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THE APOLOGETICS OF GEORGE BERKELEY

By

James Sanford Spiegel

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
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ABSTRACT

THE APOLOGETICS OF GEORGE BERKELEY

By

James Sanford Spiegel

I explore the role of George Berkeley's immaterialist
metaphysics in the defense of the doctrines of his orthodox
Christian faith. In my study, I draw not only from his
principal philosophical works but also from his sermons and
non-philosophical essays. My conclusions are as follows.
First, immaterialism plays a very small role in Berkeley's
overall defense of Christian theism. Secondly, the
originality of Berkeley's apologetics consists almost
entirely in those arguments which presuppose immaterialism.
Thirdly, Berkeley's apologetic efforts are largely a
failure. And fourthly, the only significant accomplishment
made by immaterialism for Christian theism lies in the
additional explanatory power it provides for certain
Biblical texts.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Introduction

I. The Subject of Inquiry and Main Theses

In the final section of his *Principles of Human Knowledge* Berkeley writes, "what deserves the first place in our studies is the consideration of God and our duty; which to promote...was the main drift of my labors."[1] And he concludes the treatise by noting that his chief end in writing was to "better dispose [his readers] to reverence and embrace the salutary truths of the Gospel which to know and to practice is the highest perfection of human nature."[2] What Berkeley means to say here is that the metaphysics he defends in the *Principles*, which boils down to the claim that *esse est percipi aut percipere* (to be is to be perceived or to perceive), is intended as an apologetic device. Whatever else he thought he was doing in the *Principles*, this much he was confident of: his defense of immaterialism is a service to religion and a weapon against the detractors of religious belief. Berkeley is no less resolute in the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* when he asks this rhetorical question regarding the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere*:

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[1]. *Principles of Human Knowledge*, 156.

[2]. Ibid.

> In a word, the whole system of Atheism, is it not
> entirely overthrown, by this single reflexion on
> the repugnancy included in supposing the whole, or
> any part, even the most rude and shapeless, of the
> visible world, to exist without a mind?[3]

This is a very bold claim on Berkeley's part. And if it is true, then Berkeley has indeed achieved something remarkable, maybe incomparable in the history of ideas. If successful, he will have conquered atheism once and for all and placed religious belief, specifically Christian theism, on a sure foundation. Naturally, we are prompted to ask some serious questions in the face of such bold proclamations as are made by Berkeley in the above cited passages. Does Berkeley succeed in defeating atheism? If so, why does his system succeed where others have failed? And exactly how does his immaterialist metaphysics serve as an apologetic device? Or was Berkeley really deluded regarding what he perceived to be the usefulness of immaterialism in bolstering rational assent to the doctrines of his faith? These are some of the questions that I shall be addressing in what follows. My inquiry essentially regards the precise role of immaterialism in Berkeley's apologetics. And, tersely put, my conclusion will be that immaterialism actually plays a relatively small role in his defense of Christian theism. My findings will be surprising to some because there is general agreement among Berkeley scholars about the following two claims: First, Berkeley

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[3]. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, (Chicago: The Open Court Library of Philosophy, 1969), p. 66.

was a devoted religious apologist, at every opportunity seeking to defend his Christian faith,[4] and secondly, Berkeley's distinctive philosophical position is immaterialism, a metaphysical view which he was committed to throughout his career[5], Considering these two theses, it should seem surprising that Berkeley's immaterialism plays only a very small role in his apologetics. And yet this is what I intend to demonstrate in this dissertation.

When I began this project it was my initial intention to show that immaterialism had a crucial function in Berkeley's apologetics. After thorough research, however, it became clear to me that even if the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere* and the whole metaphysics which hangs on that claim were entirely removed from the corpus, the greater portion of Berkeley's apologetic arguments would remain intact. Furthermore, I discovered that among those arguments used by Berkeley to defend the tenets of his religious faith, a sizable number are not original with him. In fact, I found that those apologetic arguments which

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[4]. Jessop has perhaps put it most succinctly: "Berkeley's system, whatever may be the right textbook label to apply to it, was plainly a piece of religious apologetics, the outline of a constructive natural theology, of a theistic metaphysic." From "Berkeley as a Religious Apologist" in *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, Warren Steinkraus, ed. (Washington: University Press of America, Inc., 1981), p. 98.

[5]. The second part of this claim, that Berkeley remained an immaterialist over the entire course of his life is doubted by some commentators. Elsewhere, in a paper entitled "Metaphysical Integrity in Berkeley", I have defended the view that the Berkeleyan corpus displays an unwavering commitment to immaterialism.

depend upon immaterialism represent the only aspects of Berkeley's apologetics which do not have precedents in the history of Christian apologetics. Thus, the central claim in this dissertation is this: Berkeley's apologetic arguments are largely unoriginal, and for the most part they do not presuppose immaterialism. And where his arguments are original it is precisely here that his immaterialist metaphysics does play a pivotal role.

Including a number of satellite theses which I also defend, the claims I make in this dissertation are the following. First, Berkeley's immaterialism plays a role in his apologetics, but it is a very minor one. Specifically, immaterialism figures critically in two of the arguments for the existence of God. Secondly, Berkeley's defense of Christian theism is almost entirely unoriginal, and more often than not his arguments are rearticulations of arguments used by philosophers such as Augustine, Aquinas, Clarke, Cudworth, Descartes, Malebranche, Leibniz and others. I do not attempt to show that Berkeley actually borrowed from these or other particular thinkers. This would be a major project in itself. It is only my concern to note that the arguments in Berkeley's apologetics which do not assume immaterialism are not original. This actually constitutes a third claim: the originality of Berkeley's apologetics consists almost entirely in those areas where his immaterialism is presupposed. Fourthly, I show that Berkeley's apologetic efforts are largely a failure. His

theistic proofs, arguments for the immortality of the soul, theodicies, and rational defense of sundry other Christian doctrines are all laden with difficulties. It might seem that including criticisms of Berkeley's arguments is superfluous, since it is not my main purpose to show that his apologetic project fails. However, I believe that discussing the difficulties with his arguments serves to further illuminate them. More importantly, in offering criticisms of Berkeley's immaterialist theistic proofs I show that immaterialism does not advance Berkeley's case for Christian theism. A fifth claim in this dissertation regards what I believe to be the chief asset of immaterialism for the Christian theist. While immaterialism does not succeed as an apologetic device per se, it does provide greater explanatory power regarding certain biblical passages which are cryptic at best for the matterist theist. Thus, I argue, there are perhaps good theological reasons for adopting immaterialism for the person who is <u>already</u> a Christian theist.

II. Terminological Clarifications

I want to pause now to explain some terminology that I shall employ throughout my discussion, specifically the terms "immaterialist" and "matterist". To some, it might seem that more appropriate terms to be used are "idealist" and "materialist" (or even "realist") respectively. This does not seem so to me, and I shall explain why not. I have

chosen to label Berkeley's system "immaterialism" rather
than "idealism" because of several considerations. My
reasons for refusing to use the term "idealist" in
describing Berkeley's thought are largely those given by
Luce, the most esteemed Berkeley scholar of this century.
Luce rightly notes that because idealism is a label pinned
on the systems of such metaphysicians as Kant, Hegel, and
Bradley, and their thought bears little resemblance to that
of Berkeley's, it is at best misleading to apply the term to
him.[6] To use any single term to describe Berkeley's
metaphysics which also describes such philosophers as these
is to invite misinterpretation of a philosophical system
that has been distorted perhaps more than any other.[7]
Secondly, as Luce incisively observes, idealism has often
connoted "a distrust of the senses and an exaggerated
estimate of the powers of the human mind; in both those
respects Berkeley is non-idealist".[8]

Besides the dangers of appending the term "idealist" to
Berkeley, there are good positive reasons for using the term
"immaterialism" to describe his metaphysics. As I read him,

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[6]. See A. A. Luce's *Berkeley's Immaterialism* (New York:
Russell and Russell, 1968), p. 26.

[7]. Here I concur with Margaret Wilson who writes "Of all
the major modern philosophical systems the views of George
Berkeley have probably met with the most resistance, ridicule,
and distortion". See her "The 'Phenomenalisms' of Berkeley
and Kant" in *Self and Nature in Kant's Philosophy*, Allen Wood,
ed., (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), p. 157.

[8]. Luce, p. 27.

Berkeley believes everything about the world that the metaphysical realist believes <u>except</u> that material substance (in the technical Lockean understanding of the term described below) exists. For this reason the tag "immaterialist" precisely captures the essence of Berkeleyanism, for it focusses on just this fact. Of course while my interpretation agrees with such esteemed Berkeley scholars as Luce and Jessop, it is at odds with that of others. So to avoid becoming needlessly embroiled in this dispute in trying to justify my nomenclature I shall only note that my preference of the term "immaterialism" is not crucial to my argument, so those who remain unconvinced that Berkeley cannot be properly labelled an idealist may persist in their conviction. Doing so should not make my arguments any less convincing for them.

As for my use of the term "matterist" instead of "materialist", my reasons are probably less controversial. A materialist, in the philosophical rather than the economic sense, is one who believes that the world is composed of <u>nothing more</u> than matter in its various forms. Philosophers who have been given this label include Democritus, Hobbes, and contemporary mind-body identity theorists. A matterist, on the other hand, may or may not be a materialist. "Matterism" is the view that there exists a material substratum in which the qualities of physical objects inhere. Examples of matterists are Descartes, Locke, and Russell. It was Locke's view in particular which served as

the philosophical substrate for the development of
Berkeley's own metaphysics. Berkeley's principle *esse est
percipi aut percipere* can be seen as a direct response to
Locke's view that underlying all physical objects there is
an unknown, unperceived, qualitiless substance. More shall
be said later about why Berkeley's theological sensibilities
were threatened by this doctrine. For now it is sufficient
to note that this view of Locke's (and Russell's) is more
accurately termed "matterism" than "materialism", for the
former, not the latter, implies nothing about belief in a
non-material reality. Locke, for one, was a matterist but
was not a materialist. He was a most devout believer in a
non-material God and human soul (though he entertained
doubts about the latter) as part of a spiritual reality
transcending the material one we know empirically.

III. Historical Context

Understanding Locke's view about material substance is
essential to understanding the philosophical impetus for
Berkeley's metaphysics, for immaterialism was devised
especially to combat atheism and religious skepticism
generally and Locke's doctrine of material substance in
particular because of its potential for providing the
occasion for the emergence of these trends of thought. So
what exactly was this doctrine of material substance
advanced by Locke which Berkeley considered so hazardous to
religious belief? To understand Locke's doctrine about

material substance it is necessary first to understand
something about his theory of ideas. For Locke an idea is
the immediate object of the understanding. And in the
context of perception of external objects, he calls the
power bodies have to produce particular ideas "qualities".
Now the qualities of objects are of two kinds, primary and
secondary. Primary qualities are, in Locke's words,
"utterly inseparable from the body" which produces them.[9]
They include extension, solidity, figure, motion, and
number. They are those qualities in an object to which our
ideas bear resemblance. Secondary qualities, on the other
hand, do not resemble anything in the body which gives rise
to them. They include such qualities as colors, tastes, and
sounds.

Locke further inquires about the source of the
qualities in objects. He maintains that bodies cannot
simply be collections of qualities but must be something
more besides. This is where he posits the existence of
material substance as a support for qualities. He writes,

> because we cannot conceive how [qualities] should
> subsist alone, nor one in another, we suppose them
> existing in, and supported by some common subject;
> which support we denote by the name substance,
> though it be certain, we have no clear, or
> distinct idea of that thing we suppose a
> support.[10]

In using the first person plural here, Locke intimates his

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[9]. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, VIII, 9.

[10]. Ibid., II, XXIII, 4.

conviction that his is a common view, shared by many of his readers. And yet he finds himself at a loss to further characterize the concept, restricting his descriptions of substance to its function as the subject of qualities and sometimes cryptically referring to it as "we know not what".[11]

So what possible danger could Berkeley have sensed in such a doctrine? First, he considered the Lockean doctrine of substance a gross violation of common sense. Berkeley considered himself a champion of common sense,[12] and to espouse, as Locke does, the existence of an insensible, mysterious, occult entity such as material substratum was to him anathema. Berkeley defended what he purported to be the common sensical position that what you see is real, that appearance _is_ reality.[13] He opposed the notion of a physical world inaccessible by our senses, for he believed this view would give leverage to the skeptic who maintains that we cannot know the physical world as it really is but only as it appears to us. Consequently, the doctrine of material substance, Berkeley believed, is the father of

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[11]. Ibid., I, IV, 18.

[12]. See, for example, _Philosophical Commentaries_, 405, 408, and 751 and the _Dialogues_, pp. 90, 100, 110, and 136.

[13]. For more on Berkeley's defense of common sense and his opposition to skepticism see Richard Popkin's "Berkeley and Pyrrhonism" in _Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge_, Colin Turbayne, ed., (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 100-128 and J.O. Urmson's _Berkeley_, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 3.

skepticism.

A further reason for Berkeley's opposition to the Lockean doctrine of substance was that it is unintelligible. As Locke himself testifies, we cannot have any idea or notion of it whatsoever, and we certainly don't perceive it. So how could we ever know that it exists? But Berkeley's reason for rejecting the theory goes beyond the problem of lack of empirical evidence. For Berkeley to exist is to be perceived or to be a perceiver, thus for him the notion of an entity which is neither is non-sensical:

> I do not deny the existence of material substance, merely because I have no notion of it, but because the notion of it is inconsistent; or, in other words, because it is repugnant that there should be a notion of it.[14]

When one recalls that Berkeley was an empiricist of a much more thoroughgoing sort than Locke, one begins to see just why he reacted so vehemently to the notion of substance. Note that Locke does admit that we _suppose_ the existence of substance. Berkeley would agree we must suppose _some_ cause of our ideas, but he insists that Locke errs in positing an unthinking, inconceivable entity. Rather, Berkeley maintains the cause of our ideas is spirit, namely God.

Thus we have revealed what Berkeley perceives to be the poison at the heart of the Lockean doctrine of substance. This theory constitutes a rejection of God as the immediate

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[14]. _Dialogues_, p. 94.

cause of our ideas. Of course, this is itself far from a denial of the existence of God or even of the sovereign control of God over nature. Berkeley's fear, however, is that atheism is the inevitable result of Lockean metaphysics. That is, once one denies that God is the continual cause of all creation, relegating him to mere creator and overseer (rather than intimate sustainer) of the world, the slippery slope to atheism has begun. In addition to Locke, Berkeley opposed himself to a number of other figures whose views he took as a threat to Christian theism, thinkers who are now loosely gathered under the label "deism". Berkeley preferred to refer to them as "free thinkers", the name which was most popularly used in his own day to designate those philosophers who advocated full freedom of thought and inquiry, especially regarding religious questions and, most importantly, who maintained a skeptical attitude towards claims about the supernatural, especially miracles, special divine revelation, and church infallibility. The deist movement began in the early seventeenth century with Lord Herbert of Cherbury (1583-1648). Herbert espoused the submission of matters of faith to the scrutiny of reason. Specifically he maintained that all religions must first be investigated historically and tested against common sense before being accepted.[15]

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[15]. Two particularly influential metaphysical works of Herbert's were *De Veritate* (1624) and *De Religione Gentilium* (published posthumously in 1663).

Charles Blount (1654-1693), a disciple of Herbert's (and of Hobbes'), popularized deistic thought in England. Like his mentor he attacked such religious institutions as priestcraft, and he undermined belief in the doctrines of miracles, immortality, and scriptural authority.[16] After Blount the movement ballooned and continued as a dominant intellectual school of thought in Europe in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Deists who were particularly influential in Berkeley's day were John Toland[17] (1670-1722), Anthony Collins[18] (1676-1729), Bernard Mandeville[19] (1670-1733), Anthony Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury[20] (1671-1713), and Matthew Tindal[21] (ca. 1657-1733). Each of these figures most

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[16]. Important works include *Great is Diana of the Ephesians* (1680), a sustained critique of priestcraft, and *Religio Laici*, (1683) which contains an attack of the doctrine of special divine revelation.

[17]. His most famous work *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) received fifty refutations and resulted in his persecution throughout Great Britain.

[18]. His works included *Priestcraft in Perfection* (1710) in which he criticizes theological dogma and rejects all appeals to mystery, *A Discourse on Free Thinking* (1713), and *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (1715).

[19]. His most influential work, *Fable of the Bees* (1705) proposed that private vices are public benefits.

[20]. Works include *An Enquiry Concerning Virtue or Merit* (1699), *A Letter Concerning Enthusiasm* (1708), *An Essay on the Freedom of Wit and Humor* (1709), and *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, Times* (1711).

[21]. In 1709 his *A Defense of the Rights of the Church* was condemned by the House of Commons and later burned. This did not deter Tindal, however. In 1730 he published *Christianity as Old as the Creation* which became known as "the deist's

assuredly deserved the label "free thinker", as each

championed the cause for complete freedom of intellectual

inquiry and toleration of all views. Collins in particular

was convinced that even atheism was not as dangerous as

superstition and enthusiasm. It is easy to see why Berkeley

was so fiercely opposed to this movement. Typically he did

not mention the deists by name when addressing their views

in his writings, though at times it is transparently clear

he is attacking a particular deist doctrine. In *Alciphron:*

or, the Minute Philosopher Berkeley devotes an entire

dialogue each to both Mandeville and Shaftesbury. In the

second dialogue Mandeville's thesis from *The Fable of the*

Bees that private vices are public benefits, is criticized

at length. And in the third dialogue Shaftesbury's view

that humans are naturally virtuous is discussed and refuted.

In most cases when Berkeley addresses the doctrines of the

"free thinkers" he does so generically, as in some of his

essays in the *Guardian*.[22]

Though Berkeley took great pains to address specific

deistic doctrines, as we have seen, the thinker whose

substance ontology provided the key substrate for the

development of Berkeley's immaterialism was himself,

ironically, a professing Christian. Locke had in fact

Bible".

[22]. See "The Pineal Gland", "The Sanctions of Religion",
and "Minute Philosophers", essays III, V, and VII
respectively.

written his own volume on apologetics, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). This did not assuage Berkeley, however, who was not prepared to forgive his defense of the doctrine of material substance as an honest mistake. Berkeley was convinced that in Locke's doctrine he saw the philosophical writing on the wall: the imminent advance of religious skepticism and atheism. Historically, the case can be made for this development of thought (from Locke to modern atheism), since deism provided the bridge to naturalism, and many of the deists such as Shaftesbury and Toland were deeply influenced by Locke.[23] Berkeley, therefore, considered it his philosophical calling to fight against the doctrine of material substance and defend a metaphysic that conceived of God as intimately associated with and in immediate sovereign control of the world, a philosophical system which as a whole constituted an unconquerable case for theism. All of this, Berkeley was convinced, immaterialism could do.

IV. Overview

Thus, Berkeley's immaterialism was more or less borne into (and perhaps out of) the deist controversy, and it is part of Berkeley's attempt to reestablish theistic belief as

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23. J.M. Hone and M.M. Rossi have argued that Berkeley's view that deism leads to atheism "is historically as well as psychologically correct". See their *Bishop Berkeley: His Life, Writings, and Philosophy*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), chapter 10.

the foundation of thought. But, as we shall see, Berkeley's immaterialism actually plays a small role in his apologetic project. In what follows I shall show precisely the place of immaterialism in Berkeley's defense of the faith. But first I want to provide a chapter by chapter summary of my examination of the key aspects of the relation of Berkeley's immaterialism and his apologetics. In chapter two, "The Theological Orthodoxy of Berkeley's Immaterialism", I address a question which must be answered before Berkeley's apologetics and the role of immaterialism in it can be analyzed. This chapter is, therefore, a prolegomena of sorts. The question I address is this: How can immaterialism be an apologetic device for Berkeley when it is inconsistent with some doctrines of scripture? My answer is that the presupposition of this query is false. The question about the consistency of immaterialism with scripture is taken up by Berkeley himself in the *Principles*[24] and the third *Dialogue*. But his treatment of the issue is brief. In chapter two I defend Berkeley's own position that his principle that *esse est percipi aut percipere* is indeed consistent with the scriptures. But I go further than Berkeley himself dared to, as I argue that Berkeley's metaphysics is actually recommended by the scriptures, especially in the creation narrative in the early chapters of the book of Genesis.

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[24]. Section 82.

In chapters three and four Berkeley's arguments for the existence of God are discussed. There is disagreement among commentators over the precise number of theistic proofs used by Berkeley, but I only explain the contours of this debate. This is because a particular position on this interpretive issue is not necessary for the reader to subscribe to my main line of argument in these chapters. In chapter three, "Berkeley's Immaterialist Arguments for the Existence of God", I discuss the proofs which have become known (since Jonathan Bennett's influential 1965 article "Berkeley and God") as the "Passivity" and "Continuity" arguments. I show that both of these proofs are presumptive of immaterialism, and I note that even if one reads these arguments as inseparable or indistinct my claim still stands that immaterialism plays a pivotal role in the proof. In addition to showing the precise role of immaterialism in each proof, I note that Berkeley's Passivity and Continuity arguments are original just to the extent that immaterialism is operative in them. Finally, I discuss criticisms and conclude that whether interpreted as distinct arguments (as I do) or as a single argument, Berkeley's immaterialist proofs ultimately fail to prove the existence of God.

In chapter four, "Berkeley's Teleological Arguments for the Existence of God", I discuss the two theistic proofs which have garnered much less attention in the literature than the Passivity and Continuity arguments. These are the argument from divine visual language and the moral argument

for God's existence. As the chapter title suggests I find
that both of these arguments take the basic logical form of
the argument from design, the substantive difference between
the two being that the subject matter of the former is
metaphysical (or perhaps more precisely phenomenological)
while that of the latter is moral. As in chapter three I
note that as regards the basic structure of these arguments
they are unoriginal. Also, each argument is subjected to
logical scrutiny and found seriously deficient.

In chapter five, "The Problem of Evil", I discuss the
various theodicies used by Berkeley to fend off objections
to theistic belief on the basis of evil in the world. I
address the two sub-problems of evil, natural and moral,
singly, inquiring whether Berkeley's immaterialism helps or
hurts his case for theism. I find that his apologetics is
neither helped nor hurt by immaterialism when it comes to
the problem of evil. Nevertheless, I conclude that the
theodicies employed by Berkeley are problematic, susceptible
to the same criticisms as the theodicies of such theists as
Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, to whose arguments his
own bear a strong resemblance.

Chapter six, "The Immortality of the Soul", contains a
discussion of Berkeley's six arguments for the soul's
immortality. On this subject we find Berkeley at his least
original, using arguments previously employed by the likes
of Plato, Augustine, and Aquinas. None of the arguments in
defense of the doctrine of immortality in any way suggest

immaterialism, a fact which is hardly surprising given that most of them appear in writings intended for non-philosophical audiences, such as the *Guardian* essays and various sermons preached by Berkeley. I critically evaluate each of Berkeley's arguments for the immortality of the soul and find that none of them succeed.

The seventh and final chapter, "Berkeley's Defense of Scripture and Christian Doctrine", treats the arguments used by Berkeley to defend such distinctive tenets of the Christian faith as the authority of scripture, the holy trinity, the divinity of Christ, and the doctrines of faith and grace. Drawing mainly from *Alciphron* I explicate Berkeley's arguments in defense of each of these and note historical precedents for them. In so doing it is shown that immaterialism plays no part in any of these rational defenses of the theological doctrines of his faith. I also identify serious objections to Berkeley's defense of each.

CHAPTER 2

**The Theological Orthodoxy
Of Berkeley's Immaterialism**

The Theological Orthodoxy
of Berkeley's Immaterialism

I. Introduction

Since it was the chief end of Berkeley's philosophical labors to defend the Christian religion, it is no surprise that he is careful to insist that his metaphysics is fully consistent with biblical principles. Indeed, in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, he proclaims "there is nothing in Scripture that can possibly be wrested against me, but, perhaps, many things for me."[1] Here Berkeley's claim is two-fold. On the one hand, he boldly asserts that his immaterialism implies nothing which in any way contradicts scripture; on the other hand, he suggests that in scripture there are to be found some passages which in fact favor his immaterialism. For the sake of brevity, let us call the above two claims Berkeley's "consistency" thesis and the "endorsement" thesis, respectively. In this chapter I shall assess these two theses, investigating, first, Berkeley's defense of the biblical soundness of his immaterialism and, second, the degree to which, if at all, his immaterialism is recommended by scripture. In doing so, I shall be answering a question which might be posed regarding Berkeley's apologetic project, especially by those who share his commitment to Christian theism: How could Berkeley's

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[1]. *Philosophical Commentaries*, 281.

immaterialism be construed as an apologetic device when it is inconsistent with the scriptures of the religion he purports to defend? It is critical that we address this query before exploring Berkeley's apologetics per se.

II. Berkeley's Immaterialism and the "Consistency" Thesis

Before proceeding to an examination of these two theses, let us review the essential features of Berkeley's metaphysics which earn him the title "immaterialist" and which his Christian opponents have on occasion found offensive. The central thesis of Berkeley's system is the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere* (to be is to be perceived or to perceive). Nothing which is not itself a mind exists independently of perception by some mind. In the *Principles* Berkeley arrives at this conclusion by arguing as follows. Since a physical object is nothing more than a collection of sensible qualities, and sensible qualities are ideas, an object is just a collection of ideas. Now since ideas are mind dependent, existing only when perceived, it follows that physical objects exist only when perceived. Their *esse* is *percipi*. In Berkeley's ontology, then, there are two categories of being: minds and ideas. There exist only ideas perceived and minds perceiving them.

Implicit in Berkeley's principle that to be is to be perceived is a denial of material substance, the inert, "I know not what" of which Locke spoke and in which, according

to him, all of the sensible qualities of bodies subsist.[2]
This doctrine is repudiated by Berkeley as unintelligible,
since it is impossible to conceive of something which is
unperceived, and Locke's material substance, not itself
being sensible, is unperceivable. These are, in a nutshell,
Berkeley's philosophical reasons for rejecting material
substance. But, as we shall see in evaluating his
"consistency" thesis, his objections are not entirely
philosophical but theological as well.

Berkeley's "consistency" thesis, once again, is that
his immaterialism in no way implies anything which is
inconsistent with scripture. I want now to explore those
doctrines or issues which the orthodox Christian might think
to be threatened by a Berkeleyan metaphysics. That is, I
shall discuss those issues where inconsistency between
Berkeley's immaterialism and scripture might be (and in some
cases has been) alleged.

In both the *Principles* and the *Dialogues* Berkeley
anticipates objections from scripture. In the former he
proposes the objection that although no incorrigible
philosophical proof for the existence of bodies can be made

> the Holy Scriptures are so clear in the point as
> will sufficiently convince every good Christian
> that bodies do really exist, and are something
> more than mere ideas, there being in Holy Writ
> innumerable facts related which evidently suppose
> the reality of timber and stone, mountains and

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[2]. An *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, XXIII, 2.

rivers, and cities, and human bodies.[3]

Berkeley's reply is to deny that his principles in any way conflict with the scriptures or "the right use and significance of language." He is prepared to abide by the "vulgar acceptation" of such words such as "timber", "stone", "body", etc. which denote tangible objects and to distinguish between real and imaginary objects. And, reiterating his central thesis, he reminds us that it is only the existence of material substance (as philosophers use the term) which he denies. In the *Dialogues*, through Philonous, he presents us with this challenge:

> As for solid corporeal substances, I desire you to shew where Moses makes any mention of them; and if they should be mentioned by him, or any other inspired writer, it would still be incumbent upon you to show those words were not taken in the vulgar acceptation.[4]

Until then, Berkeley urges, the authority of the scriptures is irrelevant to the discussion, for they are neutral on the issue of material substance. In this way Berkeley shifts the burden of proof onto the matterist, convinced that he has already fully demonstrated the truth of *esse est percipi aut percipere*. But with regard to the propriety of God's use of material substance in creating the world, Berkeley has yet another argument--from the principle of parsimony. In section 61 of the *Principles* he argues that the use of

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[3]. *Principles*, 82.

[4]. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company, 1969), p. 120.

material substance would be unnecessary and superfluous for an omnipotent deity. That is, Berkeley in effect asks, why should God use material substance in doing that which "might have been effected by the mere command of His will without all that apparatus"? To posit the existence of matter, then, when God can accomplish all that he has accomplished without it, is to violate Ockham's razor (or, at least, the theological principle that a being of perfect wisdom and power will always effect his ends by the simplest and most expeditious means). The existence and operations of the universe are entirely explicable by God's will and are needlessly explained with the addition of corporeal substance.

Theologically Berkeley considers the doctrine equally repugnant, because it implies that "God has created innumerable beings that are entirely useless and serve no manner of purpose".[5] Belief in material substance, then, amounts to the highest irreverence, for it suggests divine frivolity in the creation of the physical world.

A second potential objection from scripture pertains to Berkeley's doctrine of mind or spirit. His view is that there exist only two kinds of things, spirits (or minds) and ideas, or respectively, perceiving subjects and that which is perceived. So, Berkeley tells us, we have no idea of spirit. Now the problem is this. The Old and New

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[5]. *Principles*, 19.

Testaments, especially the latter, are replete with hundreds of discussions of and references to the human soul or spirit which clearly presuppose that we have some ideas of these entities. Numerous particular attributes are predicated of the human soul or spirit, for example, that it can be "downcast,"[6] "steadfast,"[7] "broken,"[8] "joyful,"[9] "contrite,"[10] "lowly,"[11] and "strong."[12]

How is Berkeley's professed ontology to be reconciled with this biblical language? He seems to have glimpsed the seriousness of the problem, for he deals with the matter explicitly in the *Principles* as follows. He says of spirit that it is an active being. So "there can be no *idea* formed of a soul or spirit; for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert, they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts."[13] Therefore, spirit "cannot be of itself perceived, but only by the effects which it produces,"[14] and these may be taken to include such

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6. Psalm 42:11 and Lamentations 3:20.

7. Psalm 51:10.

8. Psalm 51:17.

9. Psalm 94:19.

10. Isaiah 57:15.

11. Ibid.

12. Luke 1:80.

13. *Principles*, 27.

14. Ibid.

operations as willing, perceiving, and loving. Attributes of spirit noted in scripture, examples of which are listed above, Berkeley would likely classify among the "effects" of spirit, thus remaining true to his principles while at the same time preserving the intelligibility of scriptural discussions of soul.

The technical distinction Berkeley makes in this context in order to allow for knowledge of spirit is between "ideational" and "notional" knowledge. He writes, "We may be said to have some knowledge or notion of our own minds, of spirits and active beings, whereof in a strict sense we have not ideas."[15] Unfortunately, Berkeley says little more in the way of explicating this distinction.[16] This much we know, that notional knowledge has an active being as its object rather than a passive being, which is the object of ideational knowledge. Furthermore, the object of notional knowledge is perceived indirectly, through its effects, whereas the object of ideational knowledge is directly perceived.[17] It seems that Berkeley is

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[15]. *Principles*, 89.

[16]. This unusual reticence on Berkeley's part has led Charles McCracken to suggest that his negligence was willful rather than a mere oversight, owing to Berkeley's recognition of the problems inherent in his account of notions. See "Berkeley's Notion of Spirit," *The History of European Ideas*, Vol. 7, No. 6, 1986, pp. 597-602.

[17]. For a good discussion of this distinction of Berkeley's see Phillip Cummins' "Hylas' Parity Argument" in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), pp.283-294

suggesting that notional knowledge is best (or only) understood as knowledge which is non-ideational. At any rate, his doctrine of notions, cryptic though it is, is certainly motivated by his concern to preserve the possibility of genuine knowledge of spirits, which in turn can be seen as an attempt to reconcile his immaterialism with the basic scriptural presumption of this possibility.

A third objection from scripture comes from Berkeley's associate Samuel Johnson. He argues that given Berkeley's view of bodies as collections of ideas the perception of which is not really dependent upon sense organs, the doctrine of bodily resurrection seems to be undermined, since upon death it is conceivable that "we should still be attended with the same ideas of bodies as we have now."[18] The result is that the wonder of physical resurrection is diminished by the ease of its explainability under Berkeley's principles. Johnson's ironic conclusion is that immaterialist metaphysics explains too much and that therefore Berkeley's ontology "seems to have no place for any resurrection at all, at least in the sense that word seems to bear in St. John 5:28, 29."[19]

Berkeley's reply to Johnson is that his principles imply no exotic view of bodily death and resurrection but that they may be conceived as easily with as without

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[18]. Johnson's letter to Berkeley, September 10, 1729.

[19]. Ibid.

corporeal substance. He writes, "it seems very easy to conceive the soul to exist in a separate state...and to exercise herself on new ideas, without the intervention of these tangible things we call bodies."[20] Berkeley's response here is again indicative of his assumption that the burden of proof is not upon him to show the consistency of his principles with the doctrine of bodily resurrection but rather rests upon critics such as Johnson to demonstrate their inconsistency. Note that in the last quoted passage he is content to point out that the separate existence of the soul is conceivable. Keeping in mind that for Berkeley and many of his contemporaries conceivability is tantamount to (logical) possibility, we can see why Berkeley did not feel compelled to engage in much elaboration on this point. This case provides a clear example of the tone pervading Berkeley's replies to critics, including Johnson, that there is at the start a presumption in favor of his immaterialism, in particular that *esse est percipi aut percipere* (because he thinks he has demonstrated its truth) so that when it comes to comparatively peripheral matters, such as the metaphysics of death and resurrection, he need only reveal the possibility of an explanation showing their consistency with his views or give the contours of such an explanation in order to preserve this presumption. Of course, it was often the case that Berkeley did do more than this and in

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20. Berkeley's letter to Johnson, November 25, 1729.

fact went to great lengths to show how with regard to explanatory power his immaterialism was not merely as good as matterist metaphysics but was in fact superior in explaining certain phenomena and providing solutions to problems hitherto unsolved. We shall discuss examples arising in the context of Christian theology when we turn to an examination of Berkeley's "endorsement" thesis below.

A fourth potential source of contention between Berkeley and his theologically orthodox[21] critics concerns the issue of common sense. In his notebooks Berkeley makes the following candid remark which many commentators have since found incredible, or at least paradoxical, considering the novelty of his metaphysics: "All things in the Scripture wch side with the Vulgar against the Learned side with me also. I side in all things with the Mob."[22] Later, through Philonous in the *Dialogues*, this claim is not compromised. He declares "I am content, Hylas, to appeal to the common sense of the world for the truth of my notion."[23]

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[21]. By "theologically orthodox" I intend traditional, conservative Christian doctrine such as is advanced in common by all or most mainstream theological traditions and is articulated in such ecumenical creeds as the Apostles' creed and the Nicene creed. As a devout Anglican Berkeley undoubtedly acknowledged the authority of these confessions of faith and recognized the constraints implicit in them for both scholarly and practical pursuits.

[22]. *Philosophical Commentaries*, 405. See also 368, 408 and 751.

[23]. *Three Dialogues*, p. 96. See also pp. 70, 90, 100, 110, 136, and 96.

Whether in fact Berkeley is properly considered a defender of common sense is still an open question and an issue which is today widely disputed. Commentators such as Luce, Jessop, Grayling, and Pappas have argued in defense of this claim, while Bennett, Pitcher, and Tipton among others have maintained that Berkeleyan immaterialism opposes common sense. Because of the complexity of this issue I will refrain from entering into this debate here. Nor do I believe that demonstrating Berkeley's metaphysics to be consistent with common sense is necessary in order to vindicate it against the charge of theological heterodoxy. Our present concern is to evaluate immaterialism in light of scripture, not to determine whether it is amenable to all the common sense convictions of ordinary folk. Our focus, then, is restricted only to the first claim Berkeley makes in entry 405 of his notebooks: "All things in the Scripture wch side with the Vulgar against the Learned side with me also." The question as to whether Berkeley's subsequent claim is correct, that he does "side in all things with the mob," is outside the scope of this chapter. I should note, nevertheless, that I believe the claim that his immaterialism is consistent with common sense to be defensible.[24]

In defending Berkeley's first assertion in notebook

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[24]. For an excellent defense of this position see George Pappas' "Berkeley, Perception, and Common Sense" in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays*, Colin Turbayne, ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

entry 405, it is important to make two observations. First, as has already been noted, the scriptures and the Genesis story in particular are neutral on the topic of material substance (as understood by the philosophers Berkeley opposes). The biblical writers simply do not take a clear side on the issue (though, as I shall try to show later, some passages seem to suggest a Berkeleyan immaterialism). Thus, even if one concedes that belief in corporeal substance is commonsensical, immaterialism remains unthreatened until it is also shown that the scriptural position supports this conviction, a claim that Berkeley challenges his antagonists to justify.

Someone, of course, might object that although the scriptures make no explicit reference to matter, their consistent support of common sense generally serves as an indirect defense of realism (i.e., the thesis that [a] the physical objects we seem to perceive are real and [b] physical objects continue to exist when not perceived). Immaterialism is, after all, an esoteric doctrine, not readily comprehended, let alone accepted, by ordinary folk. Therefore, the scriptures implicitly side with the vulgar against Berkeley on the question of corporeal substance. This objection leads us to the second observation, namely that scripture itself does not consistently side with common sense. Quite the contrary, the Bible is replete with stories, doctrines, and moral rules which fly in the face of common sense. Historical accounts of abominable Egyptian

plagues, partings of the Red Sea and Jordan river, spontaneously crumbled city walls at Jericho, and scores of miracles; metaphysical tenets of a triune godhead, divine incarnation, and justification by faith; and moral imperatives such as "love your enemies" and "bless those who curse you", to sample just a few, are admittedly opposed to common sense beliefs. Theologically sensitive rivals of Berkeleyan immaterialism who base their critique on common sense are prone to overlook this crucial consideration. The point here is that even if it is granted that matterism has common sense as an advocate, this fact alone does not show that it is supported by scripture. Immaterialism, as it turns out, just might be one of the many non-commonsensical doctrines which is either allowed by or, as I shall suggest, actually recommended by the scriptures.

The final, and perhaps most serious, objection to Berkeley's immaterialism I want to address regards the problem of evil. By all indications it is a complaint which Berkeley himself took very seriously, for he addresses the matter in several of his works. Let us look to the *Principles* first where, in his typical fashion, he states the objection both convincingly and eloquently:

> ...monsters, untimely births, fruits blasted in the blossom, rains failing in desert places, miseries incident to human life, and the like, are so many arguments that the whole frame of nature is not immediately actuated and superintended by a spirit of infinite wisdom and goodness.[25]

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25. *Principles*, 151.

What Berkeley outlines here is the problem of "natural"
evil, as distinct from the problem of moral evil. To this
objection Berkeley offers in reply the traditional
"aesthetic" theodicy.[26] "Blemishes and defects of nature,"
he asserts, serve to contribute to the beauty and goodness
of the whole just as in a painting shadows are necessary to
complement the brighter parts.[27] But since we are finite
beings we are able to glimpse but a small portion of the
whole, whereupon we impugn God on the basis of our
ignorance.[28]

III. The "Endorsement" Thesis and Scriptural Recommendations of Berkeley's Immaterialism

Now that we have shown how Berkeley deflects criticism
of his system for theological impropriety, let us look into
his bolder "endorsement" thesis which maintains, we will
recall, that the scriptures actually testify in behalf of
his metaphysics. Although, as we have seen, Berkeley
offered repeated defenses of the "consistency" thesis, he
was not so explicit in his defense of the "endorsement"
thesis. Rather, he was mostly content with merely appending

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[26]. I borrow this terminology from John Hick, who traces
this particular theodicy as far back as Plotinus, specifically
Enneads, III, 2, 17. See Hick's "The Problem of Evil" in *The
Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, vol. 3 (New York: MacMillan
Publishing Co., Inc., 1967), pp. 136-141.

[27]. Ibid., 152.

[28]. In chapter five of this dissertation I discuss
Berkeley's theodicies in much greater detail.

to his arguments biblical texts, leaving to the reader the task of embellishing a specific application. His favorite passage is found in the book of Acts where the apostle Paul, speaking at a meeting on Mars Hill, remarks that in God "we live and move and have our being."[29] (The context of this passage is especially noteworthy, considering that the audience of Paul's discourse very likely included Stoic and Epicurean philosophers.) But what exactly is the significance of this passage as it pertains to Berkeley's immaterialism? Why is he so confident that it is relevant to, much less that it serves to bolster, his position? The answer becomes clear when we note a particular implication of his denial of material substance. Since sensible qualities do not inhere in matter, their existence can only be explained by the divine mind. The world has no existence independent of a perceiving spirit but continues to exist only because God perceives it. Thus, a notion entertained by Descartes three quarters of a century earlier[30]

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[29]. Acts 17:28. Berkeley might just as readily have chosen any of a number of passages as his text of choice, including Ephesians 4:6 where Paul asserts that there is "one God and father of all, who is over all and through all and in all," Colossians 1:17 where he writes that Christ "is before all things and in him all things hold together," and Hebrews 2:10 which states that it is God "for whom and through whom everything exists."

[30]. In the third *Meditation* Descartes suggests that there is no real difference between divine conservation and creation. He argues that because of the infinite divisibility of the duration of his life into independent parts "it does not follow from the fact that I have existed a short while before that I should exist now, unless at this very moment some cause produces and creates me, as it were, anew...."

Berkeley also defends as true, asserting that "the divine conservation of things is equipollent 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*."[31]

If one carefully examines the creation account given in the book of Genesis, I believe there is to be found there the most striking recommendation of Berkeley's brand of immaterialism. But before doing so, I want to spell out in greater detail the precise relationship between God and the world which is entailed by a Berkeleyan metaphysics.

But let me first briefly characterize the theologically conscious matterist interpretation of the Genesis creation account, specifically the sort of narrative which Hylas might have provided had he obliged when Philonous pressed him for such an explanation, saying "as for solid corporeal substances, I desire you to shew where Moses makes any mention of them."[32] Hylas, as it turns out, offers no such evidence, nor does he bother to present even the contours of an interpretation of the creation story from the perspective of a matterist. However, we might imagine that

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Philosophical Essays (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1964), p. 105.

[31]. Letter to Johnson, November 25, 1729. Of course Berkeley does deny that "things are every moment annihilated and created anew" (*Principles*, 45), but this is because, he maintains, for any object which exists there is **always** some mind perceiving it.

[32]. *Dialogues*, p. 120.

it would go something like this: In the beginning God created matter, solid corporeal substance, which he subsequently formed into various shapes, e.g. the earth, sun, moon, living creatures, and so on. Of course, his creation of matter and his giving it particular forms need not to have been temporally distinct acts, but they are at least conceptually distinct.

It is important to note that on the matterist account we really have no conception as to how God created matter *ex nihilo*. We only know <u>that</u> he did so. This is a metaphysical mystery to us finite beings. Moreover, there is nothing in human experience analogous to what God did in creation. It is true, human beings do create objects in a sense, but our creativity is more precisely a reformation or modification of physical objects that already exist. What we make is always out of pre-existing material. This is not the case with God's creative acts, however, for he requires no pre-existing material. He created out of nothing.

Now on the matterist conception the world could exist independently of any particular spirit's perceiving, including God, and this is possible precisely because of material substance. Nonetheless, a theologically sensitive matterist such as Hylas would insist, the world is ruled by God, for it is governed by his laws, i.e., the laws of nature. In fashioning the world the creator built into it certain fixed physical principles such as the laws of thermodynamics, the ideal gas law, the laws of gravity,

inertia, action and reaction, etc. These insure that the physical world remains uniform, which in turn works to the benefit of God's creatures, for we learn what to expect and hence are better equipped to get along in the world. Still, despite the uniformity of nature, God does intervene miraculously at times, suspending or holding in abeyance some law or laws of nature, to perform a deed to assist his creatures, such as parting the Red Sea or transforming a staff into a snake.

Now having looked at a matterist understanding of the Mosaic creation account and God's continued governance of the cosmos, let us see what Berkeley has to say about these things. In the third *Dialogue* Hylas objects as follows to Philonous' principles:

> The scripture account of the creation is what appears to me utterly irreconcilable with your notions. Moses tells us of a creation: a creation of what? of ideas? No certainly, but of things, of real things, solid corporeal substances. Bring your principles to agree with this, and I shall perhaps agree with you.[33]

In the face of this challenge Philonous makes a distinction between two senses of the word "ideas". What Philonous does not intend by this term when speaking of the created order is "fictions" or "fancies of the mind". Instead, he understands the proper denotation of "ideas" to be "immediate objects of the understanding, or sensible things

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[33]. Ibid., p. 119.

which cannot exist unperceived, or out of a mind"[34] Yet,
he reminds Hylas that in everyday parlance sense sensible
objects are called "things" rather than "ideas". Hence,
Philonous is able to conclude that in creation God made <u>real</u>
things. Now having defended his allegiance to the "vulgar
acceptation" of the Genesis creation account, Philonous
takes the offensive, noting that neither Moses nor any other
inspired writer refers to "solid corporeal substance," or
matter in its philosophic sense, as an "unknown quiddity,
with an absolute existence." Therefore, Philonous
concludes, his own principles are no more repugnant to the
Mosaic creation account than are those of Hylas. Still
Hylas is unmoved and presses him for a fuller explanation.
Of course, Philonous is happy to comply with his request:

> When things are said to begin or end their
> existence we do not mean this with regard to God,
> but His creatures. All objects are eternally
> known to God, or, which is the same thing, have an
> eternal existence in His mind: but when things,
> before imperceptible to creatures, are, by a
> divine decree of God, perceptible to them, then
> are they said to begin a relative existence, with
> respect to created minds. Upon reading therefore
> the Mosaic account of the creation, I understand
> that the several parts of the world became
> gradually perceivable to finite spirits, endowed
> with proper faculties; so that, whoever such were
> present, they were in truth perceived by them.
> This is the literal obvious sense suggested to me
> by the words of the Holy Scripture.[35]

There are then two kinds of divine ideas: (1) those which

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[34]. Ibid.

[35]. Ibid., p. 121.

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are eternal archetypes existing solely in the mind of God

and (2) those which are temporal and relative ectypes,

perceived not only by the mind of God but by other spirits

as well.[36] The former may be said to be "private" with

regard to the divine mind, while the latter are "public",

that is, accessible by minds other than God's. Now the act

of creation, according to Philonous involves essentially

making ectypes from certain divine archetypes, or

publicizing what once was private, known only to God. About

this Jonathan Dancy writes,

> On this view, the world we live in, *our* world, is
> nothing other than (part of) the contents of the
> mind of God. It is not just that God causes us to
> have ideas *like* his; when we open our eyes and see
> what is there, we are having ideas which are
> God's.[37]

In short, the world consists of God's public ideas. And the

creation of the world was simply the process in which these

ideas first became public, perceivable by finite spirits.

With this understanding of Berkeley's conception of the

creation of the world, we are prepared to look at the

opening chapter of Genesis to test his immaterialistic

account of creation for ourselves. Recall that in the

narrative each of God's creative acts in the first chapter

of Genesis is prefaced with the phrase "And God said..."

This is the refrain through the first twenty-four verses of

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[36]. See Jonathan Dancy's *Berkeley: An Introduction* (New
York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1987), chapter 4.

[37]. Dancy, p. 50.

Genesis. "And God said...": "Let there be light" (v. 3),
"Let there be an expanse between the waters" (v. 6), "Let
the water under the sky be gathered to one place and let dry
ground appear" (v. 9), "Let the land produce vegetation:
seed-bearing plants and trees..." (v. 11), "Let there be
lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from
the night..." (v. 14), "Let the water teem with living
creatures, and let birds fly above the earth..." (v. 20),
"Let the land produce living creatures according to their
kinds..." (v. 24). At every juncture of creation, God
speaks things into existence. He creates "by the word of
his mouth". To use the vocabulary of immaterialism, this is
the means by which he makes his private, archetypal ideas
public and ectypal.

Now it is also plain from the Genesis story that we as
human beings mirror God's nature in some significant way:
"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he
created him; male and female he created them."[38] When one
considers the mystery and superlativeness of the divine
being, this is a very cryptic passage indeed. What does it
mean to say that we are created in God's image? The full
implications of this passage we will leave to theologians to
debate, but in the present context we are led to inquire
whether we mirror the divine being in the way Berkeley's
creation account would seem to suggest we do. That is, if

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[38]. Genesis 1:27.

it is the case from scripture that we are created in God's likeness and it is also the case that God creates by speaking things into existence, where is there any similarity between God and us here? Is there evidence to suggest a Berkeleyan interpretation here? I would answer this question in the affirmative and submit that we need look no further than ordinary experience to find all the confirmation we need of Berkeley's account. Let us simply examine the way we humans speak. In short, to speak is, among other things, to make one's thoughts public. For example, I am now thinking about my cat, Simon, specifically that he has a bushy tail. This is a private thought of mine to which no person other than myself has access. But when I utter the words, say, "My cat, Simon, has a bushy tail", I publicize these thoughts. They are still my thoughts, in a sense, but having expressed them in audible words other persons may become privy to them. I have made my ideas public.

What I am suggesting is that there is a fruitful analogy between the manner in which God created the world and the ordinary human experience of sharing ideas through speech. God created, i.e., made his ideas public, through the spoken word.[39] Likewise, we who are made in his image

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[39]. And, Berkeley maintains, God continues to do so, as all of nature is properly to be conceived as a "divine visual language". For Berkeley's full elucidation of this doctrine, see *Towards a New Theory of Vision*, 147-152; *Principles*, 44, 65-66, 106-109; *Alciphron* IV, 7-15; and *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, 38-40.

publicize our ideas by speaking. Hence, in this way Berkeley's immaterialist interpretation of the Genesis story of creation offers us a sense in which human beings are divine image bearers that the usual matterist conception does not.

Let me draw out the analogy in further detail. First, speaking, we should note, is not necessarily tantamount to making one's ideas known to another mind but rather only to make them perceivable to or accessible by some other mind (at least in principle). When I say "My cat, Simon, has a bushy tail" there may or may not be anyone else within earshot to hear my utterance and so to access my verbalized ideas. But _if_ someone who understands English were present, they _would_ hear me and, hence, perceive those thoughts of mine which I had just made public. This sort of state of affairs in human speaking parallels Berkeley's account of unperceived objects when he writes, for example, "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."[40] Thus, there need not actually be some finite mind now perceiving my desk for me to be able to say properly that it now exists. Similarly, when I utter some statement when no one else is present to hear me, it is nevertheless the case

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[40]. _Principles_, 3.

that I have made my thoughts public, for if someone had been listening, he or she would have perceived my objectified ideas. Both of these cases are comparable to the Genesis creation account insofar as we may say properly that God made his ideas public even if there were no other spirits present to perceive his objectified ideas, for _if_ some being, say, an angel, were present it _would_ have perceived them. Notice as well that whatever oddity or awkwardness there is in saying that God's unperceived but perceivable ideas (to finite minds) are nonetheless public, it is equally odd or awkward to refer to our spoken but unheard (except by ourselves) words as nonetheless public. In either case, this awkwardness might be thought to reveal a limitation to the account. Consequently, even with regard to the potential weakness of these accounts, there seems to be an analogy between human speaking and divine creation.

I should note in passing that I do not without good reason use the terms "publicize" and "objectify" when speaking of God's ideas which are perceived or perceivable. I do so to preserve what I believe is an accurate rendering of Berkeley's construal of the creation account and to preclude certain problems created by some commentators. Jonathan Dancy, for example, in the passage quoted earlier, is misleading, for he might be construed as suggesting that when God creates he makes his ideas known _to_ someone. We have seen that for Berkeley, given his alternative conditions for existence, this is not necessarily the case.

If divine creation did entail for Berkeley that God makes his ideas known to someone (as opposed to knowable), then the question arises "who was there to perceive God's public ideas during creation?" From a theological perspective, the best reply here for someone such as Dancy is to appeal to the prior existence of angels. The creation of the world might be understood as God's private ideas[41] becoming publicized to some cherubim, seraphim, or other angelic being(s). This line of response, however, has the further complication that it does not account for the possibility, acknowledged by Berkeley, that the world might have been created before any finite mind.[42]

Another analogy between human speaking and divine creation according to the Berkeleyan account appears when we consider that what a person says when he or she speaks tells us something about who he or she is. Through verbal communication one displays his or her intelligence, creativity, interests, moral convictions and so on. In short, by listening to what a person says we can learn a great deal about him or her. Similarly, for Berkeley, through observing what is "said" in the creator's visual

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[41]. Someone might object that Berkeley's account seems unbiblical because there is no scriptural reference to God's "private ideas". I know of at least one passage which suggests otherwise. In I Corinthians 2:11 Paul writes "no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God".

[42]. See Charles McCracken's "What *Does* Berkeley's God See in the Quad?" in *Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie*, vol. 61 (1979) pp. 283-284.

language we are able to infer much about the author of the world. As Philonous says in the second dialogue, "from the variety, order, and manner of [sensible impressions] I conclude the Author of them to be wise, powerful, and good, beyond all comprehension."[43] Hence, for Berkeley, inferring God's nature from his "language" (i.e., the created world) is in principle done in the same way we infer the attributes of other persons from the things they say. The inferrability of God's nature is suggested in various places in scripture. For instance, the psalmist proclaims that "the heavens declare the glory of God."[44] And Paul writes: "Since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..."[45] Biblical texts such as these are perfectly consonant with a Berkeleyan metaphysics which suggests the sort of unmistakable nearness of God about which the psalmist and the apostle are so confident. This leads us to a further analogy.

The person who speaks directly controls and determines much of what he or she says. In the case of the "divine speaker", this is known as "providence", the absolute and immediate control which the creator exercises over his

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[43]. *Dialogues*, p. 69.

[44]. Psalm 19:1.

[45]. Romans 1:20.

creation. Berkeley was careful to point out that the doctrine of providence is implied by his metaphysics, specifically his conception of the world as a divine visual language. He explains:

> 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, and directing incessantly, in a most evident and sensible manner.[46]

By all biblical accounts God is intimately related to, though ontologically distinct from, the world.[47] Furthermore, the creator is said to exercise complete dominion over his creation, a conviction evident in the words of Jeremiah quoted earlier: "Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good

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[46]. *Alciphron*, IV, 14.

[47]. Among orthodox Christian theologians this intimate relation between God and his creation is perhaps expressed most emphatically by John Calvin who, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, writes "I confess, of course, that it can be said reverently, provided that it proceeds from a reverent mind, that nature is God; but because it is a harsh and improper saying, since nature is rather the order prescribed by God, it is harmful in such weighty matters, in which special devotion is due, to involve God confusedly in the inferior course of his works" (Book I, chapter 6). Notice that Calvin's position here makes much better theological sense under a Berkeleyan conception of nature as God's thoughts (since God, like we humans, is, in a sense, his thoughts) than from the perspective of a theologically orthodox matterist, for whom the notion of identifying God with corporeal substance would be heretical.

things come?"[48] (Note again the speech metaphor.) In the book of Isaiah this same conviction is echoed by God himself through the prophet: "I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things".[49] And the apostle Paul proclaims that God "is before all things and in him all things hold together"[50] again suggesting the determination of all things by God.[51] Divine foreknowledge of future events, a concomitant of the deity's control over all things, also has its parallel in human experience. God's knowledge of future events is similar to a person's knowledge of the words he or she is prepared to speak. In both cases the agent has decided privately what he or she will do publicly.

A fourth parallel between human and divine "speech" is to be found in what Berkeley refers to as "divine

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[48]. Lamentations 3:37-38.

[49]. Isaiah 45:7.

[50]. Colossians 1:17.

[51]. The determinism implicit in Berkeley's immaterialism leads him headlong into the problem of the freedom of the will, a problem which he never saw fit to address directly except for some short passages in *Siris* and his notebooks. This lacuna, however, does not present a difficulty peculiar to Berkeley's metaphysics, but is shared by all proponents of theological determinism. On this matter J.O. Urmson notes that "Berkeley himself would have admitted that he had no clear answer to [the problem of freedom] but that it, too, was one which was common to all and in no way a special problem for him." See Urmson's *Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 64-66.

conservation" or "constant creation".[52] Since the world
consists of God's public ideas, it must persist only because
he continues to publicize his thoughts. That is, unlike
some matterisms which imply that it is possible for God to
"step back" from his creation or even, at least in
principle, stop thinking about the world without its ceasing
to exist, since matter is mind independent, Berkeley must
hold that were God to cease perceiving the world, it would
vanish altogether. For apart from God there remains
nothing, i.e. no material substratum, to sustain nature.

Now the analogue to be found in human experience of
divine conservation of the world consists in the fact that
we preserve the publicity of our thoughts only as long as we
speak. We objectify our ideas through speech, but our ideas
do not remain accessible to other minds if we do not
continue to verbalize them. (I utter a statement such as "I
am thirsty", and my thought is publicly accessible, but
unless I repeat this assertion, my desire recedes again into
the realm of the private.) Thus, an oral discourse is
analogous to human history in that each is a temporally
linear progression of public ideas that is unique and, in
most cases, exhibits continuity. Furthermore, just as the
conversation is preserved only so long as the interlocutors
will that it continue, human history, its content as well as

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[52]. See, for example, *Alciphron* (IV, 14) where he remarks
that the language of the deity "is equivalent to a constant
creation, betokening an immediate act of power and providence"
[emphasis added].

its duration, is entirely contingent upon the will of its author. As human thoughts remain public only so long as we continue speaking, the world is sustained only so long as God wills.[53]

Still another analogy between human and divine speech is pointed out by Colin Turbayne.[54] Under Berkeleyan immaterialism, he observes, the laws of nature are analogous to rules of grammar. In verbal communication we humans are constrained to abide by certain grammatical conventions, rules of syntax, punctuation, etc. In short, we must be consistent if we are to be intelligible and meaningful. Similarly God's ideas (i.e., the phenomena of nature), if they are to be intelligible, must remain consistent, operating in accordance with certain general rules.

Berkeley defines the laws of nature as "the set rules

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[53]. A.D. Ritchie illustrates Berkeley's doctrine of perpetual creation with the analogy of a symphony conductor. He writes, "for Berkeley God is now and everywhere actively creating. The harmony which a conductor can produce by means of his orchestra and their instruments is not produced instantaneously nor once only, nor once and for all, but is being produced anew during each performance.... [This analogy] could be slightly improved if we assumed that the conductor was also a composer and also could leave the players to improvise occasionally. Thus no performance would be a repetition but each one a new work." [*Berkeley: A Reappraisal* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 126] Ritchie's analogy surely provides an accurate and instructive simile for Berkeley's metaphysics, but like Turbayne I prefer the metaphor of speech, for it affords less strained parallels and it is Berkeley's own metaphor of choice.

[54]. "Berkeley's Metaphysical Grammar" in *Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982).

or established methods wherein the mind we depend on excites in us the ideas of sense."[55] What we call nature's "laws" then are in actuality the sovereign will of God which remains constant and uniform for the welfare of his creatures (except in the case of the miraculous where deviation from the rule works to our benefit). As in the case of syntactical rules, then, the laws of nature are conventional rather than necessary, being devised solely for the effective communication between speaker and hearer. Just as irregularity in linguistic forms would result in confusion among interlocutors, in the absence of uniformity in nature "we should be all in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life than an infant just born."[56]

Sixthly, and lastly, the immaterialist's linguistic metaphor provides an analogue in human experience to God's creation *ex nihilo*. When we speak we publicize our thoughts, which were themselves created out of nothing. This is probably Berkeley's thinking when he writes, "Why may we not conceive it possible for God to create out of Nothing. Certainly we our selves create in some wise whenever we imagine."[57] On Berkeley's principles, then, the verbal expression of our thoughts as well as thinking

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[55]. *Principles*, 30.

[56]. Ibid., 31.

[57]. *Philosophical Commentaries*, 830.

itself are some very familiar ways in which humans mirror
God's creation of the world out of nothing.

Before closing this chapter, I want to make an
observation about an additional point of interest in
Berkeley's thought from the perspective of Christian
orthodoxy. A.D. Ritchie has called the eighteenth century
"the period of maximum substance idolatry" where the deity
was demoted from the position of creator to a mere artificer
of pre-existing material.[58] Whether or not this
estimation of the centrality of substance in the metaphysics
of the age is overstated, Berkeley certainly seems to have
sensed the urgency in eradicating the notion of corporeal
substance from cosmology. In sections 92-96 of the
Principles Berkeley asserts that the doctrine of matter has
served as the principle support for atheists, skeptics,
fatalists, the irreligious, and the impious. Moreover, he
maintains,

> ...on the same principle does idolatry likewise in
> all its various forms depend. Did men but
> consider that the sun, moon, and stars, and every
> other object of the senses are only so many
> sensations in their minds, which have no other
> existence but barely being perceived, doubtless
> they would never fall down and worship their own
> *ideas*, but rather address their homage to that
> Eternal Invisible Mind which produces and sustains
> all things.[59]

This passage represents Berkeley's turn from defender of the
mere theological consistency of immaterialism with scripture

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[58]. Ritchie, p. 128-129.

[59]. *Principles*, 94.

to the much stronger contention that his metaphysical system is actually superior to matterism theologically because of its avoidance of heretical implications. Berkeley may or may not be correct in his claim that matterism spawns idolatrous religious belief and practice. However the practical effects, harmful or beneficial, of a metaphysical doctrine are not properly a philosophical consideration in judging its truth. But surely Berkeley must have known this. So why does he bother to devote long sections of his *Principles* and the *Dialogues* to the project of explaining how his immaterialism is amenable to scripture and how the practical effects of its acceptance would edify adherents to the Christian religion? The short answer is that he assumed his audience to be largely sympathetic to, though not necessarily devotees of, to the faith and therefore likely to be responsive to arguments based on points of primarily theological interest. This explanation accounts for the fact that Berkeley's chief motivations in even constructing his philosophical system were theological in character.

Now to return to the issue at hand, does immaterialism really provide a defense against idolatry? Berkeley was convinced to the point of near dogma, and I believe part of the reason has already become evident in the explication of his metaphysics above. Everything in the universe, whatever its nature, is continually sustained by the deity, utterly dependent upon him for its existence. Therefore, to worship any created item would amount to worshipping the ideas of

the creator rather than the creator himself. To understand this, Berkeley suggests, is sufficient to discourage one from succumbing to the temptation. To realize the omnipresence of God such that "in him we live and move and have our being" is to conceive at once the worthiness of this being to be worshipped and the foolishness of preferring to worship some infinitely inferior being. Substance ontology, on the other hand, allowing for the mind-independence of physical objects, in no such way demands that God be conceived as so intimately related to his creation and therefore permits the mind to stray from God in its meditation on physical objects. Something like this seems to be Berkeley's thinking. Whether he is correct is a question which might as well be left to empirical testing as to philosophical disputation.

IV. Conclusion

To sum up, the linguistic metaphor plays a central role in Berkeley's immaterialism and, as we have seen, its role is also significant in the scriptures. My defense of Berkeley's "endorsement" thesis has consisted largely in showing how his metaphysics acknowledges and exploits this biblical convention. One of the objectives of this chapter has been to argue that Berkeleyan immaterialism enjoys at least as much and perhaps more interpretive richness than matterism when approaching key biblical passages such as the Genesis account of creation. For the former is much better

prepared than the latter to attach a substantive, concrete meaning to the speech imagery pervading the Old and New Testaments. It seems to me the matterist's sole explanation for these expressions is that they are entirely metaphorical. A Berkeleyan, on the other hand, while acknowledging their metaphorical dimension, may also take these expressions to some extent literally, counting them as veritable insights into the nature of God as well as humans who on the Mosaic account are made in his image.

Most of the philosophical problems facing the Christian theist, such as the problems of evil and free will, the logic of the nature of God, and the authority of the Old and New Testaments, do still confront Berkeley. This chapter ought not to be construed as claiming otherwise. What I have tried to show here is that commitment to Berkeleyan immaterialism does not entail theological heterodoxy or heresy, at least concerning the issues discussed in this chapter. On the contrary, I have argued that Berkeley's principles are compatible with key doctrines in orthodox Christian theology and, furthermore, that they afford the believer conceptual tools practical for deepening rather than distorting the "salutary truths of the Gospel", a conclusion which would undoubtedly please a theologically conservative Anglican so sensitive to heresy.

CHAPTER 3

Berkeley's Causal Arguments
for the Existence of God

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I. Introduction

Of chief concern to any religious apologist, because of
its centrality to religious belief generally, is the
existence of God. As a committed Christian and a scholar
with perceptible dissatisfaction with many of the
traditional arguments for God's existence, the forging of a
cogent theistic proof was of principal interest to Berkeley.
But the growing free thinking of his day called not just for
a more creative or ingenious argument. Rather, in
Berkeley's eyes what was needed was a thorough revamping of
the way we see the world such that to even acknowledge the
existence of bodies is to recognize the immediate handiwork
of a personal God. The history of Western philosophy until
Berkeley had been dominated by philosophers whose theism, if
any, was not an intimate corollary of their metaphysics.
Such is one reason, thought Berkeley, why religious
skepticism, free thinking, and atheism could seep in so
easily. These strains of thought enjoyed the fertile soil
of religiously neutral ontologies in which to grow and
flourish. The end of the seventeenth century and beginning
of the eighteenth century saw the deistic thought of
Collins, Toland, Shaftesbury, and others make their way into
the public arena of ideas without signalling a fundamental
shift in ontological categories, though their publication

was marked by no shortage of controversy. What was learned
from them was that one could reject the personal God of
Christianity and still maintain consistent devotion to
metaphysical systems of all kinds. The deists demonstrated
that theistic belief was, in the context of the leading
ontologies, a mere appendix, embraced by some and not by
others for reasons extraneous to the essential doctrines of
those ontologies. This was the sort of situation Berkeley
sought to revolutionize. His principal objective in the
Principles and *Dialogues* was to devise a metaphysical system
which carried with it theism as an ineluctable corollary.
Thereby, he would thwart free thinking at its roots. The
result of this apologetically motivated scheme was
immaterialism.[1] Inevitably there would be casualties in
Berkeley's project, most significantly some of the perennial
theistic proofs. The traditional cosmological argument for
God's existence had to be rejected as insufficient on
Berkeley's principles because it reasons from the present
existence of the world to a first cause which need not be
presently sustaining the world nor even still exist for that
matter. Thus, the God of deism may be perfectly compatible
with that of the cosmological argument, so for Berkeley it
could only be seen as a useless weapon in the theist's
philosophical arsenal in the fight against deism. The

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[1]. See Jessop's "Berkeley as a Religious Apologist" for
an illuminating elucidation of the central apologetic role of
Berkeley's immaterialism.

ontological argument fares even worse from the perspective
of Berkeleyanism. It begins with the idea of God,[2] a move
which Berkeley judges to be illicit because of the
impossibility of forming an idea of spirit. In his
notebooks the young Berkeley scoffs at those who would
purport to demonstrate the existence of God in this way:

> Absurd to Argue the Existence of God from his
> Idea. We have no Idea of God. tis impossible![3]

Thus, Berkeley's ostensive motivation for rejecting the
ontological argument is purely epistemological. Its
presupposition is inconsistent with his ontological dualism.
But we must remember that Berkeley's entire immaterialist
system, inclusive of his doctrine of ideas and spirit,
itself spawns from his apologetic objectives. It is very
possible that there is a more basic reason for his distaste
for the ontological proof. Like the cosmological argument,
the ontological proof fails, even if valid, to demonstrate
the immediate providence of God and therefore provides no
bulwark against deism. This could be another reason why
Berkeley so easily casts it aside in favor of arguments
which he deems to be more effective in combatting the
deists.

Berkeley seeks a theistic proof which is much more

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[2]. For example, in Anselm this takes the form "that than
which none greater can be conceived" (*Proslogion*, II and III).
In Descartes' version it is more surreptitious, something like
"the perfect being" or "the being which possesses every
perfection" (*Meditations*, III).

[3]. *Philosophical Commentaries*, 782.

ambitious than the traditional arguments whose cogency may be defended even by deists. His purpose is to construct an argument which affirms as its conclusion the existence of a being that is not merely a first cause but also the present conserver of the world. Further, he aims to show that this being is not only omnipotent and omniscient but also personal, loving, and benevolent, a being who cares intimately about the affairs of human beings. Moreover, Berkeley is not satisfied with discrete arguments in defense of these claims. He wants these tenets of his faith to follow naturally from an entire metaphysical framework, most essentially the principle that to be is to be perceived.

Commentators differ widely as to exactly how many distinct arguments for the existence of God appear in Berkeley's writings. As I read the corpus there are four separate arguments, though some of them seem to be intended by Berkeley to be complementary. The arguments are these: (1) the Passivity argument, which appears in the *Principles*, 25-26, 28-32, 145-147, and the second *Dialogue* (pp. 64-69); (2) the Continuity argument, used only in the *Dialogues* (pp. 91-93);[4] (3) the Divine Visual Language argument, defended

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[4]. The names for these two arguments come from Bennett who first labeled them in his "Berkeley and God", *Philosophy* (40), July 1965. Alternative names for the proofs have been given since Bennett. For example, Dancy calls the Passivity argument the "Independence" argument, and the Continuity proof is termed the "Distinctness" argument by Ayers. The reasons for these alternate titles will not be discussed here, but I refer the reader to Dancy's *Berkeley: An Introduction* (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1987), ch. 4 and M.R. Ayers' "Divine Ideas and Berkeley's Proofs of God's Existence" in

in the *Principles*, 42-46, 148-150, *Alciphron* IV, 4-15, *New Theory of Vision*, 147, and *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, 38-40; and (4) the argument from morals, appearing in *Alciphron* III, 10-11 and in one of the sermons.

Among the things that I hope to accomplish in this chapter is to show exactly to what extent, if at all, each of these arguments depends upon immaterialism. I shall also subject each argument to logical scrutiny to discover which, if any, of them succeed in demonstrating the existence of God, granting the truth of Berkeley's immaterialism. Finally, I shall note in what sense, if at all, each of Berkeley's theistic proofs represents a departure from traditional theistic proofs and in what sense he remains clearly within the tradition of such Christian apologists before him as Augustine and Aquinas.

II. A Summary of the Causal Theistic Proofs

Before examining the proofs in detail, I shall first review in summary fashion their basic logical structure. The Passivity argument is used twice by Berkeley in the *Principles*. Its most succinct formulation appears in section 146, where he writes

Though there be some things which convince us

Essays of the Philosophy of George Berkeley, Ernest Sosa, ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1987). I have chosen to use Bennett's terminology mainly because his were the first official names for the arguments, and the reasons provided by Dancy and Ayers for changing them do not seem to me compelling.

human agents are concerned in producing them, yet it is evident to everyone that those things which are called "the works of nature," that is, the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on, the wills of men. There is therefore some other spirit that causes them; since it is repugnant that they should subsist by themselves.[5]

In what I believe to be a fair reading of this argument,

Jonathan Bennett represents the Passivity proof as follows:

(a) My ideas of sense (i.e. those which I have when I perceive objective states of affairs) come into my mind without being caused to do so by any act of my will;

(b) The occurrence of any idea must be caused by the will of some being in whose mind the idea occurs;

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(c) Therefore, my ideas of sense are in the mind of, and caused by the will of, some being other than

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[5]. *Principles*, 146. One remarkable difference between this presentation of the Passivity argument in the closing pages of the *Principles* and that which appears early on in the treatise is that it is articulated by Berkeley in the third person voice, while the earlier version is presented in the first person, much in the style of Descartes in the *Meditations*. Whether this emulation of Descartes' method was conscious or intentional on Berkeley's part we can only guess. But in addition to this methodological similarity to Descartes, there is a further substantive parallel between the Passivity argument and Descartes' first argument in the third *Meditation* which makes the similarity even more suspicious. They are, roughly speaking the same kind of argument. Both proofs reason from the mind's ideas to the cause of these ideas. Where the proofs differ is in the fact that Berkeley's argument concerns ideas of sense, while Descartes' focuses on our idea of God specifically. It is doubtful that Berkeley would have appreciated such a comparison of his project with that of Descartes. For while Berkeley reasons from the reality of perceived things to God's existence, Descartes first demonstrates the existence of God so that we may, on the basis of God's veracity, justify our belief in sensible things. Berkeley mocks this method of Descartes in the *Dialogues*, p. 91.

myself.[6]

Some important similarities and differences between this argument and that of the classical cosmological argument are apparent even in this short excerpt. Both the Passivity and cosmological proofs,[7] it is true, reason from effects to causes, but here is where the parallels cease. The former argues from ideas to a mind possessing or causing them, while the latter argues from things, which under many metaphysical systems are allowed to be mind-independent, to their cause.[8] Moreover, and most importantly, the Passivity argument reasons to a mind presently causing the world while the cosmological proof typically concludes only that there is some cause, however remote, of the world.

Now the Passivity argument reasons from the existence of ideas of sense to their cause, but as Berkeley goes on to argue in the same section as that quoted above, it is not just _some_ cause. Rather it is a particular kind of cause. He writes,

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[6]. "Berkeley and God" in *Philosophy* (40) 1965, pp. 207-221.

[7]. The classical cosmological argument, as I understand it, runs something like this: (1) Every being is either dependent or self-existent. (2) Not every being can be dependent. (3) Therefore, there must be a self-existent being. This version is essentially that defended by Samual Clarke in *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1704). There are other formulations which exhibit much more sophisticated logic, but I believe Clarke's version captures the basic line of reasoning of any cosmological argument.

[8]. Of course, for Berkeley things just _are_ ideas, cf. *Principles*, 38-39.

> If we attentively consider the constant
> regularity, order, and concatenation of natural
> things, the surprising magnificence, beauty, and
> perfection of the larger, and the exquisite
> contrivance of the smaller parts of creation,
> together with the exact harmony and correspondence
> of the whole, but above all the never-enough-
> admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the
> instincts or natural inclinations, appetites and
> passions of animals; I say if we consider all
> these things, and at the same time attend to the
> meaning and import of the attributes: one,
> eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect, we
> shall clearly perceive that they belong to the
> aforesaid spirit, "who works all in all," and "by
> whom all things consist."[9]

Berkeley's reasoning here is quite reminiscent of the

classical argument from design, but as the discussion

proceeds we discover that his reasoning evolves into

something much more innovative. He notes that just as we

infer the existence of another human mind from "certain

sensations or ideas excited in our own minds" such as color,

figure, size, motion, etc.,

> after the same manner we see God; all the
> difference is that, whereas some one finite and
> narrow assemblage of ideas denotes a particular
> human mind, whithersoever we direct our view, we
> do at all times and places perceive manifest
> tokens of the divinity...[10]

Thus, Berkeley proclaims astoundingly,

> We need only open our eyes to see the sovereign
> Lord of all things, with a more full and clear
> view than we do any one of our fellow
> creatures.[11]

This is Berkeley's Divine Visual Language argument. A much

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[9]. *Principles*, 146.

[10]. *Principles*, 148.

[11]. Ibid.

more elaborate defense of this proof is offered in

Alciphron, but I will postpone its elucidation until later.

My main reason for claiming that the DVL argument is a

distinct proof from the Passivity argument is that the

latter, as will become more evident later, depends vitally

on a tenet of Berkeley's immaterialism, while the DVL does

not presuppose any particular metaphysical framework.

Alciphron, in which the DVL argument appears, was not a

metaphysical but an apologetic text, written for a more

general audience than were the *Principles* and *Dialogues*. In

Alciphron, therefore, Berkeley refrained from alienating his

readers with the particulars of his unique metaphysics,

though this is not to say that there are doctrinal

discrepancies between *Alciphron* and the earlier works.

Berkeley's Continuity argument for the existence of

God, which like the Passivity proof is a causal argument,

appears only in one place in the Berkeley corpus. In the

third *Dialogue*, Philonous argues this way:

> When I deny sensible things an existence out of
> the mind, I do not mean my mind in particular, but
> all minds. Now it is plain they have an existence
> exterior to my mind; since I find them by
> experience to be independent of it. 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, and exhibits them to our view in such a
> manner, and according to such rules, as He Himself
> hath ordained, and are by us termed the *laws of*

nature.[12]

This argument may be represented as follows:

    (a) Physical objects, which are collections of sensible ideas, exist only when perceived by some mind.

    (b) Physical objects sometimes exist when they are not perceived by any human (finite) mind.

    (c) Therefore, there is some non-human (non-finite) mind which perceives physical objects when they are not perceived by any human mind.[13]

This proof has generated more rancor in philosophical circles in the last 25 years than any other of Berkeley's arguments for God's existence. The focus of debate is usually the second premise, where he makes the claim that sometimes physical objects exist when no human being perceives them. There is perhaps nothing inherently controversial about this proposition. Rather it is made so only in the context of Berkeley's empiricism. Why, as Bennett puts it, does Berkeley think he is entitled to this assumption? Later in this chapter I shall address this question among others which arise in the context of this argument.

III. Views on the Number of Theistic Proofs Used by Berkeley

There has been considerable controversy over the actual number of theistic proofs employed by Berkeley. The debate

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[12]. *Dialogues*, p. 91.

[13]. My representation of the Continuity argument closely resembles that of Bennett's in "Berkeley and God", p. 207.

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primarily concerns whether the Passivity argument and Continuity argument are really distinct proofs. There is a broad range of interpretations. At least one commentator, Edward Sillem,[14] speaks as if Berkeley uses only one proof. This might seem to be a ludicrous interpretation, but Sillem is probably on target in one important respect. If one considers that Berkeley intended his whole metaphysical system to constitute an argument for theism, this analysis is not too far off base. Granting the truth of the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere*, the existence of God, Berkeley thought, inevitably follows. This is the long and the short of it, as Sillem sees it. That there are a variety of different steps or paths one might take along the way (via the Passivity or Continuity proofs), he seems to suggest, is subordinate in importance.

In a controversial article published in 1965[15] Jonathan Bennett argues that although the Continuity argument is a logically distinct proof, it was not intended by Berkeley to stand on its own, as evidenced by the fact that it appears only in the *Dialogues*. Bennett maintains that Berkeley "does not seriously employ the [continuity] argument at all" and is in fact not even interested in

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14. *Berkeley's Proofs for the Existence of God* (London: Longmans Green, 1957), chapter 6.

15. "Berkeley and God" in *Philosophy* (40) 1965, pp. 207-221.

questions about the continuity of physical objects.[16]

Other commentators such as Furlong[17], Dancy[18], and Tipton[19] hold that the Passivity and Continuity arguments are not separate arguments but complementary. They read Berkeley as indeed being interested in considerations of continuity but only in the interest of enriching the Passivity proof. Furlong sees the two arguments as complementary in the following sense: the Passivity argument stresses perceiving, and the continuity argument stresses willing. The two complements of Berkeley's single proof, then, correspond to what in Berkeley's view are the two faculties of spirit: understanding and will. Dancy argues that the Continuity argument is properly interpreted as a supplement to Berkeley's "main" proof, the Passivity argument (which he calls the "Independence" argument). This must be so, he argues, because were they taken separately it is obvious the Continuity argument would be viciously circular. Like Furlong, Dancy disagrees with Bennett, regarding the matter of Berkeley's interest in the continuity of physical objects.

In opposition to all of the previously mentioned

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[16]. Ibid., p. 221.

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[17]. "Berkeley and the Tree in the Quad" in *Philosophy* 1966, pp. 169-173.

[18]. *Berkeley: An Introduction* (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc.), 1987, chapter 4.

[19]. *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism* (London: Methuen and Co., Ltd, 1974), chapter 8.

commentators, M.R. Ayers argues that not only is the
Continuity argument (which he calls the "Distinctness"
argument) a separate proof from the Passivity argument, but
also that if either is to be considered more important, it
should be the former.[20] Ayers bases his view that the
Continuity argument is primary on several textual
considerations, including the amount of space devoted to
each argument in the *Dialogues*, the order of their
introduction, and comparison of the number of references
Berkeley makes to each proof.

About the various views regarding the relationship
between the Passivity and Continuity proofs, I shall say no
more, for it is not my purpose to settle this dispute.
Rather, my aim here is to show (a) to what extent, if at
all, the proofs depend on immaterialism, (b) to what degree
they are original (which will in turn depend on whether they
assume immaterialism), and (c) to what degree, if at all,
Berkeley's arguments succeed.

I have a few disclaimers to make before proceeding to
analysis of the proofs. First, while the following analyses
of these two arguments will indeed presuppose a particular
view of the relation between these two arguments (only as to
the claim that they can be seen as separate proofs, not
regarding the issue of primacy or importance), the

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[20]. "Divine Ideas and Berkeley's Proofs of God's
Existence" in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*,
Ernest Sosa, ed. (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1987),
pp. 115-127.

conclusions which follow regarding the role which Berkeley's immaterialism plays in his theistic proofs is unaffected by one's position on this issue. That is, one may side with any of the above noted commentators regarding interpretation of the Passivity and Continuity arguments and my thesis about the role of immaterialism in Berkeley's theistic proofs will in no way be undermined. This is because, as shall become clear, both arguments, whether viewed as logically distinct proofs or as a single argument, presuppose elements of immaterialism.

My second disclaimer regards the implications of the debate about the relation of the two proofs for the criticisms I shall make of each. Since, as I shall show, Berkeley's Passivity and Continuity arguments are laden with problems which prove fatal to his attempt to demonstrate the existence of God, no particular interpretation of the relation between these proofs will rescue his project. Hence, one's particular position on this interpretive debate, if it is different from that assumed here, should not by itself render my criticisms irrelevant. This is because the lines of inference I attack are indisputably Berkeley's. And the above debate concerns only what view we are properly to take of the precise logical relation of some of these lines of inference to one another.

IV. The Passivity Argument

Bennett, we will recall, summarizes the Passivity argument as follows:

(a) My ideas of sense (i.e. those which I have when I perceive objective states of affairs) come into my mind without being caused to do so by any act of my will;

(b) The occurrence of any idea must be caused by the will of some being in whose mind the idea occurs;

(c) Therefore, my ideas of sense are in the mind of, and caused by the will of, some being other than myself.

I believe Bennett's representation of the argument to be a faithful general characterization of the proof, but it is a simplification of a more complex and convoluted line of reasoning on Berkeley's part.[21] In what follows I shall present a much more detailed analysis of the Passivity argument, in order that we may subject it to fair scrutiny. Now the proof as Berkeley presents it is an enthymeme. Therefore as I lay out my reconstruction of the argument I shall make explicit certain premises which are only implicit in Berkeley's account.

Here is my analysis of the argument:

(1) The sole cause of ideas is an active substance, i.e. spirit (*Principles*, 26).

(2) I have ideas of sense (assumed).

(3) Therefore, my ideas of sense are caused by a

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21. M.R. Ayers summarizes the argument in an only slightly more detailed fashion. See his "Divine Ideas and Berkeley's Proofs for God's Existence".

spirit.

> (4) Some of my ideas of sense are not caused by my spirit (29).

> ———————————————————————————

> (5) Therefore, some of my ideas are caused by another spirit.

> (6) All of my ideas of sense are steady, orderly, varied, coherent, helpful, etc. (30).

> ———————————————————————————

> (7) This other spirit causes ideas in me which are orderly, varied, coherent, helpful, etc.

> (8) The attributes of the spirit that causes my ideas may be inferred from the characteristics of these ideas (just as, analogously, we infer the attributes of another human spirit from its effects) (147-149).

> ———————————————————————————

> (9) Therefore, the spirit which causes these ideas must be wise, powerful, and benevolent (30).

This is the form of the passivity argument, but this

analysis does not exhaust its logical structure. Berkeley

offers sub-arguments for some of the premises in the proof.

Premise (4), for example, is bolstered by the following

argument:

> (4a) Some of my ideas of sense are independent of my will (29).

> (4b) Ideas independent of my will are not caused by my spirit (29).

> ———————————————————————————

> (4) Some of my ideas are not caused by my spirit.

And Berkeley also explains his reasoning behind his

assertion in premise (6) that our ideas of sense are helpful

to us. This further sub-argument may be represented as

follows:

(6a) The order and constancy of my ideas of sense
     provide me with a sort of foresight (31).

(6b) This foresight is beneficial, as it enables me to
     regulate my actions (31).

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(6) Therefore, my ideas of sense are helpful to me.

The remaining premises are arrived at either by common

sense, like premise (2), or, as in the case of premise (8),

constitute in Berkeley's judgment an axiom which does not

warrant philosophical justification but is a basic principle

which is self-evident.

Now that we have seen just how elaborate the passivity

argument actually is, let us see to what extent it

presupposes immaterialism. If we carefully examine all of

the steps of the argument as I have represented them, even

with its assumptions explicitly stated, we find that there

is only one premise in the entire argument which appears to

presuppose immaterialism, the first premise:

(1) The sole cause of ideas is spirit.

Of course, premises (3), (5), (7), and (9) do also suggest

immaterialism, but their immaterialist content is wholly

inherited from premise (1).

Now in what sense is this premise necessarily that of

an immaterialist? Essential to Berkeley's metaphysics is

the denial of material substratum. Physical objects are

simply the sum of their perceivable qualities, which are

themselves entirely passive. Now since there is no

underlying material substratum in which these qualities may

subsist, it remains only for some active cause to be their source. This, for Berkeley, is spirit or mind. Thus, we see that premise (1) is a key part of his immaterialist metaphysics. But now the question arises, "Could not a matterist metaphysician affirm a proposition such as that in premise (1)?" The answer is yes, and Malebranche is one philosopher who did exactly this, maintaining both that matter exists and that spirit is the cause of ideas. This view, however, seems to be a very awkward combination of metaphysical theses, for there is simply no need for material substance in such an ontology. (Berkeley criticized Malebranche on just these grounds.) Still, it is a plausible and, it seems, coherent position. In this sense, it is clear that premise (1) does <u>not necessarily</u> presuppose immaterialism, though it does happen to be a concomitant of this metaphysic, as was shown above. And yet, as was just noted, premise (1) could be a part of matterist metaphysics. The upshot here, then, is that to defend the Passivity argument for God's existence would not by itself commit one to immaterialism.

Now having shown that the first premise, which is clearly the best candidate for an essentially immaterialist premise in the Passivity argument, does not necessarily presuppose immaterialism, to what extent can we call this argument as a whole an "immaterialist" argument? The answer is that the Passivity proof is best described as immaterialist because its logic is implied by an

immaterialist ontology, though the reverse does not hold. That is, to use this particular argument does not thereby commit one to immaterialism. So it seems that Berkeley's Passivity argument can be called an immaterialist proof only in this very restricted sense, that it begins with a premise which is a tenet of immaterialism. The immaterialist nature of this argument, then, is actually less pronounced than might be first thought, for besides this one premise (which, granted, is the pivotal premise of the proof) there are no propositions in the argument not derived from it which are at all suggestive of immaterialism, a fact which is further illumined by the consideration that all of the premises in the Passivity argument, with the exception of those which inherit the immaterialist doctrine of spirit from the first premise (3, 5, 7, and 9), could be affirmed by a matterist such as Locke.

That the Passivity argument does not presuppose immaterialism is less surprising when we consider that premise (1) is itself only a theoretical postulate proposed by Berkeley <u>after</u> he presents his case for the principle that *esse est percipi*. The thesis that spirit is the cause of all ideas is just one of the ways in which Berkeley seeks to work out consistently and coherently the metaphysical implications of this principle. Neither of the two theses imply the other. The doctrine of spirit is no more necessitated by immaterialism than the latter is by the former.

Now let us consider the question of the originality of Berkeley's Passivity argument. The overarching theme or point of the argument is that the world, which for Berkeley is best conceived as ideas, is ultimately dependent upon God (infinite spirit). It is thus an argument from the world to its cause. The logic of this general sort of theistic proof is familiar, known typically as the cosmological argument. In fact, I believe the Passivity argument can be properly seen as Berkeley's statement of the classical cosmological argument in the vocabulary of immaterialism.[22] To see that this is so, let us consider some historical antecedents of the proof.

Cosmological arguments are generally characterized by the inference from contingent or dependent beings to some first cause which is itself independent or self-existent. The argument has an illustrious history, dating back at least as far as Plato who employed the proof in his *Laws*.[23] Aristotle used a version of the cosmological argument in the *Metaphysics*[24] where he argues for the existence of an unmoved mover. The argument was restated in

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[22]. I.C. Tipton has argued that the Passivity proof is actually just a variation of Locke's argument for the existence of real external bodies (*The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, chapter 8). Compare Locke's argument in the *Essay*, IV, 11, 5.

[23]. Book X.

[24]. *Metaphysics*, XII.

the medieval period by such thinkers as Anselm,[25]
Aquinas,[26] and Ockham,[27] and remained a popular theistic
proof throughout the early modern period. One particularly
influential articulation of the cosmological proof in
Berkeley's day was made by Samuel Clarke whose rendering
runs something like this:

    (1) Every being is either dependent or self-existent.

    (2) Not every being is dependent.

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    (3) Therefore, there is a self-existent being.[28]

Other versions of the argument which bear a much closer
resemblance to Berkeley's are to be found in Descartes and
Locke. In the *Essay* Locke reasons as follows:

    (1) "Man has a clear perception of his own being.
        He knows certainly that he exists, and that he
        is something."

    (2) "Bare nothing can [not] produce any real being."

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    (3) Therefore, "from eternity there has been
        something."[29]

From here, as Berkeley later would do in the Passivity
proof, Locke argues for specific attributes of the deity,
maintaining that "what had its being and beginning from

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    25. *Monologium*, III-VII.

    26. *Summa Theologica*, I, II, 3.

    27. *Quaestiones in lib. I Physicorum*. Q. CXXXII-CXXXVI.

    28. *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*,
XI.

    29. *Essay*, IV, X, 1-3.

another, must also have all that which is in, and belongs to its being from another too".[30] This means that since we have power and knowledge, the deity must also be a powerful and intelligent being. Locke concludes:

> Thus from the consideration of our selves, and what we infallibly find in our own constitutions, our reason leads us to the knowledge of this certain and evident truth, that there is an eternal, most powerful, and most knowing being; which whether any one will please to call God, it matters not. The thing is evident, and from this idea duly considered, will easily be deduced all those other attributes, which we ought to ascribe to this eternal being.[31]

The similarities between Locke's reasoning here and Berkeley's in the Passivity argument should be plain. The chief difference between the two lies not in the logical structure of the arguments but in the nature of the effects from which they reason. Generally speaking, both infer the existence of deity based on the fact of contingent being. The difference is that Berkeley makes his case in the context of his dualistic ontology of ideas and spirits. What Berkeley basically does, then, is transpose a Lockean-style cosmological proof into the language of immaterialism.

Now I do not mean to suggest that what is unique about Berkeley's Passivity proof is that it is a cosmological argument which argues from ideas to God's existence. Its originality, I believe goes beyond this (as I have characterized it above). Anyway, Berkeley was not the

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[30]. Ibid., IV, X, 4.

[31]. Ibid., IV, X, 6.

first to present a cosmological proof which reasons from one's ideas to the existence of God. Descartes defends such an argument in the *Meditations*:

> There remains only the idea of God, in which we
> must consider if there is something which could
> not have come from myself. By the word "God" I
> mean an infinite substance, eternal, and
> immutable, independent, omniscient, omnipotent,
> and that by which I myself and all other existent
> things...have been created and produced. But
> these attributes as such--they are so great and
> eminent--that the more attentively I consider
> them, the less I can persuade myself that I could
> have derived them from my own nature. And
> consequently we must necessarily conclude...that
> God exists.[32]

Obviously, Descartes' proof here is not an immaterialist one, but it is a causal argument, reasoning from his idea of a perfect being (which he says possesses a certain "objective reality", or ideational content) to the actual existence ("formal reality") of this being. Descartes' argument shares this feature with the Passivity argument: it parlays the existence of certain ideas into evidence that God exists.

The above discussion should suffice to show that Berkeley's Passivity argument is not original in terms of its structure as a causal argument for God's existence; nor is it even original in its articulation in terms of "ideas" rather than "beings". Berkeley's Passivity argument, rather, is original to the extent that it is an immaterialist version of the classical cosmological

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[32]. *Meditations*, III.

argument. And it is, in particular, the content of the first premise that denotes Berkeley's immaterialism. Thus, the usual reading of the proof as being unique to him, is somewhat on target. But, as we have seen, the argument is not as radical a departure from traditional natural theology as it has been commonly thought.

Since the Passivity proof represents Berkeley's appropriation of the logic of the classical cosmological argument to certain features of his immaterialism, the argument is only original to the extent that a tenet of this metaphysic, namely that for any idea, its sole cause is spirit, is assumed in the proof. That is, it is not essentially an immaterialist argument, since (1) the defining thesis of immaterialism, *essè est percipi*, is not a premise of the argument and (2) the central line of the argument is an inference from effects to an ultimate divine cause, an inference which was made by countless thinkers before Berkeley, from Plato to Locke.

V. Criticism of the Passivity Argument

Now having seen to what extent Berkeley's Passivity proof may be called an immaterialist argument we may inquire as to whether the argument succeeds in demonstrating its conclusion that the theistic God exists. I shall critically evaluate the argument step by step. Beginning with premise one, how does Berkeley know that the cause of his ideas must be spirit? His justification for this assertion is found in

sections 25-26 of the *Principles*. Here his dualistic ontology of ideas and spirit is expounded, the distinguishing characteristic being the passivity of the former and activity of the latter. He writes, "All our ideas, sensations or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive--there is nothing of power or agency in them."[33] This is to say, ideas are completely passive, unable to cause anything, whether themselves or other ideas. Having established this important point, Berkeley is prepared to inquire as to the real cause of ideas, namely spirits. But first he must show that our ideas are in fact caused. His support for this claim is thin: "We perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear. There is, therefore, some cause of these ideas, whereon they depend and which produces and changes them."[34] What Berkeley is presupposing here is that every change in ideas must have some cause, and this assumption is at least as in need of justification as the proposition which he uses it to justify. How does the succession or change of ideas imply the existence of a cause any more than the mere presence of ideas does? Bennett frames the question this way: "Why does Berkeley...help himself to the assumption that there must be...a cause for

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[33]. *Principles*, 25.

[34]. Ibid., 26.

any change in anyone's sensory state?"[35] Bennett's answer
is that "Berkeley just is a philosopher of that familiar
kind who cannot entertain the possibility that an
intelligible 'why?' might have no answer."[36] This answer,
I believe, is in some respects correct, but Bennett fails to
explain the import of this aspect of Berkeley's
philosophical disposition, and ultimately Bennett's
explanation serves more to dismiss than to illumine
Berkeley's view. The sense in which Berkeley is the sort of
philosopher "who cannot entertain the possibility that an
intelligible 'why?' might have no answer" is this: when it
comes to the of fact of change Berkeley accepts the
principle of sufficient reason. That is, as Leibniz
articulates it, "nothing happens for which a reason cannot
be given why it should happen as it does rather than
otherwise."[37] In accepting this principle Berkeley joins
a long tradition of philosophers, theists and non-theists
alike, who believe that all events do have causal
explanations. Moreover, in this particular context, the
passivity argument, Berkeley avoids the tenuous appeal to
common sense or the so-called "light of nature" which would
render this important part of his proof (and perhaps his
whole metaphysics) vulnerable to easy demolition.

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[35]. Bennett, p. 210.

[36]. Ibid.

[37]. *The Nature of Truth*, 1686.

Now this acceptance of the principle of sufficient reason does not imply that Berkeley believes that <u>all</u> 'why' questions have answers nor that all of those which do have answers are such that they can be known by us.[38] In fact his opting to justify the belief in a cause for ideas as he does (by appealing to the need for an explanation for <u>change</u> in ideas) rather than by arguing from the mere existence of a cause suggests that Berkeley does not believe the question "Why do we have ideas?" to have an answer which is knowable by us. For the strategy of answering this question directly would be simpler and less circuitous than the route he decides to take. This means that there is at least one intelligible "why?" question which Berkeley believes does not admit of an answer. But this is not the only such instance. For Berkeley there are certain facts in the areas of theology and philosophy of religion which likewise do not admit of rational explanation, among them the divine incarnation and grace.[39] So Bennett's claim about Berkeley being the sort of philosopher who believes that <u>all</u> intelligible "why" questions have answers is simply false.

Let us turn now to an examination of premises 2 and 4 in Berkeley's passivity argument (as I have represented it). The propositions in these two premises:

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[38]. Leibniz himself acknowledges that **in most cases** the reason for a fact or the truth of a proposition **cannot** be known by us. See *Monadology*, 32.

[39]. See *Alciphron*, VII and chapter 7 of this dissertation for Berkeley's treatment of these doctrines.

(a) I have ideas of sense

and (b) Some of my ideas of sense are not caused by my
spirit

will be considered together, because they invite two kinds

of criticisms, neither of which seems to have been

considered by Berkeley. The first I wish to discuss was

considered by Descartes before him and Hume after him. It

is this: How do I know that what I think to be my ideas of

sense are not actually ideas of the imagination, caused by

my own mind? I open my eyes and I experience sensations of

color and shape. My ears are continually bombarded with

sounds of all kinds. I reach out my hand and experience

various tactile sensations, rough, smooth, hot, cold, etc.

All of these ideas I assume to be gained <u>through</u> my senses.

That is, I believe, were it not for my having functional

sense organs, I would not have these ideas. But is this

belief justified? Is Berkeley warranted in assuming as he

does that some of our ideas actually arise in us through the

operation of our senses? Moreover, how does he know that

these ideas are caused by some spirit other than one's own?

This objection might seem extravagant when approached in

the light of common sense, but its challenge was taken

seriously by Descartes who proposed the possibility that

> there is in me some faculty or power adequate to
> produce these ideas without the aid of any
> external objects, even though it is not yet known
> to me; just as it has so far always seemed to me
> that when I sleep, these ideas are formed in me
> without the aid of the objects which they

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represent.[40]

Hume wrestled with this same problem and subjected the
empiricist thesis to similar objections as those offered by
Descartes:

> By what argument can it be proved, that the
> perceptions of the mind must be caused by external
> objects, entirely different from them, though
> resembling them (if that be possible) and could
> not arise either from the energy of the mind
> itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible
> and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still
> more unknown to us? It is acknowledged, that, in
> fact, many of these perceptions arise not from any
> thing external, as in dreams, madness, and other
> diseases.[41]

The assumptions Descartes and Hume are questioning in these
passages are precisely those made by Berkeley in premises 2
and 4 in the passivity argument. Descartes appealed to the
benevolence of God to ensure that our senses are reliable
and that our belief in external bodies which cause our ideas
of sense is justified. But Berkeley cannot take this route
because the proposition in question is utilized by him as a
premise in a theistic proof. To appeal here to God's
benevolence, as he does in other contexts (e.g., in
obviating the problem of induction), would make this
argument viciously circular. Hume, on the other hand,
emphatically rejecting theism, found no satisfactory
solution to this objection and opted for a Pyrrhonistic

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[40]. *Meditations* III.

[41]. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, XII, 1.

brand of skepticism.[42] Of course for Berkeley, a vigorous defender of common sense and an opponent of skepticism and atheism, this was not a live option either.

How then might Berkeley deal with this problem noted by Descartes and Hume? In the *Principles* Berkeley distinguishes between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination as follows: "The ideas of sense are allowed to have more reality in them, that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent than the creatures of the mind."[43] The criteria here listed by Berkeley are reminiscent of the standard of clarity and distinctness used by Descartes for distinguishing true and false beliefs.[44] And, curiously, Hume invokes similar criteria for distinguishing between ideas of memory and imagination.[45] But are such characteristics as strength, orderliness, coherence, etc. reliable gauges for telling us which ideas are ideas of

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[42]. For his part, Hume appears to have been persuaded that Berkeley ought similarly to have been committed to skepticism. He remarks that Berkeley's writings "form the best lessons of skepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted" (*Enquiry*, XII, 1).

[43]. *Principles*, 33.

[44]. *Discourse on Method*, IV.

[45]. "'Tis evident, at first sight," Hume explains "that the ideas of the memory are much more lively and strong than those of imagination, and that the former faculty paints objects in more distinct colours, than any which are employ'd by the latter" *(Treatise of Human Nature*, I, I, III.) Why Hume did not consider these criteria to be adequate to also distinguish ideas of sense from those of imagination is not clear.

sense, having their origin from without rather than from our own mind?

The problem with these criteria is that in using them it is presupposed that one already knows the difference between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination, which of course is the very question at issue. That is, to arrive at these criteria we must first know which ideas arise from the senses and which from the imagination before we can proceed to determine what are the characteristics peculiar to each. But this is precisely what we need these criteria to assist us in determining. Alternatively, one might simply stipulate that those ideas which are strong, ordered, and coherent will be designated ideas of sense, while those which lack these features will be assigned some other status. However, this strategy is even less promising. For while it perhaps provides a practical means for distinguishing between ideas of sense and imagination, it makes the distinction wholly arbitrary. Using such a *priori* criteria may indeed insure that any given idea can be readily classified as derived from sense or imagination, but it is far from a guarantee that our new technical usage of the terminology will correspond to experience or even to ordinary language.

A further objection to Berkeley's criteria derives from experience. It seems just false to imply as Berkeley does that ideas of the imagination are never as strong, ordered, and coherent as ideas of sense. This might usually be the

case, but it is not always true. Many dreams, for example, are characterized by tremendous strength, order, and coherence or at least to a degree sufficient to persuade us that they are not mere images born of our own mind. Furthermore, sometimes what we call ideas of sense are very weak, disordered, or even incoherent as when we are drowsy or under the influence of some mind altering agent. Naturally, in our more lucid moments we seem capable of distinguishing ideas of sense from those of imagination. But we must ask to what criteria may one appeal when determining whether he or she presently enjoys lucidity of thought? The fact is that ideas are not always so easily categorized as Berkeley (and Descartes and Hume) would have us believe.

Premise 6 in the Passivity argument is subject to serious criticism as well. First, not all of our ideas of sense are steady, ordered, and coherent. Illusions and hallucinations provide clear counter-examples. Healthy persons with functional sense organs see mirages of water on dry roads, objects with distorted shapes when seen at a distance, and straight oars bent when placed in water. Some schizophrenics hear voices in their own heads when they are alone, and still others with psychological malfunctions seem to see objects which do not exist. Such ideas are admittedly unsteady and incoherent.

Berkeley's probable reply in the case of illusions is that these ideas we sense are not themselves lacking in

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order or coherence, but they only appear so when we indulge in the inference that because we have such and such perceptions from a given perspective that we will have similar perceptions when we adopt a different perspective. Thus, for Berkeley, when it comes to illusions it is our reasoning that is incoherent, not our ideas of sense. As for the matter of hallucinations, we can only guess what Berkeley's reply would be. There are several lines of response which are open to him. He might, for instance, simply deny the claim that hallucinatory ideas derive at all from the senses and are to be classified as born of the imagination. Or, he could concede that some hallucinations can be properly called ideas of sense and defend the view that they are not really incoherent relative to the mind of the person to whom the phantoms appear.

Supposing, however, that there is some workable Berkeleyan reply to these problems, it must be remembered that granting the orderliness, steadiness, and coherence of ideas of sense this serves as no further evidence that they must have some cause outside the mind. One might, for example, assume, a Kantian line: Any order in our ideas might just as well be attributed to the structure of one's own mind as to a cause external to it. The knower, on this account, contributes the essential characteristics of steadiness, coherence, etc. to the manifold. This Kantian conception should seem particularly appropriate in Berkeley's case, for he argues for the mind-dependency of

all physical objects. If all physical objects are mind dependent, one might ask, then why not all of the attributes of those objects?

Perhaps the most serious problem in Berkeley's passivity argument regards the inference he makes from premises (7) and (8) to the conclusion that the spirit causing his ideas (not caused by himself) must be wise, powerful, and benevolent. In canvassing important criticisms of this crucial move in the proof we need look no further than Hume who in his *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* enumerates a battery of objections to the classical teleological argument for the existence of God. It is likely that Hume had in mind the famous watch analogy popular in his day, but many of his objections apply equally well to the present argument of Berkeley's. In discussing these criticisms we must keep in mind the sort of being whose existence Berkeley wishes to prove, namely the personal, all-loving, benevolent, omniscient, omnipotent God of the Christian religion.

Supposing there are good grounds to infer the existence of a spirit (other than one's own) causing one's ideas and supposing as well that this cause must also be intelligent, does the passivity argument really give sufficient evidence for concluding that this being is omniscient? Or granting that this being is wise, even exceedingly wise, do we know as well on the basis of this argument that it is perfectly wise? From the evidence provided by Berkeley in this proof

the answer to this question must be no. It is difficult to envision just what would count as sufficient evidence for the claim that a being is perfect in wisdom. Any given quantity of wisdom-displaying acts would presumably be finite. Moreover, our knowledge being limited to a small corner of the universe, it would be presumptuous for us to infer that the remainder of the cosmos displayed the kind of intelligent design that the portion of the world experienced by us does.

The same line of criticism applies to the attribute of divine power. About one such as Berkeley who infers great power on the part of the deity, Hume writes

> This world, for aught he knows, is very faulty and
> imperfect, compared to a superior standard; and
> was only the first rude essay of some infant
> Deity, who afterwards abandoned it, ashamed of his
> lame performance; it is the work only of some
> dependent, inferior Deity.[46]

While it may be admitted that if a single being is responsible for the creation of this world that being must possess tremendous power, we cannot deduce from our experience of this cosmos that this being is omnipotent as is maintained in Christian orthodoxy.

As regards the moral attributes of this being, Berkeley's inference fares no better than the rest. The presence of so much evil in the world is a serious impediment for a theist such as Berkeley wishing to add goodness to the list of divine attributes. Again Hume

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[46]. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, V.

lucidly explicates this point of criticism:

> As this goodness is not antecedently established,
> but must be inferred from the phenomena, there can
> be no grounds for such an inference, while there
> are so many ills in the universe, and while these
> ills might so easily have been remedied, as far as
> human understanding can be allowed to judge on
> such a subject.[47]

In light of all of the suffering in the world due to natural and moral evil we cannot look to this world as proof of the deity's benevolence, though we may, Hume admits, construe some way in which the goodness of God is compatible with the presence of evil in the world.

A final criticism of the Passivity Proof concerns Berkeley's casual conclusion that the cause of his ideas is a unified spirit. Why, we might naturally ask, must we conclude that our ideas have as their cause a single spirit? Is it not conceivable that our ideas could be produced in us by many spirits? J.F. Thompson offers this same objection to the Passivity proof and even suggests that in Berkeley's argument "the way is...left open for a kind of animism (one spirit for each physical object) and for views intermediate between this and theism."[48] It seems that, as is often the case with religious apologists, Berkeley was prone to forget that the being whose existence his argument purports to prove is just one among innumerable conceptions of deity.

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[47]. *Dialogues*, XI.

[48]. "G.J. Warnock's *Berkeley*", *Mind*, vol. 65, 1956, pp. 95-101.

VI. The Continuity Argument

We turn now to Berkeley's other causal proof for the existence of God, the Continuity argument. In our earlier summary of the proof we represented it as follows:

(a) Physical objects, which are collections of sensible ideas, exist only when perceived by some mind.

(b) Physical objects sometimes exist when they are not perceived by any human (finite) mind.

(c) Therefore, there is some non-human (non-finite) mind which perceives physical objects when they are not perceived by any human mind.

Now to better understand what motivates the argument in the discussion, let us briefly review the context of the third *Dialogue*. Immediately preceding the proof is this objection offered by Hylas': "Supposing you were annihilated, cannot you conceive it possible that things perceivable by sense may still exist?"[49] Now Philonous is in a very precarious position, seemingly painted into a corner by his own logic. For while unwaveringly defending a radical empiricist thesis, he is also defending common sense, referring to himself as of "a vulgar cast" believing that "common custom is the standard of propriety in language".[50] So when Hylas puts this question to him, a dilemma emerges for Philonous. If he answers "yes", then he implicitly rejects *esse est percipi aut percipere*. If he answers "no", then he denies what everybody knows to be true as a simple matter of

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[49]. *Dialogues*, p. 91.

[50]. Ibid., pp. 90 and 70.

common sense, namely that physical objects do not disappear when we stop perceiving them. Thus, it seems, he must abandon one of these two commitments, immaterialism or common sense. In a stunning piece of dramatic turnabout, however, Hylas' attack is conveniently transformed by Philonous into an occasion for a theistic proof. By holding firmly to both *esse est percipi aut percipere* and the common sense belief in object permanence what results is an argument for the existence of God. The Continuity argument is simply the product of Berkeley's marriage of these two precepts, both of which he fancied himself a champion.

It is immediately apparent that the reasoning in this proof is considerably less complex than that of the Passivity argument. Furthermore, as just observed, the Continuity argument is built squarely on the supposition of the central principle of immaterialism, *esse est percipi aut percipere*. Premise (a) is actually just a paraphrase of this thesis. Unlike the Passivity argument, then, the Continuity proof contains this element that cannot be affirmed by anyone who is not an immaterialist. In this regard the argument is uniquely Berkeleyan. In contrast, premise (b), which amounts to an assertion of the common sense belief that physical objects continue to exist even if no finite mind is perceiving them, is perhaps as philosophically ecumenical a proposition as can be conceived. It is a premise that metaphysicians of all stripes will heartily affirm (with the exception of an

esoteric few).

If my representation of the argument is accurate, then it seems Berkeley's Continuity proof is formally valid. But is it sound? Premise (a) can be criticized only as far as one can criticize immaterialism itself, for it is the essence of Immaterialism. Consequently, if immaterialism is true, then at least half of the Continuity argument is intact. So Berkeley's whole defense of immaterialism is a defense of this premise. This is one clear sense in which immaterialism is an apologetic device. If the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere* can be successfully defended, then the most controversial leg of a new argument for the existence of God will have been established. All that will remain is for Berkeley to combine this principle with a nearly universally held common sense belief about the continuity of physical objects.

Premise (b) which asserts this common-sensical proposition is based on Berkeley's enigmatic remark that "I find [sensible things] by experience to be independent of [my mind]".[51] One wonders how a thinker as careful as Berkeley could have let such a puzzling passage go to print. In the above discussion I show that I am inclined by the textual context to interpret this assertion as embodying Berkeley's sympathy with and commitment to common sense. (Most people do believe that physical objects exist

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[51]. *Dialogues*, p. 91.

independently of their minds.)

Most commentators, prudently less generous than those of a "vulgar cast" who might gladly grant Berkeley his second premise without asking for justification, point to the conspicuous problem of circularity in the proof. Given the thesis that *esse est percipi aut percipere*, Berkeley has no justification for believing that physical objects exist unperceived by any finite mind, **except** for the fact, if it is a fact, that there exists some infinite mind (which Berkeley understands to be God). So in even asserting the common sense proposition in premise (b), Berkeley tacitly affirms God's existence. But this is the very thing the argument has set about to prove. The Continuity argument, consequently, begs the question.[52] It is because of the obvious circularity of the Continuity argument, that commentators such as Bennett and Dancy take the view that the Continuity argument is not even intended by Berkeley to be a separate proof. Berkeley, they suggest, would not so blatantly beg the question. The Continuity argument is best seen, therefore, not as an entirely independent proof but as a supplement to the Passivity argument. I am not inclined to agree with this part of their analysis, preferring to read the second premise not as based on the presupposition

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[52]. This standard criticism of the Continuity argument is used by Tipton (*The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, pp. 322-323), Dancy (*Berkeley: An Introduction*, pp. 44-45), and Aschenbrenner ("Bishop Berkeley on Existence in the Mind" in *George Berkeley*, B. Mates and S.C. Pepper, eds., 1957), p. 429.

that God exists but as justified by simple common sense.

Given the Bennett-Dancy interpretation of the Continuity argument as a supplement to Berkeley's main theistic proof, and therefore as an argument which presupposes the existence of God, it follows that it is not really a proof of God's existence at all. In Dancy's view the argument is really just Berkeley's way of solving the problem of continuity of physical objects. Here Dancy departs from Bennett who thinks that Berkeley is not even concerned about continuity. This is why Bennett concludes that Berkeley "does not seriously wish to employ the Continuity argument at all."[53]

The Bennett-Dancy interpretation does of course make criticism of Berkeley's case for the existence of God a much easier, or at least more economical, task. If there are not two independent theistic proofs here but only one, then nothing more will be called for in refuting Berkeley than what I have already done above in criticizing the Passivity argument. My view, however, is not that of Bennett and Dancy, as I just noted. Hence, I shall say more in the way of criticism of the Continuity argument.

Without being able to fall back on the existence of God to justify premise (b), Berkeley does face a serious problem of circularity plaguing the Continuity argument, for Bennett and Dancy are correct when they note that the only way

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[53]. Bennett, p. 221.

Berkeley can justify this is by appealing to an infinite mind which perceives physical objects when they are not perceived by finite minds. But why else would Berkeley feel justified in accepting premise (b)? I have already noted one answer to this question, and I believe it is most likely the correct answer. In short, Berkeley doesn't think that our belief in the continuity of physical objects <u>needs</u> justification. He was quite aware that all persons hold this belief as a matter of common sense. And the Continuity argument attempts to exploit this universal belief for theological ends.

I really see no way in which Berkeley can be seen as doing anything but assuming premise (b) on the basis of common sense. Now the natural response to Berkeley's appeal to common sense here is to note that regardless of the popularity of this belief, in the context of Berkeley's immaterialism it is <u>no longer</u> a common sensical view. This is precisely why, like Hylas, we are tempted to bring up the issue of continuity. So it will not suffice for Berkeley to hold fast to premise (b) as a common sense belief. Given his commitment to immaterialism, it no longer enjoys that status.

Thus, it seems that Berkeley's continuity argument is viciously circular. Of course, there is another way in which this argument could be criticized--by attacking premise (a), which constitutes Berkeley's immaterialist thesis, *esse est percipi aut percipere*. I shall refrain

from pursuing this line of criticism, however, since this would necessitate a full-orbed critique of his metaphysics. Anyway, the criticism I have given should suffice to show that Berkeley's attempt to prove God's existence using the continuity argument fails.

VII. Conclusion

In summation, regarding Berkeley's two arguments for the existence of God examined in this chapter the following has been established. First, both the Passivity and Continuity arguments are causal arguments. Each pivots on the assumption that ideas of sense must have some cause. Secondly, both arguments include elements of immaterialism, but only in the Continuity proof does Berkeley's immaterialist thesis *esse est percipi aut percipere* actually serve as a premise. The Passivity argument is not essentially immaterialist, in the sense that affirming all of the premises in the argument does not by itself commit one to immaterialism. Thus far in our study, then, it is only in the Continuity argument that Berkeley uses immaterialism as an apologetic device. Thirdly, we have found that while the Continuity argument is a truly original Berkeleyan proof, in so far as it is essentially immaterialist, the Passivity argument is not original with Berkeley. Rather, it is simply his appropriation of the logic of the traditional cosmological argument to his immaterialism. Finally, both of these arguments ultimately

fail to justify their conclusion that God exists. The Passivity argument is riddled with a number of serious problems, many of which plague most versions of the cosmological argument. The Continuity argument, on the other hand, is beset with a single fatal flaw: circularity. Fortunately for Berkeley the two theistic proofs examined in this chapter are not the only ones in his apologetic arsenal. He uses two others which are teleological in nature. In the next chapter they are subjected to critical analysis.

CHAPTER 4

**Berkeley's Teleological Arguments
For the Existence of God**

Berkeley's Teleological Arguments
For the Existence of God

I. Introduction

Because of the recent controversy over the relationship
of the Passivity and Continuity arguments in Berkeley's
works, Berkeley's other theistic proofs have drawn less
attention from scholars than they deserve. This is
especially true of the moral argument which has been all but
ignored in the literature. In this chapter I shall discuss
this argument as well as the argument based on the divine
visual language. One reason I have decided to devote a
separate chapter to their analysis is that, as shall become
clear in the following discussion, these proofs are
distinguished by the fact that, unlike the Passivity and
Continuity arguments, they in no way presuppose or depend on
immaterialism.

Berkeley's most zealous days as a defender of
immaterialism were in his youth. It was also in his early
works that the Passivity and Continuity arguments appear.
The divine visual language (DVL) and moral arguments, on the
other hand, receive their most elaborate defense in
Berkeley's later writings (*Alciphron* and, in the case of the
DVL argument, *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and
Explained*), which were written when Berkeley's apologetic
aims were as strong as ever but when defense of his
immaterialist metaphysics was no longer an important part of

his scholarly agenda.

It will be my primary concern in this chapter to demonstrate the following points: (1) neither the DVL proof nor the moral argument for God's existence presuppose immaterialism, (2) neither of these arguments is entirely original with Berkeley, and (3) both of these arguments ultimately fail to provide a compelling case for theism. Two of these theses, of course, must be qualified, in both cases regarding the DVL argument. An immaterialist version of this proof does appear in the *Principles*. However, it will become plain with my elucidation of the fuller *Alciphron* version that the rendering of the proof we find in the *Principles* is only incidentally immaterialist. With respect to the originality of this argument I must also qualify my claim. The DVL argument as a whole is indeed unique to Berkeley. He seems to have been the first (and the last) philosopher ever to defend it. In this sense the proof is novel. But upon careful analysis we shall find that it is an argument which is composed of two sub-arguments, specifically the classical analogical argument for other minds and the teleological argument for the existence of God, neither of which is original with Berkeley. So the sole innovation made by Berkeley lies in the way he combines these two traditional arguments. All of this, I hope, will become clear as we proceed.

II. The Divine Visual Language Argument

By now it should be clear that God is the intended center of Berkeley's philosophy. Nowhere is this more apparent than in his doctrine of the physical world as constituting a divine visual language. This metaphor, and the theistic proof which it constitutes, is unpacked in vivid detail in *Alciphron*. In the fourth dialogue Euphranor is challenged by the formidable "free thinker" after whom the work is named to offer some positive evidence for his claim that God exists. Euphranor's strategy is first to inquire of Alciphron how it is that we justify our belief in the existence of other minds. His reply is that minds are "inferred from appearances which are perceived by sense"[1] and he further grants that we may infer "from reasonable motions (such as appear calculated for a reasonable end) a rational cause, soul, or spirit".[2] Here Euphranor is using what has since become the traditional analogical argument for the existence of other minds. By comparing the observable behavior of others with that of our own and noting at the same time how such behavior in ourselves is accompanied by certain thoughts and emotions, we infer that these internal phenomena in our own experience must also have an analogue in the other person.

Now the unsuspecting Alciphron is persuaded by this

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1. *Alciphron*, IV, 4.

2. Ibid.

argument for other minds, thus providing Euphranor the
necessary leverage to complete his theistic proof, as the
latter asserts that just as in the case of other human
beings we infer an "invisible thinking principle or soul"
from outward signs, we may reason likewise to God's
existence from signs in the world.[3] Euphranor explains,

> Though I cannot with eyes of flesh behold the
> invisible God, yet I do in the strictest sense
> behold and perceive by all my senses such signs
> and tokens, such effects and operations, as
> suggest, indicate and demonstrate an invisible
> God, as certainly, and with the same evidence, at
> least, as any other signs perceived by sense do
> suggest to me the existence of your soul, spirit,
> or thinking principle...[4]

Upon glimpsing the conclusion to which his concessions
have led him, Alciphron at this point modifies his position
by noting that it is more specifically a person's speaking
which is the most convincing evidence for his having a mind.
That is, the best philosophical argument for the existence
of other souls consists in hearing them use a language. And
by "language" Alciphron intends

> ...sensible signs which have no similitude or
> necessary connexion with the things signified; so
> as by the apposite management of them to suggest
> and exhibit to my mind an endless variety of
> things, differing in nature, time, and place;
> thereby informing me, entertaining me, and
> directing me how to act, not only with regard to

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[3]. Because of the use of analogy in this theistic proof
to the argument for other minds, which is itself an analogical
argument, Michael Hooker calls Berkeley's argument a "second
order analogy". See his "Berkeley's Argument from Design" in
Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays, Colin Turbayne,
ed. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1982), 261-270.

[4]. *Alciphron*, IV, 5.

> things near and present, but also with regard to
> things distant and future.[5]

It is here that Euphranor proceeds to show how, by Alciphron's definition of a language, the sensible world qualifies as such and that therefore it must follow that a "Universal Agent or God" speaks to us in the workings of nature.

Colin Turbayne has brilliantly elucidated what he calls Berkeley's "metaphysical grammar", systematically capturing the implications of this notion of divine language in contemporary linguistic parlance, while carefully managing to avoid distortion of Berkeley's views.[6] For the remainder of this section I draw considerably from the work of Turbayne.

In *Siris*, Berkeley writes,

> 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...language
> or discourse.[7]

Berkeley is speaking quite literally in this passage, as Turbayne illustrates, by drawing numerous analogies between the "phenomena of nature" and human language. For example, the letters of the divine alphabet consist of "sensible

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[5]. Ibid., IV, 7.

[6]. "Berkeley's Metaphysical Grammar" in *Berkeley: Principles of Human Knowledge*, Colin Turbayne, ed. (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1970), pp. 3-36.

[7]. *Siris*, 254.

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qualities," e.g., "red", "smooth", "sweet", etc. These "letters" combine to form complexes which we refer to as "particulars" or "sensible objects," e.g., "apple". Like human language, the language of nature also has a syntax, which we call the "laws of nature". These rules are both descriptive and prescriptive. Their descriptive function is to provide explanations, predictions, and retrodictions of particular phenomena. We employ the "laws of nature" to interpret or "read" the language of nature, to learn why nature behaves as it does and how it is likely to behave in the future. As Berkeley explains, the laws of nature

> extend our prospect beyond what is present and
> near to us, and enable us to make very probable
> conjectures touching things that may have happened
> at very great distances of time and place, as well
> as to predict things to come; which sort of
> endeavor toward omniscience is much affected by
> the mind.[8]

Of course, the analogy here to human language is that in English, for instance, there is a rule of syntax regarding subject-verb agreement which explains why I used the word "is" rather than "are" or "was" earlier in this sentence and provides grounds for predicting what tense of this same verb I shall use to complete the sentence "The apple I ate yesterday ___ sweet." The prescriptive function of the laws of nature is to instruct us with regard to what ends can be achieved by certain kinds of actions. Berkeley writes, "the laws of nature give...us a sort of foresight which enables

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[8]. *Principles*, 105.

us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. And
without this we should be eternally at a loss..."[9] For, as
in human language, these syntactical rules of the language
of nature serve to guide and admonish us, to furnish us with
hypothetical imperatives such as "If you want to be
nourished, then eat," just as syntactical rules of human
language serve as guidelines and admonitions for ensuring
that we communicate effectively.

In light of the foregoing exposition, the DVL argument
may be represented as follows:

(a) The existence of another mind may be inferred from
the use of language, i.e. the use of signs in such
a way as to convey meaning.

(b) On the basis of what is communicated through the
use of language we may infer that a mind possesses
such attributes as intelligence, wisdom,
benevolence, etc. depending upon the kind of use
the author makes of it.

(c) The visible world consists of a complex system of
signs which instructs us about what to expect and
how to act to achieve certain ends; that is, the
visible world constitutes a language.

(d) Therefore, there is a mind who is the author of
this language (the world), and this mind is
exceedingly powerful, intelligent, wise, and
benevolent.

I want now to make two important observations. First, the
DVL argument does not operate on the supposition of
immaterialism. It might be contended against this claim
that premise (c) actually does assume Berkeley's
immaterialist ontology, specifically his belief that only

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9. Ibid., 31.

spirits and ideas exist, the latter constituting what we call the physical world which is visible to us. However, reading the DVL argument in this way is, I believe, a result of reading immaterialism into it, for to say that the visible world constitutes a sort of language simply does not by itself imply anything, pro or con, about the existence of matter, much less Berkeley's particular dualistic ontology. Anyway, if we consider the works in which Berkeley's doctrine of divine visual language appears, it becomes clear that it does not presuppose immaterialism. The doctrine first appears in *Towards a New Theory of Vision* which in no way assumes immaterialism.[10] Furthermore, the fullest articulation of the doctrine is in *Alciphron*, which, as noted earlier, is a treatise written for a general audience, not only for those who subscribe to the metaphysics he defended in the early works. In writing that work Berkeley is concerned to convince his readers of the truth of the Christian world-view, not to persuade them of his metaphysics. This is certainly not to suggest that in *Alciphron* Berkeley departs from his immaterialism. Everything in this treatise is perfectly consistent with his early metaphysics. I am only insisting that we restrict our present analysis of the DVL argument to the text of *Alciphron* and not project something onto our interpretation of it that is not there. When we successfully resist this

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[10]. Section 147.

temptation we find that the term "visible ideas" need mean nothing more than it says and that this proof speaks just as well to the matterist as to the immaterialist.

The other point I wish to make, perhaps a surprising one, is that this argument is not original, at least not essentially. Close inspection of the reasoning in this proof reveals that what Berkeley does is to combine two traditional philosophical arguments. While the final product seems new and unique, its basic elements are actually very familiar, once isolated from one another. The two arguments I am referring to are the analogical argument for other minds and the teleological argument for the existence of God. Careful examination of the individual premises in the DVL argument shows this to be the case. Premise (a) states that the <u>existence</u> of mind may be inferred from language use. Premise (b) makes the further claim that we can infer certain <u>attributes</u> of a particular mind from the kind of usage that is made of language.[11] This line of reasoning is essentially that of those who wish to argue that there are minds other than and similar to one's own, based on certain external similarities, such as

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[11]. My interpretation here concurs with that of commentators such as Paul Olscamp who believe that in *Alciphron* IV Berkeley attempts to conclude not just that God exists but also that the deity has a certain nature. See Olscamp's *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970). Michael Hooker is one commentator who challenges this interpretation, maintaining that Berkeley here attempts only to prove God's existence. See his "Berkeley's Argument from Design".

language use. Hence, premises (a) and (b) represent arguments by themselves, but they constitute only the first leg of Berkeley's DVL argument. It still remains for this analogical reasoning to be applied to God, the infinite mind, in Berkeley's terminology. This is precisely the function served by premise (c), which does so indirectly by referring to the world itself as a language. Now God is simply the "world mind", as this analogy would lead us to label it, the intelligent, purposeful being who "speaks" in the form of visible ideas just as we finite minds speak audibly. It is the inference to these particular attributes of the "world mind" which composes the teleological argument within the DVL argument, for this inference, like the inference to other finite minds, is based on the appearance of purpose in the so-called language of the visible world.

Having noted, then, that the DVL argument is just a combination of these two arguments, to show that Berkeley's proof is unoriginal we need only identify versions of these arguments preceding Berkeley. The historical antecedents of the argument from design are well known, extending as far back as the ancient Greeks. Plato and Aristotle both were convinced that the world displayed design and purpose. In the medieval period this conviction was shared by Aquinas who attempted to prove God's existence on the basis of apparent teleology in the world.[12]

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12. *Summa Theologica*, I, II, 3.

The "Golden Age" of the argument from design began in the seventeenth century.[13] It was a favorite among scientists as well as philosophers. Probably the most famous version of the argument from design is William Paley's watch analogy. Of course, this did not appear until long after Berkeley.[14] Paley, however, was not the first to use this analogy. In *Micrographia*, first published in 1665, Robert Hooke writes,

> So various and seemingly irregular are the
> generations or productions of insects, that he
> that shall carefully and diligently observe the
> several methods of nature therein, will have
> infinite cause further to admire the wisdom and
> providence of the Creator; for not only the same
> kind of creature may be produced from several
> kinds of ways, but the very same creature may
> produce several kinds: For, as divers watches may
> be made out of several materials, which may yet
> have all the same appearance, and move after the
> same manner, that is show the hour equally true,
> the one as the other, and out of the same kind of
> matter, like watches may be wrought differing
> ways; and as one and the same watch may, by being
> diversely agitated or moved by this or that agent,
> or after this or that manner, produce a quite
> contrary effect: so may it be with these most
> curious engines of insect bodies; the all wise God
> of nature may have so ordered and disposed the
> little *automatons*, that when nourished, acted, or
> enlivened by this cause, they produce one kind of
> effect or animate shape, when by another they act
> quite another way, and another animal is

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[13]. Meyrick H. Carre in his article "Physicotheology" characterizes the early modern period as such with regard to the argument from design. For a thorough history of this theistic proof during that period, I refer the reader to this article in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 6), Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: The MacMillan Co. and the Free Press, 1967), pp. 300-305.

[14]. *Natural Theology*, 1800.

produced.[15]

Here Hooke's argument takes as its departure point the apparent purpose in animate nature. Other versions of the argument from design have appealed solely to inanimate nature. A notable example among them is offered by Isaac Newton who in his *Principia* discourses in extensive detail about how the order in the heavens testifies to the wisdom and power of God. A sample passage reads:

> This most beautiful system of the sun, planets, and comets, could only proceed from the counsel and dominion of an intelligent and powerful Being. And if the fixed stars are the centres of other like systems, these, being formed by the like wise counsel, must be all subject to the dominion of One...

> This Being governs all things, not as the soul of the world, but as Lord over all; and on account of his dominion he is wont to be called *Lord God*...or *Universal Ruler*;...

> We know him only by his most wise and excellent contrivances of things, and final causes; we admire him for his perfections; but we reverence and adore him on account of his dominion: for we adore him as his servants; and a god without dominion, providence, and final causes, is nothing else but Fate and Nature.[16]

Robert Boyle is yet another scientist of this period who could not resist the temptation to draw theological conclusions from his scientific observations:

> So numberless a multitude, and so great a variety of birds, beasts, fishes, reptiles, herbs, shrubs, trees, stones, metals, minerals, stars, &c. and everyone of them plentifully furnished and endowed with all the qualifications requisite to the

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[15]. *Micrographia*, XLIV (1665).

[16]. *Principia*, "General Scholium", 1687.

attainment of the respective ends of its creation, are productions of a wisdom too limitless not to be peculiar to God.[17]

These examples of the argument from design are but a representative sampling of the many versions which appeared in the early modern period. Other thinkers who defended the proof include John Ray,[18] Samuel Clarke,[19] and William Derham.[20] So popular was this line of reasoning that in presenting his own version Berkeley no doubt felt himself to be in the mainstream, perhaps even obliged to try his hand at the argument. It is clear, then, that the DVL argument, since it is essentially an argument from design, is not original with Berkeley. Although in combining this line of reasoning with the argument from other minds Berkeley's proof is unique some respects, the central inference from design to designer is an old one. This is the point I want to stress.

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[17]. This passage is found in *The Usefulness of Experimental Natural Philosophy*, Part 1 (1663). I have taken this quote from *Robert Boyle on Natural Philosophy: An Essay with Selections from His Writings*, by Marie Boas Hall (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1965), p. 143. Boyle defends the argument from design in other works as well, including *The Excellence and Grounds of the Mechanical Philosophy*, (1674).

[18]. *The Wisdom of God Manifested in the Works of Creation*, (1691). This work, reprinted in 1705, was particularly popular in Berkeley's day.

[19]. *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God* (1704).

[20]. *Physico-theology* (1713) and *Astro-theology* (1715).

III. The Divine Visual Language
and Berkeley's Conception of Science

Having seen how Berkeley conceives of nature as a literal divine language, we are now in a position to understand what it is, on Berkeley's view, that the scientist actually does. Contrary to the popular conception in his own time (and which still flourishes in contemporary times), he held that it is not efficient causes which the scientist discovers in doing science, since for Berkeley the only efficient causes are spirits. What the scientist is actually engaged in is the enterprise of learning God's language, of interpreting divine utterances manifested in the workings of nature.[21] Thus, an important corollary of Berkeley's conception of nature is that it provides a theistic foundation for scientific inquiry. This is because induction, the reasoning process upon which science itself rests, is justified by the knowledge that God exists.[22] Now it is interesting to note that Berkeley writes before David Hume arrives on the philosophical scene, the man who is credited with first articulating what has since become known as the problem of induction. I say it is interesting because Berkeley's notion of nature as a divine visual language provides a sort of attempt to justify inductive

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[21]. See Jonathan Dancy, *Berkeley: An Introduction*, Chapter 8, "The Language of God" (New York: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1987), pp. 114-115.

[22]. The inspiration and germ of the account given here is to be found in Dancy's *Berkeley: An Introduction*, Chapter 8.

reasoning. I shall explain just how this works, but before
doing so it will be well to review the Humean problem of
induction.

Hume's critique of induction emerges in the context of
analysis of causation, specifically our belief in causal
laws, that is, that in the future similar effects will
follow from similar causes as they have in the past. His
argument is two-pronged: If our belief in causal laws is to
be justified, this must be done either via reason or
experience. He attacks the first approach on the following
grounds. Since I can conceive the occurrence of any cause
without its being accompanied by its usual effect, it
follows that it is not impossible that any effect of any
cause should not follow from it. For "whatever is
intelligible, and can be distinctly conceived, implies no
contradiction, and can never be proved false by any
demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning *a priori*."[23]
In appealing to experience to justify causal laws one can
appeal to past and present experiences only. However, in
doing so we inevitably beg the question, since it is our
belief that the future will resemble the past that we are
trying to justify. Hume concludes that "It is impossible,
therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this
resemblance of the past to the future; since all these
arguments are founded on the supposition of that

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[23]. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, 2.

resemblance."[24] Thus, to rephrase Hume's argument, in order to justify our belief that the future will resemble the past (that nature is uniform), our only possible philosophical recourse is to appeal to the fact that in the past nature has been uniform, but in arguing this way we presuppose that nature is uniform, the very proposition we are attempting to justify. Hence, we are arguing in a circle. The upshot, in Hume's view, is that our belief in the uniformity of nature is unjustified, as he writes,

> there is nothing in any object considered in itself which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it; and, even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience.[25]

Hume's own response to this problem is to take a pragmatic tack. While acknowledging what he considers to be a lack of rational grounds for believing that the future will resemble the past, he concedes that this belief is irresistible, and although entirely a product of instinct and custom, it is in fact very practical. If we are to get along in life, we must assume, if not in word at least in deed, that nature is uniform. It is a sort of "animal faith" which abides with us for our own good.[26] This

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24. Ibid.

25. *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, III, 12.

26. See Hume's *Enquiry*, XII, 1. This notion, exploited by, among others, George Santayana in his *Skepticism and Animal Faith*, is not a pejorative one for Hume, as it is simply descriptive of the fact that despite our exalted status

strategy of dealing with Hume's critique of induction has
been judged deficient by many philosophers, and so a wide
array of alternative tactics have been employed in the
interest of offering a satisfactory solution.[27]

So what is the Berkeleyan proposal for solving the
problem of induction? It begins by noting that we observe
certain regularities in nature, for example that unsupported
objects fall, fire burns, and that a day is twenty-four
hours long. Now it is also the case that, as we observe
that given certain qualifications these regularities are
without exception and have in the past obtained universally,
we are able to exploit this knowledge to our own benefit.
We learn to get out of the way of falling objects, to keep a
safe distance from hot objects, and to refrain from leaping
from great heights. We also learn when to sow and when to
reap and how to warm ourselves when the cold season comes.
In short, regularities in nature help us to survive and even
to prosper in the world. The above examples are perhaps
mundane, but of course, as humankind through the
sophistication of science and technology has discovered more
subtle "laws" of nature, we have been able to secure more
substantial and impressive benefits. Discoveries of Boyle's
law, the ideal gas law, the laws of thermodynamics, and the

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as **rational** animals, at the end of the day we actually have
good reasons for very few of our beliefs.

[27]. Notable tactics include those of Whewell, Popper,
Reichenbach, Black, and Braitwaite.

laws of electricity, light, and radio waves, etc. have brought us such goods as the air conditioner, electric heat, the telephone, television, radio, and the internal combustion engine. In these and countless other ways regularities in nature prove useful for the general welfare of humankind and thus, on a Berkeleyan account, testify to the existence of a purposeful, intelligent, and powerful mind at work behind the cosmic scene who seeks to benefit his creatures. That is, for Berkeley, the laws of nature display the deity's benevolence, among other attributes.

Now since God is benevolent, and, we must suppose, unchanging in his nature, we can trust that the regularities in nature will indeed remain constant as they have in the past, that they are in fact lawful. That is, we can trust that the future will resemble the past. Why? Because if, after observing the constancy of nature and employing this knowledge for our own benefit, this uniformity were to cease, the results would be harmful to us. We might cite as a simple example the chemistry of water. If the freezing point of water suddenly rose four degrees, the consequences for the human race, as well as for the rest of the animal kingdom, would be devastating. Ice would sink instead of floating, so oceans and lakes would freeze from top to bottom thus killing all marine life and making human life as we know it virtually impossible. Briefly put, humankind would suffer terribly if there occurred deviations from the normal course of nature's basic operations, and this would

be inconsistent with the benevolence of God and his love for his creatures. Therefore, on Berkeley's principles, we can and should believe that the future will resemble the past, since the world is ruled by a loving God. Providence assures us that there are indeed "laws" of nature, so our belief that nature is uniform is not mere instinct or custom but is justified and hence rational.

The Berkeleyan account, then, may be represented by the following schema:

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                                                      Uniformity
  Observed                                            of Nature
Regularities -> Benevolence -> Trustworthiness -> (Observed
  in Nature        of God           of God            and unob-
                                                      served)
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From the regularities of nature and the benefits derived from exploiting them we learn the benevolence and trustworthiness of God. And given our knowledge of these two attributes of God we are justified in believing that nature is uniform. In a nutshell, this is Berkeley's anticipatory reply to Hume. Now there are some important objections to this general account which need to be addressed, but before doing so I want first to draw attention to some interesting corollaries.

First, let me note a significant implication of this view for Berkeley's philosophy of science generally. Since the laws of nature are some of the most basic tools of empirical science, it follows from Berkeley's justification of induction that scientific enterprise as whole is girded

on the foundation of faith in the "author of nature".[28]
Rational scientific investigation, it seems for Berkeley,
critically requires reliance upon trust in God. And every
empirical scientist who embarks on gaining insight about the
natural world at least implicitly demonstrates this faith.
Berkeley thus unites faith and reason in empirical science,
and this constitutes one more instance in which he shows
himself to be a relentless defender of the faith.

Secondly, Berkeley's account accommodates a reasonable
explanation of miracles. He writes,

> It may indeed on some occasions be necessary that
> the Author of Nature display overruling power in
> producing some appearance out of the ordinary
> series of things. Such exceptions from the
> general rules of nature are proper to surprise and
> awe men into an acknowledgment of the Divine
> Being...[29]

A miracle, then, differs from an ordinary event only insofar
as it is "out of the ordinary series of things." Its cause
and purpose, however, are the same as that of nature's usual
operations. God is the cause, and his purpose is to
convince humankind of his goodness and power and ultimately
to draw people to himself. So strictly speaking, for
Berkeley nature is not absolutely uniform. There do occur
what appear to be exceptions to its general rules.

Now we may observe here, that this doctrine of miracles

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[28]. As we have already seen Berkeley's use of the
expression "author" when referring to God amounts to no mere
metaphor. Rather, he intends this appellation to be taken
quite literally.

[29]. *Principles*, 63.

when combined with Berkeley's solution to the problem of
induction is not without its difficulties. It seems here
that he is wanting to have his cake and eat it too, for he
uses both the regularity of nature as well as its occasional
irregularities to infer the existence of the deity as well
as certain facts about the attributes of this being. Now
either there is regularity in nature or there is not, and
depending upon which is actually the case the theist may
conclude that the deity is benevolent or that miracles do
occur, but he cannot have it both ways. Berkeley's likely
reply here would be to insist that he can have it both ways,
since the exceptions to the rules in nature are every bit as
helpful to the creatures as the regularities.[30] That is,
these deviations like the rules themselves are always
intended for the sake of a creature's welfare. Thus, the
rational person is still justified in trusting God, despite
his occasional divergences from cosmic routine.[31]

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[30]. An irresistible objection here regards the so called
miracles in Berkeley's religious tradition which resulted in
the harm of many human beings. A case in point is the story
of the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus. The Israelites
surely benefitted from this exception to the laws of nature,
but the Egyptians did not. At the least, such an account
raises questions about divine goodness. Berkeley's treatment
of this issue I examine in chapter five, on the problem of
evil.

[31]. Berkeley's doctrine of miracles is similar to, though
not identical with, that of C.S. Lewis who maintains that "A
miracle is emphatically not an event without a cause or
without results. Its cause is the activity of God.... The
great complex event called Nature, and the new particular
event introduced into it by the miracle, are related by their
common origin in God." From *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*
(New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1960), p. 60.

I should note in passing that a belief in miracles might even serve to bolster Berkeley's analogy between human and divine visual language, for it is true that in any human language there are exceptions to many of the syntactical rules, though by and large a given rule is applicable.

IV. Objections to the Berkeleyan Approach to Induction

The Berkeleyan approach to induction will be found unsatisfactory by some because in an essential respect his solution marks no genuine advance on Hume's response to his own criticisms, that our sole means of philosophical redress in the wake of such a critique is to appeal to faith. The only noteworthy difference in Berkeley's case, the critic might lament, is that the sort of faith he endorses is religious faith rather than Hume's "animal faith", and this is hardly a desirable amendment for the agnostic or atheist.

The best response to this complaint is the simplest. What the critic points to in the above objection, that Berkeley's attempted solution to the problem of induction merely supplants animal faith with religious faith, is precisely Berkeley's design. For he seeks to lead us to the sovereign deity behind the laws of nature that we might put our ultimate trust in the former rather than in his works or ourselves. It was, after all, Berkeley's first concern to "inspire in [his] readers with a pious sense of the presence

of God."[32] And what better way to accomplish this end
than by showing that the legitimacy of empirical science,
historically one of the most secular of intellectual
pursuits, depends fundamentally on a trust in God.

A related criticism regards a problem which emerges if
we press Berkeley's analogy between human language and the
divine visual language. It is well known that the syntax of
any human language (e.g. English, German, French, etc.)
changes over time, albeit very slightly and only over long
periods of time. Now the critic could conceivably argue
that since in Berkeley's scheme the laws of nature are
analogous to linguistic syntax, it would seem to follow that
the laws of nature should be expected to change as well.
And if this is the case, then the regularity in nature is
merely relative to the phenomena we experience. And from
this it follows that we really do not have the grounds to
conclude that God is benevolent, as Berkeley thinks we do.
In response to this objection an important clarification
must be made with regard to the structure of Berkeley's
argument. Specifically, we must keep in mind that
Berkeley's is a two-step argument. In the first step he
makes an inference to the existence of an intelligent deity
on the basis of the analogy between human language and the
visual phenomena we experience. It is in the second step of
his argument where he infers that this being is benevolent

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[32]. *Principles*, 156.

and loving because of the regularity of these phenomena.
And once having established this point, of course, Berkeley
has obtained what he deems sufficient grounds for concluding
that regularity in nature will continue, that is, that
nature is uniform. Now notice that to acknowledge
syntactical evolution and variation need not disrupt the
first part of the argument because the essence of the
analogy is preserved, namely that in both human language and
the visual phenomena there are certain rules by which the
"signs" are (or must be) arranged and organized. It is
irrelevant in this first part of the argument that such
rules could evolve, however significantly, so long as there
remain rules which serve to govern the "meaning" of the
discourse. Thus, the objection does not touch the first
half of Berkeley's argument. So what about Berkeley's
subsequent argument, from regularity in the visual language
to the benevolence of God? Here again, the possibility of
mutation in the syntactical rules, in this case known as the
"laws of nature", does not nullify Berkeley's inference, for
two reasons. First, we cannot be certain that the laws of
nature (thermodynamics, gravity, inertia, the gas laws,
etc.) do not themselves mutate minutely over very long spans
of time (say, trillions of years), in which case a more
exact analogy between human and divine visual language would
be preserved. Secondly, even if it is the case that there
is no such change, however slight or slow, in the laws of
nature, this does not impugn the second step of Berkeley's

argument because there all that is necessary for us to infer divine benevolence is enough observable regularity to enable us to exploit this regularity for our own welfare. Thus, in neither part of Berkeley's argument is it necessary that the syntax of human language be perfectly analogous to the syntax of the divine visual language, i.e. the laws of nature.

A third, more serious objection regards a questionable premise implicit in Berkeley's account. Even if we grant God's existence and furthermore that he is in sovereign control of all of nature's operations as Berkeley suggests, there still remains the dubious claim that God is unchanging, a crucial assumption in the Berkeleyan justification of induction. Aside from the theist's belief that God's actions are consistent, how do we know God's nature is itself constant? And how is the theist's belief in this claim any more rational than the non-theist's belief in the uniformity of nature itself?

This objection raises some serious and complex issues which could lead us into a discussion of numerous tangents, but here I have time only to address its queries broadly. Berkeley's probable answer to the first question raised in this objection is that just as we must have faith in the being of God we must have faith that his nature is constant, that tomorrow he will not suddenly transmute into a

malevolent deity.[33]   And to the second question, it may be answered that a faith that God preserves the uniformity of nature's operations is more rational than faith in the laws of nature themselves because of who God is--an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent being.   In brief, he is the sort of being who is more worthy of the trust of his creatures than are the laws of nature (a term which, incidentally, denotes no object in the world but only describes the feature of regularity discernable in the phenomena of nature).

If Berkeley's divine visual language argument can be seen as an anticipation of Hume, it is not the only such instance.   At one juncture in the *Dialogues* Hylas advances a Humean view of mind.[34]   Elsewhere, Hylas is the mouthpiece for skeptical arguments about knowledge of the external world strikingly similar to those offered by Hume in chapter VII of his *Enquiry*.[35]   The theme to be found in Berkeley's rejoinders to Humean skepticism is that we, philosophers and lay persons alike, must in the end resort to faith in God in order to combat doubt and secure knowledge, whether its object be the external world or our belief that the future will resemble the past.

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[33]. In chapter seven we shall find that Berkeley allows other particulars about the nature of God, e.g. the Holy Trinity, to be entirely a matter of faith.

[34]. *Dialogues*, p. 61.   See also *Philosophical Commentaries*, 577, 579, and 580.

[35]. Ibid., p. 113.

V. Criticisms of the Divine Visual Language Argument

Returning now to the divine visual language argument itself, we may note some difficulties with this proof which perhaps prevent Berkeley's project of creating a theistic foundation for science from even getting off the ground. The general form of the proof, we will recall, is this:

(a) The existence of another mind may be inferred from the use of language, i.e. the use of signs in such a way as to convey meaning.

(b) On the basis of what is communicated through the use of language we may infer that a mind possesses such attributes as intelligence, wisdom, benevolence, etc. depending upon the kind of use the author makes of it.

(c) The visible world consists of a complex system of signs which instructs us about what to expect and how to act to achieve certain ends; that is, the visible world constitutes a language.

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(d) Therefore, there is a mind who is the author of this language (the world), and this mind is exceedingly powerful, intelligent, wise, and benevolent.

I shall focus on a few very serious problems with this argument. The first concerns the sub-arguments found within premises (a) and (b), both of which make inferences about minds other than one's own. In premise (a) the existence of another mind is inferred from language use. In premise (b) certain attributes of other minds are inferred from particular uses of language. This part of Berkeley's argument is an early version of the analogical argument for other minds. This is an argument which is notorious for its popularity despite its fatal flaws. The main problem with

versions of the analogical argument like Berkeley's here is
that while they point to many observable similarities
between oneself and another person (including not only
language use but facial expressions, bodily postures, etc.)
and while these tangible parallels are suggestive of the
notion that the other person indeed has a private mental
life much like one's own, these parallels are insufficient
to demonstrate with certainty that other persons have minds
(much less that all other persons have minds). That is to
say, by its nature the analogical argument, even if
successful, can only make the proposition that there are
minds other than one's own probable.

But this is only the beginning of the difficulty with
the analogical argument for other minds. The argument
cannot even succeed in proving that there are probably minds
other than one's own. This is because analogical arguments,
being inductive, depend for their strength in part on the
number of cases to which the case in question can be shown
to be analogous. Now in the case of the analogical argument
for other minds the inference is based on only one case in
which one knows there to be a correlation between physical
and mental attributes--one's own, hardly a sufficient
sampling from which to infer the existence of other minds.
The seriousness of this difficulty becomes especially
glaring when we consider that this argument is intended to
justify our belief in not just one or two minds but millions
of them--every human being we encounter, in fact. Hence,

the analogical argument for other minds reasons on the basis of observation of mental attributes in one case, our own, to the conclusion that all other persons have mental attributes, minds of their own.[36]

Now these troubles with the first part of the divine language argument seem to be devastating, but there is a further serious problem with the proof. In short, the argument either begs the question or else it is invalid. If one understands language to be the use of signs by which one person communicates to another, then even to suggest that the visible world is a sort of language, as in premise (c), is already to assert that there is a personage communicating to human beings through the natural world. Which is to say, this premise is assuming the existence of the entity whose existence is being inferred in the conclusion. This means the argument is viciously circular.

Now in order to avoid this charge of circularity, Berkeley must adopt a naturalistic conception of "language", where no notion of a person responsible for the use of signs is built into the it. But if this adjustment is made, the conclusion of the argument will no longer follow from the premises, for in (a) and (b) it is crucial in the analogical argument for other minds that language use be a characteristic peculiar to minds. To deny this, as Berkeley

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[36]. For further criticisms of the analogical argument for other minds see J.M. Shorter's "Other Minds" in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (vol. 6), Paul Edwards, ed. (New York: The Macmillan Co. and the Free Press, 1967), pp. 7-13.

would have to in taking the naturalistic view of language, would render the analogical argument inductively weak. The critical first leg of the DVL argument, then, could never succeed. Far from concluding the existence of the divine mind, then, Berkeley's argument cannot prove the existence of any mind other than his own.

In addition to these problems there are a number of traditional criticisms of the teleological argument that Berkeley's argument must overcome. For instance, some of Hume's criticisms from the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* apply. First, even if successful, Berkeley's argument would not guarantee that there is only one author of nature. Is it not conceivable that in "reading" the language of nature we are actually observing the conversation of a plurality of deities? This hypothesis is not ruled out by Berkeley's reasoning. Moreover, there are certain considerations which might actually recommend such a scenario, such as the fact of natural evil. The notion of a plurality of deities could explain evil as the result of the disagreements of the gods or as miscommunication among them, e.g. a tornado results when the cold front caused by one deity collides with the warm front of another.

Secondly, what Berkeley calls the "language of nature" might have resulted from random, natural processes. One could argue that over infinite time the intermingling of different kinds of matter must at some time produce a world such as ours where there is apparent design. So we need not

appeal to some intelligent mind to explain it. The Big Bang theory in astronomy and Darwinian gradualism in biology are attempts to account for the natural evolution of order in the world, and they do not appeal to any intelligent designer. In these or similar ways one might successfully explain apparent design in the universe naturalistically, rejecting Berkeley's tacit assumption that design (or what appears to us as design) demands a designer.

Thus, it seems that Berkeley's DVL proof falls short of proving the existence of the theistic God. The argument suffers not only from defects which plague all teleological arguments, but, as we have seen, it has some serious difficulties which are peculiar to Berkeley's particular formulation of the proof. But the DVL argument is not Berkeley's only teleological proof. To his other argument from design we now turn.

VI. The Argument from Morals

Although unrecognized by commentators (at least in the literature I have surveyed), Berkeley defends an argument from morals. The lack of scholarly attention to it is probably due to several factors, not the least of which are the facts that it is neither an original nor particularly interesting argument.

In the following discussion I intend to make three points, none of which I believe to be controversial. First, the moral argument is an application of teleological

reasoning to the moral realm. It is an argument specifically from _moral_ design in the universe to the existence of God. Secondly, the moral argument is not original with Berkeley. This follows from the fact that it is a species of teleological argument, a line of reasoning which I have already shown to have had numerous pre-Berkeley formulations. Thirdly, Berkeley's argument from morals does not arise from nor in any way involve immaterialism. In fact, it is a proof which does not demand allegiance to any particular metaphysical system. That Berkeley's most explicit formulation of the argument appears in _Alciphron_ underscores this fact, since this was a work intended for a metaphysically heterogeneous audience. Finally, I shall show that the proof is a failure, succumbing to several different devastating criticisms.

The first appearance of a suggestion of the moral argument in Berkeley's writings is found in a 1714 sermon entitled "On Charity". The sermon begins with an enumeration of various evidences for the truth of Christianity, culminating in the proclamation that,

> among all the numerous attestations to the
> divinity of our most holy Faith, there is not any
> that carries with it a more winning conviction,
> than that wch may be drawn from the sweetness and
> excellency of the Christian morals. There runs
> throughout the Gospel and Epistles such a spirit
> of Love, Gentleness, Charity and good-nature that
> as nothing is better calculated to procure the
> happiness of Mankind, so nothing can carry with it
> a surer evidence of its being derived from the

common Father of us all.[37]

These remarks constitute the germ of an argument that appears fully developed nearly two decades later in *Alciphron*. In the third dialogue of that work we find the interlocutors discussing so-called moral beauty in the world. Euphranor declares,

> Doubtless there is a beauty of the mind, a charm in virtue, a symmetry and proportion in the moral world. This moral beauty was known to the ancients by the name of *honestum*...[38]

In what exactly does this moral beauty consist? It consists in proper or just proportion. And proportions "are to be esteemed just and true only as they are relative to some certain use or end."[39] (That this is the case Euphranor takes much time to show by a series of illustrations and examples from architecture, dress, and interior design.) But where are such proportions evident in the world? A certain beauty is perceived in the hope of reward and fear of punishment to be found among many people, facts about human psychology which are "highly expedient to cast the balance of pleasant and profitable on the side of virtue, and thereby very much conduce to the benefit of human society."[40] Expectancy of reward or punishment for one's

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[37]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 27.

[38]. *Alciphron* III, 4. The reference here is to passages in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1109a, 29; 1144a, 26; 1169a, 34; and Plato's *Alcibiades* II, 145c.

[39]. Ibid., III, 9.

[40]. Ibid.

conduct, that is, is useful for making individuals virtuous and improving social relations. This universally observed relation of means to end suggests proportion, and hence beauty. Other facts about the moral life of human kind, such as conscience, sense of duty, and the love of virtue further suggest an ordered moral system. About all of this the free-thinker concurs, yet s/he is reluctant to admit that this implies a transcendent, divine source of this order. It is here that Euphranor insists that no real moral beauty in the world can be acknowledged without also recognizing an intelligent mind responsible for it. He says,

> I would fain know what beauty can be found in a moral system, formed, connected and governed by chance, fate, or any other blind, unthinking principle? Forasmuch as without thought there can be no end or design; and without an end there can be no use; and without use there is no aptitude or fitness of proportion, from whence beauty springs.[41]

In this passage we find the linchpin of Berkeley's moral argument. Remarkably, it is the same assumption which figures centrally in the DVL argument, namely that design demands a designer. The Moral argument, it turns out, is but another form of teleological argument for the existence of God. It may be summarized as follows:

> (a) There exists moral beauty in the world consisting in an orderly system of commands, rewards for the virtuous, punishment for the wicked, which prompts obedience to moral laws and leads to the general benefit of humankind.

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41. Ibid., III, 10.

    (b) Such moral beauty, order, and harmony is possible only if there is an intelligent mind behind it.

    (c) Therefore, there exists an intelligent mind (God) who is the cause of the moral beauty in the world.

Closer examination reveals that this argument resembles the DVL argument in more than just its appeal to teleology. The two are exactly parallel arguments, the only difference being the subject matter with which they deal. The DVL proof argues from design to intelligent designer in the descriptive realm, the world as it is. The moral argument reasons from design to designer in the prescriptive realm, the world as it ought to be. The former notes the usefulness of regular, ordered sensible ideas for achieving certain ends and concludes a mind is responsible, while the latter reasons from the usefulness of certain moral facts. Thus, these two arguments share and exploit the following assumptions as they infer the existence of a divine mind:

1. Certain regularities are observable in the world which are useful for human well-being.

2. These regularities constitute a kind of order or design.

3. Design is only explicable in terms of an intelligent mind which is its cause.

These three propositions, used in both the DVL and moral arguments, constitute the basic logic of the classical teleological argument for the existence of God. Essentially, then, what Berkeley has done in *Alciphron* is to apply this same logical structure to two different subject matters, visible phenomena and morals. Because of this

logical structure of the proofs, they are both properly designated "teleological" arguments.

Now this is a significant insight, for in uncovering this fact we discover that like the DVL argument the moral argument is not original, and for some of the same reasons. Above we saw just how long and varied is the history of argument from design. We noted, in particular, historical precedents in the writings of seventeenth century scientists Boyle, Newton, and Hooke. It is true that Berkeley's moral argument is unusual in that it focusses in particular on moral order in the world, but even in this regard it is not entirely unique. For many who defended the teleological argument included considerations of apparent moral design in their proofs. In his argument from moral teleology, Berkeley has merely isolated this particular aspect of teleology and built an argument upon it. The same has been done with other particular kinds of design, e.g. biological,[42] astronomical,[43] chemical and physical,[44] etc. But they merely constitute subject-specific formulations of the teleological argument. This, I

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[42]. The argument quoted above from Hooke's *Micrographia* is a good example, for its subject matter is restricted to small insects and microscopic life forms.

[43]. The previously quoted argument in Newton's *Principia* is an example.

[44]. For instance, see Robert Newman's "Inanimate Design as a Problem for Nontheistic Worldviews" in *Evidence For Faith*, John Warwick Montgomery, ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing Company, 1991), pp. 61-70.

maintain, is just what Berkeley has done in his moral argument for the existence of God.

It should be apparent by now that in arguing to the existence and providence of God from moral order Berkeley does not assume immaterialism to make his case for God's existence. This is clear from a number of considerations. First, as we have just seen, it fits squarely within the classical tradition of teleological arguments, a tradition which is metaphysically ecumenical, inclusive of philosophers subscribing to substance ontologies as well as scientists who do not concern themselves with metaphysics and are therefore not formally committed to a particular theory on the subject. Secondly, if we take into account the places in the Berkeleyan corpus in which the moral argument appears, we will notice that it is found only in works which have no metaphysical agenda. The principal source for the argument is *Alciphron*, which, as I have mentioned, was written for a general audience and did not presuppose commitment to any particular philosophical perspective, metaphysical or otherwise, on the part of its readers. Thirdly, and most importantly, close inspection of Alciphron III reveals that immaterialism is not an assumption of the moral argument. In my summary representation of the argument, which closely follows the text, this is made plain. Both premise (a), that there is moral order in the world, and premise (b), that order implies the existence of an intelligent mind, are

propositions which could be and in fact have been affirmed by matterists.

VII. Criticism of the Moral Argument

Now that I have shown that Berkeley's Moral argument is neither original nor assumptive of immaterialism, it is time to critically evaluate the proof. Earlier we saw that the DVL argument is irremediably flawed, due to, among other reasons, the logical problems of the proof. Does this mean, then, that the Moral argument is also doomed to failure, since its logical structure is basically identical to that of the DVL proof? The short answer to this question, I believe, is yes. But there are further problems with the argument which make it, if possible, an even more abysmal failure as a theistic proof.

First, premise (a) could be false. How do we know there is really moral "order" in the world? And what would constitute moral "disorder"? It seems there is enough evidence of injustice, immorality, and disregard of notions of ultimate reward and punishment to undermine claims about moral order and suggest instead that there is actually moral chaos. Moreover, there is disagreement over which moral code, if any, is the single correct one. In eighteenth century Europe the suggestion of a pervasive moral beauty constituted by such things as universal moral commands and the expectation of reward and punishment might have had some intuitive appeal. But in the late twentieth century, this

notion seems much less plausible, especially given the immense diversity of competing moral codes and beliefs about morality in general, from casuistry to moral skepticism. Today the diversity is so impressive, in fact, that a large contingent of ethicists have decided to abandon commitment to a single moral perspective, opting instead to practice applied ethics borrowing moral principles from various moral traditions, even when these traditions are hopelessly incompatible.[45] This movement towards moral eclecticism, it seems, constitutes a concession to the notion that there is no single moral order in the world, Berkeley's insistence to the contrary notwithstanding.

Secondly, premise (b) could be false. What evidence is there to support the claim that design demands a designer? Although this is a proposition that nearly every defender of teleological-type arguments assumes, typically it is not supported with arguments. Instead, it seems to be considered self-evident. However, this position is not convincing, mainly because there are many persons to whom it is not obviously true.

Finally, Berkeley's argument from morals is invalid. Even granting that there has to be a designer to the moral order in the world, this does not mean the designer has to

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[45]. See Stanley Clarke and Evan Simpson's *Anti-theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989) and Martin Benjamin's *Splitting the Difference: Compromise and Integrity in Ethics and Politics* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1990).

be the God of Christian theism. The cause of such order, we
might grant, would likely be an intelligent and moral being,
but why should we conclude that this being is omniscient,
omnipotent, omnipresent, or even personal? In fact, why
need we conclude that this being is transcendent or even
unified? Can we not propose reasonably that the cause of
moral design in the world is to be found in human beings
themselves? In the dialogue we find the free thinker
defending this very view, but Alciphron's perspective is but
a single version of this position, a theory of "moral sense"
akin to that proposed by Shaftesbury, and later by Hume. If
Euphranor defeats Alciphron's arguments, then he has
triumphed over only one specific naturalistic explanation
for moral order in the world. There remain other accounts
which are untouched by Euphranor's logic. Might not what we
call moral order in the world simply be a human construct,
projected onto the world to serve some practical end, such
as the regulation of conduct and the preservation of
society? Or, if moral subjectivism or even cultural
relativism were true, the perception of moral order could be
explained entirely in terms of individual tastes or cultural
mores and folkways. Such metaethical theories account for
moral "order" in such a way that no appeal to any universal
moral code need be assumed. This is not to suggest that
either of these theories is true, but only to point out that
it is _logically possible_ that both of the premises in
Berkeley's argument from moral teleology could be true and

the conclusion still be false, which is to say that the argument is invalid.

Thus it seems Berkeley's teleological arguments fall short of their mark. They do not succeed in proving the God of Christian theism, though like so many versions of teleological proofs they are perhaps psychologically persuasive. Kant noted this feature of the argument from design and praised the proof because of its capacity to inspire the scientific study of nature. Nevertheless, he rightly notes that because of the flawed logic of the argument, it can never succeed in demonstrating the existence of God.[46] Berkeley's versions of the argument from design prove to be no exception.

VIII. Conclusion

I want to review now some key points which have been made to this point in our discussion of Berkeley's apologetics. First, the precise role of immaterialism in Berkeley's theistic proofs has been shown. The Continuity argument crucially presupposes immaterialism, as is evidenced by its use of the principle *esse est percipi aut percipere* as one of its premises. The moral argument does not assume immaterialism, as is shown by its logical structure as a particular kind of argument from design and by the fact that it appears only in those works which are

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[46]. *Critique of Pure Reason*, A621/B649-A630/B658.

intended for a general audience. As regards the Passivity and DVL arguments, the role of immaterialism is more complicated. The Passivity proof does not presuppose immaterialism per se (the thesis that *esse est percipi aut percipere*), but it does rest on what for Berkeley is a corollary of this thesis, namely his doctrine that only spirits cause ideas. Finally, the DVL argument does not presuppose immaterialism, but in the *Principles* we find a version of the argument in which it is used as an enhancement of the Passivity proof and thus is expressed in the vocabulary of immaterialism.

Secondly, we have found that Berkeley's arguments for the existence of God are original only in so far as they presuppose or contain elements of immaterialism, as shown by the fact that besides the Continuity proof (the sole proof which is thoroughly immaterialist in its reasoning) the arguments used by Berkeley have historical precedents. The Passivity argument can be construed as Berkeley's adaptation of the cosmological argument to his immaterialist metaphysics. And the DVL and moral arguments are each formulations of the argument from design.

Thirdly, we saw in chapter two that immaterialism is not inconsistent with the scriptures of his religious tradition and therefore is not a hindrance to Berkeley's apologetic ends. Also, we found that immaterialism actually offers the Christian theist a metaphysical conceptual scheme with more explanatory power than the traditional matterist

perspective, especially regarding the Creation account and the biblical notion of immediate divine providence.[47]

Finally, to defeat Berkeley's theistic proofs, criticism of immaterialism is <u>not necessary</u>. I have noted other serious, probably fatal objections to Berkeley's two causal arguments which do presuppose or contain elements of immaterialism, objections which do not call the truth of immaterialism into question. Thus, it seems immaterialism is not the weapon against atheism Berkeley thought it was.[48]

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[47]. I should also note, although I have not argued this point specifically, that immaterialism may be considered an apologetic device in the sense that it serves to generate new twists on old proofs, such that the God at the conclusion of the Passivity and Continuity arguments looks more like the God of the Old and New Testaments which is intimately involved with his creation and which is a "thou" (personal creator) rather than the "it" (impersonal artificer) of the traditional cosmological and teleological arguments. See Tipton, pp. 297-298 and Ritchie, pp. 126-128.

[48]. Cf *Dialogues*, p. 66.

CHAPTER 5

The Problem of Evil

The Problem of Evil

I. Introduction

Like any thorough apologist, Berkeley was concerned to work out a reply to those who would impugn faith in God on the basis of the presence of evil in the world. Christian philosophers and theologians before Berkeley, such as Augustine, Aquinas, Malebranche, and Leibniz, sensed the necessity to reconcile two apparently incompatible facts: the presence of evil in the world and the existence of a loving, all-powerful God. They assumed, moreover, that the burden of proof fell upon them to assuage the apparent philosophical "problem" that evil posed, and each proposed a battery of solutions in hope of diminishing the nagging doubts that evil is prone to instill in the sensitive believer. Berkeley was no different in this regard. Like his ecclesial ancestors he parades a plurality of theodicies before his audience, no one of which is entirely satisfying but which together create perhaps as formidable a defense of theism against the stubborn problem of evil as can be found among the theists of his generation.[1]

In Berkeley's time the problem of evil was not

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[1]. This approach to the problem of evil, as it relies on the strength of no single explanation for evil's presence but appeals to a number of partial explanations, is a method appropriate for a problem as complex and multidimensional as evil. John Hare calls such strategy a "disjunctive theodicy". See his article "The Problem of Evil" in *Evidence for Faith*, J.W. Montgomery, ed. (Dallas: Word Publishing Inc., 1991).

formulated as a formal disproof of the existence of God, as is sometimes done today[2], though with the appearance of Hume shortly after Berkeley this more zealous atheistic tradition found its inception. For Berkeley and his predecessors evil seemed to be looked upon as more or less a quirky fact about the world that demanded an explanation, an obstacle to be surmounted by the religious apologist but hardly a serious threat completely to undermine claims to rational belief in God's existence. For Berkeley, theodicies are employed in order to obviate inevitable objections to his theistic proofs and his positive apologetic program. They are not set forth as decisive rebuttals of aggressive skeptical arguments from evil. This will be an important point to keep in mind as we examine Berkeley's theodicies, for overlooking this fact will invite the twentieth century reader to judge Berkeley's analysis flippant in tone and philosophically reckless.

In this chapter I shall examine each of the theodicies used by Berkeley in the face of the problem of evil. It will become clear that while some of the arguments he deploys are traditional, stock theodicies, he yet provides us with a slant on the topic which is unique and highly instructive. We shall also discover that, like his theistic proofs, the originality of Berkeley's defense of Christian theism on the issue of evil consists in its use of

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[2]. J.L. Mackie and Antony Flew are examples.

immaterialism.

Perhaps the most ancient treatment of the problem of evil is to be found in the Old Testament book of Job, where we find the righteous man wrestling with the paradoxical fact that God allows, even causes, evil to exist. In the face of his terrible suffering Job makes his eloquent complaint: "Does it please you to oppress me, to spurn the work of your hands, while you smile on the schemes of the wicked?"[3] And elsewhere he remarks, chillingly: "God has wronged me and drawn his net around me. Though I cry, 'I've been wronged!' I get no response; though I call for help there is no justice."[4] Although we do not find in the book of *Job* a precise formulation of the problem of evil, these and other texts do represent a passionate illustration of how distressing the reality of evil can be for the thoughtful theist.

An early enunciation of the problem of evil comes from Epicurus who is quoted by Lactantius as saying:

> God either wishes to take away evils, and is
> unable; or He is able, and is unwilling; or He is
> neither willing nor able; or He is both willing
> and able. If He is willing and unable, He is
> feeble, which is not in accordance with the
> character of God; if He is able and unwilling He
> is malicious which is equally at variance with
> God; if He is neither willing nor able, He is both
> malicious and feeble and therefore not God; if He
> is both willing and able, which is alone suitable
> to God, from what source then are evils? or why

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[3]. *Job* 10:3.

[4]. *Job* 19:6-7.

does He not remove them?[5]

In the Christian era we find the problem restated by

Augustine: "Either God cannot abolish evil or He will not:

if He cannot then He is not all-powerful; if He will not

then He is not all-good"[6] and by Aquinas:

> If one of two contraries is infinite, the other is
> excluded absolutely. But the idea of God is that
> of an infinite good. Therefore if God should
> exist, there could be no evil. But evil exists.
> Consequently God does not.[7]

Since these early statements, the essence of the problem of

evil seems to have remained nearly constant. In

contemporary times, the problem of evil has been succinctly

formulated as follows:

(1) An omnipotent, omnibenevolent God would not allow
    evil to exist in the world.

(2) Evil does exist.

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(3) Therefore, there cannot exist a God who is both
    omnipotent and omnibenevolent.[8]

The above statements of the problem of evil may be

characterized as versions of the "general problem" of evil,

for they do not distinguish between kinds of evil but rather

refer generally to evil of any kind. In our discussion it

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[5]. *The Works of Lactantius* (*On the Anger of God*, ch. 13, trans. W. Fletcher), Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1871.

[6]. *Confessions*, Bk. VII, Ch. 5.

[7]. *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Ques. 2, Art. 3.

[8]. See, for example, J.L. Mackie's "Evil and Omnipotence" in *Mind*, Vol. LXIV, No. 254 (1955). See also Alvin Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), chapter 5.

will be important to distinguish between two kinds of evil,
natural and moral, mainly because Berkeley himself was
careful to do so.[9] Although he did not label these two
senses of evil as such, it appears that they were distinct
in Berkeley's mind, since he sometimes treats the one
without even so much as mentioning the other. The
Principles, for example, contains a discussion of the
problem of natural evil and entirely ignores the question of
moral evil. In the *Dialogues*, on the other hand, we find
Berkeley's answer to the problem of moral evil and not a
word about pain and suffering.

Now what exactly is this distinction presupposed here
between "natural" and "moral" evil? Generally put, it is as
follows. When we speak of natural evil, we refer to any
sort of pain, bodily, mental, or emotional, brought on by
events in the world that are not the result of the voluntary
actions of human beings. Examples include suffering due to
such things as natural disasters, infectious diseases, and
congenital deformities. For this reason such evils are
sometimes termed "physical". However, this term is
misleading because there are many natural evils that, for
instance, arise from clinical depression, personality
disorders, and psychological traumas of various kinds which
are evil in the above sense but which are not literally of a

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[9]. Here Berkeley follows the medieval Jewish philosopher
Maimonides, who makes this distinction in *Guide for the
Perplexed*, Bk. III, chapter 12.

physical nature.

The presence of natural evil in the world is a problem for the theist because under the traditional theistic conception of God, this is a being both omnipotent and omnibenevolent. Being all-powerful, God <u>could</u> prevent pain and suffering in the world. And as a good and loving being, he would <u>want</u> to prevent the suffering of his creatures. But the orthodox theistic view is that evil does exist. Hence, it would seem, the theist must surrender one of the two divine attributes in question, omnipotence or omnibenevolence (though s/he need not surrender both).[10] This is the problem of natural evil.

So called "moral" evil is distinguished from natural evil in the following sense. While natural evil is not the result of certain voluntary human actions, moral evil is. Examples of moral evil include murder, rape, theft, racism, and cruelty. At first blush the presence of moral evil in the world might not appear to be a genuine problem for the theist, since, after all, it is we human beings and our own volitions that are to blame for our suffering when we harm one another in various ways. However, when the question is posed, "Why would God allow us to make choices that cause terrible suffering to others and ourselves?" we see that moral evil is in fact a problem for the theist. A favorite reply here, which incidentally Berkeley does not use, is to

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[10]. Such "finite theists" as J.S. Mill and William James adopted the solution that God's power is limited.

appeal to human free will. God wanted to create human beings free, the argument goes, and to prevent us from making certain choices would constitute an infringement on our freedom. Thus, God refrains from stopping our evil ways, in the interest of preserving our freedom. But here the skeptic replies that this answer seems to restrict the power of God, for it implies that there is something that God cannot do, namely, create beings that are free **and** that always (or almost always) make morally right choices. The problem of moral evil, then, seems to be every bit as sticky for the theist as the problem of natural evil.

II. The Problem of Natural Evil

Above we saw why the fact of natural evil is a "problem" for the theist generally. Now it is important to note that if it is problematic for the matterist theist, then it seems to be all the more so for an immaterialist theist such as Berkeley, who maintains that God immediately governs the world. In the *Principles* Berkeley suggests just how intimate he conceives the association between God and nature to be when he says that "by nature is meant only the visible <u>series</u> of effects or sensations imprinted on our minds, according to fixed and general laws."[11] Berkeley compares God to an author and the world to a language or

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11. *Principles*, 150.

text.[12] The world for Berkeley is the effect of the immediate action of God upon our senses, not a collection of objects existing independently of minds. And what we call the "laws of nature" just _are_ God's will (cf PHK 32). The divine mind, Berkeley prefers to think, is as near to us as our own perceptions and ideas, for he is their source. Notwithstanding the claim of the deists that God is at some distance (figuratively speaking) from the world, observing its happenings even as are we, Berkeley insists, quoting St. Paul, that God "be not far from every one of us."[13]

It is here that Berkeley anticipates the objection that natural evils in the world undermine his claim about immediate divine governance of the world (or else his belief that the world-governing spirit is a loving, benevolent being).

> It will, I doubt not, be objected that the slow and gradual methods observed in the production of natural things do not seem to have for their cause the immediate hand of an Almighty Agent. Besides, monsters, untimely births, fruits blasted in the blossom, rains failing in desert places, miseries incident to human life, and the like, are so many arguments that the whole frame of nature is not immediately actuated and superintended by a spirit of infinite wisdom and goodness.[14]

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[12]. It is perhaps a misrepresentation of Berkeley's view to say that he only "compares" God to an author and the world to a text. He actually emphatically insists that nature be conceived quite literally as a language and God as its literal author. This is no mere metaphor as far as Berkeley is concerned. See Colin Turbayne _The Myth of Metaphor_, New Haven, 1962.

[13]. Acts 17:27.

[14]. _Principles_, 151.

Note that here the matterist espousing theism can use his matterism as a shield against this objection, as material substance and the mind-independent existence of nature serves as a buffer between the creator and the pain and suffering brought on by the course of nature. God, the matterist can argue, is ultimately responsible for such disasters and miseries, but he is its remote and not its proximate cause. He is not _directly_ responsible for natural evil, as the immaterialist must conclude. God is only indirectly responsible. So while the matterist theist still bears the burden of having to answer the query, "Why does God permit (or indirectly cause) such evil?", the immaterialist is saddled with the more ominous and weighty burden of having to explain why God directly inflicts pain and suffering on his creatures, a fact which psychologically, if not logically, presents a greater challenge to the theist than the task of accounting for mere allowance of human misery. Berkeley, of course, will deny that the use of an instrument such as material substance helps the realist's God on the question of evil. More will be said about this later.

How, then, does Berkeley respond to the problem of natural evil? He actually offers several solutions to the problem. He begins by urging that the regularities in the world (i.e., the laws of nature) that cause pain are actually necessary for human life and well-being. These "laws of nature" that he conceives as simply "the set rules

or established methods wherein the mind we depend on excites in us the ideas of sense"[15] provide us with the foresight enabling us "to regulate our actions for the benefit of life."[16] Berkeley elaborates:

> That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that to sow in the seedtime is the way to reap in the harvest; and in general that to obtain such or such ends, such or such means are conducive--all this we know...only by the observation of the settled laws of nature, without which we should be all in uncertainty and confusion and a grown man no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life than and infant just born.[17]

So although the regularities in nature result often in human misery, they are all the same preconditions for human life in the first place, since without them we would have no idea as to how to act in order to achieve desired ends. This good alone, Berkeley insists, "outbalances whatever particular inconveniences may thence arise."[18]

Here, however, the skeptic will be quick to object that these so-called regularities in nature which cause harm seem actually to be irregularities. If nature were truly constant in the sense that Berkeley insists it is, then we would not be surprised by earthquakes, tornadoes, droughts, and the like. Such events in fact are conspicuous and devastating precisely because they are irregular. So how

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[15]. *Principles*, 30.

[16]. Ibid., 31.

[17]. Ibid.

[18]. *Principles*, 152.

can Berkeley seriously attempt to apologize for natural evil on the basis of consistency in nature? He is perhaps correct in saying that regularities in nature are necessary for survival, but he is mistaken in claiming that nature displays perfect regularity. Nature displays enough regularity for us to anticipate sufficiently for survival, it is true. But nature is not perfectly regular, and this is often the cause of great human misery. And it is just this which the skeptic demands an explanation for: Why do occasional irregularities occur (i.e., why are there natural disasters)?

Berkeley does not deal with this particular objection, but it is easy to imagine just how he might have replied. He could claim that the objector in his preoccupation with the readily observable variety of natural events fails to discover the much more subtle underlying regularity in nature. Admittedly earthquakes, hurricanes, and droughts are the exception rather than the rule (at the macro-level), but these events are properly to be seen as the consequence of the <u>regular</u> working of the laws of nature which give rise to them. It is <u>because</u> of the constancy of such laws as gravity and thermodynamics and the ideal gas law that a hurricane forms given certain other conditions obtaining in the earth and its atmosphere. Hurricanes are the product of deeper, more basic regularities in nature, as are such phenomena as droughts, earthquakes, infectious diseases, mutations, and so on. What the above objection fails to

notice is that regularities at the primary level in nature give rise to irregularities at a secondary level. It is precisely for this reason, in fact, that seismologists can with increasing accuracy predict an earthquake and that meteorologists are able to forecast the formation, strength, and direction of tornadoes and hurricanes. Were such phenomena actually irregular in this basic sense, predictability would be out of the question.

This line of reply available to Berkeley, however, invites a further, more formidable objection. Why didn't God order the world in such a way that the laws of nature remained constant without giving rise to disasters and diseases which cause so much suffering and misery? That is, the skeptic will ask, if God is really omnipotent, then isn't he capable of making a world in which there is perfect regularity in nature but which at the same time does not allow for such things as hurricanes, earthquakes, and deadly viruses? Or couldn't the creator have at least fashioned the world with a few additional higher order regularities or "laws" of nature that prevented the lower order regularities (e.g., gravity, inertia) from resulting in harm of the creatures? Or, finally, if none of these options were available to the creator, why was this being compelled to give his creatures so sensitive a nervous system, enabling them to feel pain with such acuteness? Now God was presumably capable of implementing any of these options, since an all-powerful being can do anything that is

possible. Moreover, were the creator truly omnibenevolent,
loving his creatures and wishing the best for them, then he
would have desired to obviate such severe natural evil as we
witness in this world. It seems, then, that Berkeley's God
is either not almighty or not all-good.

The reasoning in the above objection amounts to an
argument for proposition (1) noted earlier in this chapter:
An omnipotent, omnibenevolent God would not allow evil to
exist. We see here that the skeptic has made explicit the
two sub-premises in his argument:

> (4) If God is omnipotent, then he <u>could</u> prevent natural
>   evil.

> (5) If God is omnibenevolent, then he would <u>want</u> to
>   prevent natural evil.

Now assuming that evil really does exist in the world,
Berkeley is forced to deny either proposition (4) or (5) if
he wants to avoid the above devastating line of inference.
We have already seen that Berkeley is not prepared to deny
that evil exists {proposition (2) above} and so to join the
ranks of Spinoza, Buddhists, Christian Scientists, and some
Stoics. What strategy, then, does he adopt?

Berkeley, like most orthodox Christian theists, chooses
to attack (5). In the interest of falsifying this
proposition he employs the "aesthetic" theodicy. Berkeley
writes,

> We should...consider that the very blemishes and
> defects of nature are not without their use, in
> that they make an agreeable sort of variety and
> augment the beauty of the rest of the creation, as
> shades in a picture serve to set off the brighter

and more enlightened parts.[19]

The system of nature, then, is to be likened to a work of art the brighter colors of which are accentuated by darker shades. Natural evil functions to highlight the good that is also to be found in the world. Were there never pain and misery, how could we ever really appreciate real peace, joy, and happiness? Moreover, the sheer variety that evil adds is also not without its aesthetic virtues. A world without evil would be an entirely good world, it is true. But it would be homogeneous and plain, aesthetically inferior to a system of nature wherein there occurred phenomena ranging from the triumphant to the tragic and where individuals experienced a broad spectrum of feelings from the ecstatic to the excruciating. A world in which only a range of pleasures obtained would, from the standpoint of the cosmic artist at least, be less desirable than a world that contained a full range of pain as well.

To many this reply will seem inadequate because it supposes incorrectly that aesthetic beauty can justify human misery in the world. Deep physical and emotional suffering, the critic will object, are not the sorts of things that can be treated so lightly and dismissed as analogous to a dark shade in a painting. When we speak of natural evil we are not talking about phenomena or experiences which are merely

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[19]. Ibid., 152. The assumption was an old one; Francis Bacon had argued that there is no great beauty without some ugliness by way of contrast.

ugly or aesthetically displeasing. In fact, we are not dealing with an aesthetic problem at all. We are dealing with a _moral_ problem. And this theodicy fails to address it in these terms. Furthermore, the critic will argue, the aesthetic theodicy glosses over the severity of the problem of natural evil. It fails to appreciate the extent of human suffering in the world. Even if considerations of the beauty of the cosmos were appropriate in treating the problem of evil, it is difficult to see how such factors could account for the presence of so _much_ evil in the world. Granting that there must be a full range of pains as well as pleasures, the theist is hard pressed to show that it is necessary that so many people should die agonizing deaths from such gruesome illnesses as cancer, AIDS, and multiple sclerosis, nor why equal numbers should suffer terribly in natural disasters and still others from disfigurement and torment due to congenital defects of all kinds. Are we really to believe that such rampant and deep personal traumas are justified by the overall cosmic beauty that they produce?[20]

As if to anticipate the foregoing objection, Berkeley augments his version of the aesthetic theodicy by insisting that pain and suffering are counted as defects in nature

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[20]. Mark Twain and Fyodor Dostoevsky have illustrated dramatically, what perhaps can be done only inadequately in a philosophical discourse, just how problematic the existence of pain and suffering is for the theist. See Twain's "Little Bessie" in _Fables of Man_ and Dostoevsky's _The Brothers Karamazov_ (especially the chapter "The Grand Inquisitor").

only to those who do not view them in their larger context.

Natural evil is a problem to us because

> our prospects are too narrow. We take, for
> instance, the idea of some one particular pain
> into our thoughts, and account it *evil*; whereas,
> if we enlarge our view, so as to comprehend the
> various ends, connections, and dependencies of
> things, on what occasions and in what proportions
> we are affected with pain and pleasure, the nature
> of human freedom, and the design with which we are
> put into the world; we shall be forced to
> acknowledge that those particular things which
> considered in themselves, appear to be evil, have
> the nature of good, when considered as linked with
> the whole system of beings.[21]

Berkeley is here underscoring the fact that we are finite

and are prone to fixing our thoughts on the details of

nature rather than upon the grand scheme. He does not

believe, of course, that we are compelled by nature to dwell

on particulars rather than upon the big picture, though it

is our tendency as finite human beings to do so. He enjoins

us to overcome this propensity and to glimpse the larger

picture, for herein is wisdom. This injunction of

Berkeley's emerged as a theme in his apologetic writings

throughout his career, and the intellectual disfunction of

vicious over-attention to detail, which this advice was

meant to cure, came to be identified by him as one of the

defining characteristics of the free thinkers of his day.

Moreover, it was this tendency to dwell on minutiae which

Berkeley considered to be the most pernicious habit among

his skeptical contemporaries.

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[21]. *Principles*, 153.

Throughout his career Berkeley busied himself with attacks on the method of the free thinkers. One particularly colorful example of Berkeley's critique appears in an essay in the *Guardian*, entitled "Minute Philosophers" (a synonym for the free thinkers). There he compares the minute philosopher to a fly in St. Paul's cathedral

> whose prospect [is] so confined to a little part
> of one of the stones of a single pillar, the joint
> beauty of the whole or the distinct use of its
> parts were inconspicuous, and nothing could appear
> but small inequalities in the surface of the hewn
> stone, which in the view of that insect seemed so
> many deformed rocks and precipices.[22]

Now the free thinker is like the fly in the cathedral who fails to notice the beauty of the entire structure because of a preoccupation with infinitesimal detail. Both, says Berkeley, lack a certain "largeness of mind" necessary for "forming a true judgment of things".[23] Now the evil in the world constitutes just one of those things that when viewed locally seems to suggest that this world is seriously flawed. Berkeley entreats the minute philosopher, or anyone prone to dwelling excessively on particulars, to acquire the "largeness of mind" necessary to see the big picture. Like the fly in the cathedral we must enlarge our view to glimpse the master plan.

With regard to this counsel, Berkeley reasons as did Descartes and Leibniz before him. In the fourth *Meditation*

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[22]. *Complete Works*, Vol VII, p. 206.

[23]. Ibid., p. 207.

Descartes warns against taking particular evils out of

context when he says,

> We should not consider a single creation
> separately when we investigate whether the works
> of God are perfect, but generally all created
> objects together. For the same thing which might
> perhaps, with some sort of justification, appear
> to be very imperfect if it were alone in the world
> is seen to be very perfect when considered as
> constituting a part of this whole universe.[24]

Similarly, Leibniz argues that despite the apparent

imperfections that we encounter in the world on a local

scale we may rest assured that every such detail is

necessary to make this the greatest possible world. He

writes,

> It follows from the supreme perfection of God that
> in producing the universe He chose the best
> possible plan, containing the greatest variety
> together with the greatest order; the best
> arranged situation, place, and time; the greatest
> effect produced by the simplest means; the most
> power, the most knowledge, the most happiness and
> goodness in created things of which the universe
> admitted.[25]

Berkeley's illustration of the fly in the cathedral seems to

be an attempt to communicate the aesthetic theodicy less

dryly and dogmatically than it was typically formulated. He

was not alone in this effort, for we find one of the

greatest English poets of Berkeley's generation, Alexander

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[24]. *Philosophical Essays*, (New York: MacMillan
Publishing Company, 1964), p. 111.

[25]. *Principles of Nature and Grace*, section 10.   This
same sort of theodicy is implicit in Spinoza as well.   He
writes: "From the necessity of divine nature infinite numbers
of things in infinite ways...must follow." See *Ethics*, (New
York: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1949), p. 55.

Pope, doing the same as he presents a lyrical version of

this theodicy in his defense of the finitude of man:

> Respecting man, whatever wrong we call,
> May, must be right, as relative to all.
> In human works, though labored on with pain,
> A thousand movements scarce one purpose gain;
> In God's, one single can its end produce;
> Yet serves to second too some other use.
> So man, who here seems principal alone,
> Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
> Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
> 'Tis but a part we see, and not the whole.[26]

Perhaps one motivation someone might have for presenting the

aesthetic theodicy in other than straightforward

philosophical terms, as do Berkeley and Pope, is that this

theodicy, after all, seems to be bare dogma rather than an

argument. As for this general line of defense, it is no

wonder that Voltaire could not resist the temptation to

satirize such a callous and dogmatic line of argument.[27]

III. The Problem of Moral Evil

As with natural evil, the presence of moral evil in the

world seems to be a more acute problem for Berkeley than for

theists who accept metaphysical realism. Moreover, the sort

of theodicies Berkeley gives in treating the problem of

natural evil will not help him when it comes to moral evil.

In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley treats the problem of moral

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[26]. *Essay on Man*, I, 2.

[27]. His *Candide* or "Optimism" is intended as a jab at Leibniz who is represented in the novel by Dr. Pangloss who despite his terrible suffering is unwavering in his conviction that this is the best of all possible worlds.

evil, and he deals with the issue not by dissolving it from the theist's perspective but rather by showing just that moral evil is no more of a problem for the immaterialist than for the matterist. He begins by noting that with regard to immoral actions performed by human beings "the imputation of guilt is the same, whether a person commits such an action with or without an instrument,"[28] where in this context the "instrument" on the matterist's account is understood to be material substance. In this way, Berkeley argues that his immaterialism is, for good or ill, on equal footing with matterism when it comes to the problem of moral evil. If given his principles the benevolence of God must be denied because of the presence of moral evil in the world, then the same follows for the philosopher who assumes the principles of matterism. Interposing material substance between God and human misconduct provides no buffer against divine responsibility. Just as a murderer is equally culpable for his act whether he uses a gun or his fist, God is culpable (if culpable at all) for nature's defects whether or not he created the world using corporeal substance. Thus, Berkeley says to the matterist, "In case...you suppose God to act by the mediation of an instrument, or occasion, called Matter, you as truly make Him the author of sin as I."[29] An important lesson

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28. *Dialogues*, p. 99.

29. Ibid.

Berkeley wants us to learn here is that any theodicy regarding moral evil which works for the matterist works equally well for the immaterialist. There is no difference between them on this issue.

Berkeley has an additional reply which addresses the deeper problem of moral evil shared by all theists. He writes,

> sin or moral turpitude doth not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion.... therefore...the making God an immediate cause of all such actions is not making Him the Author of sin.[30]

However, one might object, to cause such action is tantamount to willing it. For God, to cause an event is to will it, since he presumably knows what he is doing whenever he undertakes an action. Thus, it seems, the distinction Berkeley draws here fails to exonerate God from responsibility for human sin, for obviously God must will or intend whatever he brings to pass. He does not ordain blindly. (Notice that here Berkeley is offering a theodicy on behalf of all theists who believe in a God of the Calvinist sort who preordains all things that come to pass.)

Berkeley does, I believe, have a counter-reply. The option is open to him to retort that the presupposition of the objection, that God wills whatever he causes, is false. This potential rejoinder of Berkeley's is expressed in the following proposition:

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[30]. Ibid., p. 100.

(6) Not all actions God causes are willed by him. Though this reply might seem counter-intuitive, there is support for this position to be found in the scriptures. Consider for example the following passage in the Old Testament book of Lamentations:

> Men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men.[31]

And a little later the prophet underscores the foreordination of all things.

> Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come.[32]

There are two side observations I want to make here. The first regards the writer's usage of the speech metaphor. Divine decrees are carried out through the "mouth of the most high". This passage may be seen as a scriptural confirmation of the theological orthodoxy of Berkeley's metaphysics, which I have already discussed in a previous chapter. Secondly, note that the subject of the above passages is natural rather than moral evil. However, the text is still quite relevant to our discussion, since the issue these passages are meant to address is the question of the intelligibility of saying that God does not always will what he causes.

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[31]. Lamentations 3:31-33.

[32]. Lamentations 3:37-38.

According to the above passages God decrees all things and brings them to pass by the word of his mouth. But some of these decrees, those that result in the affliction and grief of his creatures, he does not cause willingly. Clearly this passage works as a defense of Berkeley's second theodicy in the *Dialogues*, for Jeremiah's words here strongly suggest (6). But having shown that Berkeley and holy writ agree in their acceptance of (6), it remains to be considered whether theirs is an intelligible position. That is, although the passage in Lamentations coheres with Berkeley's thinking, is the doctrine it sets forth any more defensible? Or have we merely discovered an errant view which is held in common by Berkeley and the prophet Jeremiah?

I believe there are at least three different ways in which this difficult passage, or more generally the claim that it espouses, (6), may be interpreted. First, one could claim that the correct view is that God merely <u>allows</u> human misery, that he never in fact intends our pain and suffering. Such an interpretation presses for an understanding of the use of the term "bring" in its soft or broad sense, where God is the ultimate cause but not the immediate cause of evil in the world. However, for all the potential explanatory power of this interpretation and the general popularity of the view it espouses among theists, it is not an exegetical option on Berkeley's principles. Berkeley's God is not merely the creator, but an active

sustainer of the universe, the immediate cause of everything that comes to pass.

Secondly, someone might interpret Jeremiah's assertion as implying that there are two senses of "will" being attributed to God, one which refers to his sovereign will, the sum of divine decrees that dictate whatever comes to pass and one that refers to God's moral will, which desires good for his creatures.[33] God thus wills moral evil in the first sense (i.e., he has decreed it) but not in the second sense (i.e., he disapproves of it). The obvious problem with this interpretation is that it seems to concede too much, collapsing under the weight of the problem rather than solving it. The "two wills" explanation is suggestive of a sort of divine schizophrenia where God suffers from flatly contradictory wills. This route, then, seems inadequate.

Thirdly, it might be held that the use of the expression "willingly" in the context of the Lamentations passage is to be taken figuratively and that its claim is tantamount to saying that although God causes grief, he regrets bringing it about. God does in a literal sense will human suffering but only with much displeasure. This sort of attempt to justify (6) is, I believe, the most promising, though it too has its difficulties. For instance, how are

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[33]. The distinction between two divine "wills" I am proposing here is close to that made by some medieval thinkers who distinguished between God's "antecedent" and "consequent" wills.

we to understand divine regret and is this really an accurate understanding of the term "willingly" in the Lamentations passage? It is quite possible that Berkeley might have rejected this line of defense as well as the above two. He might have preferred to contrive some alternate rejoinder or perhaps even to throw the entire problem up to mystery. Whatever the case, the point here is that Berkeley's immaterialist metaphysics does not subject him to any more formidable problem of evil than that which confronts the matterist. For both the task of forging a satisfactory theodicy is equally onerous.

Now supposing that some satisfactory account can be given by Berkeley reconciling the goodness and omnipotence of God with the foreordination of moral evil, there remains the question about the abundance of immorality and wanton cruelty in the world. Assuming for the moment that there is ultimately a good reason for some moral evil in the world, we may still ask why there is so much of it. This same question arose in the context of natural evil above and it was answered by Berkeley with the aesthetic theodicy. In the context of moral evil, however, we find Berkeley giving a different response, though it is in some important respects similar. We find this particular theodicy in *Alciphron*. There the dialogues' namesake articulates the objection as follows:

> It may, perhaps, with some colour be alleged that
> a little soft shadowing of evil sets off the
> bright and luminous parts of creation, and so

> contributes to the beauty of the whole piece; but
> for blots so large and so black it is impossible
> to account by that principle. That there should
> be so much vice and so little virtue upon earth,
> and that the laws of God's kingdom should be so
> ill observed by His subjects, is what can never be
> reconciled with that surpassing wisdom and
> goodness of the supreme Monarch.[34]

How could God be a powerful and just ruler if he allows wickedness to run so rampant among his creatures? That is the question Alciphron poses. Granted that some shading might be necessary to make a beautiful painting, to use Berkeley's artist metaphor, it seems that this world is more analogous to a painting which is dominated by dark shades and possesses but small portions of light. Euphranor replies to this objection:

> for aught we know, this spot with the few sinners
> on it bears no greater proportion to the universe
> of intelligences than a dungeon doth to a kingdom.
> It seems 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.[35]

Euphranor's response here is noteworthy for several reasons. First, he refuses simply to appeal to human free will, just as Berkeley resists this temptation in the *Principles*. Again, the reason for the conspicuous absence of this traditional theodicy is probably that Berkeley thought it to be a fruitless line of argument. For to appeal to free

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34. *Alciphron*, IV, 23.

35. Ibid.

will, as we noted earlier, invites the further inquiry as to why God should give us free will that results in so many evils. On this score, then, we see no deviation in Berkeley's thinking over the two decades from the *Dialogues* to *Alciphron*.

Secondly, the particular theodicy offered here, while in some respects resembling his aesthetic theodicy, is in some respects unique. The pivotal doctrine here, pertaining to the "innumerable orders of intelligent beings" is suggestive of the medieval notion of a hierarchy of beings.[36] In Berkeley's hierarchy, humankind is conceived to be among the unhappiest of beings in the created order. This consideration, he thinks, puts judgments about evil in perspective, such that we will not be as inclined to impugn the creator because of the existence of "so much" evil.

A third point of note about this theodicy based on the hierarchy of beings is that its reasoning parallels one of Hume's later criticisms of the teleological argument in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In part two Demea addresses Cleanthes' assumption that we can extrapolate from the known universe to the rest of the universe (in this case with regard to the observation of apparent design). Demea corrects him, noting, "A very small part of this great system, during a very short time, is very imperfectly discovered to us: And do we thence pronounce decisively

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[36]. See, for example, Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Pt. 1, Ques. 108., Art. 1-8.

concerning the origin of the whole?"[37] In *Alciphron*
Euphranor similarly sets out to temper the eagerness of his
opponent to extrapolate from this small corner of the
universe to the universe as a whole, as he begins his
response "<u>for aught we know</u>, this spot, with the few sinners
on it, bears no greater proportion to the universe of
intelligences than a dungeon doth to a kingdom." Of course,
Euphranor himself goes on to suggest that we can make an
inductive inference (by analogy) to a hierarchy of beings
which has never been experienced by any human being.[38]

Does this theodicy succeed in defeating the objection
posed by Alciphron? I believe the answer here is yes,
insofar as it seems to undermine the criticism of theism on
the basis of the sheer quantity of moral evil in the world.
For, like Hume, Berkeley has pointed out that we must assume
a modest tenor when it comes to making inferences to the
entire universe, for it is at least conceivable that the
evil we experience on earth is minuscule relative to the
rest of the universe. The lesson we learn from Berkeley (in
this instance) and from Hume is that any claim about the
prevalence of any phenomenon or fact in the entire universe,
whether it regards apparent design or evil, is suspect. For
we are at present in the dark when it comes to most of the

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[37]. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1947), p. 148.

[38]. This inductive inference was also made by Locke in the *Essay*, IV, 16, 12.

universe. Talk of quantities of evil or design is really meaningless (or, at best, problematic) unless we recognize from the start that it is relative to a particular context or region of the universe, such as that part of which human beings have actually had experience.

I want to return now to what I believe is, for Berkeley, the central question at issue. On the matter of evil, does immaterialism undermine Berkeley's apologetic ends? In answering this question, we must first clarify what is being asked. To be precise, and to redirect the question towards the metaphysical realist, this query really is asking whether belief in material substance helps the theist. Our answer to this question, of course, will turn on whether we judge Berkeley's argument to be a success when he claims that the creator is as culpable, if at all, for the existence of evil if he causes it indirectly (via material substance) as he would be if it proceeds directly from him. For if in either case the deity is equally culpable (if at all), then at least with regard to the problem of evil, a theist's matterism or immaterialism is irrelevant. Now it is interesting to note that the answer to this question (whether material substance diminishes, or eliminates altogether, divine culpability for evil) to some degree turns on our acceptance or rejection of (5) above, that an omnibenevolent God would _want_ to prevent evil. For if this proposition is falsified, then the question of the moral relevancy of a divine instrument used in creation

(i.e. material substance) is moot. If omnibenevolence is compatible with the existence of evil, then the whole question whether material substance exonerates the deity is irrelevant, because there will be nothing for God to be exonerated from. But Berkeley and the matterist theist (most of the orthodox ones anyway) are interested in falsifying proposition (5), and the rationality of both of their brands of Christian theism hangs on their success in doing so. Consequently, it seems that they are on equal footing when it comes to preparing a satisfactory theodicy. As far as evil is concerned then, Berkeley's immaterialism is not an additional liability for him when it comes to the defense of the faith.

IV. Conclusion

Berkeley's treatment of the problem of evil is critical for his apologetics both directly and indirectly. If he can reply satisfactorily to the problem of evil he will have removed some of the grounds for the skeptic's doubt. This is the direct apologetic service of his theodicies. They serve his defense of the faith indirectly by bolstering his immaterialist metaphysics. For if he can show that his position on evil is no less strong than that of the matterist, he will have removed one more stumbling block to acceptance of his system. And given the parity of his metaphysics and matterism when it comes to dealing with the problem of evil, combined with what he conceives to be the

independent logical strength of his new principle, his metaphysics, the main end of which is to inspire religious belief, will on the whole be superior. Of course, this is not to suggest that Berkeley's theodicies (or his general apologetic project for that matter) are a success. On the contrary, the objections we have considered show his use of traditional theodicies to be problematic. His program might indeed be an utter failure. However, the point here is that its ultimate failure or success does not turn on immaterialism. This is because of two facts that have emerged in this discussion: (1) immaterialism by itself does not exacerbate the problem of evil for Berkeley (or for any theist who happens to be an immaterialist) and (2) in the main, Berkeley's theodicies do not presupposes immaterialism. Rather, they are largely traditional and unoriginal.

CHAPTER 6

The Immortality of the Soul

The Immortality of the Soul

I. Introduction

Among the religious doctrines for which Berkeley gives
a philosophical defense in some of his writings is the
immortality of the soul. Demonstrating that the soul is
"naturally immortal" was one of his stated aims in both the
Principles and the *Dialogues*. In these works the doctrine
emerges as a convenient corollary of his immaterialism.
However, Berkeley's most sustained defense of the doctrine
appears in his sermons and his essays in the *Guardian*.
There are no less than six arguments for the soul's
immortality in these works. In what follows I shall
identify and explain them, noting their historical
precedents and showing how each of the arguments fails to
demonstrate conclusively the immortality of the soul.

Before proceeding to the arguments themselves, it will
be helpful to clarify Berkeley's motivations for defending
the doctrine as well as to explain precisely his view of the
nature of soul or spirit. As for his motives, it is clear
that Berkeley attached great importance to the defense of
this tenet of his faith. An obvious incentive for doing so
lay in the fact that the doctrine is taught in the
scriptures to whose authority he readily bowed, but aside
from this Berkeley had some practical considerations
inspiring him to defend the view zealously. In *Alciphron*,
Euphranor, Berkeley's spokesman, declares that "hope of

reward and fear of punishment are highly expedient to cast
the balance of pleasant and profitable on the side of
virtue, and thereby very much conduce to the benefit of
human society."[1] Belief in the soul's immortality, that
is, stimulates one to virtuous living. On the other hand,
those who have no such conviction lack as well sufficient
motivation to perform decent acts. Moreover, as Berkeley
maintains in the following excerpt from an essay combatting
"Free-thinkers" in *The Guardian*, their disbelief constitutes
strong incentive to act viciously: "it should even seem
that a man who believes no future state, would act a foolish
part in being thoroughly honest. For what reason is there
why such a one should postpone his own private interest or
pleasure to the doing his duty?"[2] Belief in immortality,
then, for Berkeley provides a necessary impetus for the
moral life. All other practical grounds for living
virtuously are inadequate. The doctrine is in fact central
to the spiritual life of believers, as he remarks in one of
his sermons that "eternal life is the ultimate end of all
our views: it is for this, we deny our appetites, subdue
our passions and forgo the interests of this present
world."[3] On a personal level as well Berkeley placed a
high premium on the doctrine of immortality. He confesses,

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[1]. *Alciphron*, III, 4.

[2]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 200.

[3]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 105-106. See also *Passive
Obedience*, section 6.

> There is not any property or circumstance of my
> being that I contemplate with more joy than my
> immortality... It if were not for this thought, I
> had rather be an oyster than a man, the most
> stupid and senseless of animals than a reasonable
> mind tortured with an extreme innate desire of
> that perfection which it despairs to obtain.[4]

Thus, we see just how much was at stake for Berkeley in arguing for the immortality of the soul. This explains why he made its demonstration a primary objective in his early works as well as in some of his later writings and why he resorted to the use of so wide an assortment of arguments.

Berkeley's conception of soul, mind, or spirit falls clearly within the Cartesian tradition. His account of the nature of the soul is that it is a simple, indivisible, unextended thing, the substantial self designated by the term "I". The powers or faculties of the soul are two: understanding and will. The understanding denotes the capacity of the soul to perceive ideas, while its active operations about these ideas constitutes will or volition. Being active, spirit is "altogether different" from ideas, for they are wholly passive, having nothing in them which is active or causal. For Berkeley, the soul's existence consists in its thinking. It is, to use Descartes' phrase, a *res cogitans*. He writes, "whoever shall go about to divide in his thoughts or abstract the *existence* of a spirit from its *cogitation* will, I believe, find it no easy

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4. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 222.

task."[5]

Unlike ideas, which are perceived directly, spirit is itself incapable of being perceived but is only known by its effects and through reflection. Thus, properly speaking, we have no idea of spirit, though we do have a "notion" of it. In this regard, our knowledge of the soul parallels that of the deity, which also is known indirectly through reason and reflection. Moreover, on Berkeley's account, God's nature as a simple, active, undivided, spiritual substance is clearly reflected in the soul. So Berkeley's conception of spirit falls clearly within the Christian tradition, and his concern to show the congruity of his doctrine with the orthodox Christian dualism is never more evident than when he compares the soul to the deity.[6]

Berkeley's argument for the existence of the soul is that since our ideas themselves are entirely passive, they must have some cause outside themselves. Now this cause must be an incorporeal substance, because the notion of material substance is repugnant. The cause must be active and possessing power to account for its capacity to produce and change ideas. And it must also be rational, for that which it moves is always seen to be moved towards some end

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[5]. *Principles*, 98.

[6]. Here Berkeley follows his elder contemporary, Leibniz, who writes "minds or rational souls are little gods, made in the image of God, and having in them some glimmering of Divine light" From *New System, and Explanation of the New System* in *Philosophical Writings*, G.H.R. Parkinson, ed. (J.M. London: Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1973), p. 117.

or purpose.[7] This argument for the existence and nature of the human soul is prone to a number of objections, but since the focus of this chapter is restricted to Berkeley's arguments for the soul's immortality I shall defer discussion of these to the context of criticisms of Berkeley's attempted proofs for immortality.[8]

II. The Argument from the Indestructibility of the Soul

Berkeley's favorite argument for immortality pivots on his conception of the nature of the soul. He writes,

> We have shown that the soul is indivisible, incorporeal, unextended, and it is consequently incorruptible. Nothing can be plainer than that the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions which we hourly see befall natural bodies...cannot possibly affect an active, simple, uncompounded substance; such a being therefore is indissoluble by the force of nature; that is to say, the soul of man is naturally immortal.[9]

So the soul according to this argument (which hereafter will be referred to as the argument from indestructibility) is

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7. See *Alciphron* IV, 4ff.

8. A criticism of Berkeley's argument for the existence of spirit which will not be treated in the body of this chapter pertains to the vicious circularity of his reasoning. Berkeley's argument, again, is that ideas are passive and being wholly passive they cannot be the cause of anything. Thus, he reasons, they must have some cause outside themselves which is active, incorporeal, rational, etc. Now when Berkeley asserts in this argument that ideas are passive his justification for saying so is that "they and every part of them exist only in the mind" (*Principles*, 25). But this is to appeal to the very entity whose existence he subsequently attempts to demonstrate. That is to say, Berkeley assumes mind in trying to prove the passivity of ideas, which he then turns around and uses to prove the existence of mind.

9. *Principles*, 141.

just not the kind of thing that is subject to decomposition. Bodies are annihilated by the forces of nature, but spirit is not subject to these forces, hence the soul is by its very nature immortal. Of course, Berkeley clarifies, this is not to say that the soul is incapable of being destroyed even by almighty God. He gave the spirit life, and he can take it away.

Berkeley's indestructibility argument is not original with him but has a precedent dating back at least as far as ancient Greece. For example, consider this exchange in the *Phaedo* between Socrates and Cebes:

> The soul is most like that which is divine, immortal, intelligible, uniform, indissoluble, and ever self-consistent and invariable, whereas body is most like that which is human, mortal, multiform, unintelligible, dissoluble, and never self-consistent. Can we adduce any conflicting argument, my dear Cebes, to show that this is not so?
>
> No, we cannot.
>
> Very well, then, in that case is it not natural for body to disintegrate rapidly, but for soul to be quite or very nearly indissoluble?
>
> Certainly.[10]

The argument here is that the soul possesses certain attributes, which happen to be opposite those of the body, that make it indestructible by its very nature. A version of this same argument was later advanced by Plotinus:

> Every dissoluble entity, that has come to be by way of groupment, must in the nature of things be broken apart by that very mode which brought it

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[10]. *Phaedo* 80b-c.

> together: but the soul is one and simplex, living
> not in the sense of potential reception of life
> but by its own energy; and this can be no cause of
> dissolution.[11]

Use of the indestructibility argument has not been limited to the platonic tradition but is defended as well by medievals such as Avicenna[12] and rationalists such as Leibniz.[13] Related variations of the argument are also advanced by Augustine[14] Aquinas,[15] Montaigne,[16] and Malebranche.[17] So Berkeley draws on, or at least is preceded by, a long tradition of argumentation from the natural incorruptibility of the soul. The distinctive feature of his own version of the argument lies in the claims he makes for the specific attributes of the soul. Berkeley's version of the indestructibility argument may be represented as follows:

1. Only those entities which can be broken down into parts (e.g. corporeal, divisible substances) are capable of being destroyed.

2. The soul is not capable of being broken down into

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[11]. *Enneads*, IV, 7, 13.

[12]. See his *Deliverance*, VI, 13.

[13]. *Discourse on Metaphysics*, section 32. See also the preface to *New Essays on the Human Understanding*.

[14]. In *The Soliloquies*, section 24, Augustine argues that since the mind knows eternal truth, and since that in which the eternal subsists must itself be eternal, the mind too must be eternal.

[15]. *Summa Theologica*, I, 75, 6.

[16]. *Apology for Raimond Sebond* (1588).

[17]. *Search After Truth*, IV, 2, 4.

parts (i.e., it is not corporeal or divisible).

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3. Therefore, the soul cannot be destroyed.

There are a number of objections which can be brought against the indestructibility argument. The most basic problems, of course, concern the assumptions it makes about the existence and nature of a soul. First, why need we say that the soul is an entity distinct from the body? Why not rather conceive of the soul or mind naturalistically, as reducible to material elements or processes? In Berkeley's day such an option had been advanced by, among others, Thomas Hobbes.[18] Even Locke entertained the possibility of thought being derived from the matter composing our bodies.[19] Today there are still other materialist possibilities, e.g., eliminative materialism, functionalism, and more sophisticated versions of reductive materialism. At any rate, the belief that the soul is a distinct entity is today more seriously challenged than it was in eighteenth century Europe. This might partly explain Berkeley's failure to justify his belief in mind as ontologically distinct from the body.

Secondly, it might be asked, even if the soul is a distinct entity, what reason do we have to believe that it

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[18]. See *Leviathan*, part I.

[19]. In *the Essay* Locke writes "I see no contradiction in it, that the first eternal thinking Being should, if he pleased, give to certain Systems of created senseless matter, put together as he thinks fit, some degrees of sense, perception, and thought" (IV, 3, 6).

is simple, incorporeal, and more active than the body? The
difference between body and soul enumerated by Berkeley and
other exponents of these claims really seem to be thin and
artificial. The mind **does** seem to be like the body, for
example, insofar as it is variable and subject to change,
for it passes in and out of consciousness, it suffers mood
changes, becomes traumatized or elated, and so on.

The argument from indestructibility is the only proof
of immortality offered by Berkeley in the *Principles* and
Three Dialogues. The remainder of his arguments are found
in two sermons, entitled "On Eternal Life"[20] and "On
Immortality" and in two essays, "The Future State" and
"Immortality", published in *The Guardian* in 1713. Four of
the five arguments appear in both "On Eternal Life" and "The
Future State", a noteworthy detail given the fact that these
messages were addressed to dissimilar audiences, the former
to a church congregation and the latter to the general
public. The *Guardian* essay does not even assume theism on
the part of its readers. He states near the beginning of
the essay, "I shall in this paper endeavor to evince that
there are grounds to expect a future state, without
supposing in the reader any faith at all, not even the
belief of a Deity."[21] This strategy, it appears, followed
from Berkeley's design in many of his *Guardian* essays to

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[20]. This sermon, Jessop and Luce note, was probably
preached by Berkeley on more than one occasion.

[21]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 181.

reveal the foolishness of the free-thinkers and to interdict the burgeoning deism of the early eighteenth century.[22]

"The Future State" and "On Immortality" are comprised of only eight and nine paragraphs respectively, as was fitting for the *Guardian* format, so in each Berkeley dives directly into argument. The sermons are likewise brief and to the point, also characteristic of the genre. The result in these works is more of a cataloguing of proofs for immortality than detailed, technical treatment of the issue. Nevertheless, the essential contours of the arguments are sketched so succinctly and with such precision that the brevity of the work in each case is actually exploited by Berkeley as an asset. His confident tone and swift presentation of the arguments leave the reader with the impression that they are more rigorous than they actually are. The cumulative rhetorical effect of the proofs is augmented by Berkeley's machine gun method. Their persuasive force as a whole far exceeds that of the sum of the individual arguments. As a master rhetorician, this was most likely Berkeley's intention.

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[22]. About his intentions in the *Guardian* essays Berkeley was often painfully candid. At the close of "Immortality" he remarks, "I shall omit no endeavors to render their persons as despicable, and their practices as odious, in the eye of the world, as they deserve" (*Works*, Vol. VII, p. 224).

III. The Argument from Desire

Among the proofs appearing in both the *Guardian* essay "The Future State" and the sermons is the argument from desire. Briefly put, this proof reasons from the common longing for eternal life to the probability its fulfillment. Berkeley asks, "shall every other passion be rightly placed by nature, and shall that appetite of immortality, natural to all mankind, be alone misplaced, or designed to be frustrated?" This rhetorical question is placed in the context of regard for the general teleology supposedly manifest in nature, where there exists in the corporeal world unmistakable order, harmony, and adjustment of means to ends, and where, for example, the physical desires of men can be satisfied by the application of certain "animal powers". From these empirical facts, Berkeley concludes by analogy that similar order and harmony must obtain in the intellectual or spiritual realm. This reasoning, he submits, is justified by an inductive rule mandated by common sense: "Men ought to form their judgments of things unexperienced from what they have experienced".[23]

Formally represented, then, Berkeley's proof from desire looks like this:

1. Human beings have natural physical desires of various kinds, and these desires are capable of being fulfilled.

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[23]. Ibid., p. 182.

2. Human beings have a natural desire for immortality.

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3. Therefore, it is probable that this desire is capable of being fulfilled.

The argument is inductive, arguing from the truth of the premises to the strong likelihood of the truth of the conclusion. Specifically, it is an argument from analogy.

Like the argument from indestructibility, the proof from desire predates Berkeley by centuries. For instance, it is one of several arguments employed by Aquinas in the *Summa Theologica*. There he writes,

> it is impossible for the intellectual soul to be corruptible. Moreover, we may take a sign of this from the fact that everything naturally aspires to existence after its own manner. Now, in things that have knowledge, desire ensues upon knowledge. The senses indeed do not know existence, except under the conditions of *here* and *now*, whereas the intellect apprehends existence absolutely, and for all time; so that everything that has an intellect naturally desires always to exist. But a natural desire cannot be in vain. Therefore, every intellectual substance is incorruptible.[24]

The likenesses between this argument and Berkeley's version are obvious. But there are also important differences. While Aquinas' proof is deductive, Berkeley's, as we noted, is inductive in form. Moreover, the Thomistic version is, not surprisingly, advanced in Aristotelian vocabulary and makes explicit use of Aristotelian categories. Berkeley's version, on the other hand, is not presented in the context of nor committed to a broader metaphysical system, not even his own immaterialism. The result is an argument that makes

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[24]. *Summa Theologica*, I, 75, 6.

more modest claims but which has a larger audience.

Notwithstanding these adjustments made by Berkeley in his formulation of the desire argument, there are several objections to which it is prone. First, since his rendering turns on the notion of a natural appetite for immortality which is shared by mankind, it may be asked, what exactly does he mean by "natural"? We need not speculate how Berkeley would answer this question, for he takes up this very issue in *Alciphron*. In the first dialogue the interlocutor after whom the work is named proposes this definition: "For a thing to be natural, for instance, to the mind of man, it must appear originally therein; it must be universally in all men; it must be invariably the same in all nations and ages."[25] Euphranor takes exception to this account of "natural", offering counter-examples to each of the criteria laid down by Alciphron. An apple tree, Euphranor explains, does not yield its fruit until it reaches maturity, nor does every apple tree produce fruit, because some environmental conditions prevent it. Yet in these cases we do not deny that the production of fruit is natural to the tree, despite the fact that apples are not found originally nor universally in apple trees. Nor ought we to conceive of that which is natural to be invariable, Euphranor contends, for there are some things which are natural but which vary greatly. The use of language is one

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[25]. *Alciphron*, I, 14.

clear instance. He points out that most would readily acknowledge language use as natural, and yet a tremendous variety of languages exists. So it seems that Alciphron's criterion of invariability is ill-conceived.

Berkeley thus rejects any definition of "natural" which includes as necessary conditions the criteria of originality, universality, or invariability. But what exactly are his criteria for "natural"? And does the desire for immortality really meet these conditions? Unfortunately Berkeley is not as explicit in his own positive account of the attribute "natural" as he is in his rejection of Alciphron's doctrine. Upon a careful reading of the dialogue, however, what emerges is a linking of the natural to the rational, based on Berkeley's conviction that man is essentially a rational animal. What is natural to man, Euphranor declares, is that which is "agreeable to, and growing from, the most excellent and peculiar part of human nature."[26] In other words, what conforms to reason also conforms to man's rational nature and is therefore natural to him.

Now we are in a position to ask whether under Berkeley's conception of "natural" (as that which conforms to and grows from man's rational nature) the desire for immortality is indeed natural. In addressing this question the first thing to be noted is that it is not clear that a

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[26]. Ibid., I, 14.

desire is the sort of thing which can be properly called rational or irrational. That is, one might argue, the canons of rationality preside over beliefs, not desires. Or put differently, it is more appropriate to speak of desires as the province of the will rather than of the understanding and reason. Others, wanting to avoid metaphysical jargon, might prefer to conceive of desires in brute physiological terms. By any of these alternative analyses of the category "desire" Berkeley's account of "natural" (as I have interpreted him here) would seem to be too narrow or else simply unhelpful.

If it be granted that we can meaningfully speak of desires as "rational" and "irrational" and that we can evaluate a given desire by the standards of rationality (by, say, determining the likelihood of a desire's fulfillment, the likely benefits to the agent if the desire is fulfilled, etc.), then we will be able to judge whether the desire for immortality is truly natural to man. Now suppose this can be done (that desires are indeed the sorts of things that properly take the predicates "rational" or "irrational"). Then the next question will be: Is the desire for immortality rational? If the answer to this question is negative, then neither is the desire for immortality natural. Berkeley's proof therefore will obviously fail, for his premise asserting the naturalness of the desire for immortality will be false.

But what if the answer to this question is affirmative

and the desire for immortality is rational? Then, of course, the desire will also be natural. Berkeley's first premise will be true, and we can proceed with the proof. However, a serious problem arises: To know if the desire for immortality is rational, we must know _first_ whether it is justified, that is, whether there is evidence enough to warrant our believing in immortality. But this is precisely the issue in question, i.e. whether the soul is immortal. Hence, the question is begged or, if the immortality question is settled by some other argument(s), the proof is unnecessary. Berkeley's argument from desire, therefore, is either viciously circular or superfluous.

Now suppose, in the interest of protecting Berkeley's argument from the above criticism, we enlarge upon his positive [rationalistic] account of "natural" in _Alciphron_. Suppose also that we heed Euphranor's objections to Alciphron's definition. We might arrive at an understanding of "natural" as denoting those traits or characteristics which _typically_ develop in a thing or which emerge under normal conditions but which in some cases do not appear because of unusual circumstances. Hence, in this sense the desire for immortality would indeed be properly conceived of as natural, though instances are plentiful of persons who have no such desire. Some there are, to be sure, who shudder at the thought of living forever. These persons, Berkeley might say, have developed abnormally, and for whatever reason they lack spiritual or psychological health.

Like the apple tree that fails to yield fruit at maturity,
the individual who does not long to be immortal is deviant,
this failure being explicable in terms of some disfunction.

However, under this modified conception of "natural",
there is a further difficulty. It concerns Berkeley's
assumption that "every other passion" which humans have is
capable of being fulfilled. This supposition seems to be
open to question. One can imagine possible counter-
examples. Some so-called "natural appetites" (taking this
phrase in the broader sense just described) which are always
or usually unfulfilled are the desire to remain young, the
desire to stay healthy, the desire for continuous peace and
prosperity, etc. These are cases in which our desires could
not possibly be satisfied, it being our nature and the
nature of the world that we should grow old, become sick,
suffer hardship, and die. The plain fact seems to be that
it is not the case that "every other passion" natural to
humans is capable of being satisfied. Again, then, the
first premise in the proof from desire appears to be false.

There emerges still another problem with Berkeley's
argument when we consider it in light of his philosophy of
science, specifically his conception of the laws of nature
as uniform divine activity. Berkeley, we will recall from
chapter four, implicitly attempts to justify induction on
the basis of divine benevolence. It is his view that we can
trust that the future will resemble the past, or more
generally that unexperienced events are like experienced

events, precisely because the ultimate cause of all events is a loving God. Now given this theistic foundation for induction, it becomes clear that Berkeley's appeal to the rule of induction in the proof from desire presupposes the existence of God. Furthermore, it is also assumed that this God is loving and benevolent. Thus, Berkeley is stuck with this dilemma: either he cannot appeal to the rule of induction and the argument fails (since it pivots on this principle), or else he can retain the rule of induction and presuppose God's existence and restrict his audience to theists only.

In "On Eternal Life" he takes the latter route, making explicit use of the proposition that God exists. Berkeley states there that the desire for immortality was "implanted in us by the author of our beings."[27] This assumption makes the argument stronger but at the same time greatly diminishes the audience to be persuaded, for obviously one must be a theist to accept this crucial premise. The added strength of this version of the argument derives from its new deductive form, which may be represented as follows:

1. God has given human beings a strong desire for immortality.

2. God is benevolent, so he would not give human beings any strong desire which was not capable of being fulfilled.

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3. Therefore, the desire for immortality is capable of

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[27]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 108.

being fulfilled.[28]

However, even granting the truth of theism, as well as the further claim that most of us share the desire to live forever, the deductive proof is problematic. An objection may be directed at premise 1 of the argument regarding the notion that our appetite for immortality was placed in us by God. Conceivably this desire might arise in us (or, anyway, in those of us who harbor it) by one of a variety of other means such as through society's myths (whether inculcated intentionally as in Plato's *Republic* or in some other way). Or, from an evolutionary perspective (theistic or non-theistic) the desire for immortality might be seen as a simple manifestation of the will to survive.

Finally, the second premise of the deductive proof is no less flimsy than the first. Appeal to the benevolence of God could perhaps hold more promise for Berkeley were it not for the fact that countless other evils (natural and moral) in the world are allowed by the deity. If wars, diseases, famines, and holocausts do not impugn his goodness, it is difficult to see how the allowance of mere frustrated desires should do so.

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[28]. This formulation of the desire argument is reminiscent of a version defended by St. Anselm in the *Monologium*, chapters 69-72.

IV. The Argument from Justice

Another stock argument for the immortality of the soul employed by Berkeley is the argument from justice. An afterlife is necessary, the argument runs, for there to be adequate reward for those who have lived virtuous lives and just retribution for the wicked. We can reasonably expect some sort of future state because recompense

> can never be justly distributed in this life,
> where so many ill actions are reputable, and so
> many good actions disesteemed or misinterpreted;
> where subtle hypocrisy is placed in the most
> engaging light, and modest virtue lies concealed;
> where the heart and the soul are hid from the eyes
> of men, and the eyes of men are dimmed and
> vitiated.[29]

It violates our shared sense of justice, Berkeley thinks, to suppose that the good or evil actions one performs in this life might go unacknowledged. An afterlife will be necessary in which final judgment is made as to each person's just compensation for deeds performed in this life. And time, or eternity as Berkeley sees it, will be necessary for the enforcement of these judgments, whether for the enjoyment of rewards or suffering of punishments.

Among those to whom Berkeley is indebted for this argument are the medieval Latin philosophers. In defending the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, Bonaventure argues in this way:

> Justice necessarily demands that a man who has
> merited or demerited, not in the soul alone nor in
> the body alone, but in both soul and body, be also

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[29]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 182. See also p. 108.

punished or rewarded in both.

> Divine justice renders to everyone his due
> according to the circumstances of place and time;
> and, moreover, a soul joined to a body for but a
> single instant acquires in this union either guilt
> or merit: therefore all must necessarily
> rise.[30]

Aquinas sets forth a similar argument in his *Summa Contra*

Gentiles:

> by divine providence sinners deserve punishment,
> and those who do well a reward. But in this life
> men, composed of soul and body, sin or act
> rightly. Therefore, in both the soul and the body
> men deserve reward or punishment. But...in this
> life they cannot achieve the reward of ultimate
> happiness... And time after time sins are not
> punished in this life... Necessarily, then, we
> must assert a repeated union of the soul with the
> body, so that man can be rewarded and punished in
> the body as well as in the soul.[31]

The argument from justice is not even original with these

Latin fathers but was used by Augustine centuries

earlier.[32] Thus, it had already been recycled for scores

of generations before Berkeley adopted it. Despite its

illustrious history, ironically, the argument from justice

is a poor logical specimen. Just as the moral argument for

the existence of God is defenseless against the non-

objectivist's denial of an absolute moral law, the "justice"

argument for immortality is prone to the skeptic's objection

that this might not be an ultimately just world. There is

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[30]. *The Breviloquium*, II, 5.

[31]. *Summa Contra Gentiles*, IV, 79, 12. See also IV, 91.

[32]. See his *Enchiridion*, 109-110; *City of God*, I, 8; and Calvin's *Institutes*, I, V, 10..

nothing logically incoherent in supposing that whatever transcendent moral mandates there are in this universe, they will go unenforced. We might indeed share a "sense of justice", but this alone does not justify our expectation that justice will in fact be meted out.[33]

Though he doesn't anticipate this criticism explicitly, one can envision how Berkeley might reply. Following Augustine he could appeal to temporal justice as a grounds for expecting justice in an after life, while at the same time acknowledging that in this world there is at best imperfect justice. The argument is that there is enough justice in this world to know that there is ultimate justice, but not enough to make an after life unnecessary. For all its poetic beauty, however, this Augustinian line is really not compelling, for it does not adequately address, or perhaps it begs, the real question, namely, whether or not the cosmos is ultimately just. That local justice obtains on occasion we all know, and the present argument for immortality is based precisely on the fact that this justice is never perfect, that is, that the lack of justice in the temporal realm makes ultimate eternal justice

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[33]. A perhaps less cynical version of this objection is implicit in the principles of Hume who insists that our whole conception of justice is properly limited to temporal considerations. He declares that "public utility is the *sole* origin of justice, and...reflections on the beneficial consequences of this virtue are the *sole* foundation of its merit" (*An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, III, 1). Therefore, by Hume's account, to extend the notion of justice to matters in a supposed afterlife, and hence outside the domain of utility, would be to misapply the concept.

necessary. But the above Augustinian reply to the skeptic, who bites the bullet admitting the cosmos to be ultimately unjust, turns around and exploits the presence of justice in the temporal realm as still another proof of ultimate justice. But the defender of the argument from justice cannot have his/her cake and eat it too. Insisting that the presence and the lack of justice in the world are proofs for perfect justice in an afterlife only invites the critic to answer analogously that both of these facts actually count as evidence against an afterlife. In short, it might be argued, if rewards and punishments will be dispensed in the afterlife, then why do they so often occur in this life?[34] And if God is truly benevolent and genuinely cares about our well-being in this world as well as the next, as the likes of Augustine, the Latin doctors, and Berkeley will certainly allow, then why would he permit such gross injustice during our mortal lives? It seems, then, that the empirical facts can be used as evidence on either side of the immortality debate. And what may be used as proof for contradictory claims really serves as proof for neither.

The Berkeleyan might retort here by pointing to some of the pernicious consequences of denying an afterlife and judgment. As we saw above, for Berkeley the doctrine of

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[34]. This criticism captures the spirit of the reply of the Italian Renaissance Aristotelian Pietro Pomponazzi to the argument from justice. Though admitting that God's justice demands proper reward for good deeds and punishment for evil, Pomponazzi explains that all such compensation comes in this life, virtue being its own reward and vice its own punishment.

immortality is critical for there to be sufficient motivation to live morally. If we have neither hope of future reward nor fear of punitive measures for our behavior in this life, then we have little reason consistently to perform our ethical duties. In "On Immortality" Berkeley writes,

> wt man would not embrace a thing in it self so
> lovely & profitable as vertue, wn recommended by
> the glorious reward of life & immortality? wt
> wretch so obdurate & foolish as not to shun vice a
> thing so hatefull & pernicious wn discouraged
> therefrom by the additional terrors of eternal
> death & damnation? Thus might a man think a
> thorough reformation of manners ye necessary
> effect of such a doctrine as our Saviour's.[35]

Berkeley is here urging that the doctrine of immortality, and the eternal rewards and punishments which attend it, serves doubly as a strong incentive towards virtue and an effective deterrent from vice.

The critic's objection to this counter-reply is twofold. First, it can be argued that regardless of any consideration of an afterlife the moral life is still worth living because it is in one's self-interest. The virtuous life is generally the happier life. In fulfilling our duties towards others and ourselves, by being honest, just, temperate, courageous, loving, etc. it is likely that we will eventually reap dividends as the respect and affection with which we treat them is reciprocated to us. Secondly, our interest in others is a motivation to live virtuously.

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[35]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 10.

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Almost everyone has loved ones for whom he or she cares for their own sake. Moreover, most of us share a genuine, though less intense, concern for strangers simply because they are persons. Doing our moral duty benefits others, our loved ones and society at large and therefore answers to this genuine interest in others which we experience.

Again Berkeley has a counter-reply. Simply put, it is that while a world-view without an afterlife might still possess the capacity to motivate a virtuous life, it is ill-equipped to provide sufficient motivation for heroic deeds such as saving someone's life while endangering oneself. Here the skeptic may respond by conceding this claim and pointing out that it is precisely this fact which makes such acts truly heroic. The hero or heroine does not enjoy substantial personal benefit when performing the deed nor is he or she compelled to do it, but this is why we call the person a hero.

V. The Argument from Authority and General Assent

Berkeley exploits what he believes to be a further shared presupposition prevailing among humankind: belief in the doctrine of immortality itself. He argues that "the doctrine of a future state is attested to and confirmed by the general consent of nations, as well as by the especial suffrage of the wisest men in all ages."[36] This claim he

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36. Ibid., p. 110.

believes rightly to be verified by empirical fact.

Christians, Jews, and Gentiles of all nations and in ancient

as well as modern times have held to the belief.[37] Also,

he adds, it is a doctrine which "hath alwaies been strongest

in the most wise and virtuous, the most reasonable and

intelligent of mankind."[38] However, Berkeley makes the

further claim that the virtual universality of belief in the

immortality and the assent of great minds throughout the

ages counts as an evidence in support of the truth of the

doctrine. Represented formally, therefore, the argument

seems to be this:

1. The immortality of the soul is (a) a nearly
   universally held belief and (b) a belief held most
   strongly by the wise and virtuous.

2. Those beliefs which are nearly universally held and
   most firmly believed by the wise and virtuous are
   almost always true.

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3. Therefore, it is likely that the soul is immortal.

This attempted proof for the immortality of the soul is

Berkeley's weakest. The most obvious problem is that it is

an *ad populum* argument. It illicitly appeals to the

popularity of belief in immortality as an evidence of its

truth. Arguments of this sort are obviously flawed from a

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[37]. Berkeley takes particular care in providing textual
evidence suggesting that the doctrine of immortality is taught
in the Old Testament, a point of serious contention in
Berkeley's day as well as in contemporary times. Today
liberal Jewish sects deny the immortality of the soul, just as
the Sadducees did at the time of Christ.

[38]. Ibid., p. 109-110.

strictly formal standpoint, but notwithstanding their lack of logical elegance their rhetorical power is undeniable, perhaps explaining their tenacity in philosophical discussions. It is not entirely surprising that in his sermons and Guardian essay even the usually meticulous Berkeley succumbed to the temptation to employ so weak an argument. His audiences on these occasions were largely philosophically unsophisticated and therefore more easily to be persuaded by bad logic.

A second problem with Berkeley's argument from general consent concerns the second premise. Numerous examples from history can be given of beliefs held nearly universally, for long periods of time, and by the most wise and virtuous persons but which were later shown to be false. The doctrines of a flat earth, geocentrism, and spontaneous generation are notable examples.

Further, a naturalistic account of the general assent to the doctrine of immortality might be proposed which explains the belief as a concomitant of the common yearning for immortality prevailing among humankind. If this desire is natural or at least very common, as defenders of the argument from desire such as Berkeley insist, then it would be expected that most persons would believe in immortality. For better or worse, most of us are more inclined to believe what we would like to be true, and other evidence being equal we will accept that thesis which we find most pleasant or personally agreeable. Thus, the critic may note, it is

to be expected that the majority of people should believe in the immortality of the soul, since in the eyes of most people immortality is something greatly to be desired.

Berkeley's premise that the most virtuous people have believed in immortality might be explained naturally as well. If it is true that belief in an afterlife and judgment does indeed motivate right living, then it is only to be expected that this conviction would be strongest in those who live well. But, again, it should be remembered that this fact by itself is not evidence for the truth of the belief, but only of the power of this opinion as an incentive for piety.

As for Berkeley's claim that the doctrine of immortality has been strongest in the most wise, reasonable, and intelligent persons, this premise seems to have been falsified in the two centuries since his death. Anyway, there is decided skepticism about immortality among contemporary philosophers, and these are the individuals whom we should probably call the most reasonable when it comes to metaphysical questions.

VI. The Argument from Analogies in Nature

Berkeley also uses what he thinks to be analogies of resurrection in the natural world to bolster his case for the immortality of the soul.

> All the parts of this corporeal world are in a
> perpetual flux and revolution, decaying and
> renewing, perishing and rising up again. The

various successions and returns of light and
darkness, winter and summer, spring and autumn,
the renovation of plants and fruits of the earth,
all are in some sort so many instances of this
truth.[39]

On the basis of these general observations and various
specific examples of resurrection in nature, such as are
found in flowers, insects, and caterpillars, Berkeley
asserts that "resurrection... is conformable to the course
of nature in her ordinary production, which nature is the
work of God." This last phrase reminds us of Berkeley's
view that all of the operations of nature are providentially
governed. God's immediate direction is not limited to the
spiritual, incorporeal realm as some Christian traditions
might have it, leaving governance of the material world to
the laws of nature. The laws of nature just _are_ the uniform
workings of providence. The hand of God actively manages
all events, corporeal as well as spiritual. This feature of
Berkeley's metaphysics strengthens his analogical argument
for immortality, for given this notion of complete divine
control of the world it seems plausible that we should
expect God's management of the spiritual sphere to somehow
resemble that of the corporeal. Viewed in this light,
instances of resurrection in the former, Berkeley suggests,
counts as evidence for resurrection in the latter. He
concludes,

> there is nothing impossible or incongruous in
> supposing that the same omnipotence which before

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[39]. Ibid., p. 107.

our eyes raiseth so many fair plants and flowers
and fruits out of the dust of the earth, should
from the same dust in due time raise up humane
bodies.[40]

Like Berkeley's other arguments this analogical proof

hearkens back to those of thinkers before him. In the

Phaedo Socrates sets forth an argument from opposites which

also appeals to cyclic patterns in nature and then compares

the life of the soul to these. He concludes that just as

stronger is generated from weaker, bigger from smaller, and

hotter from colder, life must be generated from death.[41]

Another version of this argument is defended by the early

Roman theologian, Tertullian. In *Concerning the*

Resurrection of the Flesh he uses the analogy of the

mythical Phoenix bird:

> If the universe does not portray resurrection, if
> creation indicates no such character, because its
> individual parts are said not so much to die as to
> come to an end, and are not regarded as re-endowed
> with life, but given a new shape, take a
> sufficient and undeniable example of this hope,
> since it is a breathing thing, subject both to
> life and to death: I mean that bird, special to
> the east, famous from its solitary character,
> miraculous in its after-history, which gladly puts
> itself to death and renews itself, passing away
> and appearing again by a death which is a birth, a
> second time a phoenix where now there is none, a
> second time the very creature that no longer
> exists, another and yet the same.... But shall
> men perish once for all, while Arabian birds are
> sure of rising again?[42]

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40. Ibid., p. 108.

41. *Phaedo*, 70d-72e.

42. *Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh*, 13.
Curiously, in this passage Tertullian does not treat the
Phoenix's powers of resurrection as mere fable. It is

Unfortunately, Berkeley's argument is no stronger than those offered by Plato and Tertullian, despite Berkeley's innovation regarding the immediate providence of God. The most serious objection to the argument is that the so-called resurrection in nature is not really analogous to what is supposed by believers in the soul's immortality, for all "resurrected" animals and plants eventually die. But the claim at hand is that the soul <u>never</u> dies. One might grant that the soul lives after death, but this no more shows that it will <u>never</u> die than the chrysalis' emergence into a butterfly ensures that it will live eternally.

In the *Phaedo* we find Cebes articulating this very criticism using the analogy of a tailor:

> The tailor makes and wears out any number of
> coats, but although he outlives all the others,
> presumably he perishes before the last one, and
> this does not mean that a man is inferior to a
> coat, or has a weaker hold upon life. I believe
> that this analogy might apply to the relation of
> soul to body, and I think that it would be
> reasonable to say of them in the same way that the
> soul is a long-lived thing, whereas body is
> relatively feeble and short-lived.[43]

What Cebes is suggesting, then, is that granting that the soul survives the death of perhaps many different bodies or, that is to say, is resurrected repeatedly, this fact is no guarantee that it will not itself become extinct at some time. He concludes that "no one but a fool is entitled to face death with confidence, unless he can prove that the

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possible that he accepted the myth of the phoenix as fact.

[43]. *Phaedo*, 87c-d.

soul is absolutely immortal and indestructible."[44] Plato here is facing head-on the objection that resurrection alone, or many resurrections for that matter, do not imply eternal life. And he is able to do so because he is confident that he possesses in his theory of forms an adequate reply. Berkeley had no such luxury. Whether or not he glimpsed these difficulties latent in his argument we cannot tell. But whatever weaknesses in this proof he may have been cognizant of, he did not consider them worthy of discussion, at least in those contexts where the argument appeared.

Another problem with Berkeley's argument from analogies in nature concerns his doctrine of divine providence and the more fundamental assumption of God's existence. As is the case with his proof from desire, this argument faces the dilemma of being either too weak (if God's existence is not assumed) or having too small an audience (if God's existence is assumed). And in the latter case, it is not fair to presuppose that all theists hearing Berkeley's argument will readily take his view of providence, so his audience will be narrowed even further to those theists who believe in the immediate governance of God. So it might be misleading to suggest that Berkeley's version of the argument from analogies in nature which assumes God's existence is the stronger. For those who do accept this premise about divine

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[44]. Ibid., 88b.

providence the argument will indeed be stronger. But many, or perhaps most, will consider this premise to be false, and the argument will be rejected as unsound.

VII. The Argument from the Resurrection of Christ

In addition to the above philosophical arguments for immortality, Berkeley uses a theological argument based on the scriptural account of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

> We are wonderfully strengthened in this hope of eternal life, when we consider the resurrection of our blessed Saviour, than which nothing could be more apt to produce in us a strong persuasion that we our selves also shall rise from the dead.[45]

Obviously this is an argument intended only for Christians. That this argument appears only in his sermon "On Eternal Life" serves to confirm this fact. In arguing as he does here, Berkeley is adopting the line of argument taken by the apostle Paul when he writes,

> If it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.[46]

Like Paul in this passage, Berkeley begins with the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ and concludes from this that those who believe in him shall also rise from the dead. He is aware of the "novelty and strangeness" of the doctrine of

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[45]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 106.

[46]. I Corinthians 15:12-14.

Jesus' bodily resurrection, but again like Paul,[47] he insists that these difficulties are overcome by "the expectation of so many ages, such mighty miracles, the concurring testimony of so many wise and good men."[48]

Aside from the fact that this argument is theological and, therefore, like the more rigorous versions of some of Berkeley's other arguments for immortality, restricted to an audience of Christian theists, this proof is problematic even assuming the reliability and authoritativeness of the New Testament scriptures. In this argument Berkeley seems to assume that biblical evidence for the resurrection is *ipso facto* evidence for the immortality of the soul. The fact is, however, that these are two different (though related) issues, the truth (or falsity) of neither one implying the truth (or falsity) of the other. That the dead shall rise and live again does not imply that they shall live forever. This is the thrust of Cebes' tailor objection discussed above. One may grant the possibility of many bodily resurrections, in fact, and at the same time reject the notion of an immortal soul. It no more follows from the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead that the soul is immortal than it follows that a tailor who has outlived many coats must therefore live forever. So Berkeley is mistaken in appealing to the doctrine of Christ's resurrection as

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[47]. See I Corinthians 15:3-8.

[48]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 106.

evidence for immortality. He would have been better advised to limit his use of this doctrine, and specifically the passage in I Corinthians 15, as a theological proof for the resurrection of the body. This strategy, for instance, is taken by St. Thomas in *Summa Contra Gentiles*.[49]

This is not to say that there are no theological proofs for the immortality of the soul at Berkeley's disposal but only that the one he uses here is flawed. Better arguments from scripture might be constructed, for example, using some of the copious references, particularly in the New Testament, to "eternal life" and "everlasting life". Or one might build such a proof on a passage which appears later in chapter 15 of I Corinthians:

> We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.[50]

Here are just a few of the more promising theological strategies Berkeley might have employed to justify the doctrine of immortality.

VIII. Conclusion

Let us summarize our findings in this chapter. First, while Berkeley's arguments for the existence and attributes

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[49]. IV, 79, 2 & 4.

[50]. I Corinthians 15:51-53.

of the soul are novel in an important sense, his attempted proofs of the immortality of the soul are for the most part unoriginal, having their inspiration, and some perhaps borrowed directly, from the likes of Plato, Plotinus, Augustine, Aquinas, Bonaventure, Malebranche, and Leibniz. Secondly, Berkeley's arguments for the immortality of the soul are uncharacteristically poor, particularly when they are stripped of theistic presuppositions. When the assumption of God's existence is retained, the cogency of the arguments is improved but only at the expense of eliminating a large portion of Berkeley's intended audience. Thirdly, that so acute a mind as his should defend such weak arguments is to be explained by several factors: (1) the genre of the works in which they appear: the sermons and *Guardian* essays had to be short and so did not permit long defenses of premises or replies to criticisms; (2) the audiences of these works: generally speaking, the readers of *The Guardian* and the hearers of his sermons were not the intellectuals and academics to whom Berkeley addressed his *Principles*, *Dialogues*, and other of his philosophical works, but lay persons; (3) the historical context: in the early eighteenth century there was wide adherence to the doctrine of immortality and a much more prevalent acceptance of the biblical doctrines generally. Thus, many of his assumptions now open to question and subject to criticism were thought self-evident or perceived by common sense, in any case needing no philosophical justification. Finally, it should

be noted that none of Berkeley's arguments for the
immortality of the soul presuppose immaterialism. Although
I did not make this point explicitly in the course of the
discussion, it should be clear from my exposition of the
arguments that this is the case.

CHAPTER 7

Berkeley's Defense of Scripture and Christian Doctrine

Berkeley's Defense of Scripture
and Christian Doctrine

I. Introduction

As with his theodicies and his arguments for the
immortality of the soul, Berkeley's defenses of distinctive
Christian doctrines such as the Trinity, the divine
incarnation, grace, faith, and biblical authoritativeness
are made independently of his immaterialism and are not
really original, representing little advance from similar
apologetic arguments offered by Christian apologists before
him, such as Augustine, Aquinas, and Pascal. In some cases
Berkeley is probably directly indebted to his predecessors.

In this chapter I shall analyze Berkeley's rational
defense of the following: (1) the doctrine of divine
revelation--or that the written texts of the Christian
scriptures, the Old and New Testaments, are divinely
inspired; (2) the doctrine of grace--the redemptive work of
God in human beings, (3) the doctrine of divine incarnation-
-that Jesus Christ is God in human form, (4) the doctrine of
the Trinity--that the deity exists in three persons but one
substance; and (5) the doctrine of faith--belief in God or
other religious claims in the absence of conclusive
evidence. I shall explicate each of Berkeley's main
arguments for the orthodox position he takes regarding them,
noting historical precedents for many of them. The
discussion will make clear that immaterialism is in no way

presupposed in this aspect of Berkeley's apologetics.

II. Divine Revelation and the Authority of the Christian Scriptures

Should Berkeley succeed at proving the existence of God and the immortality of the soul as well as presenting an adequate theodicy, he will indeed have made great strides towards presenting a rational defense of theism. As we have seen, however, his attempts at accomplishing these tasks are more than a little problematic. And yet his most formidable challenge still awaits him even given that the above aims have been achieved. He must provide adequate rational grounds for our accepting the Christian religion as the correct expression of these doctrines. How, in other words, do we know that among the many religious traditions of the world Christianity is that one which is actually divinely revealed?[1] In *Alciphron* the problem is posed in this way:

> All the various castes or sects of the sons of men
> have each their faith, and their religious
> system... They shall each tell of intercourse
> with the invisible world, revelations from heaven,
> divine oracles and the like. All which
> pretensions, when I regard with an impartial eye,
> it is impossible I should assent to them all, and
> I find within myself something that withholds me
> from assenting to any of them.[2]

What, in short, sets Berkeley's tradition, Christianity,

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[1]. Attempts to solve this problem by appealing to certain biblical texts themselves are circular and therefore unhelpful. Passages often cited in the interest of using the Bible's assumed authority to "prove" its authority include II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 3:15-16.

[2]. *Alciphron* VI, 2.

apart, such that we can be confident it is the single true religion? Berkeley's answer is the traditional one. The proof, he asserts, is to be found in miracles, fulfilled predictive prophecy, and the excellence of Christian doctrine. But what evidence have we, asks Alciphron in the dialogue, of miracles actually occurring?

Berkeley's answer, through Euphranor, is that "we have authentic accounts transmitted down to us from eyewitness."[3] He is arguing here on the basis of the historicity of such miraculous accounts as are found in the four gospels and the book of Acts, the turning of water into wine, healing of the blind, raising of the dead, etc. Such events, it is assumed, could only be caused by some supernatural power. They are, he believes, the signature of the true God.

But here emerges a serious problem for Berkeley, for there is at least the appearance of circularity in his argument. He appeals to miracles to justify his belief in the authority of the scriptures. But if we are to be confident that the accounts of miracles in question are veridical it seems we must _first_ know that the biblical accounts are divinely inspired, and moreover, perfectly trustworthy. Berkeley seems not to be aware that he could be construed as begging the question. I say "could be", because if pressed on this point Berkeley might have replied

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[3]. Ibid., VI, 3.

by saying that we need not know that the Bible is divinely inspired in advance of our trust in the accounts of the miraculous. We can assume the authenticity of the reports of miracles for the same reasons that we can trust any other ancient historical document, such as Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War*, Herodotus' *Histories*, or Plutarch's *Lives of the Philosophers*. And once having verified the general reliability of the biblical histories, we may conclude that the specific reports of miracles are also trustworthy. <u>Then</u> on this basis we make the inference that the biblical writings bear the mark of divine inspiration.

From the discussion in *Alciphron* VI, where Berkeley treats various issues related to the question of the historicity of the New Testament, it seems that this general line of approach is one that he would sanction. There the free thinker, Alciphron, confronts Euphranor with a series of objections to the view that the books of the New Testament are reliable. Many of these criticisms were actually posed by deists in Berkeley's day, and it is to answer them, presumably, that he takes up the gauntlet.

I want now to look at a few of Berkeley's arguments in some detail. It should be noted that none of Berkeley's replies to his critics on the matter of the historicity of the manuscripts presupposes nor in any way suggests his immaterialist metaphysics. Instead, he provides straightforward, stock arguments, many apparently borrowed directly from his philosophical and theological

predecessors. For example, with regard to the objection that the present day translation must have been significantly altered since the writing of the original autographa, Berkeley appeals to the Codex Alexandrinus to verify the reliability of centuries of transcriptions. As for the objection based on dispute over which books ought to be canonized, Berkeley appeals to common sense, noting that the few controversial books do not detract from the authority of the non-controversial ones.[4] Berkeley adds that anyone who would quibble over the precise list of canonized books seems to be arguing from within the church.

Like most Christian apologists Berkeley lays down the injunction that biblical texts be judged by precisely the same rule as is used in determining other ancient texts when determining historicity. He remarks,

> Men are apt to make great allowance for
> transpositions, omissions, and literal errors of
> transcribers in other ancient books, and very
> great for the difference of style and manners,
> especially in Eastern writings, such as the
> remains of Zoroaster and Confucius; and why not in
> the Prophets? In reading Horace or Persius, to
> make out the sense, they will be at the pains to
> discover a hidden drama, and why not in Solomon or
> St. Paul?[5]

Berkeley seems to recognize the seriousness of the problem of obscurity and awkward style in certain biblical texts. But he does not shrink from attempting to dissolve

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4. This argument is used by Augustine. See *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 8.

5. *Alciphron*, VI, 8.

some of these problems. He explains that such difficulties are to be expected in divine revelation which has been set down and transmitted by imperfect human beings. Some textual obscurities, he notes, might result from the translation across languages and cultures and that obscure or seemingly nonsensical expressions "harsh and odd to English ears [could] have been very natural and obvious in the Hebrew tongue," as is the case with idiomatic phrases in any languages.[6] Berkeley's reasoning here is strikingly similar to that of Augustine's in *On Christian Doctrine* where he offers the same defense of the scriptures, but in more detail.[7]

Berkeley's general view towards stylistic enigmas is that we should not conclude a passage itself to be obscure simply because its meaning is presently unclear to us. Our attitude should be that of Euphranor's when he says "I dare not pronounce a thing to be nonsense because I do not understand it."[8] Here Berkeley is advising humility in the whole enterprise of biblical interpretation, much as is countenanced by Augustine who also considered proper attitude of mind in approaching difficult passages to be

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[6]. *Alciphron*, VI, 7.

[7]. *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 10-12. Compare also Origen's *On First Principles*, IV, II, 2.

[8]. *Alciphron*, VI, 7.

paramount.[9]

Berkeley makes a further point about the problem of obscurity. Lack of clarity can only be properly judged a defect in a text relative to the author's intentions. When it comes to divine revelation, the author might have good reasons for obscurity, such as "to enlarge our diligence and modesty," virtues which, Berkeley adds, are noticeably lacking among the free thinkers. Here again Berkeley's influences are apparent. Augustine gives an identical argument, claiming that such obscurities are "provided by God to conquer pride by work and to combat disdain in our minds, to which those things which are easily discovered seem frequently to become worthless."[10] And Calvin asserts that "obscure passages...convict us of ignorance. With this bridle God keeps us within bounds.[11]

We see, then, that Berkeley's defenses of the scriptures for their authoritativeness, despite apparent stylistic and historical problems, are not original with him, though these arguments have perhaps never been couched

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[9]. Augustine writes "It is necessary that we become meek through piety so that we do not contradict Divine Scripture, either when it is understood and is seen to attack some of our vices, or when it is not understood and we feel as though we are wiser than it is and better able to give precepts. But we should rather think and believe that which is written to be better and more true than anything which we could think of by ourselves, even when it is obscure" (*On Christian Doctrine*, II, 7).

[10]. *On Christian Doctrine*, II, 6.

[11]. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 2, 4.

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in more eloquent terms. It is easy to see why *Alciphron* was

among Berkeley's most popular works during his lifetime and

up until the beginning of the twentieth century.[12] Here

we find Berkeley rhetorically at his best. And yet with

regard to the real strength of his arguments, considering

subsequent developments in biblical criticism, Berkeley is

at his weakest. We must keep in mind that he writes a

century before the explosion of modern higher biblical

criticism, which explains his naivete, from a twentieth

century perspective, regarding textual problems. Because of

this fact, his Augustinian defense has not aged well.

Berkeley next takes up the onerous task of apologizing

for seemingly absurd doctrines at the heart of the Christian

faith, most notably those of grace, the divine incarnation,

and the Trinity. These tenets of his faith are the most

difficult to justify rationally, but they are also three of

the most central and distinctive doctrines of the faith.

That salvation should be a free gift to sinful, undeserving

creatures from a just and holy God, that the infinite God

should take on finite flesh, and that God should be three

and yet one are prima facie incomprehensible. All this

Berkeley seems to acknowledge. He writes, "that many points

contained in Holy Scripture are remote from the common

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12. Indicative of this is Fraser's remark in the
introduction to the 1901 edition of Berkeley's complete works
that *Alciphron* was at that time "the most popular of
Berkeley's works". *The Works of George Berkeley*, (vol. 2)
A.C. Fraser, ed. (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1901), p. 3.

apprehensions of mankind cannot be denied."[13] But he

refuses to believe this constitutes counter-evidence to the

claim that the scriptures are divine revelation. On the

contrary, he construes this fact as confirmation of the

claim that the Bible is "God's word" to human beings. For,

> should it not seem reasonable to suppose that a
> revelation from God should contain something
> different in kind, or more excellent in degree,
> than what lay open to the common sense of men, or
> could be discovered by the most sagacious
> philosopher?[14]

Do Berkeley's remarks here signify a retreat from his battle

cry in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, "I side in all things

with the mob?"[15] Although at first glance it might seem

to be the case that his religious beliefs force him to

forfeit his whole-hearted allegiance to common sense, this

turns out not to be the case. Berkeley actually explicitly

articulates his conception of common sense as if to

anticipate this objection. In book VI, section 12, of

Alciphron we find Crito offering a definition of common

sense which accommodates even such strange doctrines as

those at the heart of Christianity: "By common sense I

suppose should be meant either the general sense of mankind,

or the improved reason of thinking men."[16] This

definition is more liberal than what might have been

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13. *Alciphron*, VI, 10.

14. Ibid.

15. *Philosophical Commentaries* 405. See also 368.

16. *Alciphron*, VI, 12.

proposed by the young Berkeley, which is not surprising
since he still strives to be a champion of common sense but
in the present context must forge a conception of it which
incorporates belief in certain theological paradoxes.

III. Grace

Alciphron is Berkeley's only work which contains a full
discussion of the doctrine of grace. In the seventh
dialogue he devotes a full seven sections to its discussion
and justifiably so, for it is a central doctrine of the
faith. In fact, as Alciphron rightly notes, "grace is the
main point in the Christian dispensation."[17] However, he
is not satisfied with common theological uses of this term.
He complains that the notion is not sufficiently clear,
particularly for a concept that constitutes the essence of a
religious tradition. That Alciphron points to a serious
problem becomes clear when one considers that the New
Testament itself is replete with references to grace, yet
nowhere is there to be found even a hint at a definition of
the term.[18] Because of this obscurity, he declares "I
cannot assent to any proposition concerning it nor have any

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[17]. Ibid., VII, 4.

[18]. Detailed discussions of grace in Romans 5, II
Corinthians 8, and Ephesians 2 do suggest an understanding of
the term as denoting "unmerited favor". However, arriving at
a satisfactory definition of the term does not remove the
difficulty, for the heart of the problem raised by Alciphron
in the dialogue is not linguistic but metaphysical in nature.

faith about it."[19] Moreover, he insists that a rational inquirer into the matter, such as himself, will find that there is "nothing in it but an empty name" and that the notion is taken by so many to be intelligible solely by virtue of its familiarity. Berkeley himself is prepared to admit that "grace" is a notion of which even the accomplished biblical scholar is unable to frame a clear idea. This is precisely the object of Alciphron's criticism, "for there can be no assent where there are no ideas; and where there is no assent there can be no faith; and what cannot be, that no man is obliged to."[20]

How then does Berkeley defend the Christian doctrine of grace? His first strategy, typical of the Berkeleyan apologetic method, is not to demonstrate directly the rationality of this article of faith. Rather, he justifies the use of the concept indirectly, by comparing it with notions in other disciplines whose use is widely regarded as legitimate. A paradigmatic example used by Berkeley is the cryptic concept of "force". He points to the difficulties encountered by scientists in trying to forge an adequate account of force, noting that it has "puzzled men to know whether force is spiritual or corporeal; whether it remains after action; how it is transferred from one body to

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19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

another."[21] He further notes that "strange paradoxes have been framed about its nature, properties, and proportions."[22] Such problems with the concept lead Berkeley to suggest that "upon the whole...we shall find it as difficult to form an idea of force as of grace."[23]

Berkeley is not here proposing that scientists discard the term. On the contrary, he acknowledges it to be a very useful notion for understanding the world, explaining events and making predictions. The concept of force has tremendous practical use, and this is enough to justify the term's employment. Now as "force" is a vague but useful notion in science, Berkeley reasons, grace may have analogously practical uses in theology and morality. Thus, Euphranor says to Alciphron,

> Grace may, for aught you know, be an object of our
> faith, and influence our life and actions, as a
> principle destructive of evil habits and
> productive of good ones, although we cannot attain
> a distinct idea of it, separate or abstracted from
> God, from man the subject, and from virtue and
> piety its effects.[24]

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[21]. Ibid., VII, 6.

[22]. Ibid. If the advance of physics and the sophistication of theories of force make this an unfortunate analogy today, concepts from contemporary scientific vocabulary could be conveniently substituted, such as molecular "resonance", the "charm" of subatomic particles, and even the astronomical notion of "black holes".

[23]. Ibid.

[24]. Ibid., VII, 7. Berkeley makes a similar argument based on a comparison of the notion of grace with that of numbers. Although we have no ideas of number, Euphranor says, "we can nevertheless make a very proper and significant use of numeral names. They direct us in the disposition and

This defense of the use of the doctrine of grace, by appealing to practice, is not only Berkeley's best defense, it is consonant with the use that theologians make of the term. For typically it is discussed exclusively in terms of its effects, rather than its essence. Aquinas, for example enumerates at least ten practical benefits of grace, but he declines to explain its essence.[25] Others such as Calvin and Pascal discuss grace at length without bothering to define it.[26]

Underlying this strategy of Berkeley's in defending the concept of grace is his doctrine of the multiple uses of language, a commitment of his which is as strong at the time of the writing of *Alciphron* as it was in his early works. He insists that the purpose of words is not restricted to signifying ideas. Other functions that are equally legitimate include "influencing our conduct and actions, which may be done either by forming rules for us to act by, or by raising certain passions, dispositions and emotions in our minds."[27] As in the *Principles*, in the later editions of *Alciphron* Berkeley opposes the doctrine of abstract

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management of our affairs and are of such necessary use that we should not know how to do without them" (VII, 5). Grace, Berkeley would say, is a notion the use of which is at least as necessary in the religious life of humankind.

[25]. *Summa Theologica*, I, 109, 1-10 and I, 110.

[26]. See Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Bk III and Pascal's *Pensees* 430 and 508.

[27]. Ibid., VII, 5. Cf *Principles of Human Knowledge*, introduction, 19-20.

ideas. In the latter, however, his critique is not presented towards the end of defeating matterism but in the immediate apologetic interest of defending theological use of the concept of grace. Thus the apologetic service of his critique of abstract ideas is not exhausted by the role it plays in defense of immaterialism.

IV. The Doctrines of the Incarnation and the Trinity

If the doctrine of grace is a problematic one for Berkeley because of its obscurity, the doctrines of divine incarnation[28] and the Trinity[29] are all the more troublesome because of their apparent incoherence. Also, with regard to the former, there is the further problem of the historical details of the life of Jesus Christ, which would not be expected of human instantiation of the deity. I shall discuss the doctrine of divine incarnation first.

Before examining Berkeley's defense of the doctrine of divine incarnation, we must first make clear just what this

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[28]. Biblical proof texts for this doctrine are copious. Key passages include John 8:58, 10:30; Colossians 2:9; and Hebrews 1:3.

[29]. Interestingly, the term "trinity" is used nowhere in the New Testament. And yet, that this doctrine is taught there is as nearly a matter of consensus in the history of Christendom as any teaching in the church. Unlike other central teachings, such as the divine incarnation, very few passages independently support the doctrine. A rare example is Matthew 28:19 where Jesus exhorts his disciples to baptize "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit". Other textual evidence for the Trinity comes typically by gathering individual references to the deity of each person in the Godhead.

teaching asserts. In mainstream Christian denominations the Creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon have historically been judged to embody the definitive articulation of this teaching, for these creeds affirm both the full divinity and the full humanity of the person of Jesus Christ.[30] Taking the teaching of these statements as the standard for orthodoxy, then, we find that Berkeley falls clearly within the orthodox tradition in the matter of Christology. He affirms the essence of these creedal formulations when he writes "our blessed Lord condescended to take upon Him Humane nature"[31] and, through Euphranor, "may not Christians...be allowed to believe the divinity of our Savior, or that in Him God and man make one person...?"[32]

Now setting aside for the time being the logical and conceptual problems inherent in this doctrine, let us investigate Berkeley's attempt to reconcile the biographical

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[30]. The Nicene creed asserts Jesus Christ to be "the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not created, of the same essence as the Father...; Who...for our salvation came down and was incarnate, becoming human." The Chalcedonian formulation declares that Christ is "to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without conversion, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one subsistence." The distinctive "four alphaprivatives" of this famous creed were articulated specifically to address the christological views of certain heretics in the early church, such as the Docetists, Apollonarians, Ebionites, Arians, Nestorians, and Monophysites.

[31]. *Works*, Vol. VII, p. 46.

[32]. *Alciphron*, VII, 8.

information about the person Jesus Christ with the notion

that he was in fact God incarnate. In *Alciphron* Lysicles

expresses his dissatisfaction with the biblical account of

the Son of God as humble, impoverished, mistreated and

ultimately a victim of murder. These accounts, he insists,

do not cohere with our preconception of how an incarnation

of an omnipotent deity would actually appear. He says

> Common sense shews every one what figure it would
> be decent for an earthly prince or ambassador to
> make; and the Son of God, upon an embassy from
> heaven, must needs have made an appearance beyond
> all others of great *eclat*, and in all respects the
> very reverse of that which Jesus Christ is
> reported to have made, even by his own
> historians.[33]

So not only is the life of Jesus Christ inconsistent with

what one would anticipate of the Son of God, it is utterly

antithetical to it.

Crito notes other oddities about the doctrine,

specifically the unexpected particularities of the Christ.

Assuming that God must come to earth in the form of a human,

one must still explain

> Why in that individual place? Why at that very
> time above all others? Why did he not make his
> appearance earlier, and preach in all parts of the
> world, that his benefit might have been more
> extensive and equal?[34]

Rather than attempt to solve the problems raised here

by calling into question Crito's assertion about what common

sense would lead us to expect of God incarnate, Berkeley

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[33]. Ibid., VI, 15.

[34]. Ibid.

takes a more modest approach to the difficulty, tacitly
admitting the point of the objection but encouraging the
skeptic to attend to the practical aspects of the doctrine.
He argues that while the divine incarnation is a tenet of
the faith which eludes "the mere light of human reason", it
is nevertheless recommended by its effects. For Berkeley, a
debit of apparent rational inconsistency can be, and is for
him in this case, overridden by the asset of a teaching's
usefulness. And naturally, as a devout churchman, no
doctrine could be more useful than that which serves as the
means of grace and the basis of saving faith. To this
extent Berkeley is a pragmatist, holding that the dogmas of
the church are eminently practical, not to be judged solely
by their logical rigor but also by their fruitfulness in
practice. In this instance, the latter consideration trumps
the former. Berkeley always emphasized the practical import
of philosophical views, and this proclivity intensified
through his career, as is perhaps evinced in the present
case.

For Berkeley, then, the practicality of the doctrine of
divine incarnation bears much more weight than its
conceptual difficulties. And he is quick to point out in
section 16 of the sixth dialogue that those who malign this
teaching betray their own narrowness of mind, for they fail
to take adequate account of the importance of religious
practice. Berkeley's treatment of this issue, once again,
reflects his apologetic kinship with (and perhaps

indebtedness to) Augustine who when dealing with peculiar
doctrines often called attention to their practical benefits
in the lives of believers.[35]

The lessons Berkeley has to teach us here are
important, and his particular defense of the notion of a
divine incarnation against common sense is ably made.
However, Crito's quibbles hardly compare to the formidable
logical puzzles that this teaching raises. And as we shall
see, Berkeley's appeal to practical usefulness will not
suffice against the charge of logical incoherence.
Answering the above criticism pertaining to the startling
humility of the God-man and justifying the oddity of certain
other particularities in Jesus Christ does improve
Berkeley's case, but he is hardly out of the woods yet. For
he must now tackle the awesome problem of showing how the
dual nature of Christ, in the sense outlined in the creed of
Chalcedon, is even intelligible. How can a single person
possess two natures simultaneously? What sense of personal
identity could save this teaching from absurdity? The
doctrine of the Trinity, it seems, fares no better under
logical scrutiny. For what sense can be made of the notion
that God is, as the teaching asserts, three persons in one
substance?[36] Now if these doctrines prove to be logically

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[35]. See *On Christian Doctrine*, I, 14-16.

[36]. The church fathers in the fourth century councils
expressed this doctrine using the term *homoousios* (one
substance). This formulation quickly captured the claim to
orthodoxy and the rival conception of the three persons as

inconsistent, absurd in principle, then the Christian
religion will be shown to be irrational at its doctrinal
core and discussion of such matters as grace and the
authority of scripture will be unnecessary. And the
doctrines of divine incarnation and the Trinity do seem to
assert contradictions.

What then is Berkeley's strategy in dealing with the
problem of apparent inconsistency in these teachings? The
route he takes is like that which he uses in defending the
doctrine of grace, as was discussed above. Instead of
giving a direct justification for the rationality of these
doctrines, Berkeley chooses to compare them to a more common
but no less intractable doctrine from non-theological
discourse, specifically the doctrine of personal identity in
human beings.[37] He writes,

> To me it seems evident that if none but those who
> had nicely examined, and could themselves explain,
> the principle of individuation in man, or untie
> the knots and answer the objections which may be
> raised even about human personal identity, would
> require of us to explain the divine mysteries, we
> should not be often called upon for a clear and
> distinct idea of person in relation to the
> Trinity, nor would the difficulties on that head

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similar, denoted by the term *homoiousios* (similar substance)
was relegated to heterodoxy. Berkeley clearly shows himself
to be a homoousian and, therefore, orthodox.

[37]. Berkeley uses this same strategy when defending his
immaterialism against objections from evil. He points to the
fact that his doctrine is no more susceptible to the objection
than that of the matterist. Thus, we assume, if matterism can
stand against the objection, then whatever tool it employs to
escape the criticism can also be used by the immaterialist.
See chapter five on the problem of evil.

be often objected to our faith.[38]

As is suggested in the final phrase of this excerpt, and as is evident from the larger context of the passage, Berkeley's remarks apply to the doctrine of divine incarnation as well as the Trinity. His counsel amounts to this. The skeptic should demand no more explanation from the Christian regarding this teaching than s/he can him/herself supply. Or, put another way, the beliefs of the religious devotee ought not to be held to a standard any more stringent than those of the non-religious. For, Berkeley insists, the notion of the dual nature of Christ is no less problematic than that of human personal identity.[39] Philosophers have and will continue to dispute wherein lies a person's identity. The whole issue of personhood is itself a highly controversial one. And since the time of Berkeley's writing philosophers have come no closer to a consensus on the matter, as a perusal of recent work in philosophy of mind will show. So although no

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[38]. *Alciphron*, VII, 8.

[39]. Berkeley's method here resembles that of the twentieth century apologist Alvin Plantinga, for the latter applies this strategy when arguing for the proper basicality of belief in God. Like Berkeley, Plantinga compares the theist's belief in God to belief that others persons have minds of their own. By Plantinga's account, since the two beliefs are on equal evidential footing (poor footing, as it turns out), and since the latter is typically judged to be rational nonetheless and in fact properly basic, then we must say the same for belief in God. See Plantinga's *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), chapters 8-10 and "Is Belief in God Properly Basic?" in *Nous* (1979) vol 1, pp. 41-51.

adequate philosophical account of the dual nature of Christ can be given by the Christian (this seems to be Berkeley's tacit confession), this is not grounds for concluding that the belief ought to be abandoned, unless one is prepared also to surrender his or her beliefs about human personal identity. An historical precedent for this line of defense can be found in John Calvin who writes of the divine incarnation that "the most apposite parallel seems to be that of man whom we see to consist of two substances. Yet neither is so mingled with the other as not to retain its own distinctive nature".[40]

Unfortunately, the problems with the notion of divine incarnation are considerably more serious than Berkeley (or Calvin) is willing to admit. We are dealing with more than a problem of simple obscurity when it comes to this doctrine. It is a teaching that seems prima facie to be contradictory, whereas the problem of human personal identity, for all its difficulty, does not. So Berkeley, like all Christian apologists, faces a serious metaphysical problem when it comes to justifying the rationality of this central tenet of the faith, a problem which, as it turns out, he never really makes a serious attempt to solve.[41]

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[40]. *Institutes*, II, 14, 1.

[41]. As we have seen, his preferred tactic is to deny that the burden is upon him to solve this problem. Although Berkeley was not equal to the task, apologists before and after him have made formidable efforts to do so. Aquinas, for example, not only carefully explicates the ontology of the divine incarnation and the precise mode of the divine and

Berkeley's final remarks on this subject in *Alciphron*
give us a clue as to why he did not feel compelled to work
out a thorough rational defense of the doctrine of divine
incarnation:

> There is, if I mistake not, a practical faith, or
> assent, which sheweth itself in the will and
> actions of a man although his understanding may
> not be furnished with those abstract, precise,
> distinct ideas, which, whatever a philosopher may
> pretend, are acknowledged to be above the talents
> of common men... What should hinder, therefore,
> but that doctrines relating to heavenly mysteries
> might be taught, in this saving sense, to vulgar
> minds, which you may well think incapable of all
> teaching and faith, in the sense you suppose?[42]

So Berkeley refuses to submit to the free thinkers' mandate
that all tenets of religious faith be subject to the
dictates of reason. The teachings of the church, Berkeley
points out, are not intended to compose a rigorous
philosophical system. He asks, "what footsteps are there in
Holy Scripture to make us think that the wiredrawing of
abstract ideas was a task enjoined [by] either Jews or
Christians?"[43] Their teachings, Berkeley will maintain,
are largely practical and intended first and foremost to
produce saving faith, charity and obedience. And since they
regard the domain of faith, they are consequently not

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human natures but also attempts to show why it was fitting God
should become incarnate at the beginning rather than at the
end of the world (*Summa Theologica* Pt. III, Q. 2-6). In
recent years this aggressive tradition has been continued in
the work of Thomas V. Morris. See *The Logic of God Incarnate*
(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

[42]. *Alciphron*, VII, 9.

[43]. Ibid.

properly to be evaluated by reason alone.

As with the doctrine of the divine incarnation, the
doctrine of the Trinity is conceded by Berkeley ultimately
to be a mystery which defies satisfactory rational
justification. Berkeley's reluctance to give any evidence
for these doctrines places him in the mainstream among
Christian apologists. Aquinas, for instance, maintains
these teachings can only be known by biblical authority and
not by natural reason alone.[44] Berkeley thinks, however,
it is a tenet of the faith that is also susceptible to some
support from extra-biblical authorities. In the final pages
of *Siris*, Berkeley discourses on the doctrine, arguing for
its plausibility on the basis of philosophical authority,
Christians and non-Christians alike. He writes, "Certain it
is that the notion of a Trinity is to be found in the
writings of many old heathen philosophers--that is to say, a
notion of three divine Hypostases."[45] He refers to

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[44]. See *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 32, Art. 1. And for
similar approaches to the doctrine of the Trinity, see St.
Ambrose (*De Fide*, II, 5) and Hilary (*De Trinity*, I) The
alternative view, that the doctrine of the plural personality
of God can be rationally demonstrated, is not without its
proponents. St. Bonaventure attempts such a proof, arguing
that God, being the highest good, must be self-diffusive, a
single substance present in many persons (*The Mind's Road to
God*, VI, 1-6). Compare St. Victor (*De Trinity*, I, 4).
Augustine, while stopping short of offering a strict proof,
believed strong evidences of the Trinity to be available,
specifically in the nature of human beings in whom mind, love,
and knowledge mirror the divine nature. (*De Trinity*, IX, 4; X,
11-12). See also Augustine's *City of God* XI, 26 and
Confessions, XIII, 11.

[45]. *Siris*, 361.

Plotinus' remark that an investigation of the writings of
Plato and Parmenides shows that at least a rough conception
of the plurality of personhood in the deity predates
Christianity.[46] As textual evidence for this claim,
Berkeley quotes a cryptic passage from an epistle of Plato.
The text is as follows:

> All things are related to the Sovereign of all
> things, and all things are for the sake of Him;
> and that is the cause of all things that are
> excellent. There is a Second related to the
> second things, and a Third to the third
> things.[47]

Berkeley admits his ignorance of the precise meaning of the
text and appeals to the use of this text by the Alexandrine
Fathers as anticipatory of the Christian teaching of a
Triune God.

Of course, Berkeley is on very thin philosophical ice
here, for not only is his an argument from authority, it is
not at all clear that those individuals he uses as his
authorities actually intended to suggest the truth of
anything like the Christian Trinity. It is possible that
Berkeley was led into such a weak line of reasoning because
of its use by Ralph Cudworth who sixty years earlier had
made a similar appeal.[48] Berkeley's defense of the
doctrine of the Trinity is not at all strengthened by the
Siris discussion. It certainly is no improvement on his

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[46]. *Enneads* V, 1, 8.

[47]. *Siris*, 365.

[48]. *True Intellectual System*, I, 4, xxxvi.

appeal to mystery and the legitimacy of faith in *Alciphron* twelve years earlier.

As observed earlier, Berkeley's preferred method regarding religious mysteries is to defer to the practical effects of such teachings to justify belief in them. His approach is no different when treating the doctrine of the Trinity. And here again we find a significant precedent of Berkeley's method, specifically in the thought of Thomas Aquinas. He maintained that reason could be employed in justifying the doctrine of the Trinity just "by showing the congruity of its results", and yet, like Berkeley five centuries later, even this aggressive apologist can muster no stronger argument by natural theology alone.[49]

V. Faith

Perhaps the pivotal point at which Berkeley and his deist opponents diverge regards their understanding of the essence of religious faith. For the deists, the essential aspects of the Christian faith were not mysterious but could be reasoned out completely.[50] In Berkeley's view, the place of reason in religious inquiry is prominent but hardly decisive. In keeping with Christian orthodoxy, the final arbiter of theological truth is the inspired text of the Old

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[49]. *Summa Theologica*, Pt. I, Q. 32, Art. 1.

[50]. This claim boldly made by Toland in *Christianity Not Mysterious* (1696) and Collins in *Priestcraft in Perfection* (1710) emerged as the unifying theme of 18th century English deism.

and New Testaments. Sometimes the teachings of scripture,
such as those examined above, cannot be rationally
demonstrated. This is when reason must defer to faith.
However awkward, obscure, or even logically incoherent a
biblical teaching may be, its authority takes precedence
over the judgment of reason.

How, then, are we properly to understand the
relationship between faith and reason and the role of
evidence in each of these domains? One's answer to this
question is essentially a statement of one's general
apologetic perspective. The sort of answer Berkeley would
give should by now be apparent. A very succinct formulation
of his position on this question appears in the sixth
dialogue of *Alciphron*:

> Knowledge, I grant, in a strict sense, cannot be
> had without evidence or demonstration: but
> probable arguments are a sufficient ground of
> faith. Whoever supposed that scientific proofs
> are necessary to make a Christian? Faith alone is
> required; and provided that, in the main and upon
> the whole, men are persuaded this saving faith may
> consist with some degrees of obscurity, scruple,
> and error.[51]

Berkeley's words here are remarkable for several reasons.
First, and most obviously, Berkeley refuses to identify
faith as knowledge. He thus opposes the view of certain
reformers such as John Calvin who vigorously insists that
faith is just knowledge of a certain sort, specifically

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[51]. *Alciphron*, VI, 31.

knowledge of God and his will toward us.[52] Secondly, he
is unabashed in his liberality regarding what may count as
"saving faith", for such may include even erroneous beliefs.
Coming from an apologist, this might not be surprising, but
given Berkeley's own philosophical acumen and his record of
placing a high premium on logical consistency and rigor, his
standards for rational belief here seem to be exceedingly
lenient. Thirdly, these remarks might seem to suggest that
Berkeley in fact used two different standards in judging the
rationality of belief. As we observe in the present
passage, and in our examination of Berkeley's defense of
Christian doctrines, Berkeley makes generous allowances for
religious beliefs apprehended by faith if the practical
consequences are significant. Yet he is not willing to
grant such latitude when dealing with strictly speculative
claims, such as regards the existence of material substance
or general abstract ideas.

While it is true Berkeley does have a double standard
regarding the rationality of religious beliefs and other
kinds of metaphysical claims, his position is not as
duplicitous as it was just represented. For while he does
allow even erroneous beliefs to provide grounds for genuine,
saving faith, this is not to say that such faith constitutes
knowledge, which, as he notes in *Alciphron* and elsewhere,
does require evidence or rational demonstration. In the

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[52]. See *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III, 2, 2-6.

above passage Berkeley is answering the question "What makes
one a Christian?" not "When is a Christian's belief
justified?" The latter is a question about the criteria of
knowledge; the former regards the prerequisites for
salvation. And the "double standard" objection confuses
these two questions. We have already seen that Berkeley's
answer to the latter question intimates more relaxed
standards of rationality than what he applies to those who
seek justification of other kinds of speculative claims, but
the dissonance between these two standards, if they can
rightly be called two standards, is far less severe than
what is suggested if we mistakenly construe Berkeley as
maintaining that knowledge is necessary for the Christian's
salvation.

We have arrived at perhaps the central feature of
Berkeley's conception of faith. For him faith is _not_ a kind
of knowledge, though it most certainly is a kind of belief.
Furthermore, it is a kind of belief that is usually based on
some evidence, though not absolutely conclusive evidence.
To some this might still seem an awkward position for a
philosopher such as Berkeley who usually displays stringent
standards for belief and who enjoins us to "proportion our
beliefs to the evidence". In _Alciphron_ he seems to have
sensed this tension, for in dialogue VII, section 10, he
discusses at length the necessity of faith even for minute
philosophers. The religious devotee, it seems, is not
peculiar in his/her reliance upon faith but only in the

particular kind of faith that he/she displays. This is because, according to Berkeley's definition, faith may be understood broadly as "an operative persuasion of mind, which ever worketh some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it."[53] This conception of faith allows Berkeley to include such things as time, number, and force among those objects or notions apprehended by faith. And having done that, he believes, the Christian has the intellectual right to exercise faith in religious matters, so long as there are positive practical consequences.

Berkeley's view of faith is comparable to that of Aquinas who maintains that "faith resides in the speculative intellect" and, as was noted earlier, that some central tenets of Christianity cannot be known by reason alone.[54] Moreover (and here we see further similarities to Berkeley's position) Aquinas holds that the only non-scriptural evidence we have for these doctrines is probabilistic at best.[55]

VI. Conclusion

In summation, Berkeley's defense of key Christian doctrines does not depend upon his immaterialism. In fact, his arguments do not presuppose any particular metaphysical standpoint. Nor do most of his arguments display

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[53]. *Alciphron*, VII, 10.

[54]. *Summa Theologica*, Pt. II, Q. 4, Art. 2 and Pt. I, Q. 32, Art. 1.

[55]. Ibid., Pt. I, Q. I, Art. 8.

originality. He seems to borrow freely from his ecclesial ancestors, especially Augustine and Aquinas.

Berkeley's general apologetic tactic when it comes to Christian doctrine differs in an important respect from his defense of, say, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul: Rather than offer strict rational proofs for these teachings, he is content to try to show that the believer has a right to assent to them, a right to faith secured not through compilation of philosophical evidence, but by practical considerations, most importantly the salvific power of belief in such doctrines as the Trinity, divine incarnation, and grace. This slackened apologetic ambition on Berkeley's part when it comes to these central doctrines betrays his concession that they are, when all is said and done, incomprehensible mysteries. By their nature they are insusceptible to rational proof, so Berkeley has no other resort in making a case for them but to appeal to their perceived practical benefits. This he does, if not cogently or convincingly, with extraordinary eloquence and rhetorical facility.

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