of philosophy and makes him to be the hinge of the new mechanistic worldview. God established definite patterns in matter which once created have no further reference to their creator. The activity of creatures is not a movement towards a final goal but the mechanical unravelling of these corpuscular blueprints.

Descartes “abhorred” substantial forms and real qualities, and therefore sought to explain phenomena mechanically: he took the essence of material beings to be extension and consequently conceived of change solely in terms of local motion. The role of matter is central to his philosophical schema:

Descartes did indeed, in his physics, confer on matter a self-creating power and he held mechanical motion to be its vital act. Within the bound of his physics, matter is the only substance, the only foundation of being and of knowing.⁵⁵

The human mind is envisaged by Descartes to have such an affinity with matter as to be able to pierce straight through the secondary qualities of smell, colour, etc. to the essence of a body which is matter; accidents exist only to be stripped away.⁵⁶ Once excoriated of these superfluous accidents the “real”, mathematically intelligible world of matter reveals itself as a kind of mechanists’ realm of the purely Intelligible. This rigid mechanism and the implicit negation of the search for the supra-sensible in Cartesian physics marks the end of metaphysics. However, almost

⁵⁵ Fabro, *God in Exile*, 215.

⁵⁶ See Descartes’ treatment of the accidents of wax in the Second Meditation; *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, 109. Interestingly Descartes anticipates the immaterialism of Berkeley in his *Meditations* when he writes: “Nevertheless, I have for a long time had in my mind the belief that there is a God who is all-powerful and by whom I was created and made as I am. And who can give me the assurance that this God has not arranged that there should be no earth, no heaven, no extended body, no figure, no magnitude, or place, and that nevertheless I should have the perception of all these things, and the persuasion that they do not exist other than as I see them”. First Meditation, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, (London, 1987), 98. Of course, Descartes rejects this notion on the grounds that God, being supremely good, does not deceive.

paradoxically, Descartes still sees himself as following the mainstream of Christian thought on conservation of the world by God:

And although I were to suppose that I have always been as I am now, I could not, on that account, escape the force of this reasoning, and fail to be aware that God is necessarily the author of my existence. For the whole time of my life may be divided into an infinity of parts, each of which depends in no way on the others; and thus, it does not follow that because I existed a little earlier, I must exist now, unless at this moment some cause produces and creates me anew, so to speak, that is to say, conserves me. In truth, it is quite clear and evident to all those who will attentively consider the nature of time, that a substance, in order to be conserved in each moment of its duration, needs the same power and action that would be necessary to produce and create it afresh, if it did not yet exist. So that the natural light shows us clearly that conservation and creation differ only in regard to our mode of thinking, and not at all in fact.⁵⁷

This passage is little more than a sop to traditional Christian cosmology for Descartes' conception of conservation is not anything like that of the established Christian tradition. Existence for Descartes is a state of *being there* and is not the qualitative act of being. Since matter is unable of itself to inaugurate motion, God alone is able to cause motion. The definition of substance as *res quae nulla alia re indigeat ad existendum* does not leave room for the conservation of things by God.

It was inevitable that this "New Philosophy", in adopting a reductive and mathematical method, would deny a priori the very possibility of meta-empirical principles acting within creatures. It is this which causes Descartes to "mistake the quantitative aspects he is considering and the mathematical entities he is manipulating for actually physical causes and principles".⁵⁸ From the outset the speculative potential of philosophy was established according to the scientific and mathematical mode. Mechanism was so successful at expressing and predicting physical phenomena that its status was inflated and, even though its methods were not those of theology and metaphysics, all realms of reality were deemed to fall under the eye of the mathematical and scientific methods. As a direct result the worldview of the Age of Reason differs strikingly from that of the Middle Ages. Broadly speaking Christian neoplatonism dominated the Mediaeval worldview; the forms of created things were held to participate in God's

⁵⁷ Descartes, Third Meditation, *Discourse on Method and the Meditations*, 127-28.

⁵⁸ Jacques Maritain, *The Dream of Descartes* (New York, 1944), 40, quoted in Fabro, *God in Exile*, 362.

creative knowledge of them. In the post-Cartesian period, where creatures other than man were held to be no more than matter, the created, material world was viewed as the antithesis of divine, spiritual knowledge and as a result a cleavage between the creator and his creation was effected.

Atheism's Debt to Deism

Deism arose not from the findings of the new science, but rather from the presupposition that the debut of science must mean the abdication of metaphysics and theology. But as Jaki points out:

It is not always realized that physics, classical and modern, is, like all sciences, the product of a most purposeful enterprise, and therefore its methodical disregard of purpose can in no way be taken for a preemptory argument against it.⁵⁹

Since the dependence of the natural world on the creative causality of God can only be concluded from a metaphysical investigation of reality, the presumption that metaphysics is invalid leads, as Berkeley noted it had done by the early eighteenth century, to the conclusion that the world must be responsible for its own existence. Samuel Clarke, in his famous debate with Leibniz, objected to Leibniz's comparison of the universe to a clock with God as its clock-maker because he sees clearly the conclusions that must necessarily be drawn from such a position:

The reason why, among men, an artificer is justly esteemed so much the more skilful, as the machine of his composing will continue longer to move regularly without any farther interposition of the workman; is because the skill of all human artificers consists only in composing, adjusting, or putting together certain movements, the principles of whose motion are altogether independent upon the artificer: such as are weights and springs, and the like; whose forces are not made, but only adjusted, by the workman. But with regard to God, the case is quite different; because he not only composes or puts things together, but is himself the author and continual preserver of their original forces or moving powers: and consequently 'tis not a diminution, but the true glory of his workmanship, that nothing is done without his continual government and inspection. The notion of the world's being a great machine, going on without the interposition of God, as a clock continues to go without the assistance of a clock-face; is the notion of materialism and fate, and tends, (under pretence

⁵⁹ Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God*, 20.

of making God a supra-mundane intelligence,) to exclude providence and God's government in reality out of the world. And by the same reason that a philosopher can represent all things going on from the beginning of the creation, without any government or interposition of providence; a sceptic will easily argue still farther backwards, and suppose that things have from eternity gone on (as they now do) without any true creation or original author at all, but only what such arguers call all-wise and eternal nature. If a king had a kingdom, wherein all things would continually go on without his government or interposition, or without his attending to and ordering what is done therein; it would be to him, merely a nominal kingdom; nor would he in reality deserve at all the title of king or governor. And as those men, who pretend that in an earthly government things may go on perfectly well without the king himself ordering or disposing of any thing, may reasonably be suspected that they would like very well to set the king aside: so whosoever contends, that the course of the world can go on without the continual direction of God, the Supreme Governor; his doctrine does in effect tend to exclude God out of the world.⁶⁰

For Hobbes the laws of mechanics became the first principles of philosophy, but unlike Descartes, Hobbes applied the laws of mechanics to all areas of reality making the term substance to mean a bodily being and so effectively denying the spirituality of man and the reality of God. All the accidents of a body are reduced to subjective responses produced in the perceiver, and causation is always a physical process involving local motion, consequently the possibility of creative causation and immaterial activity are denied. Being is limited to completely material: "I mean by the universe the aggregate of all things that have being in themselves; and so do all men else. And because God has a being, it follows that he is either the whole universe or a part of it".⁶¹ Naturally if being per se is reduced to the purely material then God is a material being that can in no way be distinguished from the universe; the term God becomes quite meaningless. Hobbes does not quite conceive of God as an absentee God, but insofar as he conceives of God at all Hobbes considers him to be a material being among other material beings.

Locke on the other hand develops a truly deistic notion of God. Being a pious Christian Locke did not deny the traditional attributes of God but views God primarily as transcendent: God is the highest of a chain of

⁶⁰ *The Leibniz-Clarke Correspondence*, Clarke's First Reply, #4, 13-14. Berkeley had a copy of this work in his library.

⁶¹ Hobbes, *English Works*, ed. Molesworth, vol. 4 (Aslen, 1962), 349, quoted in Fabro, *God in Exile*, 239.

beings who created the lesser beings and at the same time established certain immutable laws but who does not intervene in his creation. Locke adopts the Cartesian view of matter as the reality underlying the fictitious impressions which we call the secondary qualities:

So that if any one will examine himself concerning his notion of pure substance in general, he will find he has no other idea of it at all, but only a supposition of he knows not what support of such qualities which are capable of producing simple ideas in us: which qualities are commonly called “accidents”. . . . The idea, then, we have, to which we give the general name “substance”, being nothing but the supposed, but unknown, support of those qualities we find existing, which we imagine cannot subsist *sine re substante*, “without something to support them”, we call that support substantial which, according to the true import of the word, is, in plain English, “standing under” or “upholding”.⁶²

This unknowable substance could be interpreted as being either spiritual or material, and Berkeley feared that the latter interpretation would result in materialism. Because matter here is viewed of as a mind-independent, extended support of accidents, Berkeley’s attack on extension is another facet of the denial of the existence of matter. What Berkeley is concerned to dispel is the belief that there can exist a subsistent entity, whether it is extension, power, or matter, outside the providence of God.⁶³

Toland’s version of materialism is more extreme than that of Hobbes. He asserts that matter is not only the subject of motion, but the principle of motion also: that it is self-moved. Here the line between deism and atheism becomes blurred; any acceptance of the existence of God must proceed not from the evidence of the created world but rather from a subjective motive such a faith. The existence of God is considered not to be accessible to rational knowledge. Indeed it hardly matters whether one believes in the existence of God, he having become a “useless and superfluous principle” that, while perhaps exerting an influence in that

⁶² Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 2, ch. 23, sect. 2 (London), 208-9.

⁶³ In the *Philosophical Commentaries*, #17 Berkeley appears to draw a link between the belief in the existence of matter and original sin: Tfall [*sic*] of Adam, rise of Idolatry, rise of Epicurism & Hobbism dispute about divisibility of matter &c expounded by material substances”. In some way the original sin of man may have been in Berkeley’s opinion the substitution of matter for God and Berkeley seems keen on redressing the balance by substituting God for matter.

shadowy domain of a person's consciousness, definitely has no influence on the natural, physical world.

Ultimately deism arose from a philosophical superficiality, probably aided by the fact that many of the philosophers of the time were better scientists and mathematicians than they were metaphysicians. Gilson, speaking of later deists, diagnoses a certain superficiality of thinking as lying at the root of deist tendencies:

Having forgotten, together with "Him who is", the true meaning of the problem of existence, Fontanelle, Voltaire, Rousseau, and so many others with them had naturally to fall back upon the most superficial interpretation of the problem of final causes. God then became the "clock-maker" of Fontanelle and of Voltaire, the supreme engineer of the huge machine which this world is. In short God became again what he had already been in the *Timaeus* of Plato: Demiurge, the only difference being that this time, before beginning to arrange his world the Demiurge had consulted Newton.⁶⁴

Berkeley's Attitude towards Deism

Berkeley is not opposed to the physical sciences in themselves. He considers it perfectly acceptable to deal scientifically with the quantitative aspects of perceptible qualities and changes. This can be done, Berkeley holds, without recourse to the spiritual realm. However, for Berkeley, the world of nature cannot be completely understood apart from its Creator.

The tendency of the rationalists, as we have seen, is to focus on the intellectual in God and therefore to stress the orderliness and regularity of his creation. The pietistic nominalists on the other hand emphasise the more humanly accessible dimension of God: his will. They lay the stress on God's freedom vis a vis creation and hence the contingency of creatures. Berkeley's sympathies clearly lie with nominalism and voluntarism and as a result it is particularly important in his eyes to stress the contingency of the world; neither its order nor its existence inheres in the world but depends on the good favour of God at each moment.

Not all deists explicitly denied the providence of God, nor did they all actually disbelieve in his providence. In defending the deists against the charge of denying God's providence Hefelbower points out that "Toland and Collins are silent on the subject", that Tindal asserts that the world is constantly preserved by the "all-wise Providence" of God, that Wollaston

⁶⁴ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 109.

asserts that God governs the world providentially and that “Locke’s whole conception of God’s dealings with man, in revealing to him the plan of salvation and certifying it by miracles and fulfilled prophecies, and in making it effective, assumes an active immanence of God”.⁶⁵

Hefelbower concludes that the opinion that the deists adopted the conception of God as the “clock-maker God” is incorrect. Indeed Hefelbower may well be correct if he has in mind the sincerely held, subjective beliefs of these men. However, a philosopher’s sincere intentions may easily be at variance with the logical conclusions of his philosophical doctrines. This is an irony that pervades the history of philosophy: in the words of Gilson “philosophy buries its undertakers”. Berkeley is not so charitable towards the deists as Hefelbower. He always presents them as masqueraders duping the general public into believing that they are theists. Berkeley sets out to expose them as atheists regardless of their protestations. It is clear to him that their materialism is irreconcilable with orthodox theism.

It has been contended that Berkeley’s main attacks on atheism and materialism were directed principally against John Toland.⁶⁶ Toland’s extreme deism does manifest that transition from deism to atheism which Berkeley so feared. Toland asks why, if God is deemed unnecessary to preserve a material world in existence, it being proper to matter to exist of itself, is there the need for an initial act of creation? The question of existence works in both ways: if the world was created from nothing then this act of creation is outside time and it therefore is as equally present and essential to the existence of the world now as it was at the moment of creation, but if matter is existentially self-sufficient then there are no grounds for asserting that it has been created. Moreover the very rigidity of the laws of nature seems to lend further evidence for this autonomy of the world, for are we to believe that

the Divine Architect constructed this admirably adjusted system to wear out, and to fall in ruins, even before one single revolution of its complex scheme of wheels had been performed? No; I see the mighty orbits of the planets slowly rocking to and fro, their figures expanding and contracting, their axes revolving in their vast periods; but stability is there. Every change shall wear away, and after sweeping through the grand cycle of

⁶⁵ S. G. Hefelbower, *The Relation of John Locke to English Deism* (Chicago, 1918), 91.

⁶⁶ See Fabro, *God in Exile*, 294.

cycles, the whole system shall return to its primitive condition of perfection and beauty.⁶⁷

Berkeley saw that if matter is accredited with the inherent power to govern itself and organise itself into the complex and ordered patterns then we must consider matter to be the divine architect of the universe; no longer does matter manifest the intentions and intelligence of God but rather its own intentions. Consequently Berkeley took refuge in voluntarism and asserted the dependence of all things on the sheer will of God without a nature or principle of action of their own. Berkeley's contemporary, the Abbé Noel-Antoine Pluche also noted how materialism prejudiced the purposefulness of the universe and God's providence, writing that

the intentions, foresight, goodness, and the constancy of his favors . . . find themselves absolutely banished from the greater scope of physics, and God is as much forgotten as if he had never existed.⁶⁸

This observation applies especially to the Cartesian universe where God is the most remote of causes; having created the universe he leaves it to evolve according to its own intrinsic laws.

Concomitant with materialistic mechanism was the notion of absolute space: a huge, infinitely extended, self-existent entity. Eternity and infinity were marks of God for Berkeley and to attribute them to anything less was to deify some aspect of God's creation. Where Newton had only implied that space and time were attributes of God, Samuel Clarke went further still in explicitly attributing them to God.

Berkeley was not alone in his revulsion of the growing spirit of mechanism in the post-Cartesian era; the writings of the Cambridge Platonists are very similar to those of Berkeley in their denunciations of mechanism, particularly that of Descartes and Hobbes. In *Siris* Berkeley makes extensive use of Ralph Cudworth's *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* printed in London in 1678. Likewise the most famous of the Cambridge Platonists, Henry More, who had initially adopted Cartesianism only to later reject it, fought the rising tide of atheism by asserting the wisdom of God as evidenced in his creation and the greatness

⁶⁷ O. M. Mitchell, *The Orbs of Heaven* (London, 1853), 125, quoted in Mascall, *Christian Theology and Natural Science*, 136-7.

⁶⁸ *Histoire du Ciel* (Paris, 1739), 2, 225-56, quoted in Fabro, *God in Exile*, 364.

of God's power and providence. This, as we shall see, is Berkeley's main strategy also.

Berkeley's abiding concern is to show that there is a great intimacy between God and the world. His intention is not to prove the existence of God alone, but rather "his interest was in the kind of God, and in the kind of relation He stands in to the corporeal universe and us humans . . ." ⁶⁹ A proof of the existence of God alone is not enough; Berkeley wants to arrive at the God of religion: a personal God who is concerned about the welfare of man and on whom all of creation is radically dependent.

⁶⁹ T. E. Jessop, "Berkeley as Religious Apologist", in Warren E. Steinkraus, ed. *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy* (New York: Holt, Rinehard & Winston, 1966), 106.

CHAPTER THREE

RADICAL DEPENDENCE

Who sees with equal eye, as God of all,
A hero perish, or a sparrow fall,
Atoms or systems into ruin hurled,
And now a bubble burst, and now a world.

Pope, *An Essay on Man*, Epistle 1, 11. 87-90.

Introduction

Each of Berkeley's philosophical works, from the *Philosophical Commentaries* up to and including his last work *Siris*, despite the various alterations many of his core doctrines undergo over the years, is primarily and continuously motivated by the desire to provide a philosophical justification for the Christian notions of providence and conservation. It would appear that Berkeley himself would have wished his philosophy to be studied as a whole rather than discrete works be examined in isolation from one another for "so long as the main points are settled and well understood" he "should be less solicitous about particular conjectures". He states:

I could wish that all the things I have published on these philosophical subjects were read in the order wherein I have published them; once, to take in the design and connexion of them, and a second time with a critical eye, adding your own thought and observation upon every part as you went along.⁷⁰

Berkeley's philosophical works⁷¹ and doctrines continually affirm the dependence of the world on God for its existence or, on the other hand,

⁷⁰ Letter to Johnson, March 24, 1730 in *Works*, vol. 2, 293-4.

⁷¹ In some of his treatises on physics and mathematics Berkeley attacks certain mathematical and scientific doctrines which he thinks prejudicial to the faith. Newton's fluxions for example are criticised for this reason in the *Analyst*.

attack the contrary positions: materialism and mechanism, deism and atheism. His final work, *Siris*, requires special attention for in many respects it marks a radical break with the thinking contained in Berkeley's earlier works and so we will have to dedicate a separate section to the study of this work.

The Philosophical Commentaries

The *Philosophical Commentaries* (1707-1708) (hereafter *Commentaries*) is the name given to two notebooks containing short reflections of the young Berkeley on matters philosophical and scientific. It is sometimes referred to as his *Commonplace Book*. These reflections formed the basis for his subsequent works *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709) and *A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). Many of the entries manifest Berkeley's concern to affirm Radical Dependence in opposition to the deistic doctrines present in contemporary philosophy.

Whether Berkeley remains constant in his opposition to matter is of particular importance in the debate concerning the putative development in Berkeley's philosophy. By "matter" Berkeley does not mean the matter in the Aristotelian sense of pure potency which is a co-principle with form, but rather the inert, extended "stuff" which Descartes and Locke hold matter to be. For both men matter is the true reality underlying a veil of chimeric accidents such as colour, odour, etc., which have only the most tenuous degree of reality. For Descartes matter is, as we have seen, an extended substance which exists in itself, and, in the same vein, Locke envisages matter to be an unknowable but necessary support for the accidents we perceive. In Berkeley's view, the admission of the existence of matter thus conceived leads to scepticism, the divinisation of space and matter, and ultimately leads to atheism.

A. A. Luce holds that Berkeley remains firm in his immaterialism but John Wild is of the contrary opinion. T. E. Jessop, as co-editor of the Works, writes:

Berkeley wrote the *Commentaries* as a study in "ye immaterial hypothesis" (No 19). All turns on his view that you can have a true philosophy of the world without the traditional Greek notion of material substance. The entries on vision are there to show that gravity is not proportional to

However, since such works are not philosophical in nature, an examination of them does not come within the ambit of a discussion on Radical Dependence.

matter; those on mathematical problems are there to show that the infinite divisibility of matter is an idle phrase.⁷²

This is clearly mistaken; the notion of matter which Berkeley always criticises is that of matter conceived of as the substantial “thing” underlying supposedly illusory secondary qualities; when Berkeley became acquainted with the Aristotelian notion of matter as a co-principle of form he responds to it positively, although it must be granted that he makes no unequivocal acceptance of Aristotle’s position.

Starting from the Cartesian position, with its radical dualism between matter and mind, makes it very difficult to show how matter can act on a spiritual mind; Descartes’ own solution to the problem—the infamous pineal gland connection—exposed him to widespread ridicule. Berkeley saw that such dualism, in establishing a chasm between the mind and reality, must result in scepticism regarding the existence of God; or what we nowadays term “agnosticism”. Similarly, scepticism must follow, according to Berkeley, if it is contended with Locke that substance is a “something, I know not what”, an unknown substrate lying at the heart of reality. Instead Berkeley denies the existence of this “occult realm”: “Nothing corresponds to our primary ideas wthout but powers, hence a direct & brief demonstration of an active powerful being distinct from us on whom we depend etc”.⁷³

Berkeley saw the attribution of immutability and indestructibility to space as tantamount, on the one hand to a deification of space in that it makes space to be an absolute being independent of God,⁷⁴ or on the other hand, to a reification of God:

The great danger of making extension exist without the mind, is yet if it does it must be acknowledged infinite immutable eternal etc. which will be to make either God extended (w^{ch} I think dangerous) or an external, immutable, infinite, increate being beside God.⁷⁵

Berkeley’s contemporaries in science and philosophy held space to be a universal receptacle, distinct from bodies, in which bodies move. Locke posited space as a fourth substance in addition to the Cartesian trinity of

⁷² *Works* 1, Introduction, 5.

⁷³ *Commentaries*, #41. This “direct & brief demonstration” appears again in the *Principles*, #29.

⁷⁴ See R.P. Phillips, *Modern Thomistic Philosophy*, vol. 1; *The Philosophy of Nature* (Massachusetts, 1959), 83.

⁷⁵ *Commentaries*, #290.

God, mind, and matter.⁷⁶ The notion of space as being an extended *sensorium Dei*, as it was held to be by Newton, Clarke, More, and Raphson, makes space an attribute of God and so absolutises it:

Locke, More, Raphson etc seem to make God extended, 'tis nevertheless of great use to religion to take extension out of our idea of God & put a power in its place, it seems dangerous to suppose extension which is manifestly inert in God.⁷⁷

Instead of having man “live and move” in God in this spatial sense, Berkeley, following the doctrine of St Paul, interprets this in an ontological sense. The universe belongs in the mind of God as a spiritual entity rather than a spatial and extended one:

Spinoza (vid: Praef. Opera Posthum:) will have God to be omnium rerum causa immanens & to countenance this produces that of St. Paul, in him we live etc. Now this of St. Paul may be explain'd by my Doctrine as well as Spinoza's or Locke's or Hobb's or Raphson's etc.⁷⁸

So Berkeley is no more prepared to allow God to be extended, than he is prepared to allow an idea in the mind of God to be extended.⁷⁹ Just as space is deified if immutability and indestructibility are attributed to it, likewise matter is deified if causal power is attributed to it: “Matter once allow'd. I defy any man to prove that God is not matter”.⁸⁰ Locke asserts that power can be located in matter and because of his voluntarism takes this to the extreme of arguing that matter could possibly think.⁸¹ Berkeley is determined to defend the power of God by denying matter or substance any causal power. This is a prudent step from the point of view of apologetics, i.e. defending the Christian faith; the tremendous discoveries

⁷⁶ See Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 2, ch. 13, no. 5ff, esp. no. 22.

⁷⁷ *Commentaries*, #298. It is noteworthy that Berkeley believes that it is of “great use to religion” to reject certain notions; this gives us an insight into the pietism that leads Berkeley to deny the obvious.

⁷⁸ *Commentaries*, #827.

⁷⁹ I have not seen any commentators establish the important link between the manner in which God is to be conceived and the manner in which the world is to be conceived for Berkeley: an extended world must be caused by an extended by an extended God and a spiritual world must be caused by a spiritual God.

⁸⁰ *Commentaries*, #625.

⁸¹ See Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 2, ch. 7, no. 10.

in the scientific revolution of the ordered nature of the universe provided great support for the teleological argument for the existence of God, but if matter is given the credit for the tremendous organisation of the universe then all the glory won for God must be relinquished as properly belonging to mere matter instead; matter must be deified. Berkeley, in order to prevent such an eventuality goes to the opposite extreme and denies even the existence of the other contender! Matter is a myth and the order of the universe must always and everywhere depend on God directly. Order, from the macrocosmic to the microscopic level, is due to the immediate ordering of our ideas by God. Berkeley treats philosophical dilemmas as Alexander the Great dealt with the Gordian Knot: “Nothing properly but persons i.e. conscious things do exist, all other things are not so much existences as manners of ye existence of persons”.⁸² This is Berkeley’s first formulation of his immaterialist hypothesis. The things of our experience are “ideas” and are impotent; God is *purus actus*; he alone acts and is responsible for the activities of the things we perceive.⁸³

The roots of Berkeley’s immaterialist doctrine lie then in his conviction that to defend the omnipotence of God he must deny the potency of material substances; Berkeley cuts his philosophical doctrines to the measure of this theological end. Berkeley’s declared enemy is the deism and atheism of philosophers such as Epicurus, Hobbes, and Spinoza rather the epistemology of Locke; Locke’s notion of abstraction comes in for attack primarily insofar as it implies the existence of the matter and the universe of the deists and atheists, and secondarily because of its consequent scepticism. It is because the acceptance of the existence of matter produces atheistic consequences that Berkeley denies its existence: “Opinion that existence was distinct from perception of horrible consequence. It is the foundation of Hobb’s doctrine, etc”.⁸⁴

Such doctrines threaten both the conception of the soul as spiritual as well as traditional Christian theism and so are the real enemies which Berkeley intends to overthrow through the unusual, but philosophically expedient, doctrine of immaterialism. The doctrine may be a pill that is bitter to swallow but it is worthwhile since by it

⁸² *Commentaries*, #24.

⁸³ We will see in the *The Principles of Human Knowledge* how Berkeley distinguishes between the voluntary sensations, for which our imagination is responsible, and the stronger, involuntary sensations which are produced in our minds by God directly.

⁸⁴ *Commentaries*, #799. The materialism of Hobbes and other philosophers mentioned by Berkeley has been dealt with in the previous chapter.

the Philosophers lose their abstract or unperceived Matter. The mathematicians lose their insensible sensations. 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 nat. philosoph: & mathem: get vastly by y^e bargain.⁸⁵

Immaterialism presents itself to Berkeley as an almost magical panacea for the problems facing religion, what tar-water will do for the body, immaterialism will do for the soul. With immaterialism “all that philosophy of Epicurus, Hobbs, Spinoza, &c., which has been a declared enemy of religion, comes to the ground”.⁸⁶

Berkeley is happy to exchange matter for a guarantee of theism: the common man loses nothing but an abstract philosophical hypothesis and gets God into the bargain. The atheistic and materialistic philosophers have much more to lose by it than the *homo rudus* whose world remains unchanged: “N.B. On my Principles there is a reality, there are things, there is a *rerum natura*”.⁸⁷

Berkeley realises that it will be necessary to reassure his readers that, though this pietistic expedience conflicts with the common-sense experience of the material and extended nature of reality, it does save appearances: “Mem: again & again to mention & illustrate the doctrine of the reality of things *rerum natura* etc”.⁸⁸ With his principle also vanish all those even less acceptable doctrines of the Ancients and the Schoolmen, who, having believed in the existence of matter, had to invent some kind of actuating principle: “Anima mundi, substantial form, omniscient radical heat, plastic vertue, Hylaschic principle—all these vanish”.⁸⁹

Given this principle, we have ask ourselves how does Berkeley envisage reality? Is it the reality that Berkeley claims it to be: that which is accepted by the ordinary man “in the street” on the basis of his “common-sense” knowledge of the world. Or is it rather a shadowy world in which the only real existents are God and the souls to which he transmits a continuous sequence of images which (because of ignorance due to the Fall and Original Sin?) these souls tend to take for a real, material and

⁸⁵ *Commentaries*, #391.

⁸⁶ *Commentaries*, #824.

⁸⁷ *Commentaries*, #305.

⁸⁸ *Commentaries*, #550.

⁸⁹ *Commentaries*, #617. It is interesting that Berkeley should banish the neoplatonist *Anima Mundi* at this point; its reappearance in *Siris* would suggest that Berkeley adopts some principle to animate matter and that, consequently, the doctrine of immaterialism has been discarded.

extended world. Berkeley contends that the real is still real in the immaterialist scheme of things: “According to my doctrine all are not *entia rationis*. The distinction between *ens rationis* and *ens reale* is kept up by it as well as any other doctrine”.⁹⁰

However Berkeley fluctuates between panpsychism (the view that God’s mind is the only reality) and the view that the world is really distinct from God, as if unsure how he is to reconcile his immaterialism with the common sense perception of the world. He seems to side with panpsychism when he quotes his continental contemporary Jean Le Clerc: “The real properties of all things, as much corporeal as spiritual, are contained in God.”⁹¹ Later Berkeley reiterates the same idea when he says that the properties of all things “are in God i.e. there is in the Deity Understanding as well as Will”.⁹²

In this system God is the only cause, all change must be attributed to God directly; the question of the power of matter does not even arise given that matter is relegated to the order of unicorns, fairies, and fables: “One idea not the cause of another, one power not the cause of another. The cause of all natural things is onely God. Hence trifling to enquire after second causes. This doctrine gives a most suitable idea of the Divinity”.⁹³ Presumably one of the reasons this doctrine “gives a most suitable idea” of God is because it is so readily applicable to the Christian notion of God as conserver of creation. Berkeley notes this application of the doctrine explicitly in the *Commentaries*: “The Principle may be apply’d to the difficulties of conservation, co-operation, &c”.⁹⁴

Obviously if the world is seen as a series of ideas produced in the mind by God, then its conservation in existence is no longer problematic. And yet Berkeley never commits himself completely to the position that this is the complete meaning of conservation; that it is no more than the production of sensible images by God in the mind of man. Berkeley’s own ambiguity on this point registers even in these early years. At one point Berkeley clearly affirms that the world does exist unperceived, that “bodies etc do exist even w^h not perceiv’d they being powers in the active

⁹⁰ *Commentaries*, #474a.

⁹¹ “*Proprietates reales rerum omnium in Deo tam corporum quam spirituum continentur.*” *Commentaries*, #348. The quotation is taken from the *Logica* (1692) of Jean Le Clerc (1657- 1736). Berkeley was personally acquainted with Le Clerc.

⁹² *Commentaries*, #812.

⁹³ *Commentaries*, #433.

⁹⁴ *Commentaries*, #402. This notion surfaces in the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, ##45-48.

Being”,⁹⁵ while elsewhere Berkeley notes that this, more plausible version of immaterialism gives rise to its own problems: in particular its apparent irreconcilability with the Biblical notion of creation which is portrayed as *for* man and *before* man: “How was light created before man? even so were Bodies created before man”.⁹⁶ “I may say earth, plants etc were created before man there being other intelligences to perceive them before man was created”.⁹⁷

The fact that creation poses a problem for Berkeley shows us that his system is not as resolved as some commentators suggest: were God’s perception of the world sufficient to account for the existence of objects unperceived by man then Berkeley would not hesitate on this point. However Berkeley maintains an unfailing obscurity on this question. He often justifies his doctrine of immaterialism by saying that it is meaningless to affirm that something exists when it is not perceived by me. For Berkeley the existence of sensible objects without the mind is meaningless; by mind here he would seem to be referring to the human mind but leaves himself open to the more lenient interpretations. To interpret Berkeley as saying, as Jessop appears at times to do,⁹⁸ that God alone is sufficient to uphold the existence of the world is to miss the real significance of immaterialism as well as its problematic nature. For Berkeley a sensible object is an “imprint” on the mind of man by God in the same way as a seal is an imprint on wax. The sensible object is impossible without both God as the active element (analogous to the “imprinter”), and the mind of man as the passive element (analogous to the “wax”). According to the immaterialist doctrine the mind of man functions like matter in Aristotle’s hylomorphic theory: it receives and individuates

⁹⁵ *Commentaries*, #52. Commenting on this point Jessop says this notion of intermittency is “virtually discarded in #802 in favour of the position taken up in *Principles* ##45-8, where intermittency and the companion doctrines are stated not to follow from his principles”. *Works*, vol. 1, 109. This appears to make no sense as one would expect the opposite, but indeed Berkeley seems to assert the conditions for intermittency while at the same time denying it as a consequence.

⁹⁶ *Commentaries*, #436.

⁹⁷ *Commentaries*, #723.

⁹⁸ *Works*, vol. 2, Introduction, 9. Here Jessop makes a rather muddled distinction between objects which are “relative not to my accidental sensing, but to sensing as such” and concludes that “though I can coherently think of a tree as not seen by me, I cannot think of it as not seen at all”. This is used by Jessop to imply that objects in Berkeley’s doctrine of immaterialism are not related to my sensation alone, but to sensation in general—whatever is meant by “sensation in general”.

the immaterial forms. Just as in Aristotle's system, neither of the co-principles, in this case the receiving mind of man and the imprinted ideas, can exist alone. Sensible objects always require a mind to be received into, and the mind, for Berkeley, must always be thinking. The common-sense judgement that things can indeed exist unperceived by man is logically impossible within this system since immaterialism is based on the hypothesis that visible reality is essentially a product of the interaction between the mind of God—which conceives—and the mind of man—which perceives. From the beginning Berkeley is caught on the horns of a dilemma: he cannot assert what he knows to be only common-sensical without losing the very basis of his immaterialism. For this reason all Berkeley can do is to avoid the question as much as possible, leaving himself open to the common-sense interpretation even though this does not follow from his doctrine. To attempt to find a final position of Berkeley on this question always remains a fruitless exercise. It is only later, in the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), that Berkeley can be less ambiguously interpreted as proposing a system in which there is reality outside the mind of man. Here Berkeley asserts that all things can exist outside man's perception because they exist in the mind of God. Strictly speaking, when Berkeley adopts this version of Christian neoplatonism he has lost the *raison d'être* for his immaterialist doctrine. However, this cannot be said to be true of the *Commentaries* not of the *Principles*, for ideas are not primarily in the mind of God, but are rather a dual creation of God *and* man.

An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision

In his first published work, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), Berkeley prepared the public for the reception of his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Knowledge*. In *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* he asserts that the phenomena of our visual perceptions are only within the mind, though he must at times be interpreted as allowing “his readers to assume, and in one or two passages almost suggesting, that the tangible world is the world of matter”.⁹⁹ The objects of sight are said to “constitute the universal language of nature”¹⁰⁰ through which we can get to know the existence and nature of God.

⁹⁹ A. A. Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1945), 8.

¹⁰⁰ *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, #147.

In this work Berkeley says nothing about the radical dependence of the world on God for its existence. He only presents his optical theories, in particular those concerning the perception of distance, with a view of course to the revelations he is soon to spring on the world regarding the illusory nature of such perceptions! For that reason the work is of little interest for us except to note that in it Berkeley develops the theory of vision requisite for his doctrine of immaterialism.

A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge

Berkeley's best known work, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), (hereafter the *Principles*), is a presentation of his immaterialist doctrine in full. The version of immaterialism presented in the *Principles* is no different from that which has been worked out in the *Philosophical Commentaries* and the motivation is the same; namely, to show that creation can be known, and, at the same time, can be seen to be sustained by God. The primary function of Berkeley's immaterialism is to allow him to develop a philosophy to affirm against the growing tide of scepticism, deism, and atheism, that God is intimately involved in the world, and that things do not have "an absolute subsistence" distinct from God. Indeed, Berkeley makes this plain when he says that he would consider his labours "altogether useless and ineffectual, if by what I have said, I cannot inspire my readers with a pious sense of the presence of God".¹⁰¹ It would be a great incentive to virtue and a guard against vice if we were aware

that the eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good; that he is with us and keepeth us in all places whither we go, and giveth us bread to eat, and raiment to put on . . . that he is present and conscious to our innermost thoughts; and that we have a most absolute and immediate dependence on him.¹⁰²

Insofar as we can take Berkeley's own statements of intent at face value, it is rather difficult to understand how Farooqi can claim that the role of God in the *Principles* is no more than that of a *deus ex machina* which serves as a source of the perceptions imprinted onto our sensory

¹⁰¹ *Principles*, #156.

¹⁰² *Principles*, #155.

faculties.¹⁰³ Luce would appear to be much closer to the truth when he says that “the main drift and design” of the *Principles* was rather “to show that we depend absolutely and immediately upon God”.¹⁰⁴ This surely negates the possibility of God being a mere *deus ex machina*. Yet Luce is not prepared to accept that if Berkeley can show, without recourse to immaterialism, that creation depends on God, he may indeed do so. He considers the immaterialist doctrine to have priority over the doctrine of Radical Dependence in the mind of Berkeley. Clearly, however, Berkeley opposes matter because of the perceived threat it poses to traditional Christian theism: it is not evident anywhere in Berkeley’s works that he considers matter to be pernicious in itself. In the *Principles*, as in the *Commentaries*, Berkeley considers matter to be the bulwark of scepticism and a cause of atheism:

For as we have shewn the doctrine of matter or corporeal substance, to have been the main pillar and support of scepticism, so likewise upon the same foundation have been raised all the impious schemes of atheism and irreligion. . . . How great a friend material substance hath been to atheists in all ages, were needless to relate. All their monstrous systems have so visible and necessary a dependence on it, that when this corner-stone is once removed, the whole fabric cannot choose but fall to the ground; insomuch that it is no longer worth while, to bestow a particular consideration on the absurdities of every wretched sect of atheists.¹⁰⁵

Berkeley defends the “freedom, intelligence and design” in the creation of the world against the materialists who, by reducing everything to matter, have made “blind chance or fatal necessity” the cause of the workings of nature. He speaks of it as “natural” that those “impious and profane persons” would adopt a system that replaces “a providence, or inspection of a superior mind over the affairs of the world” with mechanistic determinism.¹⁰⁶

The *Principles* begins with an attack on scepticism and its cause: abstract ideas. Berkeley’s main criticism of abstract ideas is that they mislead man into believing mere abstractions to be real entities. Berkeley counters that there are no such extra-experiential entities and that only the perceived is real; this is Berkeley when he is most a British empiricist. But

¹⁰³ Waheed Ali Farooqi, *A Spiritual Interpretation of Reality in the Light of Berkeley’s Immaterialism*. PhD diss., Michigan, 1966, 14.

¹⁰⁴ *Berkeley’s Immaterialism*, 69.

¹⁰⁵ *Principles*, #92.

¹⁰⁶ *Principles*, #93.

the introduction to the *Principles* appears to be no more than a device to allow Berkeley to launch his attack on matter. The belief in matter is concomitant, in Berkeley's eyes, with the belief that the world is not as we experience it; the belief that reality is unknowable and that the secondary qualities that we do perceive are at bottom delusory. The denial of abstraction is not an absolutely necessary starting point for immaterialism, as one could assent to the possibility of abstract ideas and yet hold that the "concrete" thing is an idea imprinted by God on the mind. Luce is correct in saying that Berkeley, through his immaterialism, is not merely reacting against Locke's representationalism but is actively seeking to highlight the causal power of God: "Berkeley was an immaterialist long before he adopted the term idea for the immediate object of sense".¹⁰⁷

In the *Principles* Berkeley unambiguously strips matter of all causality, ascribing all the apparent powers of material beings to the direct activity of God. There is less of the ambiguity of the *Commentaries* regarding the ontological status of material reality: the real world is the perceived world and the ideas of sense are excited on the mind directly by God.

For Berkeley, an idea is any sort of sensory object: those that are "more strong, orderly, and coherent" are "imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature" whereas those that are "less regular, vivid and constant" are produced by the imagination of man and so are better termed "images".¹⁰⁸ The ideas excited on our senses are independent of our wills for they are

more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination; they 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 regular train or series...¹⁰⁹

One mistaken interpretation of Berkeley's immaterialism is that existence is to be conceived of as a "permanent possibility of perception"¹¹⁰; that the possibility of an object being perceived by man alone explains the existence of phenomena or the fact that they may be presented to me in the future. This would be to bring Berkeley closer to the neo-positivists' position whereby the meaning of an empirical statement is identical with the mode of its verification. In this case "to exist" means no

¹⁰⁷ Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Principles*, #33.

¹⁰⁹ *Principles*, #30.

¹¹⁰ This term comes from J. S. Mill who held that Berkeley intended his immaterialism to be interpreted in this way.

more than what I can experientially verify about a situation. Just as Berkeley cannot be understood as saying that God alone is sufficient to “guarantee” the existence of an object as Jessop appears to assert, equally mistaken is this neo-positivistic reading of Berkeley’s immaterialism. For Berkeley, man’s sensations alone are not enough to guarantee the existence of an object as both man and God are the co-productive elements in the formation of ideas: God as imprinter and man as receiver. In saying this Berkeley is making a statement which is not subject to empirical verification; namely, that God is involved in the process of man’s perceptions, and so Berkeley could not possibly be thinking along neo-positivist lines. Obviously it goes against the whole tenor of Berkeley’s work and method to accord things (involuntary ideas for Berkeley) the status of mere “permanently possible perceptions”. This is only putting off the “evil hour” when their existence must be accounted for; in Berkeley’s system this can only be done only by reference to God on whom ideas of this nature must depend. Ideas in themselves are “*inert, fleeting, dependent* beings, which subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in minds or spiritual substances”.¹¹¹ Furthermore Berkeley always leaves statements ambiguous enough to allow the reader to make interpretations which accord with common-sense as much as is possible without conceding the existence of absolute matter. The following is a typical example of this kind of expedient ambiguity:

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.¹¹²

Here Berkeley is deliberately vague on whether or not he considers the table to exist outside of all perception by man; to this end he does not clarify what kind of spirit must be perceiving the table: human, angelic, or divine.

In the *Principles* Berkeley presents God’s presence in the world as evidenced primarily by the order of the world; that is, the “world” of sensible phenomena. This is Berkeley’s version of the traditional teleological argument in which an ordering intelligence is deduced from an ordered but non-intelligent cosmos. The “wisdom and benevolence” of the author of our ideas is shown by the “admirable connexion” of these ideas,

¹¹¹ *Principles*, #89.

¹¹² *Principles*, #3.

and forms a “Divine Visual Language” which is the language “whereby the governing spirit, on whom we depend, informs us what tangible ideas he is about to imprint upon us, in case we excite this or that motion in our own bodies”.¹¹³

Later in the *Principles* Berkeley begins to bring out another more “existential” aspect of God’s providence, one that is implicit in the notion of the Divine Visual Language. This existential aspect of providence is what I term “Radical Dependence”. Traditionally this has been known as the “cosmological argument” and it argues from the contingency of creatures to a necessary cause of their existence. In Berkeley’s version it is argued that since the ideas of sense are immediately imprinted on our sensory faculties by God, the world must constantly depend on God, not for its order alone, but for its very existence. In Berkeley’s later works the emphasis is increasingly placed on the theory of Radical Dependence rather than that of Divine Visual Language. This involves a shift of emphasis rather than a change in thinking, but it is significant nonetheless.

We must ask ourselves why Berkeley bothers to explicate the doctrine of Radical Dependence given that it is already contained in the doctrine of Divine Visual Language—for there to be a Divine Visual Language perceptions must be constantly produced by God in the same way as words are produced by a human speaker. Berkeley’s very point of departure is that the things are radically contingent on a perceiving mind: *esse est percipi vel percipere*. It may be that as early as the *Principles* Berkeley had intimations that the cosmological argument presented a far simpler, and probably more palatable, means of defending Christian theism than the teleological argument.

There is a logical difficulty involved in Berkeley’s transition to the doctrine of Radical Dependence which he himself did not seem to recognise; namely, that the doctrine cannot be fully reconciled with Berkeley’s distinction between images that are created by man, and the ideas created by God. Berkeley bases his immaterialism on a distinction between voluntary and involuntary ideas: those ideas not dependent on his will must be caused by some other spirit:

When in broad day-light I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other

¹¹³ *Principles*, #44.

senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them.¹¹⁴

Other marks of involuntary ideas are their strength, liveliness, and distinctiveness, steadiness; order, and coherence and the fact that they are not excited at random.¹¹⁵ Those excited by imagination are “less regular, vivid and constant”.¹¹⁶ Is it then valid for Berkeley to use the mere existence of ideas, even vivid ideas, to infer that they are being produced by God at each moment? At the level of *existence*, ideas; that is, impressions on the mind, whether voluntary or involuntary, are equal. It was only the significant differences in the nature of both types of ideas that allowed Berkeley to infer a divine cause of those that are involuntary. Berkeley’s route to God from these involuntary ideas is through *qualities* belonging to them. Berkeley accounts for the complex *order* (which in itself is an accident or quality of these ideas) of the sequences of these ideas by positing a divine mind as their cause. His appeal to the mere existence of these ideas, without attending to their significant qualities, is invalid as a way to a divine cause of them.

Two particular passages: #48 and #91, noted by Jessop,¹¹⁷ provide further evidence that Berkeley’s commitment to the doctrine of immaterialism, or at to least some of its logical implications, is not complete. In both of these passages it is allowed that corporeal objects can indeed exist independently of perception by man as they are present in the mind of another spirit—by which Berkeley is probably referring to the mind of God rather than the minds of angels. In the first of the two passages Berkeley asserts that

though we hold indeed the objects of sense to be nothing else but ideas which cannot exist unperceived; yet we may not hence conclude they have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not.... It does not therefore follow from the foregoing principles, that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or exist not at all during the intervals between our perception of them.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ *Principles*, #29.

¹¹⁵ *Principles*, #30.

¹¹⁶ *Principles*, #33.

¹¹⁷ *Works*, vol. 2, Introduction, 152.

¹¹⁸ *Principles*, #48.

In the second passage Berkeley again suggests that God secures the continued existence of the corporeal world; here he criticises philosophers for holding that there is “a natural subsistence, exterior to all thinking beings, or distinct from being perceived by any mind whatsoever, even the eternal mind of the Creator”.¹¹⁹ What Berkeley only tentatively affirms here, in the *Principles*, is fully developed in the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* where Berkeley portrays things as the ectypes of God’s archetypal ideas of them. This marks a notable development in Berkeley’s thinking; a development which will be examined further when we come to deal with the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, where, as Jessop points out, this new conception of reality becomes the chief proof the existence of God.¹²⁰

Berkeley does not challenge the incontrovertible empirical discoveries of the Scientific Revolution; on the contrary, he sees them as further evidence for his hypothesis that nature is a Divine Visual Language. What Berkeley’s rejects rather, are the materialistic conclusions drawn by scientists concerning the nature of matter and its powers; in particular the apparent power of matter to produce the order of the universe and ultimately, as claimed by the materialists, to be the cause of its own existence. The mistake of science lies for Berkeley in its “wandering after second causes” instead of looking to the “governing spirit” whose will “constitutes the Laws of Nature”.¹²¹ It appears that Berkeley would like the natural sciences to be a branch of theology. In his view scientists should busy themselves with the examination of the Divine Visual Language rather than “pretending to explain things by corporeal causes; which doctrine seems to have too much estranged the minds of men from that active principle, that supreme and wise spirit, *in whom we live, move, and have our being*.”¹²² Berkeley intends to show that the world of our

¹¹⁹ *Principles*, #91.

¹²⁰ See *Works*, vol. 2, 81, footnote 1.

¹²¹ *Principles*, #32.

¹²² *Principles*, #66. The biblical quotation is from *The Acts of the Apostles*, 17: 27-28. Berkeley’s philosophy could be summed up as an attempt to give a philosophical defence of this leitmotif. Jessop lists the other passages in Berkeley where St Paul’s line is quoted: *Principles*; #149, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*; vols 2 and 3, *Alciphron*, vol. 4, 14, *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*; title page, and in the twelfth *Guardian* Essay (Eraser’s numbering). In *Commentaries*, #827 Berkeley refers to Spinoza’s use of the Pauline maxim. Jessop also suggests that Berkeley’s attention may have been drawn to the passage from his reading of Malebranche’s *Recherché*, vol. 2, ii, 6.

experience is a theophany: that, as Jessop points out, “natural laws are simply factual regularities of co-existence and succession, making prediction, and therewith reasonable living, possible: there is no inexorable mechanism, but only benevolent disposition”.¹²³

Berkeley rebukes Christians for attributing the activities of creatures to the action of “Nature” rather than “the immediate hand of God”. Christians, he feels, should have little difficulty understanding nature in these terms of a theophany and in support of this he quotes several biblical passages:

The Lord, he causeth the vapours to ascend; he maketh lightnings with rain; he bringeth forth the wind out of his treasures, Jerem. Chap.10.ver.13. He turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night, Amos Chap.5.ver.8. He visiteth the earth, and maketh it soft with his showers: he blesseth the springing thereof, and crowneth the year with his goodness; so that the pastures are clothed with flocks, and the valleys are covered over with corn. See Psalm 65. But notwithstanding that this is the constant language of Scripture; yet we have I know not what aversion from believing, that God concerns himself so nearly in our affairs. Fain would we suppose him at a great distance off, and substitute some blind unthinking deputy in his stead, though (if we may believe Saint Paul) he be not far from every one of us.¹²⁴

Thus Berkeley presents us with a God who is intimately present to man, and a creation which is an expression of divine providence. Every single creature that exists in the world is to be interpreted as a message directly from God to the perceiving man, and the order pervading nature as the “grammar” of this language of God. There are no beings outside man’s perception as they would “serve to no manner of purpose”.¹²⁵

The doctrine of Radical Dependence lies at the heart of our enquiry as it is directly related to the question we have set out to examine: whether Berkeley’s philosophy centres on the notion of conservation and, if it does, whether this doctrine undergoes any development in the course of Berkeley’s writings. While Berkeley concentrates on the doctrine of the Divine Visual Language in the *Principles*, he also appears to realise that, given that this doctrine is no more than an elaboration of the principle that all involuntary ideas must be immediately produced by God, a proof based on this latter principle alone would be far simpler and more convincing. If

¹²³ Jessop, *Works*, vol. 2, Introduction, 12.

¹²⁴ *Principles*, #150.

¹²⁵ *Principles*, #19.

the omnipresent *order* of creation betokens the “immediate hand of God”, then the sheer *existence* of things betokens the “spirit that immediately produces every effect by a *fiat*, or act of his will”.¹²⁶ Furthermore an ordering God is not necessarily a creating God; such a divine orderer need be no more creative than Plato’s *demiurgos*. Berkeley is by no means content to settle for an orderer in the place of the Creator found in Christian cosmology. The great obstacle preventing philosophers from moving away from their conception of God as a mere Orderer to God as a Creator, has been the belief in the existence of matter:

So great a difficulty hath it been thought, to conceive matter produced out of nothing, that the most celebrated among the ancient philosophers, even of these who maintained the being of a God, have thought matter to be uncreated and coeternal with him.¹²⁷

For Berkeley it is the *whole* being that is produced immediately by God from nothing. The Creator is not the one-time creator of some inert material principle; an unknowable primary substance, of which we perceive mere representational secondary qualities. The Christian God created “every thing we see, hear, feel, or any wise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the Power of God; as is our perception of those very motions, which are produced by men”.¹²⁸ Our dependence upon God is “absolute and entire”¹²⁹; he “sustains the whole system of beings”¹³⁰, and he alone upholds all things “by the Word of his Power”.¹³¹

It is interesting that Berkeley is aware that the “schoolmen” before him had written of the Radical Dependence of the world on God; although they held the existence of matter they nevertheless held that the world could not subsist without divine conservation:

For the Schoolmen, though they acknowledge the existence of matter, and that the whole mundane fabrick is formed out of it, are nevertheless of the

¹²⁶ *Principles*, #60.

¹²⁷ *Principles*, #92. In his footnote to this passage Jessop lists passages in which the eternity of matter is assumed by the most celebrated of the ancients; Aristotle in *De Caelo*, chapter 2, i, 283b26 and Plato in the *Timaeus*, 38, B6.

¹²⁸ *Principles*, #148.

¹²⁹ *Principles*, #149.

¹³⁰ *Principles*, #151.

¹³¹ *Principles*, #147.

opinion that it cannot subsist without the divine conservation, which by them is expounded to be a continual creation.¹³²

Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous

Berkeley's preface to the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), (hereafter *Three Dialogues*), states his aim as being to divert men's minds away from "vain researches"; that is, the search for a source of our perceptions in matter, and to present "a plain demonstration of the immediate Providence of an all-seeing God, and the natural immortality of the soul".¹³³ Berkeley is convinced that the destruction of atheism and scepticism will necessarily follow from the application of these principles.¹³⁴ In this work we find that, although Berkeley makes use of both Radical Dependence and Divine Visual Language, the former is far more prevalent. In moving away from Divine Visual Language Berkeley continues the trend we have seen develop in the *Principles*. The doctrine of Radical Dependence establishes the dependence of the world on God in a far more straight-forward manner since it requires none of the scientific knowledge of the order of natural things necessary for a full appreciation of Divine Visual Language. Radical Dependence is also far more direct than Divine Visual Language: it infers from the mere fact of the existence of things their conservation by an omnipresent God. This argument has a kind of irrefutable simplicity and provides Berkeley with a much coveted "plain demonstration" of God's providence. He does speak of the fixed and immutable laws by which God "actuates" the universe¹³⁵ and of "a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive",¹³⁶ but he relies almost exclusively on Radical Dependence; thus he infers "the being of a God because all sensible things must be perceived by him".¹³⁷ Berkeley goes much deeper in his theism; rather than examining the order of things, which is only accidental, he looks at the existential contingency of things, which he sees as providing a most "direct and immediate demonstration" of the existence of God, and more

¹³² *Principles*, #46.

¹³³ *Three Dialogues*, Preface, *Works*, vol. 2, 167.

¹³⁴ *Three Dialogues*, Preface, *Works*, 168.

¹³⁵ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 210-11. This appears to be the first mention of "actuation". As we shall see later the doctrine of actuation is of particular importance in Berkeley's final work *Siris*.

¹³⁶ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 215.

¹³⁷ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 212.

importantly it shows that things do not have an absolute subsistence distinct from God. It is “in opposition to sceptics and atheists” that Berkeley wishes to demonstrate “the immediate providence of a Deity”. A mere proof of the existence of God is not considered by Berkeley to be a sufficient argument against the sceptics and atheists. In a very revealing passage in the Second Dialogue, Berkeley clearly reveals that he is no longer satisfied to defend theism through the teleological proof, since the cosmological proof is now considered to be far more accessible:

Divines and philosophers have proved beyond all controversy, from the beauty and usefulness of the several parts of the creation, that it was the workmanship of God. But that setting aside all help of astronomy and natural philosophy, all contemplation of the contrivance, order, and adjustment of things, an infinite mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare existence of the sensible world, is an advantage peculiar to them only who have made this easy reflexion: that the sensible world is that which we perceive by our several senses; and that nothing is perceived by the senses beside ideas; and that no idea or archetype of an idea can exist otherwise than in a mind. You may now, without any laborious search into the sciences, without any subtlety of reason, or tedious length of discourse, oppose and baffle the most strenuous advocate for atheism.¹³⁸

Berkeley’s earlier intuition of the *Principles* has come to fruition. He has realised the superfluity of Divine Visual Language given that it rests on the immaterialist premise, which in turn depends on God’s immediate production of the ideas which play on our senses. What then is the need to examine the order of our ideas when their bare existence provides us with an even stronger argument for God’s providence? As I have pointed out earlier, this shift towards Radical Dependence suggests that Berkeley has overlooked his earlier contention that order was the hallmark that allowed us to infer a divine cause of man’s ideas.¹³⁹ Through Radical Dependence God’s “spirituality, omnipresence, providence, omniscience, infinite power and goodness, are as conspicuous as the existence of sensible things”.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 212-13.

¹³⁹ Because Berkeley makes this rather fundamental error it appears that though he is speaking in terms of immaterialism, he is *thinking* of the world of common-sense experience: things are real, they are contingent, but they are not dependent on the mind of man.

¹⁴⁰ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 257.

Berkeley's position here is also further from the voluntarism of his initial immaterialism in that it relies less on the conviction that there are no secondary causes. Whether things exercise secondary causality or not has no bearing on the existential argument of Radical Dependence, whereas secondary causality is incompatible with Divine Visual Language.

Some of the objections made by Berkeley in the *Three Dialogues* to the existence of matter reveal that his primary objection to matter is not made on epistemological grounds, but rather on the grounds that such matter would give things an autonomy from God's conserving action. Such "an absolute subsistence extrinsic to the mind of God" would derogate from the immensity and omniscience of God.¹⁴¹ Since, he continues, it is almost impossible to prove the creation of matter "by the mere will of a spirit...divers modern and Christian philosophers have thought matter coeternal with the Deity". In short, the belief in the existence of matter has posed a threat to the Christian notion of creation".¹⁴²

In the *Three Dialogues* Berkeley posits God as a constant perceiver of ideas, regardless of whether perceived by man or not, and so allows the material world a greater degree of objectivity than was strictly possible in the *Principles*. The *esse est percipi vel percipere* principle is made to include God's perception of the world, whereas this was not necessarily the case in the *Principles*. In this way Berkeley can retain the doctrine that the being of things is to be perceived and, at the same time, suggest that things outside man's perception still exist. Clearly if this is conceded, then there is little practical difference between Berkeley's view of the world and the common-sense view of the world held by the ordinary man in the street: things outside of man's perception would continue to exist because God perceives them. There would no longer be any need to attribute any particular significance to man's perception of the world. Berkeley never goes this far for he always considers man to have a special status as a perceiver. However, given that in the *Three Dialogues* he has extended the *esse est percipi* principle to include God's perception, there is no logical reason for it to apply to man's perception any longer.

Throughout the *Three Dialogues* we find that Berkeley is concerned to defend his system against the criticism that by it things are reduced to mere chimeras. In response to this he claims that his world of ideas is as real as that of "*things*": "By whatever method you distinguish things from chimeras on your own scheme, the same, it is evident, will hold also upon

¹⁴¹ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 253.

¹⁴² *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 256.

mine”.¹⁴³ His only concession is that his use of the word “idea” where the word “thing” is more common, sounds odd. Things, he says, are called “ideas” to show their necessary relation to mind, and in retaliation he attacks the Lockean distinction between primary and secondary qualities as being the philosophical doctrine that is responsible for reducing reality and the beauty of creation to “a false glare”.¹⁴⁴ Berkeley claims that his immaterialism is far more reconcilable with the Mosaic account of creation than is that of Locke. The Mosaic account of creation speaks of the creation of real things “herbs, earth, water &c”. whereas others would hold that creation was of “unknown quiddities, of occasions, or *substratums*”.¹⁴⁵ Scripture, says Berkeley, also represents God “as the sole and immediate Author of all those effects, which some heathens and philosophers are wont to ascribe to Nature, matter, fate, or the like unthinking principle”.¹⁴⁶

Jessop remarks that in the *Three Dialogues* the emphasis shifts away from God as cause of our percepts:

The emphasis is now transposed: the argument is that the existence of God must be granted in order to account for the continuous existence of the corporeal world, God is the permanent subject of the natural order; the notion of God as cause is slipped in in a quiet casual way.¹⁴⁷

This is not just a variation on the theory of Radical Dependence; a variation in which God must be granted as the constant conserver of our involuntary ideas. It marks a more radical transition in Berkeley’s thought: now God is conceived as the constant conserver, not of mere ideas, but rather of things even when unperceived by man. These things cannot be termed ideas with respect to man but only with respect to God. Clearly Berkeley wants to avoid the complex epistemological niceties of the *Principles* which only served to obscure its apologetic intent. Berkeley’s primary intention is to foster, not good epistemology, but virtue and piety:

The question between the materialists and me is not, whether things have a real existence out of the mind of this or that person, but whether they have

¹⁴³ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 235.

¹⁴⁴ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 211.

¹⁴⁵ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 256.

¹⁴⁶ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 236.

¹⁴⁷ Jessop, *Works*, vol. 2, 152-53.

an absolute existence, distinct from being perceived by God, and exterior to all minds.¹⁴⁸

In making this subtle change Berkeley extricates the world from a complete dependence on the mind of man, and leaves it completely dependent on the mind of God instead; a “thing” is no longer in essence an idea imprinted by God on the mind of man, but simply something of which God himself has an idea. Man is relegated to a far inferior position in the business of making the world to be, for sensible things “do not depend on my thought, and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me”.¹⁴⁹ It would appear that Berkeley has dropped his strict immaterialism: things, because they can exist unperceived by man, are as much things as common-sense would claim. He says of sensible things that “it is plain they have an existence exterior to my mind. Now it is plain they have to be independent of it”.¹⁵⁰

This revised version of immaterialism would have to be interpreted then as affecting only the philosophical-scientific contrivance “matter” and as having no bearing on the world of real, objective “things”. Berkeley’s philosophical explanation for their existence is that God perceives them, they being his ideas, and through his perception they perdure. Such a notion is not original to Berkeley; Christian tradition often speaks of the world as existing in the mind of God and Berkeley himself clearly regards this stance as being consistent with, or consequent on, Christianity: “But then to a Christian it cannot surely be shocking to say, the real tree existing without his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, *exists in*) the infinite mind of God”.¹⁵¹

In the *Principles* Berkeley asserted that the ideas man receives from God do depend on man’s thought insofar as they need a receiver in order to be actualised. A sensible thing in this system is a combination of the activity of God and the perception of ideas by man. Here in the *Three Dialogues*, however, in asserting that sensible things can have existence independently of their perception by man, Berkeley implies that there are real things perceived by God alone. In the *Principles* man was the necessary perceiver in the bipartite operation of “creation” and “conservation”; in the *Three Dialogues* God alone suffices for creation and

¹⁴⁸ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 235.

¹⁴⁹ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, vol. 2, 212.

¹⁵⁰ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 230.

¹⁵¹ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 235.

conservation. The Berkeley who wrote the *Principles* would never have Philonous reply to Hylas' question as he does here:

Hylas. Ask the fellow, whether yonder tree hath an existence out of his mind: what answer think you he would make?

Philonous. The same that I should my self, to wit, that it doth exist out of his mind.¹⁵²

Although Berkeley has conceded that things exist outside the mind of man, we find that he does not mean this in the sense of a self-subsistent world but rather that things exist immaterially *in* the mind of God. He adopts the Platonic distinction between the divine “archetypal” ideas and their “ectypal” copies which, for Berkeley, exist in the mind of man.¹⁵³ Although things are said to exist outside of the mind of men, “*there must be some other mind wherein they exist*. As sure therefore as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite omnipresent spirit who contains and supports it”.¹⁵⁴

Given this distinction Berkeley can overcome two of the difficulties unsurmounted by the immaterialism of the *Principles*: the first difficulty—that things must be recreated each time they are perceived by man—no longer applies since God’s perception of things guarantees their continuity outside of human perception:

There is therefore some other Mind wherein they exist, during the intervals between the times of my perceiving them: as likewise they did before my birth, and would do after my supposed annihilation. And as the same is true with regard to all other finite created spirits; it necessarily follows, there is an *omnipresent eternal Mind*, which knows and comprehends all things...¹⁵⁵

The second difficulty was to guarantee that all men receive the same sense impressions. Given the subjectivity of sensation, Berkeley had no grounds in the *Principles* for asserting that God imprinted the same sensations on the minds of all men. Archetypes allow this difficulty to be surmounted for the diversity of men’s perceptions is unified in the

¹⁵² *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 235.

¹⁵³ Here Berkeley moves even closer to the ontologism of his French counterpart Malebranche. For an examination of the influence of Malebranche on Berkeley see A. A. Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley’s Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967).

¹⁵⁴ *Three Dialogues*, Second Dialogue, *Works*, 212.

¹⁵⁵ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 230-31.

archetypes that God has in his mind. Thus “an external archetype ... serves all the ends of identity”.¹⁵⁶

But the argument that God conserves all sensible things in his ideas has to be refined because of two shortcomings: firstly, as it stands, it is irreconcilable with the temporal creation of the world in time as revealed in the Genesis account, and secondly it appears to attribute passivity, and thus limitations, to God. The first difficulty is raised by Hylas when he asks: “How could that which was eternal, be created in time?”¹⁵⁷ In reply Berkeley (Philonous) accounts for the temporality of creation by his interpretation of creation as the making perceptible in time of the ideas which exist eternally in the mind of God: “When things are said to begin or end their existence, we do not mean this with regard to God, but His creatures . . . things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them....”¹⁵⁸ In reply to the second difficulty Berkeley asserts that God, being a pure spirit, is disengaged from having sensations in the way physical creatures do.

Thus we see that by the end of the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley’s doctrine of the conservation of the world is no longer based on the notion that God projects ideas into the mind of man, but rather that what man perceives is a direct reflection of those divine ideas contained and sustained in the mind of God. In fact, we could go further and say that Berkeley has set only the thinnest of barriers between his new version of Radical Dependence and Malebranche’s ontologism: the things which man perceives have a radical dependence on God because they are part of God! Though Berkeley makes the distinction between archetypes in the mind of God and ectypes in the minds of men, he has no solid grounds for asserting any distinction between the two; archetypes are identical with ectypes and man has a vision of the mind of God.

De Motu

De Motu (1721), subtitled “The Principle and Nature of Motion and the Cause of the Communication of Motions”, was written for a competition held by the Paris Academy of Sciences for the best essay on the origin of motion. In it Berkeley expresses his own objections to contemporary theories of motion. He sets out to show that order and motion are an

¹⁵⁶ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 248.

¹⁵⁷ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 253.

¹⁵⁸ *Three Dialogues*, Third Dialogue, *Works*, 252-53.

immediate consequence of God's action. He rejects the theory of gravity, which he accredits to Newton, on the grounds that it is tautologous, amounting to the assertion that "gravity causes gravity". (Berkeley misunderstood Newton as saying that gravity was the ultimate cause of motion whereas in fact Newton made no such claim.) Berkeley also criticises Leibniz's assertion that motion arises from a primitive power present in all bodies. In his view, both Newton's and Leibniz's explanations of motion are unintelligible as they cannot be subject to verification by sense perception nor by reason. Against them Berkeley gives two rather spurious examples where, he claims, the laws of gravity are not obeyed: in the growth of plants and in the elasticity of the air. Rather than having a gravitational force as Newton asserts, or a primitive power as Leibniz believes, things, according to Berkeley, are absolutely passive:

All that to which we have given the name body contains nothing in itself which could be the principle of motion or its efficient cause; for impenetrability, extension, and figure neither include nor connote any power of producing motion...¹⁵⁹

Spiritual beings alone have power to cause motion in bodies. Mind is the origin of all motion; finite minds are only subordinate causes of motion and God is the ultimate source of motion:

Furthermore corporeal things, there is the other class, viz. thinking things, and that there is in them the power of moving bodies we have learned by personal experience; since our mind at will can stir and stay the movements of our limbs, whatever be the ultimate explanation of the fact. This is certain that bodies are moved at the will of the mind, and accordingly the mind can be called, correctly enough, a principle of motion, a particular and subordinate principle indeed, and one which itself depends on the first universal principle.¹⁶⁰

Berkeley never explains how this is so; he merely appeals to the authority of Plato, Aristotle, the Cartesians, and Newton for the claim that God is the creator and conserver of motion.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁹ *De Motu*, #22, *Works*, vol. 4, 36.

¹⁶⁰ *De Motu*, #25, *Works*, 37.

¹⁶¹ Johnston severely criticises Berkeley for failing to give his own solution to the problem of the source of motion but surely this is unfair criticism given the restrictions under which Berkeley was presumably writing: his immaterialist

Although Berkeley is primarily interested in attributing order and change to the direct action of God, Johnston contends that, in *De Motu*, Berkeley omits any argument for God's creation of the world.¹⁶² This criticism would appear not to take account of the appearance of a Cartesian strain in *De Motu*, in particular a passage in which Berkeley makes the following, rather extraordinary, claim:

Modern thinkers consider motion and rest in bodies as two states of existence in either of which every body, without pressure from external force, would naturally remain passive; whence one might gather that the cause of the existence of bodies is also the cause of their motion and rest. For no other cause of the successive existence of the body in different parts of space should be sought, it would seem, than that whence is derived the successive existence of the same body in different parts of time.¹⁶³

This argument that the cause of motion must be the same as the cause of existence is unusual. Obviously motion presupposes existence but this is not to say that the cause of motion is the cause of existence; no more than we can say evil presupposes existence therefore the cause of existence is the cause of evil. It is true that Berkeley may be trying to curry favour among the French committee which organised the competition by speaking of Cartesianism in favourable terms. Immediately after referring to this Cartesian proof, however, Berkeley quickly adds that it does not belong to physics and mechanics to assign things their efficient causes; rather this belongs to metaphysics and theology and so is outside the scope of the treatise. Berkeley outlines the limitations of the physical sciences in this regard. The origin of motion is beyond the competence of science:

But to treat of the good and great God, creator and preserver of all things, and to show how all things depend on supreme and true being, although it is the most excellent part of human knowledge, is, however, rather the province of first philosophy or metaphysics and theology than of natural philosophy which to-day is almost entirely confined to experiments and mechanics. And so natural philosophy either presupposes the knowledge of God or borrows it from some superior science. Although it is most true that the investigation of nature everywhere supplies the higher sciences with

doctrine would have been out of place in such a competition. However it may reflect a lack of conviction on Berkeley's behalf regarding his immaterialist hypothesis.

¹⁶² See G. A. Johnston, *Development of Berkeley's Philosophy*, 226-34.

¹⁶³ *De Motu*, #34, *Works*, 40.

notable arguments to illustrate and prove the wisdom, the goodness, and the power of God.¹⁶⁴

In adopting the Cartesian conception of matter as pure extension and complete passivity, Berkeley overlooks the fact that space and time are accidents of the existing thing and that to look for the cause of the “successive existence” of a body in space and time is to look for the cause of the existence of a body *per se*. As we saw in Chapter One, and as Berkeley himself explicitly states, creation is the same act as conservation.¹⁶⁵ The cause of the existence of a thing does not have to “renew” its creative act each time the thing changes, the existence underlies the change, including spatial and temporal change, and is the subject of change. Ironically, in saying this, Berkeley unwittingly assents to the notion that space and time are absolutes through which the body moves rather than qualities accidental to the body. The only way that this assertion can be validated is by beginning with the assumption that change is on the same ontological level as existence; i.e., to assume that just as the existence of contingent things presupposes a necessary being, so too the phenomenon of change in itself implies the existence of another being directly responsible for that change. This short passage reveals that Berkeley does not fully grasp the philosophical import of equating creation with conservation.

Berkeley asserts that every single instance of motion must directly relate to a person, and that all motion must be indirectly related to God. Berkeley also discusses the mistaken attribution of divine properties to space, complaining that

many, so far from regarding absolute space as nothing, regard it as the only thing (God excepted) which cannot be annihilated; and they lay down that it necessarily exists of its own nature, that it is eternal and uncreated, and is actually a participant in the divine attributes.¹⁶⁶

The solution to this problem, says Berkeley, lies in considering what is meant by the word “pure space”. This done, it will become clear that we can only attribute necessary existence to God alone.¹⁶⁷ From this it can be

¹⁶⁴ *De Motu*, #34, *Works*, 40.

¹⁶⁵ See Berkeley’s letter to Johnson of November 25, 1729 in which Berkeley expresses his agreement with the Scholastic notion that creation and conservation differ only in their *terminus a quo*.

¹⁶⁶ *De Motu*, #54, *Works*, 46.

¹⁶⁷ *De Motu*, #56, *Works*, 46.

seen that Berkeley's objections to the conclusions of contemporary science and philosophy, like those of his earlier works, stem from a desire to avert any possibility of derogating from the radical dependence of all things on God.

Alciphron

The bulk of *Alciphron: or the Minute Philosopher* (1732) (hereafter *Alciphron*) deals primarily with the theological controversies of the time. However, in the Fourth Dialogue Berkeley deals mainly with his doctrine of the conservation of the world by God. Here he deals with both Divine Visual Language and Radical Dependence but without any explicit mention of immaterialism, and we find no further discussion of archetypes and ectypes.¹⁶⁸ Berkeley keeps his arguments simple, making two principal assertions: firstly, regarding causality, Berkeley says that there is no secondary causality in things and that God alone is a cause properly speaking, and that through his causality God speaks to man. Secondly, Berkeley affirms God's intimate presence in the world. Berkeley has moved much closer to classical Greek sources as well as Scholastic writers, citing their doctrines whenever they assert the intimate involvement of God in the world. He frequently refers to classical philosophers and clearly sees himself as belonging to a long tradition of thinkers who have asserted the radical dependence of the world on God. An examination of *Alciphron* shows that Berkeley's portrayal of the theory of Radical Dependence has also become simpler: the world is made up of real things, not mere ideas (although again a proviso must be made; Berkeley is as ambiguous as ever on this point and can be interpreted in conflicting ways), but these things are completely devoid of any causal power and rely completely on God for all their activities. Radical Dependence is no longer conceived of as a complete dependence of the thing on God in the way that an idea depends on the conceiving mind, but rather as a dependence of things on God in order to be moved or "actuated". As we have seen, mere movement is an accident of a substance and whereas it may indeed show the immediate presence of the mover, in this case God, it does not imply that the substance is ontologically dependent on the mover. Berkeley would appear to have taken a step

¹⁶⁸ It would appear that Berkeley was loathe to pursue his immaterialism into the intricacies of these debates, preferring to leave the argument aside once the basic point in defence of Christianity had been made.

backwards in seeking to affirm Radical Dependence through the “movement” of things.

Berkeley returns to the doctrine that the phenomena of sense constitute a language “contrived with such exquisite skill”, that plainly declares “the nearness, wisdom, and providence of Him with whom we have to do”.¹⁶⁹ Once again Berkeley asserts the continuous involvement of God in the world as being evidenced through his production of the phenomena of sense:

You cannot deny that the great Mover and Author of Nature constantly explaineth Himself to the eyes of men by the sensible intervention of arbitrary signs, which have no similitude or connexion with the things signified; so as, by compounding and disposing them, to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects, differing in nature, time, and place; thereby informing and directing men how to act with respect to things distant and future, as well as near and present.¹⁷⁰

Though Berkeley makes no explicit case for immaterialism as he does in the *Principles*, Luce argues that Berkeley’s continued adherence to immaterialism must be inferred from the reappearance of Divine Visual Language but this is arguable.¹⁷¹ Divine Visual Language is possible without immaterialism; for, if one does no more than deny secondary causality, signs can be considered to be arbitrary without having to be considered to be immaterial. Take for example the apparent causal connection between fire and heat. It cannot be inferred from a denial of a causal link between the two that either fire or heat is a mere perception. It can be held, as Hume does, that the link between fire and heat is one of mere succession. Both fire and heat can be held to truly exist, the constancy of their contiguity being due to God or some unknown agent. For Berkeley fire and heat are real “signs” created by God, the apparent causal connection between them being that which is “unreal”. The phenomena we perceive, for example, the lessening in size and growing faintness of an object, are not necessarily connected with what we infer from them, in this case distance. The connection is only arbitrary. Berkeley envisages God as being responsible for the constant production

¹⁶⁹ *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #15, *Works*, vol. 3, 161.

¹⁷⁰ *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #12, *Works*, 157.

¹⁷¹ Whether or not Berkeley drops his doctrine of immaterialism is not directly relevant to this work but indirectly so in that it is important for a final evaluation of the consequences of asserting Radical Dependence for Berkeley.

from them, in this case distance. The connection is only arbitrary. Berkeley envisages God as being responsible for the constant production of these signs “compounding and disposing them, to suggest and exhibit an endless variety of objects”.¹⁷²

Berkeley claims that this optic language is “equivalent to a constant creation, betokening an immediate act of power and providence”. Jessop contends that

the idea of constant creation is not logically implied in what Berkeley has said through Euphranor and Crito. It may be involved in his distinctive doctrine, which he not expounding in *Alciphron*, that the being of corporeal things consists is their being perceived.¹⁷³

It would be unusual for Berkeley to argue for radical dependence directly from the world’s order alone; Jessop is correct to claim that it is illogical to equate the optic language with constant creation. But the kind of divine providence evidenced by the Divine Visual Language here is not the complete existential dependence of things on God, but rather a less radical kind of dependence; i.e., a dependence of things on God for motion and the corresponding dependence of man on God to move the purely passive, created things in an ordered way so that man can organise his actions accordingly. The reason that ink flows from the nib of my pen is not because of the nature or design of my pen, but because God, here and now, makes the ink to appear subsequent to these motions of a pen. Berkeley’s belief that all motion depends completely on the will of God stems from his voluntarist view of the world. This guarantees the providence of God in the wide sense of the word without having to resort to immaterialism:

Some philosophers, being convinced of the wisdom and power of the Creator, from the make and contrivance of organized bodies and orderly system of the world, do nevertheless imagine that he left this system with all its parts and contents well adjusted and put in motion, as an artist leaves a clock, to go thenceforward of itself for a certain period. But this Visual Language proves, not a Creator merely, but a provident Governor, actually and intimately present, and attentive to all our interests and motions, who watches over our conduct, and takes care of our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives, informing, admonishing,

¹⁷² *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #12, *Works*, 157.

¹⁷³ Jessop, *Works*, vol. 3, 159, footnote 3.

It is notable that Berkeley uses the term “a provident Governor” for this reveals the paucity of this kind of Radical Dependence: things are real but are utterly incapable of carrying out their own activities and so God must constantly act, as it were, in their stead.

In *Alciphron* Berkeley refers extensively to the classical notion of the analogical nature of our knowledge of God. Through the character of Crito, Berkeley refers to the discussions on analogy in the Pseudo-Dionysius, Picus of Mirandola, Thomas Aquinas, and Suarez. Euphranor concludes from this discussion that it seems that

we are led not only by revelation, but by common sense, observing and inferring from the analogy of visible things, to conclude there are innumerable orders of intelligent beings more happy and more perfect than man, whose life is but a span, and whose place, this earthly globe, is but a point, in respect of the whole system of God’s creation.¹⁷⁵

The traditional notion of analogy, as found in these sources cited by Berkeley, is based on the observation that there are degrees in the participation by creatures in the perfection of God; the degree to which each being participates in God’s perfection is manifested by their particular activities.

However, though Berkeley never adverts to the fact, the analogical nature of man’s knowledge is irreconcilable with the immaterialist hypothesis. Berkeley could not accept fully the analogical knowledge of God, without, at least unconsciously, attributing a greater reality to the natural world than his immaterialism allows: if the world were merely a succession of ideas imprinted by God on our minds in the sense of being mere images without any deeper ontological content, then it would be impossible to have an analogical knowledge of God as there would be no degrees in the perfection of things. Things, being mere signs, would lack the gradation in being on which the doctrine of analogy is based.¹⁷⁶ The

¹⁷⁵ *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #23, *Works*, 172. Berkeley develops his idea of analogy in *Siris*.

¹⁷⁶ In Descartes’ distinction between the formal and objective reality of ideas the formal reality of ideas is their status as ideas. Formally all ideas, be they of God or mice, are equally ideas and are of the same value. The objective value of an idea is the status of the thing the idea purports to represent; this concerns the ontological value or the degree of being of the thing represented and in this ideas are of different values. Berkeley may mean that things differ in the degree to which God manifests his power through them. God would manifest far less power through a stone than through an animal for example.

fact that Berkeley adopts the doctrine of analogy is probably evidence more of his failure to fully understand the doctrine of analogy than it is of an abandonment of immaterialism¹⁷⁷. Berkeley's Divine Visual Language, whether we opt for an objectivist or immaterialist interpretation, reduces things to two dimensional signs the actions of which do not manifest their own particular being but rather the being of God. Analogy is incompatible with the voluntarism of Berkeley's Divine Visual Language.

Berkeley depicts God as actuating the world in the same way as the soul of man actuates his soul:

The soul of man actuates but a small body. . . . And the wisdom that appears in those motions which are the effect of human reason is incomparably less than that which discovers itself in the structure and use of organized natural bodies, animal or vegetable. . . . Doth it not follow, then, that from natural motions, independent of man's will, may be inferred both power and wisdom incomparably greater than that of the human soul?¹⁷⁸

Berkeley, by introducing the notion of actuation, implicitly affirms the existence of a potentiality distinct from God's sustaining power.¹⁷⁹ This

¹⁷⁷ W. W. S. March interprets Berkeley in this way in his discussion of the appearance of analogy in *Alciphron*. See W. W. S. March, "Analogy, Aquinas and Bishop Berkeley," *Theology* 44 (1942): 328.

¹⁷⁸ *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #5, *Works*, 146 (Euphroron speaking). A similar analogy is to be found in Newton's notion of space as the *sensoriwn Dei* (a notion that Berkeley criticised in the *Commentaries*): "Does it not appear from phenomena that there is a Being incorporeal, living, intelligent, omnipresent, who in infinite space, as it were in his sensory, sees the things themselves intimately, and thoroughly perceives them, and comprehends them wholly by their immediate presence to himself... [God] being in all places, is more able by his will to move the bodies within his boundless uniform sensorium, and thereby to form and reform the parts of the universe, than we by our will to move the parts of our own bodies". *Opticks*, 3, i, queries 288, 31 (reprint ed., 370, 403). Quoted in James D. Collins, *A History of Modern European Philosophy* (Wisconsin, 1961), 95, footnote 30.

¹⁷⁹ Though the notion of actuation does not appear in Berkeley's philosophical works prior to *Alciphron*, Berkeley did subscribe to it as early as 1713. In a letter to *The Guardian* of August 5, 1713 Berkeley bases his explanation of gravity on the notion of actuation: "The mutual gravitation of bodies cannot be explained any other way than by resolving it into the immediate operation of God, who never ceases to dispose and actuate his creatures in a manner *suitable to their respective beings*" (italics mine). *Guardian* Letter no. 126, *Works*, vol. 7, 227.

notion, positing as it does a substrate into which God introduces activity, is clearly out of keeping with the immaterialism of the *Principles* but not necessarily out of keeping with the more “objective” version of Divine Visual Language that we have seen developing and have discussed above. In fact, Berkeley’s introduction of the notion of actuation at this point would lend credence to the interpretation of Divine Visual Language in *Alciphron* as being Divine Visual Language with material objects.

Berkeley finds that the motions given to natural bodies evidence their actuation by God for an “infinite power and wisdom” must be supposed as responsible for all the order of creation in the same way that an intelligent soul is inferred from “a few signs or effects, and the motions of one small organized body”.¹⁸⁰ If Berkeley envisages the human soul as the formal principle of the body in Aristotelian terms, then God would be the formal principle of the world. He would inhere in creation as the soul of man inheres in his body; thus visible phenomena would not be mere signs *through which* God communicates to man, but rather natural manifestations of God’s own being—something very close to pantheism. However Berkeley’s model seems to be that of Cartesian dualism rather than Aristotelian hylomorphism. The objects God actuates are really distinct from his being. God is immanent in creation without there being a substantial union between the two. If this is so then actuation in this case is the moving rather than the informing (giving being to a substrate) of the body.¹⁸¹

In the *Fourth Dialogue* the character Lysicles proposes the doctrine of Lucretius in which the volatile salts contained in plants are taken to be the “essence of the soul”. After the death of the plant this “spark of entity” “returns and mixes with the solar light, the universal soul of the world, and only source of life, whether vegetable, animal, or intellectual which differ only according to the grossness or fineness of the vehicles. . .”¹⁸²

By putting these words in the mouth of the neutral Lysicles, Berkeley manages to distance himself from the views expressed without appearing to oppose them. It would seem that Berkeley became acquainted with this conception of the universe at this time and was toying with it as a possible substitute for the mechanistic worldview. Only in *Siris* does Berkeley unequivocally support this doctrine of the life-giving aether.

¹⁸⁰ *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, #5, *Works*, 147 (Euphranor speaking).

¹⁸¹ The notion of actuation occupies an important place in *Siris*. Here the universe is conceived of as actuated, not directly by God, but through the mediation of the *anima mundi*.

¹⁸² *Alciphron*, Fourth Dialogue, # 14, *Works*, 245.

The Theory of Vision Vindicated

This tract was written in reply to an anonymous letter that appeared in the *Daily Postboy* in September, 1732, in which eight objections were made against Berkeley's Divine Visual Language as it appeared in *Alciphron*. The letter writer interprets Berkeley's Divine Visual Language as being based on immaterialism and in his reply Berkeley does not dispute this interpretation. In the anonymous letter the objections are made from the Lockean stand-point: the existence of the object being inferred from the congruity of our different sense perceptions though our "ideas within have no connection with the object without".

In his reply Berkeley elucidates the position presented in the *Fourth Dialogue of Alciphron*, and reasserts that our sense perceptions are produced directly by God. However, Berkeley assumes his usual ambiguity regarding the ontological status of objects: he clearly denies, as being contrary to "received custom and opinion", the Lockean position whereby "object" is that which hides behind the secondary qualities that we perceive, but his own position remains obscure: he writes that "the first man you meet" will deny that by object we mean "a thing utterly unperceivable and unknown", but rather that an object is that which we perceive by sense. But are we to take this to mean that an object is no more than what we perceive it to be, as the immaterialist doctrine states, or is it rather the more palatable assertion that we perceive the real thing and that this thing is more than our perception of it?

The full title of the work: *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language, shewing The Immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity, Vindicated and Explained* (1733) (hereafter *Theory of Vision Vindicated*), clearly suggests that this work belongs solidly alongside the others we have examined, where the intention has been to show that in God "we live, and move, and have our being". It "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".¹⁸³

Berkeley makes it clear from the outset that his chief target is deism more so than atheism, as the latter results from the former but it is deism, not atheism that is in vogue: "It must be owned, many minute philosophers would not like at present to be accounted atheists".¹⁸⁴ Atheism is the ultimate enemy but Berkeley is fighting its precursor:

¹⁸³ *The Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #1, *Works*, vol. 1.

¹⁸⁴ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #2.

Certainly the notion of a watchful, active, intelligent, free Spirit, with whom we have to do, and in whom we live and move and have our being, is not the most prevailing in the books and conversation even of those who are called Deists.¹⁸⁵

For Berkeley it is the failure to recognise the omnipresence of God which ultimately leads to atheism. To deny, says Berkeley, that God is “an observer, judge, and rewarder of human actions” is what leads to atheism and infidelity.¹⁸⁶ Divine Visual Language is clearly a support for sustaining revealed religion and preserving morality. If it is realised that God is present to all our actions, if we have a “thorough sense of the Deity inspecting, concurring, and interesting it self in human actions and affairs”,¹⁸⁷ we will not deny that morality is directly related to God and not to some purely natural “moral sense” as Shaftesbury held. The general failure of people to recognise this means that they unwittingly applaud philosophies which are atheistic in intent:

That atheistical principles have taken deeper root, and are farther spread than most people are apt to imagine, will be plain to whoever considers that Pantheism, Materialism, Fatalism are nothing but atheism a little disguised; that the notion of Hobbes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, and Boyle are relished and applauded...¹⁸⁸

Once again Berkeley appeals to a certain principle of expedience: his immaterialism is justifiable insofar as it counters deism and prevents the growth of atheism.

In ##9-13 Berkeley answers the criticism of the anonymous letter writer by asserting that no unperceived object—that is an object such as Locke’s material substrate—which is outside and independent of the mind, can be inferred from our sense ideas. Rather we infer a “power” producing these ideas: “From our ideas of sense the inference of reason is good to Power, Cause, Agent”.¹⁸⁹ Berkeley is unambiguous in his refusal to concede “that unknown, unperceived, unintelligible thing which you

¹⁸⁵ *Theory of Vision Vindicated* #2. Of course by “deists” Berkeley is referring to “practical” deists rather than “speculative” deists.

¹⁸⁶ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #20.

¹⁸⁷ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #8.

¹⁸⁸ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #6.

¹⁸⁹ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #11.

signify by the word object'.¹⁹⁰ Instead Berkeley re-asserts the position that our sense-impressions are produced directly by God, having no natural connection with one another but acting as arbitrary signs, the convention being established by God, through which we understand the "meaning" signified. For example, we "understand" distance from its signifiers: an increased diminution of light and definition in our visual perceptions.

¹⁹⁰ *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, #32.

CHAPTER FOUR

SIRIS

That spring of life which this great world pervades,
The spirit that moves, the Intellect that guides,
Th'eternal One that o'er the Whole presides.
Go learn'd mechanic, stare with stupid eyes,
Attribute to all figure, weight and size.

Berkeley, *On Tar*, 11. 14-18.¹⁹¹

Introduction

Of all of Berkeley's works *Siris* (1744) is the one that has baffled Berkeleian scholars most, primarily because in it Berkeley exhibits a great affinity for Platonism and diverse forms of ancient mystical philosophy, which are not in keeping with the empiricism of his earlier works. Does this change fit into the pattern we have seen developing in Berkeley's earlier works, a pattern in which Berkeley tends to speak less of immaterialism and concentrates more on the passivity of things with respect to divine power? There are those who have said that *Siris* is completely unconnected to Berkeley's earlier works and in general critics tend to look on *Siris* as an oddity which is hard to reconcile with the empiricism of the *Principles*. Mabbott for instance maintains that the work is no more than an aberration. I will defend the unity of Berkeleian philosophy by showing that, although Berkeley introduces significant alterations to his system in *Siris*, the doctrine of Radical Dependence which pervades all his earlier works is still the inspiration behind it.

The primary reason for making this examination is to see whether the version of the Radical Dependence theory in *Siris*, which centres on the notion of actuation rather than immaterialism, can be viewed as a natural part of the Berkeleian system or whether it is rather an eccentricity that

¹⁹¹ This piece of verse is to be found in some copies of the second edition of *Siris*, 1744. Quoted in *Works*, vol. 5, 223.

does not fit in with the earlier works and is best ignored. The name of Berkeley is synonymous with the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, and the doctrine of *esse est percipi* is taken to be the core doctrine of his philosophy. Does *Siris* give us any new insights into Berkeley's thought that would help us to understand his earlier works in a deeper way?

It is my opinion that a true understanding of Berkeley's work is not possible without an understanding of *Siris*; this work allows us to see that the doctrine of immaterialism and the critique of abstraction in the *Principles* are not the only means of affirming the dependence of the world on God and that Berkeley is content to lay aside these means when other, and in his view superior, means are found. I believe that this supports my thesis that Berkeley was interested primarily in a philosophy of nature that would present a living and divinised universe in place of the deistic machine-universe, and that the immaterialist hypothesis was only a means to this rather than an end in itself.

It is clear from even a cursory reading of *Siris* that Berkeley's chief concern in the work is to show that a "supreme Mind" is "the true principle of unity, identity, and existence".¹⁹² Berkeley repeatedly asserts that "so long as mind or intellect is understood to preside over, govern, and conduct, the whole frame of things" then "there is no atheism".¹⁹³ It is in the light of this that Berkeley draws from a long line of theists, stretching from the Greeks to philosophers of his own day, in whose philosophical systems God is indeed presented, according to Berkeley, as such a governing mind. Unfortunately it is difficult to distinguish between the philosophical doctrines subscribed to by Berkeley and those he is merely presenting as examples of theistic cosmology.

Berkeley always remains an immaterialist, as Luce asserts, but his opposition is to the Lockean and Cartesian concept of matter; a matter which is self-subsistent Berkeley never explicitly endorses the Aristotelian notion of matter though it is reconcilable with many of Berkeley's doctrines. Paradoxically, Berkeley's later and more mystical system is in some ways easier to reconcile with common-sense than the more "empiricist" Berkeley of the *Principles*, for in *Siris* it is easier to interpret things as having a real existence than it is in the *Principles*.

In *Siris* the theory of Radical Dependence is based on God's actuation of the world. It is with the notion of actuation that Berkeley confronts the "Fatalism and Sadducism" which have gained ground "during the general

¹⁹² *Siris*, #294, *Works*, vol. 6.

¹⁹³ *Siris*, #326.

passion for the corpuscularian and mechanical philosophy, which hath prevailed for about a century".¹⁹⁴ In *Siris*, just as in his earlier works, Berkeley expresses his opposition to the seventeenth-century conceptions of matter, motion, and absolute space. Berkeley attacks Cartesian cosmology on the grounds that

nothing could be more vain and imaginary than to suppose with Descartes that merely from a circular motion's being impressed by the supreme Agent on the particles of extended substance, the whole world, with all its several parts, appurtenances, and phenomena, might be produced by a necessary consequence from the laws of motion.¹⁹⁵

He also rejects Newton's notion that "minute particles of bodies [have] certain forces of powers by which they act on one another". Berkeley counters that

those minute particles are only agitated according to certain laws of nature, by some other agent, wherein the force exists and not in them, which have only the motion; which motion in the body moved the Peripatetics rightly judge to be a mere passion, but in the mover to be *energeia* or act.¹⁹⁶

This suggests that Berkeley accepts the objective existence of "the minute particles", realising that this does not necessitate their being self-movers. Berkeley limits his criticisms of "mechanical causes" to saying that such causes do not "really and properly act, even motion itself being in truth a passion".¹⁹⁷ These mechanical principles "do not solve, if by solving is meant assigning the real, either efficient or final, cause of appearances, but only reduce them to general rules".¹⁹⁸

Berkeley renews his attack on the notion of absolute space: "That phantom of the mechanic and geometrical philosophers" and absolute motion, for "in these are ultimately founded the notions of external existence, independence, necessity, and fate".¹⁹⁹ Berkeley refers to Egyptian thinkers who rejected the notion of "an external world, subsisting

¹⁹⁴ *Siris*, #331.

¹⁹⁵ *Siris*, #232.

¹⁹⁶ *Siris*, #250. Words appearing in Greek lettering in the original text are italicised.

¹⁹⁷ *Siris*, #155.

¹⁹⁸ *Siris*, #251.

¹⁹⁹ *Siris*, #271.

in real absolute space”.²⁰⁰ He contends that the notion of absolute space has led contemporary philosophers to consider space to be one of the divine attributes and instead he proposes the alternative of Hermaic writings in which “the word space of place hath by itself no meaning” and that of Plotinus for whom “the soul is not in the world, but the world in the soul”.²⁰¹

It would be a mistake to look in *Siris* for a system as clear cut as that of the *Principles*. Berkeley has lost the naivety of his youth and no longer believes in a philosophical panacea that will bring all philosophical errors crashing to the ground. His intention rather is to re-awaken a spirit of metaphysical thinking in an age which he sees as becoming increasingly engrossed with “corporeal objects”.

As we have seen, Berkeley’s objections to deism are no different than those we found in all his earlier works. Let us examine, then, the alternative that Berkeley proposes in this, his final work, to the doctrine that has been his lifelong foe. Unfortunately it is not so easy to identify Berkeley’s solution as it has been in his earlier works, primarily due to the eclecticism of *Siris*; Berkeley picks his way through dozens of Greek, early Christian and Medieval philosophers, taking ideas from each; from some taking only vague suggestions but from others such as Plato, Aristotle, and Plotinus much more. Often it is not clear that Berkeley is even in agreement with those he cites. In general it could be said that his solution is no longer a straightforward version of the Divine Visual Language, involving as that does a complete acceptance of the evidence of the senses and a simple attribution of these phenomena to the immediate action of God. Instead Berkeley speaks of ascending “from the sensible into the intellectual world” where it can be seen “that the mind contains all, and acts all, and is to all created beings the source of unity and identity, harmony and order, existence and stability”.²⁰²

None of these conclusions differ from what Berkeley was able to conclude from his Divine Visual Language, but now he seems to imply a mystical vision of God in an intellectual realm. This is not to say that Berkeley has dropped his Divine Visual Language; he reiterates his old doctrine, though with an apparent alteration:

This Language of Discourse is studied with different attention, and interpreted with different degrees of skill. But so far as men have studied

²⁰⁰ *Siris*, #269.

²⁰¹ *Siris*, #270.

²⁰² *Siris*, #295.

and remarked its rules, and can interpret right, so far they may be said to be knowing in nature. A beast is like a man who hears a strange tongue but understands nothing.²⁰³

So now the Divine Visual Language is no longer a uniform presentation of sensations to men alone. Instead Berkeley does affirm the reality of the world, presented to the senses of men of varying intellectual ability as well as to animals. Berkeley appears to have realised that man's ability to "see" distance, things, etc., where an animal would see only patterns of colour, must be due to something in man himself. The very admission that animals do indeed perceive the same things as man implies that these things are objective and corporeal, and not received solely in the minds of men. This shows that Berkeley has been trying to explain the ability of man to "see" beyond mere perceptions. In Berkeley's earlier works an animal is no more than a series of perceptions in a human mind. Here Berkeley is unafraid to allow an animal to be spoken of as perceiving because it is not the fact of being a perceiver that makes a being a person, but the fact of *understanding*. Man participates in God in a special way because he is "knowing in nature". In his earlier works Berkeley always maintained that the reason man understands that certain sense impressions signify non-sensible qualities such as distance, is because man alone receives the language of God. The relationship between the purely sensible—what is perceived—and the non-sensible—what is understood—in such a case is a purely arbitrary one, belonging in a convention established by God. Here however Berkeley, for the first time, accounts for man's ability to "read into" these sense perceptions, not by reference to a mechanical knowledge of the Divine Visual Language, but rather by reference to an intellectual ability found in man and not in lower animals.

The Chain of Being

Berkeley envisages the "whole system of beings" as forming a hierarchical series, the lower elements of which depend on those beings immediately above. This forms a chain (*siris* in ancient Greek according to Berkeley) that stretches from the most lowly creatures up to the most sublime being: the Trinity: "There runs a chain throughout the whole

²⁰³ *Siris*, #254.

system of beings. In this chain one link drags another. The meanest things are connected with the highest”.²⁰⁴

The notion of a chain of being comes primarily from the neoplatonists, as we have seen in the discussion of neoplatonism in Chapter 2.²⁰⁵ Fraser points out that the idea of the universe forming a series of subordinated links is not peculiar to Berkeley:

The notion of a Chain ... in nature, connecting the phenomena of nature with one another, and with the Supreme Being, in a Cosmos or orderly system in which each phenomenon is rationally linked with every other, pervaded the ancient world.²⁰⁶

Throughout the course of *Siris* Berkeley continually shows that the ancients were responsible for the origin and development of this idea. He writes of Plato and Pythagoras agreeing

that the Soul of the World ... doth embrace all its parts, connect them by an invisible and indivisible and indissoluble chain, and preserve them ever well adjusted and in good order.²⁰⁷

Elsewhere Berkeley speaks of the ancients supposing

a pure invisible fire ... [which] seems the source of all the operations in nature ... to be everywhere, and always present, imparting different degrees of life, heat, and motion to the various animals, vegetables, and other natural productions, as well as to the elements themselves wherein they are produced and nourished.²⁰⁸

Berkeley gives an account of each of the successive links in the series, examining firstly the “meanest things”: the more earthy phenomena such

²⁰⁴ *Siris*, #303.

²⁰⁵ Armstrong describes the neoplatonic chain of being in the following terms: “At the head of the hierarchy stands a Supreme Mind or God, ineffably remote and exalted, combining Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover with Plato’s Form of the Good. Then come intermediary beings—the Second Mind, the lesser gods, the stars, the daemons—ruling and ordering and some of them inhabiting the visible universe which is itself as in the *Timaeus* a living being animated by a World-Soul”. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*, 152.

²⁰⁶ Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley D.D.*, vol. 2, (Oxford, 1871), 470, footnote 52.

²⁰⁷ *Siris*, #284.

²⁰⁸ *Siris*, #190.

as resins and salts, before proceeding to a consideration of increasingly rarefied or immaterial phenomena: the vapours in plants and the air from which their life is derived.²⁰⁹ The next level is that of the aether: the “ingredient” in the air on which life more immediately and principally depends”.²¹⁰ This aether or “pure invisible fire” “doth permeate all bodies, even the hardest and most solid, as the diamond”.²¹¹ It is a quasi-spiritual substance which performs the important function of linking the visible and spiritual worlds and “connects all things, and is their ultimate physical explanation—being the vital spirit of the universe, corresponding to the animal spirit in man”.²¹² For Berkeley this aether is the instrument through which God actuates the material world:

This much it consists with piety to say—that a divine Agent doth by His virtue permeate and govern the elementary fire or light (Sects. 157, 172), which serves as an animal spirit to enliven and actuate the whole mass, and all the members of this visible world.²¹³

Actuated by Mind the aether orders all things to the good, it is as it were a tool to direct nature:

Instruments, occasions, and signs (Sect. 160) occur in, or rather make up, the whole visible Course of Nature. These, being no agents themselves, are under the direction of one Agent concerting all for one end, the supreme good. All those motions, whether in animal bodies or in other parts of the system of nature, which are not effects of particular wills, seem to spring from the same general cause with the vegetation of plants—an aethereal spirit actuated by a Mind.²¹⁴

This all-pervading aether, through “the guidance of Mind”, orders the universe. Without it “the whole would be one great stupid mass”, like a soulless corpse. For Berkeley the aethereal spirit is the instrumental cause by which Mind governs the world.

²⁰⁹ Much of the first half of *Siris* is dedicated to an examination of the curative properties of “tar-water”—a medicinal drink made by distilling the resin of pine trees in water. In itself tar-water is of little relevance to Berkeley’s doctrine of Radical Dependence except to note that Berkeley looked on the existence of tar-water as a sign of divine providence.

²¹⁰ *Siris*, #144.

²¹¹ *Siris*, #200.

²¹² Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley D.D.*, vol. 2, 418, footnote 2.

²¹³ *Siris*, #291.

²¹⁴ *Siris*, #258.

Is Berkeley asserting the *existence* of the world or only the *order* of the world, to be contingent on God's actuating power? How we answer this question will depend on what we take him to mean when he speaks of Mind actuating the universe, and also whether, when he speaks of Mind as the "intellectual source of life and being",²¹⁵ this is meant in the sense of a one-time creation or a constant creation. This ambiguity is apparent many passages of *Siris*, for example when Berkeley contends that

the order and course of things, and the experiments we daily make, shew that there is a Mind that governs and actuates this mundane system, as the proper real agent and cause; and that the inferior instrumental cause is pure aether, fire, of the substance of light (Sects. 29, 37, 136, 149), which is applied and determined by an Infinite Mind in the macrocosm or universe, with unlimited power, and according to stated rules; as it is in the microcosm with limited power and skill by the human mind.²¹⁶

This comparison between the workings of the human mind in the body and that of the Infinite Mind in the universe recurs throughout *Siris*:

In the human body the mind orders and moves the limbs: but the animal spirit is supposed the immediate physical cause of their motion. So likewise in the mundane system, a mind presides: but the immediate, mechanical, or instrumental cause that moves or animates all its parts, is the pure elementary fire or spirit of the world.²¹⁷

Here Berkeley portrays God primarily as the mover and animator, rather than the conserver of the world. Clearly now the analogy in Berkeley's mind is not that of a mind conceiving ideas, but of a soul actuating a body and intelligently directing its movements. This was the sense in which the term was used in *Alciphron* as we have already seen.

The order and harmony of the universe from the macroscopic level to the microscopic level are attributed by Berkeley to the immediate action of "mind", and it cannot, he says, be attributed to the action of a "clockmaker God" who is now absent from the system he once designed and set in motion:

It is a vulgar remark, that the works of art do not bear a nice microscopical inspection, but the more helps are used, and the more nicely you pry into

²¹⁵ *Siris*, #296.

²¹⁶ *Siris*, #154.

²¹⁷ *Siris*, #161.

natural productions, the more do you discover the fine mechanism of nature, which is endless or inexhaustible; new and other parts, more subtle and delicate than the precedent, still continuing to offer themselves to view . . . [and these phenomena are inexplicable] without the immediate action of a mind.²¹⁸

Berkeley's version of the teleological argument argues for the *actual* presence of divine intelligence directing all things here and now, whereas the traditional version of the teleological argument infers the existence of God as the architect of nature: since non-intelligent creatures carry out "intelligent" actions (that is actions directed towards an end), there must be inferred a creator of the nature of these creatures who, when designing the nature, ordained it towards its proper end. Berkeley, the nominalist, does not hold that things have a particular nature or natural ordination, and so their apparently intelligent actions must be due to God's action of directing these things towards their proper ends. Berkeley interprets the Pythagoreans, Platonists and Stoics in this way:

There is, according to these philosophers, a life infused throughout all things: the *pur noeron*, *pur technikon* [by virtue of which] the great masses are held together in their orderly courses, as well as the minutest particles governed in their natural attraction, gravity, electricity, magnetism, and the rest. It is this gives instincts, teaches the spider her web, and the bee her honey. This it is that directs the roots of plants to draw forth juices from the earth, and the leaves and cortical vessels to separate and attract such particles of air, and elementary fire, as suit their respective natures.²¹⁹

Berkeley is adamant that no regular activities could be produced by a non-intelligent creature. Intelligence must be acting through them. Speaking of the regular movements of the systole and diastole of the heart he says that this cannot allow us to infer "that unknowing nature can act regularly, as well as ourselves". Rather, he continues, it is evident

that what is done by rule must proceed from something that understands the rule; therefore, if not from the musician himself, [the habitual movement of fingers comes] from some other active intelligence, the same perhaps which governs bees and spiders, and moves the limbs of those who walk in their sleep.²²⁰

²¹⁸ *Siris*, #283.

²¹⁹ *Siris*, #277.

²²⁰ *Siris*, #257.

For Berkeley these non-intelligent natures are not acted on immediately by God but rather through the mediation of the aether; the world is “quickenened by elementary fire”. Natural movements are not mechanical. They resemble the voluntary movements of the human body which also must rely on the guidance of mind. Every change in the world has at its inception the divine Intelligence. Berkeley considers that this view of creation guarantees that the world must be conceived of as rooted in God:

So long as the world is supposed to be quickened by elementary fire or spirit, which is itself animated by soul and directed by understanding, it follows that all parts thereof originally depend upon, and may be reduced unto, the same indivisible stem of principle, to wit, a Supreme Mind—which is the concurrent doctrine of Pythagoreans, Platonics and Stoics.²²¹

Unity and existence

The mature Berkeley, adopting a far more metaphysical frame of mind than the younger Berkeley, refers to the metaphysical identity between the transcendentals being (*ens*) and one (*unum*):

That only can be said to exist which is one and the same. In things sensible and imaginable, as such, there seems to be no unity; since they, being in themselves aggregates, consisting of parts of compounded of elements, are in effect many.²²²

Traditionally in metaphysics the greater the degree of being of a thing, the more unified it is. Thus the unity in a stone for instance, appears to be little more than accidental whereas man, while he has parts, has a much more substantial unity, and God, who is pure being, is one by nature. Thus for Plato, the form of the One was the most important of all forms. Berkeley adopts the neoplatonic identification of the One with God:

Every moment produceth some change in the parts of this visible creation. Something is added or diminished, or altered in essence, quality, quantity or habitude . . . But God remains for ever one and the same. Therefore God alone exists. This was the doctrine of Heraclitus, Plato, and other ancients.²²³

²²¹ *Siris*, #276.

²²² *Siris*, #355.

²²³ *Siris*, #344.

Berkeley follows Aristotle in identifying being with *ousia*, which, as Berkeley rightly notes, is not substance but essence:

By Parmenides, Timaeus, and Plato a distinction was made, as hath been observed already, between genitum and ens. The former sort is always generating or in fieri (Sects. 304,306), but never exists; because it never continues the same, being in a constant change, ever perishing and producing. By entia they understand things remote from sense, invisible and intellectual, which never changing are still the same, and may therefore be said truly to exist: ousia. which is generally translated substance, but more properly essence, was not thought to belong to things sensible and corporeal, which have no stability; but rather to intellectual ideas...²²⁴

However, as we see here, Berkeley adds that essence was thought to belong properly to “intellectual ideas”; an interpretation which allows him to place these essences in the mind of God, and so guarantee the dependence of creation on God’s ideas. This is in keeping with the assertion of most Christian philosophers that God’s ideas (which are identical with his essence) were the archetypes for creation.²²⁵ This enables Berkeley to affirm the dependence of creation on God, at least for its formal structure if not for its very being.²²⁶ The phenomenal world, being in constant flux, does not have unity and so does not properly exist. Therefore, to account for the tenuous existence that it does have, we must refer to him who alone exists properly speaking; namely God. It is God who gives unity to changing things, and in particular to the universe considered as a whole.²²⁷ All reality, Berkeley holds, participates in the

²²⁴ *Siris*, #336.

²²⁵ This is very similar to Berkeley’s distinction made in the *Three Dialogues* between archetypal ideas in the mind of God and ectypal creatures.

²²⁶ As we have already seen in Chapter 1, the Platonic participation of changing things in the forms does not imply that things rely on the forms for their very existence; as we shall see, Berkeley does speak of things participating in the existence of God. This gives us a more complete level of participation than is to be found in Platonism.

²²⁷ We will see later that a question remains concerning the ontological status of the human soul. Berkeley believed in the spiritual or non composite nature of the soul. Having its own unity, how is he to consider the soul dependent on God for its unity and therefore being? The Scholastic philosophers, who held that to be pure essence is to be God, faced a similar dilemma. They held that angels could not be pure spirits but had to have some materiality in their nature (angelic matter) in order not to be divine. What is it then, which distinguishes man from God, or makes man dependent on God as his Creator, in Berkeley’s scheme of things?

mind of God. Unity, stability, and reality properly belong to the mind of God and it is only insofar as things “take part” in these attributes of the divine mind that things exist. The more creatures participate in the mind of God the higher up the chain of being they lie:

The one, or *to hen*, being immutable and indivisible, always the same and entire, was therefore thought to exist truly and originally, and other things only so far as they are one and the same, by participation of the *to hen*. This gives unity, stability, reality to things (Sects. 264, 306). Plato describes God, as Moses, from His being. According to both, God is He who truly is, *to ontos on*?²²⁸

Berkeley seeks to present the order and harmony (on the phenomenological level), unity and existence (on the ontological level) of the world as dependent on the presence of God, or put another way, on the world’s participation in God:

Sensible things are rather considered as one than truly so, they being in a perpetual flux or succession, ever differing and various. Nevertheless, all things together may be considered as one universe (Sects. 288, 288), one by the connection, relation, and order of its parts, which is the work of mind, whose unit is, by Platonics, supposed a participation of the first *to hen*.²²⁹

The final picture presented by Berkeley is of a world imbued with God, depending on God for every level of its reality including its existence, substantiality, and order. The dependence of the world on God appears to be quite radical indeed, and yet the notion of participation, as understood by the Christian neoplatonists, does not adequately account for a creation *ex nihilo*, for the doctrine of participation presumes the existence of a material substrate which receives a likeness to God insofar as it participates in him.

Person in *Siris*

Given that in this new system there are no things unless they participate to some degree in God, it is difficult to see how this impermanence of created beings is to be reconciled with Berkeley’s earlier assertion that man has a unique position in creation; that “nothing properly but persons i.e.

²²⁸ *Siris*, #342.

²²⁹ *Siris*, #347.

conscious things do exist, all other things are not so much existences as manners of the existence of persons”.²³⁰

Even though man has a spiritual soul he is still part of material creation. How then is his existence to be understood? It is corporeality that makes a thing to be compounded and so “in effect many” but, since “of inferior beings the human mind, self, or person, is the most simple and undivided essence”,²³¹ man must belong to a somewhat higher order of existence. For Berkeley it is the substantial unity of man that marks him out from the rest of creation and is what likens him to God. In this regard Berkeley’s system is markedly better than the mechanistic conception of man as an angelic essence tagged to a machine of nerves and organs. For Berkeley it is this intrinsic unity of man which confers on him a special relationship to God: he participates in God to a much greater degree than other material creatures. Berkeley sees himself as following in the footsteps of the ancients in this regard:

It is the opinion of Plato and his followers that in the soul of man, prior and superior to intellect, there is somewhat of a higher nature, by virtue of which we are one; and that by means of our one or unit, we are most closely joined to the Deity. And as by our intellect we touch the divine Intellect, even so by our *to hen* or unit, the very flower of our essence, as Proclus expresseth it, we touch the first One.²³²

Berkeley reiterates his assertion, made in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, that “nothing properly but persons ie. conscious things, do exist”, except that now this is said not because “things” are only “ideas” but rather because now to be real means to be one:

According to the Platonic philosophy, *ens* and *unum* are the same, And consequently our minds participate so far of existence as they do of unity. But it should seem that personality is the indivisible centre of the soul or mind, which is a monad so far forth as she is a person. Therefore person is really that which exists, inasmuch as it participates of the divine unity. In man the monad or indivisible is the *auto to auto*, the self-same self or very self...²³³

²³⁰ *Philosophical Commentaries*, vol. 1, #24.

²³¹ *Siris*, #358.

²³² *Siris*, #345.

²³³ *Siris*, #346.

As Bender points out, it is in so far as the personality participates in divinity that it acquires true existence and eternal value; and this “once more confirms his theism”.²³⁴ Commenting on the observation of Themistius “that, as being conferred essence the mind, by virtue of her simplicity, conferred simplicity upon compounded beings”, Berkeley concludes that “it seemeth that the mind, so far forth as person, is individual (Sects. 345, 346, 347), therein resembling the divine One by participation, and imparting to other things what itself participates from above”.²³⁵

It is difficult to know what kind of unity Berkeley considers man to impart to lesser things. Either external reality is affected by the mind in a Kantian manner: the contents of our perceptions being ordered according to categories in the mind, in which case reality itself remains unaffected; or reality is ontologically affected by the mind, in which case the human mind actually gives existence to the things it perceives. If Berkeley’s correlation between man’s participation in God and the participation of material beings in man is to be taken literally, then if we assert a creation *ex nihilo* we are committed to absolute idealism and to transcendental idealism if we assert a material substrate of creation.

Evaluation

There can be no doubt that Berkeley does indeed intend to assert the radical dependence of the world on God in *Siris*. Most of his references to classic philosophers centre on passages and doctrines in which the being, becoming and order of the world are ascribed to “the immediate action of an intelligent incorporeal being”.²³⁶ In *Siris* “actuation” and “participation” are the key words. In *Alciphron* we found actuation to signify “moving” rather than “informing” in the Aristotelian sense of the word but in *Siris* the word takes on more of the Aristotelian meaning. Aristotle considers form to be a sufficient cause of the existence of a substance and Berkeley adopts this essentialist explanation of existence. Neither of them confront the question of how form, as contingent being, can be the ultimate source of being. Though form actuates matter and makes it to be a certain

²³⁴ Bender, *George Berkeley’s Philosophy Re-Examined* (Amsterdam and Paris, 1946) 102.

²³⁵ *Siris*, #356.

²³⁶ *Siris*, #246.

substance and to engage in certain activities it is not responsible for the very *existence* of the matter.²³⁷

Berkeley's attention is no longer on the world of sense, which before he had considered to be that alone which is, but now it is focussed on a more really real world beyond sense which is only manifest to intellectual speculation. This transition should not be interpreted as marking a conversion to idealism, or that, as some have claimed, Berkeley's new axiom should be *esse est concipi*. Berkeley does not deny the reality of this world but only lessens its value relative to the world of divine ideas which have a far greater degree of being, and in which the earthly realities participate. Though the world it actuates is a "real" world, it is in a state of flux and cannot be the object of intellectual knowledge.²³⁸ The actuating world alone is stable and so is the object of philosophical speculation:

When we enter the province of the philosophia prima, we discover another order of beings, mind and its acts, permanent being, not dependent on corporeal things, nor resulting, nor connected, nor contained; but containing, connecting, enlivening the whole frame, and imparting those motions, forms, qualities, and that order and symmetry,²³⁹ to all those transient phaenomena, which we term the course of nature.

Through this notion of actuation Berkeley can represent the universe as one organic unit to which God gives life. Rather than portraying the universe as "immaterial" it is now seen as living. The correct analogy to describe the relationship between God and the world is no longer that of the mind conceiving of ideas but rather of a soul enlivening a body. And just as the soul gives life to the body at each moment, likewise God gives life to the universe continually from moment to moment. This way of viewing the universe is sufficient to take the universe out of the hands of the deists. As Fraser says of *Siris*:

The ultimate conception is of a living and teleological, not a blindly moved universe—movement being the expression of a pervading life and meaning.

²³⁷ As we have seen in the Chapter 1 there is a degree of dissension as to whether Aristotle considered matter to be created or eternal but the general consensus is that Aristotle found no philosophical explanation for a creation *ex nihilo*.

²³⁸ There is a great similarity here with Augustine's notion of knowledge being directly of ideas in God through an act of illumination.

²³⁹ *Siris*, #293.

It is taken for granted that Life itself is inexplicable by, and incapable of being formed from, any application of mechanical or chemical laws.²⁴⁰

Where before Berkeley used immaterialism to defend his assertion that “nothing mechanical is or really can be a cause”,²⁴¹ in *Siris* Berkeley makes many references to philosophers who “had a notion of the true system of the world” meaning that “they allowed of mechanical principles, but actuated by soul or mind”.²⁴² For Berkeley then it is no longer important to investigate whether the world is material or not since the status of the world of our perceptions is not what should occupy our minds according to Berkeley, but only the intelligible world:

Naturalists, whose proper province it is to consider phenomena, experiments, mechanical organs and motions, principally regard the visible frame of things or corporeal world, supposing soul to be contained in body. And this hypothesis may be tolerated in physics, as it is not necessary in the arts of dialling or navigation to mention the true system of earth’s motion. But those who, not content with sensible appearances, would penetrate into the real and true causes (the object of theology, metaphysics, or the *philosophia prima*), will rectify this error, and speak of the world as contained by the soul, and not the soul by the world.²⁴³

We should not engross our thoughts by fixing them on corporeal objects but rather should engage them with “spiritual, moral, and intellectual matters”.²⁴⁴ The problem is no longer whether the corporeal world is real in the sense normally meant; the fact is that there is a realm of true reality which should not be obscured by the sensible appearances:

Sensible appearances . . . easily obtain a preference in the opinion of most men, to those superior principles, which are the later growth of the human mind arrived to maturity and perfection, but not affecting the corporeal sense, are thought to be so far deficient in point of solidity and reality; sensible and real, to common apprehensions, being the same thing; although it be certain that the principles of science are neither objects of sense nor imagination, and that intellect and reason are alone the sure guides to truth.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁰ Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley D.D.*, vol. 2, footnote, 422, footnote 11.

²⁴¹ *Siris*, #249.

²⁴² *Siris*, #266.

²⁴³ *Siris*, #285.

²⁴⁴ *Siris*, #332.

²⁴⁵ *Siris*, #264.

Does Berkeley's introduction of instrumental causes in #155 compromise the radical dependence of the world on God? Berkeley's own reply to this is that they are not true causes in the way that God is cause, but are subordinate to him. Earlier Berkeley asserted that instruments imply a want of power in the user; here Berkeley justifies the existence of instrumental causes by asserting that they exist for the benefit of man and not of God:

Without instrumental and second causes there could be no regular course of nature. And without a regular course, nature could never be understood; mankind must always be at a loss, not knowing what to expect, or how to govern themselves, or direct their actions for the obtaining of any end. Therefore in the government of the world physical agents, improperly so called, or mechanical, or second causes, or natural causes, or instrumental, are necessary to assist not the Governor but the governed.²⁴⁶

Whereas Berkeley in his earlier works defended Christian theism through the "Divine Visual Language", in which phenomena are held to be "words" "spoken" by God and "perceived" by man, in *Siris* on the other hand we see that Berkeley conceives of the world as a participation in an intelligible realm which alone has true existence. Creation participates in the divine ideas through the chain of being. The world receives actuality from the aether, this from the world-soul, and this in turn from God. But if by participation in *Siris* Berkeley means no more than the Platonic notion of participation, then it is insufficient to represent the absolute dependence of the world on God since the world would only depend on God for its formal structure and not for its existence. Berkeley does however assert that the world participates in the being of God and thus goes much further than the Platonic participation of substances in their archetypal Forms. Berkeley, commenting on the Platonic and Aristotelian notions of God "mixing with" of "pervading" nature, says that this is not a commixture in the way of space of extension but by way of power.

How does this alteration in Berkeley's system affect Radical Dependence? We have already seen in our discussion on Radical Dependence (in Chapter One) that creation as conceived by the ancients—the addition of forms to a pre-existing substrate or as an emanation from the one—differs vastly from the Christian doctrine of creation. Neither Plato nor Aristotle affirm Radical Dependence and while the neoplatonists

²⁴⁶ *Siris*, #160.

do, their emanationism is irreconcilable with the Christian transcendence of God. Has Berkeley, in turning to the ancients for an philosophical defence of Christian cosmology, managed to keep the crucial balance between God's immanence in the world and his transcendence of the world? At some stages in *Siris* it appears as if God, for Berkeley, is the great Architect of the universe: the Intelligence evidenced by "the fine mechanism of nature". While such a view of God does not contradict the doctrine of Radical Dependence, it does not imply it. But if God is conceived to be no more than the designer of the world then he is the "clockmaker" God of the deists. Although Berkeley portrays God as the source of unity, stability, life, and reality, this could still be interpreted as meaning that God gave existence to the world in the initial act of creation and that the world is no longer radically dependent on Him for its existence. Is Fraser correct then to claim that

Siris, regarded as a philosophical essay, is an exposition, on the basis of Ancient Philosophy, of Berkeley's spiritual theory of cause and substance—in which the whole phenomenal world, past, present, and future, is conceived in necessary dependence upon active Mind.²⁴⁷

When speaking of God's directing of ordered movements such as those of animals or of particles of matter, and particularly when speaking of instrumental causes that mediate God's activity in the world, Berkeley implies the presence of a real world existing independently of the human mind. This is a continuation of a trend initiated in *Alciphron*. Furthermore, we must infer from Berkeley's use of the doctrine of actuation a greater "objectivity" of the world of our perceptions. Things can no longer be conceived of as mere ideas imprinted on the human mind. Within the framework of the doctrine of actuation the immaterialism of the *Principles* is defunct for God must actuate—if we see Berkeley as belonging to the essentialist tradition—a pre-existing matter. God actuates an uninformed and dead "mass" (or matter in the Aristotelian sense) and transforms it into an organised and living universe.

While Berkeley is clearly trying to show that creatures must depend on a spiritual, or at least an immaterial principle, at the same time he asserts that without the actuation of the world by God through the "world soul" a "stupid mass" would remain. Such a "mass" would have to be outside the conserving action of God in the same way as matter for Plato and Aristotle pre-exists God's informing action. This is hard to reconcile with

²⁴⁷ Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley D.D.*, vol. 2, 343.

Berkeley's earlier assertion that the world participates in the being of God which would imply that no such mass exists outside of God's providence. Berkeley saves the objectivity of the world at the expense of attenuating the degree of the world's dependence on God.

When Berkeley deduces from the movement of spiders and bees according to a rule the conclusion that they must be actuated by mind, we must assume that spiders and bees are not conceived of as "immaterial" ideas imprinted by God on the mind of man.²⁴⁸ Were creatures still held to be no more than ideas in this sense it would be meaningless to speak of them as unable to move themselves in an intelligent fashion and to deduce from this fact that God actuates them. Guzzo interprets the passivity of things in *Siris* as signifying their "givenness" rather than their unreality:

Siris enables us to see that for Berkeleianism the cosmic show which God presents to human minds is not a film, visible yet flimsy, but a life in action, in which everything is real and in motion. Berkeley had, indeed, always been saying that, but we were not always attentive to this point, being obsessed and misled by his insistent dictum that the vast play of natural phenomena is "passive". It is now evident that it is called "passive" only because it is "given" to us; but it is given alive, forming and unrolling itself before our eyes, which "receive" it by grasping and understanding and interpreting it.²⁴⁹

Actuation or animation presupposes a distinction between the thing and its capacities whereas immaterialism asserts that they are one and the same thing.

Man in communion with God

In *Siris* one of Berkeley's greatest concerns is to highlight the central place of personhood in creation. The creator himself is a benevolent, intelligent Person in whom the world participates, and man, being the simplest of created essences, has the unique status of having the capacity to have a relationship with God. All the rest of material creation is just a means of establishing this relationship between man and God since it is through creation that God speaks to man, and man by virtue of his intelligence is able to see God in creation. Creation is a theophany: not

²⁴⁸ *Siris*, #257.

²⁴⁹ Augusto Guzzo, "Berkeley and 'Things'" in *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Steinkraus, 80.

only does the universe depend on God for its existence but it is seen to do so:

The phenomena of nature, which strike on the senses and are understood by the mind, form not only a magnificent spectacle, but also a most coherent, entertaining, and instructive Discourse; and to effect this, they are conducted, adjusted, and ranged by the greatest wisdom.²⁵⁰

Bender also notes the central position in *Siris* of the notion of the cosmos as a communication between persons: “Ultimate reality lies for Berkeley in a creative intelligence, in a spiritual centre conceived as a person, who desires to communicate his being to the finite spiritual centra, to persons that are his creatures”.²⁵¹

Jessop notes that the notion of the corporeal world has the function of raising “the beholding mind to the Creator” and occurs “at the end of his philosophical career, as at the beginning”.²⁵² However there have been developments in the doctrine since it was first hinted at in the *Commentaries*. Whereas in the earlier works God’s Divine Visual Language had to be postulated to explain the apparent causal activity of material creatures, here in *Siris* God’s presence is evidenced through far more metaphysical signs such as the unity, harmony, and order of creatures. No longer is man’s knowledge of God limited to an almost spontaneous inference from visible phenomena to a divine cause. Here man grows to see that creatures are by nature creaturely, that they cannot be the source of their more transcendental qualities such as being and unity, and that the only possible source of these qualities is that being which has the transcendental qualities by nature; namely God.

Through the notion of participation Berkeley brings man himself into intimate union with God. The immaterialist hypothesis is insufficient to account for the creaturely status of man: the unperceived perceiver, as only visible things could strictly be called creatures. To be a creature was to be imprinted on the mind of man by God but of course this could hardly be applied to the human mind itself. It tends to put the mind of man, in a very Cartesian fashion, alongside God as a quasi-divine co-creator of the universe. Participation, however, makes man as much a creature as any other creature and yet preserves his select position as a most simple essence, at the peak of material creation. The intrinsic unity of man

²⁵⁰ *Siris*, #254.

²⁵¹ Bender, *George Berkeley’s Philosophy Re-Examined*, 104.

²⁵² *Works*, vol. 5, 6.

evidences a special relationship with God who is the ultimate source of unity.²⁵³ Ultimately Berkeley is defending the Christian conception of the dignity of man which is rooted in his ability to relate to God and ultimately, in his vocation to be a son of God:

Can there be a higher ambition than to overcome the world, or a wiser than to subdue ourselves, or a more comfortable doctrine than the remission of sins, or a more joyful prospect than that of having our base nature renewed and assimilated to the Deity, our being made fellow citizens with angels and sons of God?²⁵⁴

²⁵³ See Collins, *A History of Modern European Philosophy*, 400-1.

²⁵⁴ *Alciphron*, Fifth Dialogue, #5, *Works*, 178-79.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

‘If I wasn’t real,’ Alice said—half laughing through her tears, it all seemed so ridiculous —‘I shouldn’t be able to cry’. ‘I hope you don’t suppose those are real tears?’ Tweedledum interrupted in a tone of great contempt.

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass*, Ch.4

In this investigation I set out to show how Berkeley’s philosophy is primarily motivated by a desire to defend Christian theism against the growing tide of deism and the impending atheism of his day by affirming that God, rather than being the mere mechanic of a clockwork universe, is the immediate source, not only of the laws governing nature, but of nature itself. The world is radically contingent on the creative causality of God. My secondary aim was to show how this intention to defend Christian theism, since it pervades all of Berkeley’s philosophical works, can be used to resolve to some degree the debate concerning the philosophical “development” of Berkeley’s thought. The doctrines of immaterialism, divine visual language, actuation, and participation are not ends in themselves for Berkeley but rather means to demonstrate the omnipresence of God.

Synopsis and Evaluation

In examining the evolution of the doctrine of constant creation we saw how Christian theists are faced with the difficult task of reconciling the freedom of God, or his transcendence of his creation, with his providential concern for creation. The former all too easily leads to the deistic conception of God as absolutely indifferent to the world whereas the latter can lead to a pantheistic identification of God with his creation.

Seventeenth-century deism has its roots in the tendency of the philosophers of the age to adopt the methodology of the empirical sciences in preference to purely intellectual speculation and, as a consequence, to concern themselves with efficient causality in place of final causality. Hence, as the metaphysical question of the cause of being was beyond the

scope of the New Philosophy, “nature” came to be considered the sufficient cause of itself. This view of nature manifests itself in practical deism which asserts the necessity of the moral law, and in speculative deism which asserts the necessity of beings in the natural order. Both varieties of deism manifestly contradict Christian theism and cosmology. In defence of the latter, Berkeley seeks to establish a philosophical system that will re-establish the contingency of nature on the causal power of God. In doing this he denies, at least in his early works, all causal power of creatures and ends up dangerously close to pantheism.

Three broad stages of development became apparent from the examination of Berkeley’s works. Firstly there was the immaterialism of the *Principles*, secondly the Christian neoplatonism of the *Three Dialogues*, and finally the doctrines of actuation and participation of *Siris*.

In the first phase Berkeley’s theism is based on the co-creation of ideas by God and man. God creates and orders nature insofar as he imprints the impressions of all things directly onto the mind of man. God reveals himself to man through this immaterial creation and not through the desiccated material world of Locke, who would have reality reduced to the unseen primary qualities of things. On the other hand Berkeley’s God is manifested through the sounds and colours of his creation as much as by its extension and movement. For this reason Berkeley opposes the epistemology responsible for the reduction of reality to primary qualities.

The thesis of Berkeley’s second phase is based on a variation on the cosmological argument. In the *Three Dialogues* he asserts that for the phenomena of nature to exist we must infer the existence of a constantly active God whose own ideas are the archetypes of these creatures. Here Berkeley omits the co-creative function of man which was part of the earlier system in favour of a version of Christian neoplatonism. By Christian neoplatonism I mean the adaptation of Avicenna’s notion of creation to Christianity. As we have seen earlier Avicenna asserts that God of necessity posits the possibles, or *esse essentiae*, in existence, or as Avicenna sees it: God must add the accident of existence to these possibles which have a mode of existence proper to them alone—outside knowledge and outside actual existence. Because these possibles exist in the speculative intellect of God precisely as possible existences, God is compelled to realise their possibility, that is, to create them. This empties creation of all divine wisdom since God cannot intend any plan for creation. Christian thinkers adapted Avicenna’s doctrine so that the *esse essentiae* would not be set over against God’s freedom. Their solution was to have the necessity of *esse essentiae* depend on God rather allowing

them an autonomous necessity. Obviously such a solution does not really escape the fact of their necessity and God's being necessitated:

Dangling before the vision of God as separate both from Him and creatures, *esse essentiae* moves from its own state to the state of *esse naturae* for no reason beyond God's will. Such a divine will-act, whether one calls it free with Neoplatonic Christians or necessitated with Avicenna, has slipped all control of practical reason.²⁵⁵

Within this neoplatonic framework, the *esse essentiae* become the doubles, subsisting in the mind of God, of their creaturely replicas. Berkeley's divine archetypes correspond to the possibles in the mind of Avicenna's God. Berkeley, as a voluntarist, does not consider divine ideas to constrain God to create corresponding ectypes and so he does not deny God's freedom as Avicenna does. However, just as Avicenna's emanationism involves him in pantheism, so too Berkeley's Christian neoplatonism brings him close to a pantheistic system of his own; in Berkeley's case that of ontologism. Berkeley never manages to resolve the crucial dilemma of creation, namely: how can creation occur if there is such a huge disparity between the cause and effect of creation? Every effect is like its cause but in what way can creation be like God? If we hold that God creates things according to his ideas of them, does this imply that God has finite ideas; something impossible for an infinite being? If creatures are of the same nature as the divine ideas then creation is in danger of becoming generation. In the *Three Dialogues* Berkeley falls squarely into the ontologism of Malebranche, and the vigour of his protests against this charge suggests that he realised it to be well founded.

The third and last phase of his development begins after a silence of sixteen years during which time Berkeley wrote no philosophical works except for the small treatise on motion *De Motu*. In his last substantial works *Alciphron* and *Siris*, Berkeley no longer refers to the system of archetypal and ectypal ideas but bases the doctrine of Radical Dependence on the "actuation" of creatures by a world-soul. This doctrine, which first appears in *Alciphron* though only in embryonic form, is the mainstay of the philosophical system of *Siris*. The forms of all living things are envisaged as stemming from the aether: a celestial fire which mediates the power of God. The basic thrust of this rather confused and eclectic work is that created reality depends on God through participation. The divine reality alone is really real. Once again we saw that the underlying motive

²⁵⁵ Gerard Smith, *Natural Theology – Metaphysics II* (London: Macmillan, 1959).

of this work is to present, not so much Berkeley's own system but rather the doctrines of earlier and especially ancient philosophers which affirm Radical Dependence to some degree. It is not clear whether Berkeley still subscribes to his immaterialist hypothesis. Though he often claims continued allegiance to immaterialism, the hierarchical universe of *Siris*, actuated through the World-Soul, is meaningless within an immaterialist framework. Ultimately the universe is portrayed as a living whole pervaded by the life of God. Berkeley envisages all creation as forming a great chain of being stretching from the most lowly inanimate creatures right up to the Trinity which infuses life into all things. God manifests himself to man and guides him by introducing changes into material creation. In adopting the model of the World-Soul Berkeley loses the immanence of God, since it is the World-Soul which acts in the world and God acts only through its mediation. Also lost is the *ex nihilo* character of creation since actuation implies the pre-existence of a homogeneous substratum which is actuated by the World-Soul.

In the first and third stages of his development Berkeley makes particular use of the notion of creation as a Divine Visual Language. When Divine Visual Language is based on immaterialism then the ontological dependence of nature on God is implied. In the third stage the Divine Visual Language theory is based on the utter passivity of things since any movement they exhibit must be caused by God: either directly as in *Alciphron* or indirectly, through the mediation of the World-Soul, as in *Siris*.

In the second stage the Divine Visual Language is of minimal importance since Berkeley bases his argument on the assertion that in order to exist and to continue in existence, the things we perceive would have to be sustained by an omnipresent perceiver, namely God. However, as we have already seen, this argument that things require the enduring creative causality of God in order to perdure, contradicts his earlier assertion that ideas per se do not evidence a divine cause since it is only from certain teleological traits in the activity of these ideas that a divine cause can be inferred.

Having seen that the defence of Radical Dependence is the intention underlying all of Berkeley's philosophical works, we are now in a position to apply this discovery to the debate concerning the supposed alteration in Berkeley's thinking in *Siris*. Luce and Wild, both eminent Berkeleyian scholars, adopt opposing positions on the question of the place of *Siris* in

Berkeley's works.²⁵⁶ Luce on the one hand maintains that Berkeley never drops the doctrine of immaterialism as found in the *Principles* and that his later works, including *Siris*, merely examine different aspects of this doctrine. He sees the immaterialist hypothesis as primary in Berkeley. He affirms the unity of Berkeley's philosophy; meaning by this that Berkeley never drops his immaterialist hypothesis in favour of a more Platonic system. He says that Berkeley always remained convinced of the truth of the immaterialist doctrine and merely presents different applications of it in the works subsequent to the *Principles*. Luce maintains that, though there is no open discussion of immaterialism in *Siris*, "*Siris* chats about things in general from the standpoint of immaterialism".²⁵⁷ Wild on the other hand holds that in fact there is a world of a difference between the *Principles* and *Siris*. He contends that the doctrine of immaterialism has given way to Platonism in *Siris*.

In the first his two articles on "The Unity of the Berkeleian Philosophy", Luce examines the interconnections between Berkeley's various works and concludes that they show that Berkeley never abandoned his doctrine of immaterialism; meaning that there was no development towards Platonism. In the second of the two articles, Luce examines certain selected themes in Berkeley and concludes that they undergo no substantial development in the course of his writings. This is "a Doctrinal Analysis, which proves that the specific doctrines of the *Principles* are to be found in the later works".²⁵⁸ Here Luce focuses on the unity of content of Berkeley's works rather than their external unity. Luce draws up a list of Berkeley's philosophical doctrines which he considers to be important and examines where and how often each doctrine occurs in Berkeley's works. From his findings Luce concludes that there is no substantial development in Berkeley's thought. In "The Alleged Development of

²⁵⁶ The sources for the thought of both men on the supposed development of Berkeley's philosophy are the following works by A. A. Luce: *Berkeley's Immaterialism* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1945); *Berkeley and Malebranche: A Study in the Origins of Berkeley's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967); "The Unity of the Berkeleian Philosophy" (in two parts; I and II), *Mind*, 46 (1937); 44-52 and 180-90, and "The Alleged Development of Berkeley's Philosophy", *Mind*, 51 (1943), 141-5; and also John Wild's *George Berkeley: A Study of His Life and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1936), ch. 17; and "The Unity of Berkeleian Philosophy. A Reply to Dr Luce", *Mind* 46 (1937), 454-64.

²⁵⁷ Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 17.

²⁵⁸ Luce, "The Alleged Development of Berkeley's Philosophy" 141.

Berkeley's Philosophy" Luce proposes "to state and examine the critics" doctrinal arguments, especially those based on the changes made by Berkeley in his later editions and on the supposed Platonism of *Siris*.²⁵⁹

In this paper he examines the claim that development is evidenced by the changes in the second edition of the *Principles*, the changes in the third edition of the *Alciphron*, and the contents of *Siris*. Surprisingly Luce contends that *Siris* is really no different from Berkeley's earlier works: "Certainly it is not the professed intention of *Siris* to recant, correct, or even modify the teaching of his earlier work".²⁶⁰

Luce appears to ignore the fact that in *Siris* Berkeley adopts a completely new philosophical system based primarily on ancient Greek sources. Luce goes on to say that Berkeley is not a Platonist, that he does not accept the Platonic Ideas.²⁶¹ This overlooks Berkeley's agreement with Plato that only *ousia* or essence truly exists. Luce's opinions on this matter are not shared by some other eminent Berkeleyian scholars. Bender is more realistic about Berkeley's sympathy with Platonism in *Siris*. He points out how the meaning of the term "idea" has altered in *Siris*:

The "ideas" of Berkeley's earlier works are often called "phaenomena" and they have a lesser degree of reality. They exist as formerly, "only in the mind", but they are now termed "gross" and "fleeting". In *Siris* the term "Idea" (now often with a capital), has acquired a new, metaphysical meaning. Plato's influence becomes more and more evident: "In Plato's style, the term idea does not merely signify an inert, inactive object of the understanding". Ideas are not figments of the mind, nor mere mixed modes, nor yet abstract ideas in the modern sense, but the most real beings, intellectual and unchangeable and therefore more real than the fleeting, transient objects of sense". Idea is no longer associated with passive perception, but now signifies a primary, true reality of which the world of the former ideas is but an appearance.²⁶²

Fraser likewise considers ideas to have taken on a new ontological significance in *Siris*: "The Platonic Ideas are not—like those of Locke, or like Berkeley's own "ideas" or "phaenomena" of sense, whose *esse* is *percipi*—"inert, inactive objects of perception". They are self-existent, necessary, uncreated principles.²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Luce, "The Alleged Development of Berkeley's Philosophy", 141.

²⁶⁰ Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche*, 174.

²⁶¹ Luce, *Berkeley and Malebranche*, 176.

²⁶² Bender, *George Berkeley's Philosophy Re-Examined*, 78.

²⁶³ Fraser, *The Works of George Berkeley D.D.*, vol. 2, 351.

The status of ideas in *Siris* is of central importance in deciding the nature of the doctrine of Radical Dependence espoused in the work. If they are seen as the product of the human mind, then the doctrine of Radical Dependence in *Siris* is no different from that of the earlier works: man, because of his nature as a perceiver, would still be a constitutive part of reality and so tends towards idealism. If ideas are the truly existing things, independent of man, then Berkeley has moved away from idealism and towards realism:

Where was for Berkeley the ultimate ground and essence of reality to be found? Do the fundamental conceptions of God, of nature and of the human soul as Berkeley developed these in his works resemble the corresponding conceptions of the Greek and Neoplatonic philosophers or those of the post-Kantian idealists which conferred on thought a creative function not only in an epistemological, but also in an ontological sense?²⁶⁴

In *George Berkeley, A Study of His Life and Philosophy*, Wild argues that in the course of his life Berkeley moves from a position of complete trust in the senses in the *Principles*, to a Platonic position in *Siris* where he shows a distrust of the senses and a reliance on the intellect for true knowledge. Wild holds that there is a great difference between the Lockean *Commentaries* and *Siris*; that the younger Berkeley centres reality on man whereas later God is central. In his article “The Unity of the Berkeleian Philosophy. A Reply to Mr Luce”, Wild responds to Luce’s papers on “The Unity of the Berkeleian Philosophy”. Wild’s main criticism of Luce’s concordance of the main themes in Berkeley is that it overlooks differences of meaning given to the same phrases and words in different texts.

Luce bases his defence of the unity of Berkeleian philosophy on Berkeley’s putative adherence to the doctrine of immaterialism. He asserts that Berkeley never abandoned his immaterialist hypothesis. However, as I believe I have demonstrated, the unity of Berkeley’s philosophy is centred on the doctrine of Radical Dependence rather than that of immaterialism. Although *Siris* undeniably differs a great deal from the earlier works in very fundamental doctrines, nevertheless Berkeley is always motivated by the desire to defend Christian theism. Luce realises that the basic spirit of Berkeley’s philosophy does not change but mistakenly takes the doctrine of immaterialism to be the constant element. He confuses immaterialism with the doctrine of Radical Dependence and fails to see how one can have

²⁶⁴ Bender, *George Berkeley’s Philosophy Re-Examined*, 94.

ontological contingency without immaterialism. Berkeley's adoption of the neoplatonic doctrine of actuation in *Siris* is inspired, no less than the immaterialism of the *Principles*, by a desire to counter the deistic worldview with that of Christian theism.

In examining the argument surrounding the putative development of Berkeley's philosophy we found that there is some degree of change in Berkeley's outlook, most notably a rejection of immaterialism in favour of the doctrine of actuation to explain the dependence of the world on God. Berkeley's adoption of the system of actuation was hampered by the ontological shallowness of "things" as portrayed in his immaterialism. Berkeley's overall development moves away from the simplistic explanation of the world's contingency in anthropomorphic terms to a more metaphysical, though less precise, argument centred on actuation and participation.

The immaterialism of the *Principles* and the Christian neoplatonism of the *Three Dialogues* allowed the conserving act of God to be immediate and total, whereas it is conceived in *Siris* as mediated through the World-Soul. This has the effect of distancing God from creation. And yet *Siris* too is directed towards the doctrine of Radical Dependence. Although Luce makes the questionable claim that *Siris* "neither announced nor contains a new philosophy or any departure from his old philosophy", he does concede that

the defence of Trinitarianism and the encouragement of the study of Greek philosophy are among its incidental aims; its main aim, if it has one, is to exhibit God as the one true cause of change in the external world, and to trace His immediate operation through the whole chain of being. (*Siris* 237)²⁶⁵

Berkeley, like an over-protective parent, tethers the world very closely to God for fear that it will stray into the ways of the deists. He fails to find a mean position between the extremes of deism on the one hand and pantheism on the other. While Berkeley, strictly speaking, does not fall into asserting the divinity of the world (although he comes close to the ontologism of Malebranche in the *Three Dialogues*), he only manages to assert the power of God by impoverishing the reality of his creation. Creation in his early immaterialism is indeed a "false imaginary glare" and later it is a dumb mass actuated by God through the World-Soul. For Berkeley, "the choice lies only between a substantial nature which does

²⁶⁵ Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, 16.

not depend on God at all for its continuing existence and operation, and an unsubstantial nature which is entirely the direct expression of God's will.²⁶⁶

Berkeley, says Byrne, fails to find the intermediate position because he cannot see how "a substantial nature of independently existing, enduring things being created out of nothing by the mere will of a spiritual being",²⁶⁷

This is a fair evaluation of Berkeley's position. He treats material, substantial being as synonymous with ontologically subsistent being. Insofar as he feels it necessary to impoverish the reality of things in order to defend God's conservation of them, Berkeley fails to understand the full import of the act of creation. Creation (or conservation) is a mysterious act in that it produces "from" nothing things which are capable of having an act of being of their own, namely substances. We have no experiential knowledge of any act remotely like creation and so it is impossible for us to imagine the act of creation or even to invent precise terminology for the act. To speak of creation "from" nothing for instance, is misleading as it gives the impression that nothingness acts as the substratum of creatures. The immediate effect of creation-conservation is the production of an existential act at the core of each substance which is "the point of impact of the creative efficacy of God".²⁶⁸ This is not the addition of something accidental to an essence as Avicenna thought; it is the creation of that which is most intrinsic to a thing. Likewise the causality that stems from this act of being, while it does require the co-operation of God, is not compromised by its reliance on God. God is what is most intimately present to each individual substance and yet God and the substance are distinct. If the being of the substance is not conceived of as truly "created", as in emanationism and pantheism, then its being is held to be a form of the being of God. Because the creature does not truly have its "own" being, it is seen as a pure relation rather than a substance in its own right. Berkeley falls into this error. Because the essence of material objects is to be perceived by God, their substantial completeness is denied. Berkeley, instead of considering substances to be related to God, makes them to be relations. Berkeley's reaction to the horizontalism of the deists, tends towards the verticalism of the mystics.

²⁶⁶ A. Byrne, "Berkeley, Scientific Realism and Creation", *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), 456.

²⁶⁷ P. A. Byrne, "Berkeley, Scientific Realism and Creation", 456.

²⁶⁸ Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 178.

Why does Berkeley fail to appreciate the depth of creative causality? The cause of this error lies largely in his anthropomorphic conception of God. From the *Principles* to *Siris* Berkeley conceives of God's causality power as essentially similar to that of man only immensely greater. In the *Principles* God creates in the same way that man imagines except that what God imagines is much stronger, more ordered and coherent, and God is able to impose the products of his imaginings onto the mind of man. In this understanding of creation, objective and subjective elements are involved: objectively man has the experience of receiving, independently of his will, perceptions and subjectively he has the experience of the complete dependence on himself of his own imagined ideas. Berkeley considers this experience of mental imagining and conceiving ideas to be an example of human creation *ex nihilo*. For this reason he considers it justified to use this instance of "creation" as a model for divine creation. Just as our ideas depend on us for their existence so too do things depend on their conceiver. This proof however only leads to a very great mind but never to the infinite perfection of God.

The only transitive activity which is proper to God alone is that of creation; i.e., the production of limited being from nothing. Other activities, such as imagining, ordering, and moving, are finite activities regardless of the scale of their occurrence. The only way to infer the existence of God from them is through considering them as limited being that must require being per se as their cause. Berkeley does not approach the problem in this way as he considers that the sheer scale of the cosmos alone must require a divine perceiver to contain it. He has fallen into the error of those who, like Clarke and Newton, would prove the existence of God from some aspect of creation that had nothing intrinsically in common with the nature of God, such as its order. Given that in Berkeley's case he intuits that the only way to God from creatures is through their ontological contingency; this, however, never rises to the level of a purely philosophical proof. Berkeley's rejection of Divine Visual Language in favour of the proof from "the bare existence of things" in the *Three Dialogues* shows us that he appreciates that God's presence is manifested in the world through conservation in being. However, because he considers "things" to be more chimera than beings, Berkeley is unable to explain how conservation is possible other than through the inadequate imagination model. Without taking the path of being to Being we are outside the very possibility of philosophically proving the existence of the Christian God who defines himself as "He Who Is".

Had Berkeley considered the obvious example of creation that stands outside this model—man—he would have been forced to re-evaluate the

power of divine causality. It is through the experience of the reality and coherence of man's own being; the experience of one's own freedom, intelligence, and even purely bodily coherence, and at the same time the limitations acting on this being, that we come to appreciate the nature of created substances. Here we experience at first hand the autonomy and, almost paradoxically, the contingency of created being. It is through our subjective experience that we realise that we are not mere relations but are true substances. This experience of our own substantiality allows us to extrapolate about the condition of other substances and to understand them by analogy with our own condition. Berkeley fails to do this with the obvious result that he diminishes the reality of creatures other than man, but also with the result that man always rests uneasy in Berkeley's three phases of the doctrine of Radical Dependence. In each of the three phases Berkeley has to make special and logically unwarranted provisions for the place of man. In his initial immaterialism man is given a position that transcends the rest of creation in that he stands alongside God in co-creating the visible world. God impresses the ideas and man receives these ideas. Man, like God, but unlike all of visible creation, is a perceiver. In the Christian neoplatonism of the *Three Dialogues* man is not to be reducible to a mere idea, not because he co-creates ideas as he does in the Principles, but because he is a spirit capable of receiving these ideas. (The fact that Berkeley concedes that creation took place prior to the existence of man through the making visible of ideas to spirits other than man does remove man from centre-stage in creation.) In *Siris* Berkeley again puts man outside the realm of material or visible creation and places him alongside God as a pure essence and therefore something which participates most intimately in the being of God. Man is outside the chain of being. His body is actuated by himself (Berkeley suggests that the body of the unconscious man, e.g. the sleep-walker, is actuated by the World-Soul) and not by the World-Soul which actuates the rest of the material world.

In *Siris* Berkeley, even though he now realises that the real existence of the world cannot be sufficiently accounted for by the imagination model, again falls into anthropomorphism, for here he conceives of conservation in terms of the soul's actuation of the body. But, as we have seen, this analogy cannot explain the *ex nihilo* character of creation and conservation.

In *Siris* Berkeley moves towards a more "realistic" view of the world. In the earlier works there is ambiguity as to whether phenomena rely on man alone for their existence, or whether the perceiving action of God is also always necessary to ensure the existence of ideas. Bender considers that *Siris* marks a break with the older immaterialism and argues against the idealistic interpretation of *Siris* made by those who believe that

“Berkeley in *Siris* has expounded the ‘*esse est concipi*’ in an ontological sense as if thought were productive of the integral reality”.²⁶⁹ Bender contends that

The notion of the Infinite Spirit dominates the last phase of Berkeley’s work and philosophy. “We cannot make one single step in accounting for the phenomena, without admitting the immediate presence and immediate action of and incorporeal agent who connects, moves and disposes all things, according to such rules and for such purposes as seem good to him (*Siris*, sect. 237). The objects of our world, formerly identified with the ideas, were in the earlier works considered as perceived by man. In *Siris* Berkeley sees these objects, as M. David has said, *a parte Dei*, as phenomena created and sustained by the Infinite Spirit.

Are these phenomena, created and sustained by God, material? Can material things be radically dependent on God for their existence and still be “material” since the condition of materiality seems to imply that an object has a ground for its own perdurance? Since Berkeley’s notion of creation in the early works is modelled on the manner in which man conceives of ideas, he is unable to accommodate a material creation since the products of man’s conceiving are always immaterial. Creation in *Siris* is no longer envisaged according to this “conceiving ideas” model but rather according to the way the human soul actuates the body. The immediate result of this is that creation need not be immaterial. Once Berkeley has dispensed with this model the way for the ontological contingency of matter has been opened up. Since Berkeley no longer makes use of the analogy of the mental activity of imagining as a model for creation he is no longer of necessity bound to immaterialism. However it would be wrong to assert categorically that Berkeley allows for the existence of matter in *Siris*, and definitely so if by this we mean the Lockean autonomous substrate of things. Berkeley does allow for a more rarefied or spiritualised concept of matter and does, as we have seen already, express approval for Aristotle’s notion of matter. Just as the initial act of creation, for Christian theists, presupposes no material substrate, so too for Berkeley, the continuous act of creation presupposes no material substrate as long as this matter be conceived in the Lockean sense of an absolute substance. It is only when matter too can be the product of the creative act of God that Berkeley will allow for its existence. It appears that Berkeley is trying to break free from the immanentism native to the

²⁶⁹ Bender, *George Berkeley’s Philosophy Re-Examined*, 103.

Cartesian *cogito* which commits philosophy to atheism. Unless the mind can escape out into the world of real beings, beings whose existence is independent of the human knower or perceiver, the way to God remains firmly closed. Paradoxically, Berkeley is at the same time the post-Cartesian philosopher who reduces philosophy to extreme subjectivism and who is aware of the need for objectivism.

And yet, however inadvertently, Berkeley raises the valid question of the function and purpose of matter. Do we take matter as a datum of sense and fail to inquire whether it has some significance? For the mechanists and the materialists matter is its own end whereas for Aristotle matter is the ground for the possibilities of a substance. Without matter there could no change in a substance and therefore no perfection; form depends on matter to become all that it can become. Berkeley has a natural distaste for matter and a preference for the forms of things; the Aristotelian notion of matter does not conflict with his desire to avoid the reduction of things to the purely material.

An Alternative Theory of Dependence

It would appear that many of the philosophical difficulties experienced by Berkeley in trying to find a philosophical explanation of the Christian notion of Radical Dependence had already been resolved five hundred years previously—by Thomas Aquinas. Like Berkeley, Aquinas was an orthodox Christian and a firm believer in God as creator and sustainer of the world. Aquinas was also a firm believer in common-sense; in the reliability of the senses to put man in contact with reality. Unlike Berkeley however, Aquinas managed to reconcile the notion of Radical Dependence with the common-sense experience of the world as real, substantial, and material. Although both men were pious Christians, only Aquinas had the rigorous metaphysics which allowed him to understand fully how created being could be both created (and hence radically dependent on God for its existence) and at the same time be (that is have its own act of being and exercise its own causality). For this reason our examination of Berkeley's theory of Radical Dependence can benefit from an examination of the Thomistic doctrine of creation which provides the synthesis of common-sense realism and theism for which Berkeley was searching.

Aquinas is the first of the Christian philosophers to unite faith in God's providence with a philosophical understanding of how such providence is possible. Aquinas manages to assert the complete ontological dependence of the created universe on God without either derogating from the transcendence of God or slipping into pantheism. He also avoids the

temptation to assert transcendence at the expense of neglecting what has been revealed about the immanence of God; God's creative act is what is most intimate to each being and so God's providence lies at the heart of each created substance. It would appear that Aquinas has managed to make a complete defence of Christian theism and has succeeded in doing all that Berkeley himself set out to do, and failed to do. Aquinas' treatment of creation is the most lucid available and resolves many of those problems which left Berkeley floundering.

Aquinas, like Berkeley, holds from faith that creation is *ex nihilo* and consequently that creation is not the addition of an accident to a substrate but rather it is the source of the whole substance itself. Gilson points out how philosophers have been guided by revelation in this matter:

Philosophers have not inferred the supreme existentiality of God from any previous knowledge of the existential nature of things; on the contrary, the self-revelation of the existentiality of God has helped philosophers towards the realisation of the existential nature of things.²⁷⁰

This applies to Berkeley as much as to Aquinas. For Aquinas creation is the production of the whole substance of a thing in the previous absence both of itself and of any other subject. Being is at the core of each creature and it is the being of each creature that has been created by God. There is nothing prior to creation that could form a barrier between the creature and the providence of God. God is present to each being through his efficient causality because this causality produces, not something extrinsic to the creature, but rather the very being of the creature. This does not lead to pantheism as each creature has its own being, but this being is received from God and stems from his causal action.²⁷¹

Aquinas discovers the "existential" nature of creatures because he conceives of God as Being, not in the sense of a verbal noun which is the sense that applies to finite beings, but in the sense of a verb.²⁷² God is the subsistent act of being and for this reason creation is most "like" Him in

²⁷⁰ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 64.

²⁷¹ On the non-existence of a formless matter prior to creation see *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 66: "How creation is related to diversification".

²⁷² It is widely held that Aquinas was brought to this insight from the name God gives to himself in Exodus 3:14: "I am the God who IS".

the act of being that each thing has received.²⁷³ “For God to be a true creator, in the sense of making things to exist from nothing, he must be an infinite being and cannot be conceived as a circumscribed thing. Conceiving God as a “thing” was what led previous philosophers to conceive of creation as the conferring of essences by God, who is conceived of as the supreme essence. Creation for Aquinas is not the giving of form alone to a pre-existing substrate, but the giving of being where before there was nothing. The act of being belongs to God alone properly speaking and a finite thing can never make being its own; its being must be received in the same way as a non-incandescent object relies on an incandescent object to be illuminated:

Every creature stands in relation to God as the air to the light of the sun. For as the sun is light-giving by its very nature, while the air comes to be lighted through sharing in the sun’s nature, so also God alone is being by his essence, which is his *esse*, while every creature is being participating, i.e. its essence is not its *esse*.²⁷⁴

Aquinas’ analogy between creation and illumination is apt; just as a thing is plunged into darkness once the source of light is extinguished, likewise an existent stops existing once the source of existence is removed.²⁷⁵ Once illuminated the object does not possess luminosity but is always depending on another source for its brightness. In the same way the actual existence of a thing to which existence does not belong by nature cannot be accounted for by a “one-time” creation but only by a constant creation:

There is no real distinction between God’s creation of the world and his preservation of it. Both are aspects of one extra-temporal act by which temporal history receives its existence. If we consider the fact that, but for this act, the world would not enter into existence, we give it the name of creation; if, on the other hand, we consider the fact that, but for the same act, the world which exists would collapse into non-being, the word that we use is preservation.²⁷⁶

²⁷³ The term “act of being” is more suitable than the term “existence”. The former signifies that which is an active, dynamic force whereas the latter signifies the mere fact of being there.

²⁷⁴ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 104. See also *De Potentia*, 5,1 *ad* 6.

²⁷⁵ See *De Potentia*, 5,1, *ad* 6.

²⁷⁶ Mascal, *He Who Is*, 101.

The difference between an “initial” creation and a “constant” creation is only accidental. God preserves creation through the same act as that which caused creation in the very beginning. This creative-conservative act is outside time, and so, though it appears to us to be constantly renewed, it is in fact one and the same act.

For Aquinas existence forms part of the substantial compound of created beings with essence acting as potency with respect to being which is act. In this way the relationship between the creature and its creator is much more intimate than that which results from Avicenna’s vision of creation for whom existence is an accident of an essence. And because this essence is of itself no more than potency, the creature remains on the brink of nothingness; being held in existence by this actualisation. This reception of being from the only possible source—self-subsistent being—means that the creature must be directly related to its creator.

Indeed Aquinas held that creation need not be temporal. Creation from eternity is as philosophically acceptable for Aquinas as the temporal creation revealed in scripture, and furthermore it is by faith alone that it is “known that the world has not always existed; and it cannot be proved by demonstration”.²⁷⁷ Creation for Aquinas was not necessarily the production of beings in time as this would imply that creatures were creatures only in a historical sense. Creation is not change for there is no “point of departure” in creation, only an arrival—in being. Hence time is accidental to creation. Time presupposes creation, and “before” creation (if it was temporal) there was no time, for “God brought into being both the creature and time together”.²⁷⁸

As we have already seen, the Platonists held higher, more universal and immaterial causes to be the creators of those things below them by participation. Creation here is nothing more than the passing on of forms. Aquinas saw, however, that this notion of creation took existence for granted for it presupposes an existent to receive the forms. Creation cannot

²⁷⁷ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 2, 3c. While Aquinas asserts that the eternity of the world is philosophically tenable, he considers a creation in time to be more fitting: “In the production of things the end of God’s will is His own goodness as it is manifested in His effects. Now, His power and goodness are made manifest above all by the fact that things other than Himself are not always in existence. For this fact shows clearly that things owe their existence to Him, and also is proof that God does not act by a necessity of His nature, and that acting is infinite. Respecting the divine goodness, therefore, it was entirely fitting that God should have given things a temporal beginning”. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 38, 15.

²⁷⁸ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 35, 6.

be mediated through created intermediaries, as it is in neoplatonic emanationism, for created beings cannot give the act of being to other beings.²⁷⁹ This led him to the realisation that there can be no intermediaries in creation, contrary to what he himself had earlier believed:

In the *Sentences* Aquinas argued that since angels are immaterial or pure acts, they can operate *se totis*. Being independent of material conditions they do not require a substrate on which to operate. Rethinking this problem, Aquinas came to see that in order to operate *se toto*, that is, being must be pure act, not in the order of Forms, but in the order of *esse*. In other words, the Creator must be *Ipsium Esse Subsistens*: not only the Idea of the Good as in Platonism, not the subsisting Thought of Aristotelianism, nor the One of Neo-Platonism, but subsisting *Esse*?²⁸⁰

Creation must issue directly from the pure act of existence (which cannot be a form as a form limits itself to being in a particular way whereas the pure act of existence does not proscribe any facet of existence) as a thing cannot give what it does not have; a thing cannot give *esse* unless it is *esse*. Aquinas holds that there are two ways in which a thing may be preserved: the first is “indirect and incidental” as for example when a person watches over a child to prevent it falling into a fire is said to preserve the child’s life. The second is what we have termed Radical Dependence, which is

a *per se* and direct way of preserving a thing in existence, insofar, namely, as the thing preserved is so dependent that without the preserver it could not exist. This is the way that all creatures need God to keep them in existence. For the *esse* of all creaturely beings so depends upon God that they could not continue to exist even for a moment, but would fall away into nothingness unless they were sustained in existence by his power.²⁸¹

Hence the world is conceived as being radically dependent on God for its preservation in existence:

²⁷⁹ See *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 65, 3: “Were angels God’s intermediaries in producing the material universe?” and *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 21: “That the act of creating belongs to God alone”.

²⁸⁰ Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics*, 71-72.

²⁸¹ *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 104, 1. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 1, 65: “That God preserves things in being”.

A thing is said to preserve another *per se* and directly, namely, when what is preserved depends on the preserver in such a way that it cannot exist without it. In this manner all creatures need to be preserved by God. For the being of every creature depends on God, so that not for a moment could it subsist, but would fall into nothingness were it not kept in being by the operation of the Divine power.²⁸²

Through his examination of creation as an “existential” act Aquinas concluded that created beings participate in the Being of God:

In the *De Veritate*, 2, 11, he admitted only an analogy of proportionality between God and creatures through fear that analogy of proportion would compromise the infinite distance between the Creator and the creature and so tend to a univocal view of being: *finiti ad infinitum nulla est proportio*. By the time of the *in Boeth. de Trin.*, 1, 2, c, he had reached the conclusion that analogy is based on degrees of participation, *secundum magis et minus*, involving creative causality. Hence, he reversed his position: *est proportio creaturae ad Deum ut causati ad causam*.

By itself, proportionality is insufficient. Were proportionality the key to the understanding of being, we should be left with an unexplained pluralism with resemblances which are not accounted for. It is creation which binds being. Proportionality is only a starting point, disclosing parallel essence/existence relationships among predicamental beings; but its explanation is found in the causal resemblance of creatures to their Creator from whom they hold their *esse*. Everything that exists, exists by virtue of an existential act or *actus essendi* which it holds from the Creator who is subsisting *esse*?²⁸³

Participation, as understood here, is the sharing of “a property or mode of being which belongs primarily to something else; partaking such a property not to the fullest extent to which that property can exist...”²⁸⁴ Aquinas uses this notion of the participation of beings in Being in his fourth way to the existence of God where he asserts that the existence of finite beings requires the existence of an infinite being from which they receive their being. This differs from the Platonic notion of participation, as Mascall points out, in that it “is not merely that the idea of finite perfection implies the existence (or even the idea) of infinite perfection as

²⁸² *Summa Theologiae*, Ia, 104, 1.

²⁸³ Thibault, *Creation and Metaphysics*, x.

²⁸⁴ Timothy McDermott, glossary of the *Summa Theologiae*, (Blackfriars), vol. 2, 233.

its model, but implies the existence of infinite perfection as its *cause*".²⁸⁵ In other words, Aquinas realised that for something which need not be, to be, it is required that it should receive being from something that must be, namely Being. Hence there is a likeness between creatures and God to the degree in which they participate in His being. This notion of creation gives us a kind of existential "chain of being" where it is not the type of form that distinguishes where a being is on the scale of being, but rather the degree of being that it has received. This chain of being does not involve the mediation of being through successive links but rather refers to the degree to which each created thing participates in the being given it by the creator. For Aristotle form is act with respect to matter which is potency, and so the animation of the body (matter) takes place due to the soul (form). However, Aquinas goes one step further, saying that the form is in its turn potency with respect to a higher act: the pure act of being. The essence of a substance cannot be responsible for its own existence but rather is actuated by something which is the cause of its own existence, namely the pure act of being in which it participates. Therefore the act of being that the pure act of being communicates to the form is in turn communicated to the matter that this actuates:

It is the same act-of-being which has issued forth from the divine *esse*, which passes through the soul, which animates the body, and which penetrates even the tiniest cells of that body ... the self-same act-of-being that belongs to the soul is conferred on the body.²⁸⁶

The act of existence which makes a being to be is more central to a being than the form which makes it to be *this type of thing*. As we have seen, Berkeley uses the doctrine of actuation in *Siris*, albeit with a much less profound appreciation of its philosophical implications.

Aquinas asks why things participate in being at all: why does God preserve creation in existence? In his answer Aquinas contends that God exercises his pervasive providence so as to draw all things to himself because he is the end or purpose of all things. This dimension of creation is highlighted in process philosophy to the detriment of God's

²⁸⁵ Mascall, *He Who Is*, 54.

²⁸⁶ Étienne Gilson, *The Christian Philosophy of St Thomas Aquinas* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957), 372. See also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 22: "That God is omnipotent".

transcendence.²⁸⁷ There are many similarities between Berkeley and contemporary theists who tend to concentrate on the immanence of God in creation; in particular those philosophers of “creation spirituality”. Contemporary philosophers in this area tend to stress the reciprocity between God and creation, the participatory rather than the “monarchical” view of God, and the need for existential rather than conceptual knowledge of God.²⁸⁸

For Aquinas the secondary causality of objects does not derogate from the omnipotence or grandeur of God, but rather through its acting a finite being reveals something of God’s creative causality. Remember that the young Berkeley considered secondary causality to be an absolutely unnecessary hypothesis since God is omnipotent. Berkeley in *Siris* conceded a degree of secondary causality, but only insofar as it was needed to regulate the course of nature so that man could know “what to expect”. Just as Aquinas reaffirmed against the pantheists that creatures do have their own being and not that of God, likewise he asserted that creatures exercise their own causality and not that of God. In response to those philosophers who, like Berkeley, think “that no creature has an active role in the production of natural effects” Aquinas gives a number of refutations of this.²⁸⁹ Aquinas firstly observes that if there were no lower causes and God alone operated in things, then since there must be a likeness between cause and effect, he would have to change according to the diverse effects which are produced. Secondly it would be contrary to God’s wisdom that created things would be useless in the production of effects. Aquinas’ main objection to the erroneous position is that creatures mirror God as their cause and so must mirror his causal power, his goodness and perfection. Just as God has communicated his likeness by bringing objects into being so too “He has communicated His likeness, as

²⁸⁷ For an attempt to reconcile traditional theism with process philosophy see Lewis S. Ford, “Contrasting Conceptions of Creation”, *The Review of Metaphysics* 45, No. 1, 177 (1991), 89-109.

²⁸⁸ See Maurice Curtin, “God’s Presence in the World: The Metaphysics of Aquinas and Some Recent Thinkers (Moltmann, MacQuarrie, Rahner)”, in *At the Heart of the Real*, ed. Fran O’Rourke (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1992), 123-136.

²⁸⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 69: “On the opinion of those who take away proper actions from natural things”. Here Aquinas opposes the various varieties of this error including Plato’s doctrine of Forms, Avicbron’s notion that it is the power of spiritual substance, “passing through bodies” which produces their actions, and Maimonides’ notion that accidents are not produced by a body but directly by God.

far as acting is concerned, so that created things may also have their own actions”.²⁹⁰

Since the ability to communicate perfection to another being is a true mark of perfection; so, “to detract from the perfection of creatures is to detract from the perfection of divine power”.²⁹¹ Likewise, since good is communicative, God has communicated goodness to creatures. But to deny that creatures can do good to other creatures is “to disparage the divine goodness”.²⁹² And just as God’s conservation of the being of creatures does not negate the reality of their being, likewise God’s immediate co-operation in the causality of creatures does not negate the reality of their secondary causality.²⁹³ Secondary causes are executors of the divine providence and yet have a real autonomy. This is precisely what Berkeley fails to see when he refuses to acknowledge secondary causality in created beings for fear of impugning the power of God or slighting divine goodness. When Berkeley, in *Siris*, does concede the existence of secondary causes, he does so only insofar as they are needed to direct man. Aquinas asks himself why there are secondary causes when God is omnipotent and has no need for intermediaries. The reasons he provides are far less anthropocentric: firstly he says that the execution of small details in an system is appropriate to a lower power; secondly because there is such a distance between the effect and the divine cause; thirdly because it belongs to the dignity of a ruler to have ministers; and fourthly because, as we have seen, creatures are good insofar as they can communicate goodness.²⁹⁴ This final point is worth considering further as it encapsulates the breadth of vision in Aquinas that is lacking in Berkeley. Aquinas considers an agent to be more perfect to the degree that it can introduce its likeness into the effect. Created things also resemble God in their degree of goodness, but “the creature approaches more perfectly to God’s likeness if it is not only good, but can also act for the good of other things”.²⁹⁵ But this is impossible unless inequality exists in the universe so that “the perfection of the universe requires that certain things participate in divine goodness more abundantly than others”.²⁹⁶ Without this gradation no being would be superior to any other and so it would be impossible for

²⁹⁰ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 69,14.

²⁹¹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 69, 15.

²⁹² *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 69,16.

²⁹³ See Gilson, *Elements of Christian Philosophy*, 182.

²⁹⁴ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 77.

²⁹⁵ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 45, 4.

²⁹⁶ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, II, 45, 4.

them to do good to one another. Such a universe would not mirror the goodness of God.

Aquinas' way of proving that order relies on God is strikingly similar to Berkeley's doctrine of the Divine Visual Language. Both of them consider, in very different ways of course, that the order of the universe is established in the act of creation. In Berkeley's Divine Visual Language the ideas imprinted by God on the mind of man are intrinsically ordered. This coherence is one of the qualities which allows man to distinguish ideas of the imagination from those coming from God. The ideas do not exist prior to receiving an order from God but rather, because they are like words spoken to man by God, they only exist because they are ordered and can convey meanings to man. The order of the universe is not distinct from its participation in God's conserving causality. Just as Aquinas bases his Fifth Way on the totality of the universe, Berkeley proves the existence of a provident God from the Divine Visual Language.

Aquinas considers the universe to be intrinsically ordered and not merely accidentally. It is not ordered in the way that books may be stacked neatly on a shelf but rather in that the things that constitute the universe, of their very nature, are ordained towards certain ends. God's providential plan for creation applies to each individual object within that creation just as much as it applies to the whole. Aquinas points out that in human providence (which is the model the mechanists and deists use to describe divine providence) overseers plan out "some of the big and universal matters" but leave the details to "agents on a lower level". But this is only so because man is deficient. God, having no deficiencies, "plans the order for all singular things.... His providence applies to all singulars immediately".²⁹⁷ The order which God establishes in the universe is immediate, just as God's conserving knowledge of individuals holds them in being. Thus the order of the universe evidences a creative orderer; one that actually created the natures themselves rather than one that merely "organises" pre-existing things. The deists' mechanistic explanation of the order of the universe does not adequately account for the order of the universe for they present the order of the universe as something accidental. The relationship between plants and animals in food chains, for instance, is comparable with the relationship between two cogs in a clock. The nature of one is not intrinsically related to the other but they find themselves in proximity by accident. The elements in such a system may be united by a common efficient cause but not by a common final cause. In nature, for

²⁹⁷ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 76, 5.

Aquinas, the cause of unity is much deeper because all things, insofar as they participate in being, mirror God and strive to imitate God by coming to the fulfilment of their nature. There is a good common to all things and towards which they strive, not individualistically, but with the aid of the rest of creation to attain the same end. In doing this they exercise a real, secondary causality. The deists conceive all causality as a purely mechanical continuation of the initial impetus provided by the first efficient cause. The cause of unity in the Thomistic system is the final, rather than the efficient cause. Neither Aquinas nor Berkeley is content with such an extrinsic cause of the phenomenon of order. This same problem is to be found in the approach of contemporary science to creation:

Some scientists, who still realize the value of the argument on the basis of design, would say that they do not feel “the need of a Creator to start the Universe”. A. H. Compton, *The Religion of a Scientist*, 11. In other words, they do not realize that these two problems are identically the same. Design appears to them as a fact whose existence calls for an explanation. Why then should not the protons, electrons, neutrons, and photons be considered as facts whose existence also calls for some explanation? In what sense is the existence of these elements less mysterious than that of their composite? What prevents many scientists from going as far as to ask this second question is that, this time, they cannot fail to perceive the nonscientific character of the problem. Yet the nature of the two problems is the same. If the cause for the *existence* of organisms lies outside the nature of the physicochemical elements, it transcends the physical order; hence it is transphysical, that is, metaphysical, in its own right. In other words, if there is nothing in the elements to account for design, the presence of design in a chaos of elements entails just as necessarily a creation as the very existence of the elements.²⁹⁸

However Aquinas holds that if it the reality of the causal power of individual things is denied, then the order of the whole is lost:

If actions be taken away from things, the mutual order among things is removed, for, in regard to things that are different in their natures, there can be no gathering together into a unity of order unless by the fact that some of them act and others undergo action.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ Gilson, *God and Philosophy*, 140, footnote 19.

²⁹⁹ *Summa Contra Gentiles*, III, 69, 17.

It is interesting to note the similarity between Berkeley's concern for the centrality of man in all his works, but in particular in *Siris*, and that of Aquinas. For Aquinas being is not "thereness" simply but

a logical and significant thereness in a community of the universe revealed to man by knowledge and love ... the being of things is conceived as fulfilling a role desired by someone, as the expression of someone's love. So that this seminal idea of being leads almost immediately to the notion of a God whose intentions rule the world, the expression of whose intentions the world is. Since St Thomas's word for the community of the universe about which we have been talking is "nature", we may say that God enters into his "philosophy" as the one who conceives nature, as the "author" of nature.³⁰⁰

Aquinas managed to sail a safe course between pantheism and deism. On the one hand he avoided neoplatonism with its implication that creatures are an extension of God (verticalism) and on the other hand he avoids the temptation to concede too much autonomy to creatures which divinises them in another way (horizontalism).

Berkeley sees the inadequacy of the deistic argument from design as presented by his contemporaries such as Clarke. Such arguments fail to prove the existence or providence of God because for them the order of the universe is extrinsic to creatures. A very great, but still finite, being could have ordered a pre-existing set of beings in this way. The clockmaker is responsible for the ordering of a clock but not for its being. The only completely valid argument from design is one which proves God to be the cause of the existence of the thing that is ordered towards a particular end.

Berkeley himself was acquainted with Scholastic philosophers such as Suarez and in particular with Aquinas.³⁰¹ It is impossible to tell to what

³⁰⁰ Timothy McDermott, ed. *Summa Theologiae*, (London: Blackfriars, 1964), vol. 2.

³⁰¹ A copy of Aquinas' *Commentary on Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy* is listed in the catalogue of the contents of Berkeley's library. See Aaron, "A Catalogue of Berkeley's Library", *Mind* 41 (1932), 475. Regarding Berkeley's knowledge of Aquinas, Browne writes the following: "Between 24 and 45 he learned a good deal about Thomism that he certainly did not know when he was just out of college. A close study of his life and works gives the impression that he had time to study the Greek Philosophers and the Scholastics in the latter part of his life, particularly in his American sojourn. President Clap, of Yale University, catalogues Berkeley's gift of books to Yale, in 1742. Interestingly, one heading of the Catalogue (p.9) is "XIII. The Schoolmen", but unfortunately the detailed listing

degree Berkeley was influenced by Scholasticism, especially since its growing unfashionableness in England definitely exerted pressure on Berkeley not to express too much enthusiasm for “those great masters of abstraction”, the Schoolmen. In a letter to Johnson, Berkeley shows that he is cognisant with the doctrine of Radical Dependence as it appears in Scholasticism. It makes clear the great similarity between Berkeley’s thought and that of the Scholastic philosophers:

Those who have all along contended for a material world have yet acknowledged that *natura naturans* (to use the language of the Schoolmen) is God; and that the divine conservation of things is equipotent to, and in fact the same thing with, a continued repeated creation: in a word, that conservation and creation differ only in the *terminus a quo*. These are the common opinions of the Schoolmen; and Durandus, who held the world to be a machine like a clock, made and put in motion by God, but afterwards continuing to go of itself, was therein particular, and had few followers. The very poets teach a doctrine not unlike the schools—*Mens agitat molem* (Virg. *Aenid* VI). The Stoics and Platonists are everywhere full of the same notion. I am not therefore singular in this point itself, so much as in my way of proving it.³⁰²

The last line quoted above is noteworthy; it is a clear statement by Berkeley that his immaterialism is a means to proving that the world is conserved by God. It is further evidence that Berkeley was not interested in the immaterialist doctrine for its own sake.

Conclusion

Deism is a consequence of the failure on the part of philosophers to recognise the contingency of things, not in their initial coming to be as found in the notion of a temporal creation, but rather in their continuing to be. It is a result of a blindness to the contingency that lies at the heart of creatures; a contingency which is part of the ontological structure of creatures. Creation is not a purely historical fact concerning the origin of

of books omits this heading altogether, so that one cannot tell which of the Schoolmen he read. However I have myself seen the *Summa Theologiae* among the books now contained in the Berkeley collection of Yale University. See The Yale University Library Gazette, New Haven: Univ. Press, vol. 8, No. 1 (July, 1933)”. J. W. Browne, “Berkeley and Scholasticism”, *The Modern Schoolman* 49 (Jan 1972), 122.

³⁰² Letter of November 25, 1729, #5, *Works*, vol. 2, 280-81.

creatures in time, but a fact which relates to the mode of being a creature always has. Though many deists did in fact acknowledge, or at least pay lip-service to, the Christian doctrine of temporal creation, their deistic, mechanistic, and materialistic philosophical systems are clearly irreconcilable with the Christian doctrines of creation and providence.

Berkeley's work, from first to last, is an exercise in Christian apologetics. At every turn he is defending the Christian faith against the growth of irreligious philosophical doctrines. The essentially apologetical character of Berkeley's work has been noted by other commentators:

From the *Principles* onwards he was fashioning a reasoned case for the existence of God, of a certain kind of God with a certain kind of relation to the world. . . . His "*esse is percipi*," his denial of the representative theory of perception and of material substance, his critique of natural science, and his theory of signs, all arise in the context of that intention.³⁰³

Though this may be a very commendable pursuit, does it make for good philosophy? It seems that Berkeley may have been too interested in a refutation of the sceptics and deists to look for the truth in a detached manner. He is too much a polemicist to be a philosopher in the best sense of the word. Does not this omnipresent "intention" of Berkeley make it difficult for him to be a good philosopher, prejudicing as it does each step along the way in his philosophical itinerary? Berkeley justifies his immaterialism by a dangerous land of pragmatism; if the end is an improvement in virtue, or is a defence of Christianity, then dubious philosophical means become acceptable: "But is not the general good of mankind to be regarded as a rule or measure of moral truths, of all such truths as direct or influence the moral actions of men".³⁰⁴ Berkeley's approach to philosophy is broadly utilitarian. The end for Berkeley is the moral well-being of mankind and the means is whatever philosophical doctrines are conducive to piety. As a result he philosophizes in a very un-philosophical manner! In general we can say that Berkeley is not concerned with particulars once important Christian doctrines are vindicated. Berkeley himself justifies his lack of philosophical rigour to Johnson, perhaps because he thinks piety has so much to gain if his general doctrines are accepted and so much to lose from precise scrutiny: "If in every inference we should not agree, so long as the main points are

³⁰³ Jessop, "Berkeley as Religious Apologist" in Warren E. Steinkraus, ed. *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, 98.

³⁰⁴ *Alciphron*, First Dialogue, #16, *Works*, 16.

settled and well understood, I should be less solicitous about particular conjectures”.³⁰⁵

Rather than considering the problems of philosophy in an open manner, being disposed to finding the truth “come-what-may”, Berkeley has decided a priori that the truth will be whatever is conducive to piety. Consequently Berkeley denies the obvious to defend the pious; most notoriously in his frequently ridiculed doctrine of immaterialism which is Berkeley’s trump-card against materialists, sceptics, and atheists. Berkeley considered that since appearances were preserved in his immaterialism, and since such great ground was gained for piety, we should have no scruples about dropping the notion of matter, especially since, for all intents and purposes, the “immaterial” objects of Berkeley can be treated as material. Since their immateriality is at a metaphysical level beyond everyday experience it concerns only the ontological and not the phenomenological status of things. Berkeley, at least in the earlier works, is prepared to cleave the “vulgar” world of common experience from the true world intelligible only to pious philosophers. On the one hand we have the world of things; and who could deny that the we experience things as material, solid, resisting our touch, weighty, etc? On the other hand philosophy is supposed to tell us that this materiality is illusory; that everything we sense is a stimulation of our minds directly by God. Given that this latter doctrine does not alter the facts of experience; we still see what we see. The alteration comes at the much deeper level of the reality of what things are. And this is no small matter to be tampered with just because some results are apparently more conducive to piety. The concern of philosophy is the truth of things regardless of other considerations. Ironically, a direct consequence of Berkeley’s temerity in affirming the reality of the world for fear of belittling the omnipotence of God the creator, is that he closes off all possibility of coming to a knowledge of God through the being of creatures. In a similar manner Berkeley’s denial of the ability of human intelligence to reach causal principles in things through abstraction—a denial which is motivated by the desire to attribute all instances of secondary causality to God alone—necessarily leads to agnosticism. Both Berkeley and the mechanists attenuate created being to such a degree that it can no longer tell us anything about the creator. Berkeley denies the intrinsic ability of creatures to act. If creatures are considered in this way it makes little difference whether one holds them to have existence outside the mind of man or merely an intentional existence.

³⁰⁵ Letter from Berkeley to Johnson, March 24, 1730, *Works*, vol. 2, 293-94.

Either way there is no practical difference between the two beings as neither is capable of doing anything. Berkeley only ever wishes to deny power to creatures; especially the power to subsist. In the same way the mechanists conceive of creatures as completely passive except that they do indeed subsist without the aid of a mind. Deistic mechanism relies on the inability of creatures to effect true causality, i.e. to be a source of being. Creatures merely pass on a received motion in a purely mechanical way thus making the understanding of the workings of nature very simple indeed. God is relegated to the position of the first mover in the purely mechanical sense; having initially imparted movement into the system his role in creation is over. Berkeley, by making God directly responsible for each and every instance of causality, also detracts from his creative capacity since he is unable to create being but only to cause the workings of mere chimera. The reductive rationalism of the deists involves them in fatal necessity while the pious voluntarism of Berkeley leads him to fatal passivity.

When Berkeley's interpretation falls on less pious ears the sequence of cause and effect is no longer ascribed to God's desire to communicate with man in a Divine Visual Language, but rather is taken as the mere fact of succession from which nothing can be inferred. So it is that Berkeley's piety all comes to nothing with Hume's criticism of the explanation to causality through recourse to the activity of God:

Supposing, that the deity were the great and efficacious principle, which supplies the deficiency of all causes; this leads us into the grossest impieties and absurdities.... If nothing be active but what has an apparent power, thought is in no case any more active than matter; and if this inactivity must make us have recourse to a deity, the supreme being is the real cause of all our actions, bad as well as good, vicious as well as virtuous.³⁰⁶

Berkeley is guilty of what Gilson terms "theologism"; that is, interpreting the world according to a piety unguided by reason: "When and where piety is permitted to inundate the philosophical field, the usual outcome is that, the better to extol the Glory of God, pious-minded theologians proceed joyfully to annihilate God's own creation".³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, Bk. 1, Part 4, Sect. 5 (London, 1882), Vol 1, 531.

³⁰⁷ Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, 37.

What then follows, and did follow in the case of Berkeley, is that there comes another, less pious, philosopher who bases an assertion that there is no God, or at least that his existence is unknowable, on the poverty of nature as portrayed by his predecessor. There is a striking similarity between Berkeley and Ockham in this regard. Both men, motivated by the desire to defend Christianity against necessitarianism, adopted nominalism and voluntarism in order to emphasise God's role in material creation. In order to safeguard the Christian doctrines of the divine omnipotence and liberty, Ockham felt obliged to eliminate universals as constraining God's freedom. This ushered in late Mediaeval and Renaissance scepticism. The less pious successors of both men found it impossible to find a creator behind a world whose creatures are deprived of their own nature and causality.

Although Berkeley fails to establish a philosophical justification of Christian theism, he does contribute to establishing the boundaries between the domains of science and philosophy. He realises that the New Science had encroached upon the domain proper to philosophy. *De Motu* in particular is a classic exposition of the limits of science concerning the origin of motion. Berkeley refuses to grant that science alone has the competence to examine material reality. He clearly recognises that the scientific investigation of the quantitative aspects of visible reality can give only a partial understanding of these phenomena. He resists the attempts of the natural scientists to reduce all possible explanations of the material world to the purely mathematical, and defends the worth of philosophical speculation on material reality. In *Siris* above all, Berkeley realises that the approach of the philosopher to reality cannot be that of the scientist who seeks to dominate reality. The philosopher's attitude to reality should be that of a contemplative: accepting what is given rather than seeking to limit being to that realm of reality which can be quantified and dominated by man.

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