

Removing Rubbish and Laying Foundations: Berkeley's Solution to the Sceptical Problem

PhD

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(Conferred 2020)

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Summary

In this dissertation, I argue that while Berkeley can and should be characterised as an idealist, an immaterialist, and an anti-abstractionist, he is, above all, an anti-representationalist thinker. My contention is that the arguments Berkeley puts forward in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713) are ultimately aimed at undermining representationalism. Representationalism is an epistemological view that was widely accepted amongst Berkeley's predecessors in the seventeenth-century and entails that our knowledge of things in the world is mediated by ideas which exist only in the mind and represent them. I argue for this conclusion across six chapters which are split between three parts. Each part deals with a specific question or issue:

- 1) *Why* Berkeley opposes representationalism (chapters one and two).
- 2) *How* Berkeley opposes representationalism and the premises of his argument (chapters three and four).
- 3) What are the *ramifications* of Berkeley's anti-representationalism? (Chapters five and six).

The break-down of each chapter is as follows.

Chapter one focuses on Berkeley's anti-scepticism. I argue that Berkeley rejects representationalism because it inevitably leads to scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world. I argue that Berkeley takes particular issue with what I call the 'thing-idea distinction' which entails that things in the world and ideas in the mind are distinct. I also compare Berkeley's epistemological arguments about representationalism with those of John Sergeant and conclude that Sergeant can also be appropriately characterised as an anti-representationalist.

In chapter two, I argue that Berkeley's theory of ideas is radically different from the representationalist theory of knowledge that was dominant amongst his predecessors and contemporaries, including Locke. I focus on three aspects of Berkeley's own theory. Firstly, his anti-abstractionism. Secondly, his employment of the term 'idea' and his reasons for accepting the 'philosophical' view that whatever is immediately perceived is an idea. Finally, his account of the role that ideas play in gaining 'general knowledge' – knowledge that takes us beyond the things immediately perceived by the senses.

Chapters three and four provide a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument against representationalism, by identifying the two premises of that argument: the resemblance thesis and the likeness principle. The resemblance thesis entails that for one thing to represent another those two things must resemble one another. Along with the likeness principle, the resemblance thesis entails that unless ideas can *resemble* external objects, they cannot possibly represent them. In chapter three, I focus on the resemblance thesis. While Berkeley does not provide an explicit argument for this position, I explain his motivations for accepting it.

Chapter four focuses on the likeness principle: the claim that an idea can be like nothing but an idea. I provide a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle. On my reading, this argument is grounded on the account of our conceptual abilities which Berkeley develops in the Introduction to the *Principles* and on his views concerning the relation of *resemblance* espoused in his writings on vision. It follows from my reading of Berkeley, that for an idea to resemble a non-idea, an idea would need to share an intrinsic property with a non-idea, something which Berkeley thinks could not possibly be the case. Thus, Berkeley concludes, an idea *can only* resemble another idea.

In chapter five, I focus on the implications of the likeness principle for Berkeley's epistemology of mind. I develop a reading of Berkeley's epistemology of mind that is both consistent with the likeness principle and avoids scepticism. I argue that, on Berkeley's account, self-knowledge is constituted by the awareness we have of ourselves as perceiving beings and of the different ways in which we perceive, which he calls 'willing' and 'understanding'. I then show that it is by means of this experience of ourselves as perceivers that we come to gain knowledge of both the *existence* of other minds and of what those other minds are *like*.

Chapter six has two aims. Firstly, I explain why Berkeley and Reid are fundamentally at odds when it comes to their views about the nature of reality, by appealing to certain philosophical 'prejudices' that motivate their metaphysical views. Secondly, I argue that, like Berkeley, Reid should also be appropriately characterised as an 'anti-representationalist' because he rejects representationalism on the basis that it inevitably leads to scepticism. I thus conclude this chapter similarly to how I concluded chapter one, by making the case for thinking that Berkeley is part of an Early Modern anti-representationalist tradition.

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INTRODUCTION

had he built as he has pulled down, he had been a master builder indeed; but unto every man his work: some must remove rubbish, and others lay foundations

(Anne Berkeley)¹

1. Immaterialism, Idealism, and Anti-Representationalism

The aims of this dissertation are as follows. First, my central aim is to establish that while Berkeley can and should be characterised as an idealist, an immaterialist, and an anti-abstractionist, he is, above all, an *anti-representationalist* thinker. As I see it, Berkeley's idealism, immaterialism, and anti-abstractionism are all subordinate to his primary aim of refuting representationalist epistemology, which he does by showing that it inevitably leads to scepticism. This should by no means be taken to imply to mean that these secondary issues are unimportant to Berkeley but, on my reading, they all serve to achieve his ultimate end of establishing an anti-representationalist account of our knowledge of sensible things. In line with this aim, one of the tasks I undertake in this thesis is to reconstruct and defend a valid argument that Berkeley puts forward against representationalism. I argue that there are two premises in this argument: the 'likeness principle' and the 'resemblance thesis'. The likeness principle is Berkeley's claim that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (PHK §8) while the resemblance thesis is the claim that representation requires resemblance. Together these premises entail that an idea could only *represent* another idea.

My second aim is to demonstrate that Berkeley was not alone in his critique of representationalism and to identify other early modern thinkers who can be appropriately characterised as anti-representationalists. For the purposes of this dissertation, I restrict this discussion to two other thinkers, focusing on one of Berkeley's predecessors, John

¹ See *Works* VII, 388.

Sergeant, and one of his most famous critics, Thomas Reid.² Sergeant, Berkeley, and Reid, I argue, are all characteristic of an anti-representationalist tradition that emerged at the end of the seventeenth-century and continued into the eighteenth century in response to the representationalism they attributed to the likes of Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke. What ties these anti-representationalist thinkers together, I contend, is their commitment to an argument along the following lines:

P1. Any epistemology that results in scepticism should be rejected.³

P2. Representationalist epistemology inevitably results in scepticism.

C. Therefore, representationalist epistemology should be rejected.

Thus, as I see it, anti-representationalism is closely tied to anti-scepticism. My final aim is to consider the various disagreements between these anti-representationalist thinkers and to identify the roots of these disagreements. Most notably, both Sergeant and Reid are, according to Berkeley's understanding of the term, 'materialists'; both accept that mind-independent, external objects exist. Berkeley, meanwhile, advocates immaterialism as a solution to the sceptical problems raised by representationalism. My aim, then, is to explain why, despite their similar 'negative' arguments against representationalism, Berkeley's 'positive' views differ from those of other anti-representationalists.

I focus primarily on two texts: *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). Berkeley's immaterialist views are not solely confined to the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, but it is only in these works that immaterialism is the central focus. For that reason, these two texts are the primary subjects of this dissertation, though I refer to other

² Tentatively, and somewhat speculatively, at this stage, I suggest that Antoine Arnauld, Henry Lee, James Lowde, and Arthur Collier might also be characterised as anti-representationalists. I think Arnauld's dispute with Malebranche – who was the arch-representationalist in the seventeenth-century – is especially important, and might serve as a 'blueprint' for later debates. For a discussion of Malebranche's representationalism, see Yolton 1984, 15; & 113 1996, 5 & 12. For more on Berkeley and Reid's anti-representationalism, see West 2019a.

³ Premise one is often (if not always) accepted on theistic grounds. As Berkeley puts it, "[w]e should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach" (PI §3). At this stage, I am not in a position to say whether or not this is true of all anti-representationalists. For more on the connection between anti-scepticism and theism (especially in Sergeant), see Adriaenssen 2017, 199.

works (especially the *New Theory* and *Alciphron*, as well as Berkeley's *Notebooks*) throughout.⁴

Before setting out to achieve the aims outlined above, I begin this dissertation by addressing some preliminary interpretative issues. First, I explain how I understand the terms 'idealism' and 'immaterialism', and whether these terms refer to two distinct metaphysical positions. Second, I situate my reading of Berkeley's philosophy, according to which epistemological concerns take priority over metaphysical ones, in the relevant secondary literature. Then, in the following section, I outline my views concerning the relation between immaterialism and anti-abstractionism and compare my reading with those available in Berkeley scholarship.

In order to clarify my understanding of the relation between 'immaterialism' and 'idealism' and justify my employment of these terms in what follows, it's worth starting with how Berkeley himself characterises his view. Berkeley himself refers to his metaphysical position as 'immaterialism' or 'immaterialist' seven times in the *Three Dialogues* (DHP 254, 255, 257, 259, 260), although he does not use the term in the *Principles*.⁵ However, Berkeley never refers to his view as 'idealism' or 'idealist' – although it is described by Samuel Johnson, in a letter to Berkeley, as an "ideal scheme" (Hight 2013, 288). Perhaps this provides us with a *prima facie* reason for thinking that Berkeley's view is best characterised as 'immaterialist'.

In what follows, I will, following Berkeley, refer to his metaphysics as 'immaterialist', but that should not be taken to imply that it is implausible to read him

⁴ As a general interpretative rule, I take it that references to entries in Berkeley's *Notebooks* can at best *support* rather than *confirm* an interpretative claim. In what follows, I therefore only use references to the *Notebooks* in order to support interpretative claims (by indicating that it is *likely* that Berkeley, e.g., affirmed or denied such and such). I do not rest any interpretative claims on the *Notebooks* alone. I follow the same interpretative approach with regard to the *Manuscript Introduction*; an unpublished draft version of the Introduction to the *Principles*.

⁵ The evidence suggests that this is because Berkeley wanted his denial of matter to "steal unawares" on his readers in the first instance (Hight 2013, 44). In a letter to his friend Percival, Berkeley explains that "I omitted all mention of the non-existence of matter in the titlepage, dedication, preface, and introduction, so that the notion might steal unawares on the reader, who possibly would never have meddled with a book that he had known contained such paradoxes" (Hight 2013, 43-44). He even asks Percival not to tell those with whom he discusses the book "that I deny the being of matter in it, but only that it is a treatise of the principles of human knowledge designed to promote true knowledge and religion". Berkeley was obviously concerned that his immaterialist conclusion would distract from the arguments developed throughout the text. His concerns seem to have been justified. In the same letter, he responds to Percival's report of the *Principles* having been received with "ridicule and contempt" (Hight 2013, 43). It is also telling that the *Three Dialogues*, published three years later, begins with Hylas' remark: "Can anything be more fantastical, more repugnant to common sense, or a more manifest piece of scepticism, than to believe there is no such thing as matter?" (DHP 172).

Berkeley as an idealist.⁶ In fact, while I will, for the sake of simplicity, use the term ‘immaterialist’, I think his metaphysics is best understood as involving *both* (i) an immaterialist claim and (ii) an idealist claim. It is worth unpacking what I mean by this. Berkeley’s *immaterialist* claim is that there is no material substance of the kind he takes ‘materialists’ like Descartes and Locke to be committed to. Material substance, as Berkeley understands it, is unperceivable and yet, at the same time, is the substance in which sensible qualities (colours, sounds, tastes, and so on) are meant to inhere. One reason why Berkeley thinks material substance cannot possibly exist is because of the inconsistency that he thinks is involved in postulating an unperceiving substance in which inhere qualities that exist by being perceived.

On the other hand, Berkeley’s *idealist* claim is that everything that exists is mental, or spiritual, in nature. Alternatively, this is the claim that all substances are immaterial substances. For Berkeley, this means that the only entities which exist are minds and ideas. Clearly, Berkeley’s immaterialist and idealist claims are closely related; it is hard to see how one could accept the former without also accepting the latter, or vice versa. What’s more, if we assume (as most of the Early Moderns did) that the *only* kinds of substance we have to choose from are material and immaterial substance, then (ii) follows from (i). Likewise, accepting (ii) commits one to accepting (i): if *all* substances are immaterial, and material substances are not immaterial, then it follows that material substances do not exist. Note, however, that there is a difference in *emphasis*. Berkeley’s immaterialist claim is a ‘negative’ claim about what does *not* exist.⁷ Berkeley’s idealist claim, however, is ‘positive’ in that it tells us what *does* exist. This difference in emphasis provides one reason for delineating between these two aspects of Berkeley’s metaphysics.

A further reason for accepting this distinction between Berkeley’s immaterialist claim and his idealist claim is that Berkeley himself presents them as distinct propositions. First, in PHK §6, he explains that it is a “near and obvious” truth that:

⁶ Indeed, as I have explained, I think Berkeley can appropriately be characterised as an idealist, immaterialist, anti-abstractionist, and (I will argue) an anti-representationalist.

⁷ Both Georges Dicker and Colin Turbayne emphasise the ‘negativity’ of Berkeley’s immaterialism. For example, Dicker describes immaterialism as an inherently “reactive” position since it involves the denial of the existence of matter (2011, xi). Similarly, Turbayne characterises Berkeley as a “prosecutor” rather than a “creative trespasser” (Berkeley 1963, xii). His point is that Berkeley spends more time undermining materialism than developing his own metaphysical system. Both readings capture the tone of Anne Berkeley’s remark that Berkeley was not a “master builder” but a ‘remover of rubbish’ (*Works* VII, 388).

all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence with a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit: it being perfectly unintelligible and involving all absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. (PHK §6)

This is a ‘positive’ claim about what exists and what those things are like; what I have called Berkeley’s idealist claim. The bodies which make up the world around us (and even “the choir of heaven”) are mind-dependent entities that exist by virtue of being perceived or known. In the following section of the *Principles*, Berkeley then writes:

From what hath been said, it follows, there is not any other substance than spirit, or that which perceives... for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is a manifest contradiction; for to have an idea is all one as to perceive; that therefore wherein colour, figure, and the like qualities exist, must perceive them. Hence it is clear there can be no unthinking substance or *substratum* of those ideas. (PHK §7)

This is what I have called Berkeley’s ‘immaterialist’ claim: the claim that material substance – an “unperceiving substance or *substratum*” – does not exist. This claim is grounded in the contradiction Berkeley identifies in the definition of the material substance as something which is both “unperceiving” and yet also something in which sensible qualities inhere. The contradiction arises from the fact that, as Berkeley sees it, sensible qualities exist by being perceived, and thus can only inhere in something that perceives them, whereas material substance is, by definition, something that does *not* perceive. For Berkeley, this is like postulating that I am perceive a colour and yet do not actually see it: there is a contradiction involved in the very proposition.

In short, since Berkeley’s metaphysics consists of both a ‘positive’ idealist claim and a ‘negative’ immaterialist claim. Thus, as I see it, both terms (‘idealism’ and ‘immaterialism’) can appropriately be used in reference to Berkeley’s metaphysics, and it is certainly not clear that one claim should take priority over the other. However, since Berkeley himself uses the term ‘immaterialism’, I will also use that term in what follows.

The second preliminary issue I want to address is how my reading of Berkeley's philosophy compares to recent interpretations of what it is that motivates Berkeley's argument for immaterialism. In this dissertation (especially chapters one and two) I will make the case for thinking that Berkeley's argument for immaterialism is chiefly motivated by epistemological concerns about the sceptical implications of representationalism. Representationalism, broadly construed, can be characterised as the view that we gain knowledge of external objects, or real things, via ideas in our mind which represent them.⁸ I will argue that Berkeley's argument for immaterialism is an *anti-representationalist* project and thus one which Berkeley embarked upon with primarily epistemological concerns in mind.

I am not the first commentator to suggest that Berkeley's epistemological concerns take priority over his metaphysical concerns. For example, Keota Fields claims that Berkeley moves from *epistemic premises* to the *metaphysical conclusion* that matter cannot exist (2011, 149). Kenneth Winkler takes a similar approach. He claims that Berkeley offers a "logical" argument for a "natural-philosophical conclusion" (1989, 1). A 'logical' argument, for Winkler, who is drawing on Locke's employment of the term, is one concerned with words and ideas. Winkler, like Fields, reads Berkeley as having been led from epistemological (and linguistic) concerns to a metaphysical or ontological conclusion. These readings are not entirely consistent with one another, or indeed with my own, but they do at least, in my opinion, get the order of priority in Berkeley's arguments correct. To put it plainly, as I see it, Berkeley identified immaterialism – and his key move of *changing of ideas into things* (DHP 244) (which I discuss in-depth in chapter two) – as the only adequate solution to the scepticism entailed by the dominant theory of knowledge in his day: representationalism. On my reading, Berkeley is an *anti-representationalist* first and an immaterialist second.

My reading of the importance of Berkeley's sceptical concerns in the *Principles* and *Three Dialogue*, is perhaps closest to that of A. C. Grayling. Grayling claims that Berkeley's central philosophical aim is to refute two kinds of scepticism: epistemological

⁸ For a characterisation of 'representationalism' (in an Early Modern context) see, e.g., Turbayne's introduction to Berkeley 1963, xv; Pappas 1989, 156-57; Copenhaver 2004, 61 & 2013, 107; Dicker 2011, 27-28; Adriaenssen 2017, ch.1. It should be noted that my usage of 'representationalism' differs from its usage in contemporary philosophy of perception, where it is the view that one's experience of the world is determined by one's mental representation thereof. For outlines of this view, see, e.g., Byrne 2001 or Allen 2011 (esp. 258). See chapter six, section three (Figure 1) for a diagram illustrating my reading of what representationalist epistemology involves.

scepticism, about our knowledge of the external world, and theological scepticism, about the existence and nature of God (2005, 167) – although I place more emphasis on the former than the latter. Grayling argues that, for Berkeley, the root of scepticism is the representationalist move of opening a gap between experience and the world. He reads Berkeley’s arguments for immaterialism as aiming to provide a solution to scepticism of the external world that this leads to (2005, 167-68). This certainly captures the tone of my interpretation of Berkeley’s immaterialism. However, my emphasis on the epistemological nature of Berkeley’s arguments is perhaps even stronger, for it is my contention that were it not for the sceptical concerns raised by representationalist epistemology, Berkeley would never have argued for immaterialism. I thus place considerable emphasis, in what follows, on the sceptical problems that Berkeley thinks representationalism leads to, the mechanisms by which he rejects it, and two of the most important ramifications of his having done so.

Berkeley describes immaterialism, as an “obvious tho’ amazing” truth (NB 279). It’s worth considering what he might have meant by this – in what sense is it obvious and in what sense it is amazing? And how can it be both? I think, for Berkeley, the truth of immaterialism is only obvious in the context of his anti-scepticism and his anti-representationalism. *Obviously*, as Berkeley sees it, if we reject the distinction, accepted by representationalists, between things in the world and ideas in the mind (and our knowledge of each), there is no room for scepticism. But that is not to say this truth is not amazing: the claim that ideas *just are* things in the world was, within the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European philosophy, a “novelty” (PHK, Preface). Indeed, Berkeley understood that it would no doubt be, at least initially, treated as a “paradox” (Hight 2013, 44). Nonetheless, Berkeley maintains that philosophical views that result in scepticism must be avoided for they are inherently mistaken. Berkeley’s motivation for this claim is theistic. As he puts in the Introduction to the *Principles*, “[w]e should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach” (PI §3). Thus, I will argue, Berkeley’s arguments for immaterialism are an attempt to provide a metaphysical *solution* to an epistemological *problem*: the problem of external world scepticism.

2. A Further Preliminary Issue: Berkeley's Anti-Abstractionism

It is also important to clarify my reading of the role that anti-abstractionism plays in Berkeley's wider argument for immaterialism, since anti-abstractionism will be central to discussions in chapters two, three, and four. In the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley develops an argument against the existence of abstract ideas. He argues that when Locke attributes a faculty of abstraction to the mind (EHU 2.6.9) he does so mistakenly. To take the example of our idea of a triangle, for example, Berkeley thinks it is a mistake to think we can have an abstract idea of the general concept of triangularity in and of itself. Instead, Berkeley thinks the only triangles we can conceive of are determinate in nature – they are *either* oblique, rectangle, equilateral, equicrural, or scalenon. *Pace* Locke, we cannot have ideas of triangles that are “*all and none* of these at once” (EHU 4.7.9, cited in PI §13).

There are clear signs in the body of the *Principles*, and in other texts, that Berkeley sees abstractionism as prevalent amongst materialists (e.g., PHK §§4-5; DHP 177, 192-93, 222). For that reason, commentators like Margaret Atherton and Martha Brandt Bolton have argued that Berkeley's anti-abstractionism is an important premise in his overall argument for immaterialism.⁹ If Atherton and Bolton are right, anti-abstractionism *must* be accepted before immaterialism can be. Conversely, Samuel Rickless, Tom Stoneham, and Jonathan Bennett have argued that anti-abstractionism does not serve as a premise in Berkeley's argument for immaterialism. Rickless argues that anti-abstractionism simply plays a helpful role in making materialism seem implausible or inconsistent with common sense (2014). Stoneham downplays the importance of anti-abstractionism on textual grounds, citing “any serious lack of abstractionism in the later works”, most notably the *Three Dialogues* (2002, ix). Bennett denies that there is any relation between anti-abstractionism and immaterialism at all. If Berkeley had intended there to be, he claims, then it “remains embarrassingly tenuous” (1971, 45).

My view is that it is quite clear – explicit even – that anti-abstractionism is not an issue that Berkeley sought to confine to the Introduction to the *Principles* and cut off

⁹ According to these commentators, accepting the non-existence of abstract ideas is essential for arguing for the non-existence of matter. See Atherton (1986); Bolton (1987). See also Jaffro 2013, 134.

from his central arguments for idealism and immaterialism. Certainly, as Stoneham emphasises, Berkeley's lack of emphasis on abstractionism in the *Three Dialogues* is puzzling, but I do not think it indicates that Berkeley thought it was unimportant. For one thing, Berkeley included an argument against Locke's version of abstractionism in the first edition of *Alciphron* which was published in 1732, twenty years after the *Principles* was first published. Admittedly, most of the passages discussing abstract ideas were later omitted from the final 1752 edition of the text and as with the absence of a sustained discussion of abstractionism in the *Three Dialogues*, it is unclear why. But this interpretative puzzle should not lead us to conclude that Berkeley saw his argument against abstract ideas as unimportant – there is clearly something more complicated going on.¹⁰

In the body of the *Principles* itself, Berkeley reintroduces the issue of abstraction as early as sections four and six. He claims that the “strangely prevailing” opinion that “sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding... will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of abstract ideas” (PHK §§4-5). He also claims that it is an “absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them [i.e., sensible things] an existence independent of a spirit” (PHK §6). This tells us two things. Firstly, Berkeley thinks the doctrine of abstraction has got *something* to do with the fact that materialism – the view the sensible things exist independently of minds – is a “prevailing opinion”. Secondly, the doctrine of abstraction, which he is presenting as an explanation for this belief, is clearly meant to be problematic because, after all, materialism is a view Berkeley *rejects*. Why should we, as readers of the body of the *Principles*, accept that abstractionism is problematic? The most natural answer seems to be ‘because we have read the Introduction’. After all, Berkeley claims that the purpose of the Introduction is “to prepare the mind of the reader for the easier conceiving of what follows” (PI §6). I agree that it is odd for Berkeley to have seemingly cut off his anti-abstractionism from the rest of his writing and that he may have been better off using the same section-numbering system for both the Introduction and the body of the text, as Stoneham suggests (2002, ix).¹¹ But I do not think it is reasonable

¹⁰ I provide an explanation for Berkeley's decision to omit his anti-abstractionist arguments from the final edition of *Alciphron* in West 2019.

¹¹ Stoneham claims that “if the Introduction was part of the main argument, confusion would ensue” (2002, ix). But clearly confusion *has* ensued. Hence the fact that there is a scholarly debate surrounding the role of the Introduction.

to conclude, in light of the explicit textual evidence on offer, that anti-abstractionism is not important – even crucial – to Berkeley’s arguments for immaterialism.

I will have more to say about the relation between Berkeley’s anti-abstractionism, anti-representationalism, and immaterialism. For the time being, it is enough to have established in this Introduction that, on my reading, Berkeley’s motivations are epistemological and that in arguing for immaterialism Berkeley is ultimately arguing for a position that does not give rise to the sceptical problems representationalism leads to.

It’s also worth noting at this stage that there are some interpretative issues that I will *not* take a stance on. These include the character of Berkeley’s philosophy of language and theory of meaning in language, the status of ordinary or sensible objects in Berkeley’s philosophy, and the question of whether Berkeley is committed to occasionalism about human agency. When relevant, I discuss these issues and provide an overview of the interpretative debates surrounding them, providing references to important publications. Of course, some issues which are subject to interpretative debate *are* central to my thesis and thus warrant in-depth analysis. These include, but are not limited to, Berkeley’s motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis (chapter three), his argument for the likeness principle (chapter four), his account of self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds (chapter five), and his views concerning the relation between philosophy and common sense (chapter six). In such cases, I engage with the relevant literature and will make my own interpretations clear. In short, I *acknowledge* scholarly debates that are not of immediate relevance and *provide an interpretation* of those that are.

3. A Historiographical Note on ‘Representationalism’ and ‘Anti-Representationalism’

Over the course of this dissertation, I will make frequent reference to ‘representationalism’ and, increasingly as my argument develops, ‘anti-representationalism’. While these are not terms that Berkeley himself ever used or would have been familiar with, ‘representationalism’ is widely used in contemporary scholarship to refer, broadly, to the view that our knowledge of the world is mediated by

mental entities which represent it to us. The term ‘representationalism’ is largely a product of twentieth-century discussions concerning the nature of perception and sense-data theories, although it most likely has its root in the term ‘*representationism*’ which was used in explicit reference to Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and other early modern figures in the first half of the nineteenth-century.¹²

Representationalism, as I construe it, entails that the knowledge we have of our ideas is *immediate* while the knowledge we have of things in the world, those things they represent, is *mediate*. ‘Mediate’, as I employ the term, should be understood as ‘mediated by something else’.¹³ For representationalists, our knowledge of things in the world is mediated by our ideas which are distinct from them. Representationalists are committed to what I call the ‘thing-idea distinction’ – a distinction which Berkeley rejects. Often (if not always), representationalism also entails an *indirect* theory of perception. That is, representationalists are likely to maintain that we immediately *perceive* ideas which provide us with mediate knowledge, or mediate perceptions, of things in the world.¹⁴

The central aim of this dissertation, as I have explained, is to demonstrate that Berkeley was part of an anti-representationalist tradition that emerged in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century. To be an anti-representationalist, as I understand it, is to reject the kinds of theories of knowledge, and corresponding theories of perception, outlined above. Anti-representationalist thinkers, like Sergeant, Berkeley, and Reid, were concerned by what they took to be the widespread acceptance of representationalist epistemology amongst their contemporaries and predecessors – because of the scepticism they took that view to result in. The first thing I should make clear that when I talk of an anti-representationalist ‘tradition’, I do so with a certain understanding of the usefulness of such talk and its limits in mind. As I see it, talk about intellectual ‘traditions’ should *come out* of an understanding of agreements and disagreements between thinkers (and their philosophical systems) but not *determine our understanding* of those thinkers.¹⁵ By

¹² See, for example, Ferrier 2011, 111 (Ferrier was writing in the 1830s and 40s). One can find the term ‘representationism’ (rather than ‘representationalism’) employed by Luce in 1953.

¹³ For a discussion of ‘immediate’ and ‘mediate’ perception in Berkeley, which outlines some interpretations of what those terms mean, see Pappas 2000, ch.6.

¹⁴ Although it should be noted that when it comes to thinkers like Descartes, Malebranche, Locke, and indeed Berkeley, the distinction between knowledge and perception is not always clear.

¹⁵ For example, it would be a mistake to claim (as an undergraduate student might find themselves doing) that Locke took experience to be key to knowledge *because* he was an ‘empiricist’ or that Berkeley maintained that everything that exists is mental *because* he was an ‘idealist’. This kind of approach implies that such thinkers actively subscribed or conformed to pre-existing traditions which, in most cases, simply is not the case.

focusing on three figures who share certain concerns and ideological commitments about the nature of knowledge (as well as related issues like cognition and perception) I argue that there are sufficient grounds for identifying an anti-representationalist ‘tradition’ in the early modern period.

I acknowledge that my argument for the existence of an *anti*-representationalist tradition commits me to the existence of a representationalist paradigm in early modern philosophy. While this historiographical claim is quite commonly accepted, it does put me at odds with John Yolton who, in his *Perceptual Acquaintance* (1984) and *Perception and Reality* (1996), argues against the view that thinkers during the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries subscribed to what he calls “the representative theory of perception and knowledge” (1984, 5). While Yolton does not oppose talk of ‘the way of ideas’ *per se*, one of his chief aims is to overturn the misconception (as he sees it) – the roots of which he traces to Reid – that thinkers like Descartes and Locke were committed to a veil of perception. Yolton accepts that a commitment to a veil of perception *would* inevitably lead these thinkers towards scepticism but, contrary to Reid, argues that this is *not* necessarily entailed by being a part of the way of ideas.¹⁶ In short, Yolton’s aim is to defend the way of ideas against the charge of entailing a veil of perception and, ultimately, scepticism (1984, 5 & 221-222).

The reason we should avoid attributing to Descartes and Locke “the standard representative theory” (1984, 113), Yolton argues, is that ideas were in fact *not* generally taken to be “special objects” (1984, 4) – or as it puts it elsewhere, “proxy objects”, “third things” (1984, 221) or “surrogates for external objects” (1996, 4). Rather, on Yolton’s reading, ‘idea’ was the term used – by thinkers like Descartes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume – to capture instances of *perceptual acquaintance* with things in the world (1984, 101). Ideas, he argues, were more commonly seen not as “things” but as “ways of knowing” (1984, 113) or “cognitive translation[s]” of objects (1984, 220). This leads Yolton to separate Malebranche from other thinkers in the way of ideas. The standard reading of the ‘representative theory of knowledge’ *does* apply to Malebranche, he argues, who took ideas to be “special objects” (1984, 15). The mistake, made by Reid and many subsequent commentators, is to read the way of ideas after Malebranche as proceeding along the same lines (1996, 12). In fact, Yolton argues, it is an under-

¹⁶ Yolton points to Richard Rorty as a recent propagator of the kind of misinterpretation endorsed by Reid. See Yolton 1984, 5; 1996, 17. Yolton is responding to Rorty’s characterisation of the way of ideas in 1979.

appreciated fact that Descartes and Locke (and, subsequently, Berkeley and Hume) employed the term ‘idea’ in a way more reminiscent of how it was understood by Antoine Arnauld, that is, as a mental *act* of perceiving (1996, 2). What’s more, Yolton claims that, like Arnauld, many such thinkers took knowledge by ideas to be *direct* (1984, 222).

It is not my intention to offer anything like a direct challenge to Yolton’s argument. Undoubtedly, the story of early modern epistemology is more complex than Reid would have us believe – and, indeed, I will challenge several of Reid’s historiographical and interpretative claims over the course of this dissertation. However, even granting Yolton’s claims about the inaccuracy of the standard reading of the ‘representative theory’, I think there is still a good reason to talk of a representationalist paradigm amongst Early Modern philosophers. This is not intended to be a normative claim, I will not argue that *we should* refer to thinkers like Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke as ‘representationalists’. Rather, when I say that I am committed to the existence of a representationalist paradigm, I am making a *historical* claim – based on the views of those thinkers I characterise as anti-representationalist. Berkeley, along with Sergeant and Reid, clearly thought that what I am referring to as ‘representationalism’ was widely accepted amongst his predecessors and contemporaries. For example, in the Preface to the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley claims that

Upon the common principles of philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived. And we are taught to distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our senses. (DHP 167)

Similarly, in the *Principles*, he refers to the “strangely prevailing” opinion that “sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding” (PHK §4). Likewise, in §8 of the *Principles*, Berkeley tackles the view that our ideas are “pictures or representations” of “originals or external things”.

My response to Yolton’s challenge, then, is to emphasise that even if *we* should not accept the standard reading of the representative theory, thinkers in the Early Modern period *did*.¹⁷ As I see it, whether or not commentators like Reid are right to identify a

¹⁷ More evidence would be required to provide a satisfying defence of this claim, but the textual evidence I have pointed to at least *indicates* that Berkeley attributed representationalism to their opponents. What’s more, the discussion of Berkeley’s epistemological arguments in chapters one and two provides further evidence that he is arguing against representationalism. In this instance, then, I think the proof is in the pudding.

widespread representationalist paradigm amongst seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thinkers, the ‘standard interpretation’ clearly captures something that was picked up on (rightly or wrongly) by early thinkers including Berkeley. This is particularly true of the connection drawn between representationalism and scepticism.

Having now addressed the most relevant interpretative and historiographical issues, all that is left to do is to provide an overview of the structure of this dissertation – which I do in the next section.

4. Overview of Chapters

The primary aim of this dissertation is to establish that Berkeley should be characterised as an *anti-representationalist*. As I see it, this entails three further claims: (i) that Berkeley’s *central* concern is to combat representationalist theories of knowledge which were prevalent in the eighteenth-century, (ii) that Berkeley offers a valid argument against representationalism with identifiable premises, and (iii) that he is part of an anti-representationalist tradition which can be traced throughout the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century. I develop this argument and consider the nature of Berkeley’s opposition to representationalism across three parts of this dissertation, each of which addresses a specific issue:

1) *Why* Berkeley opposes representationalism and *what it means* to do so.

(Chapters one and two.)

2) *How* Berkeley rejects representationalism and the premises of his argument.

(Chapters three and four.)

3) The *ramifications* of Berkeley’s anti-representationalism.

(Chapters five and six.)

The break-down of each chapter is as follows.

In chapter one, I outline Berkeley’s motivations for rejecting representationalist epistemology and the distinction between things in the world and ideas in the mind which he takes representationalists to be committed to. I call this the ‘thing-idea distinction’. I

argue that, as Berkeley sees it, representationalism *inevitably* results in scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world, or “sensible things”. I take Berkeley’s concern about this kind of scepticism to be the root of his opposition to both representationalist epistemology and the materialist metaphysics that he associates with it. It is for this reason, I argue, that Berkeley should be characterised as an anti-representationalist. His opposition to this view, I argue, motivates and pervades the rest of his philosophy in the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. I also begin the process of tracing an early modern anti-representationalist tradition by comparing Berkeley’s epistemological arguments with those of John Sergeant, a late Aristotelian thinker and critic of the ‘ideism’ he found in Descartes and Locke. I demonstrate that there are striking similarities between Berkeley and Sergeant’s arguments against representationalism and their anti-sceptical concerns. As a result, I contend, both can be appropriately characterised as anti-representationalists.

Chapter two focuses on Berkeley’s own theory of ideas and how that theory differs from representationalism. Despite his opposition to Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke – who all argue that ideas in the mind are key to gaining knowledge of things in the world – Berkeley is, in a technical sense, an ‘ideist’. That is, he is committed to the view that the only things we immediately perceive are ideas which exist in the mind (I use the term ‘ideist’ to refer to those who accept this claim in what follows). While Berkeley can be characterised as an ‘ideist’, I argue that he does *not* hold the same theory of ideas as thinkers like Descartes, Malebranche, or Locke. He is committed to the view that we immediately perceive ideas but *not* the view that ideas represent mind-independent objects. In order to outline the difference between Berkeley’s theory of ideas and the kind of theory accepted by representationalists, I focus on three issues. First, Berkeley’s views on the *nature* of ideas: his anti-abstractionism about ideas and his account of the difference between ideas of sensation, which for Berkeley are identical with real things, and ideas of the imagination and memory, which are the products of one’s own mind alone. Second, Berkeley’s employment of the *term* ‘idea’ and his motivation for accepting the ‘philosophical view’ that whatever is immediately perceived is an idea. Unlike representationalists, I argue, Berkeley does not take ideas to be representative entities that provide knowledge of external things. Finally, I consider Berkeley’s account of the role that ideas play in gaining what I call ‘general knowledge’ – knowledge that takes us beyond the things immediately perceived by sense. I argue that

despite his denial of the existence of abstract or universal ideas, Berkeley nonetheless has an account of how we speak and reason in general terms.

Chapter three marks the beginning of part two of this dissertation. In part two, I reconstruct Berkeley's argument against representationalism by identifying the two premises of that argument. The first premise is what I call the 'resemblance thesis'. The resemblance thesis dictates that for one thing to represent another those two things must resemble one another. To accept the resemblance thesis is to accept that representation requires resemblance. Along with the second premise of this argument, the claim that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea", the resemblance thesis entails that since ideas cannot *resemble* external objects, they cannot possibly represent them. Berkeley's reliance on the resemblance thesis generates two interpretative questions. Firstly, why does Berkeley think that his opponents, representationalists, accept the resemblance thesis? Secondly, does Berkeley himself accept the resemblance thesis, and if so why? To answer the first question, I defend an interpretation of Locke on which he can plausibly be said to have accepted the resemblance thesis. This helps to explain why Berkeley might have taken it to have been accepted by at least one of his opponents. Secondly, I explain Berkeley's own motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis, by showing that Berkeley's account of *representation* has resemblance built into it. Berkeley's sees representation as literally *re-presentation* of an object. Thus, the thing re-presented *must*, as he sees it, resemble the original object.

Chapter four focuses on the second premise in Berkeley's argument against representationalism: the so-called 'likeness principle.'¹⁸ The likeness principle is Berkeley's claim that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (PHK §8). Combined with his acceptance of the resemblance thesis, this places a restriction on what ideas can possibly represent. The most important implication of the likeness principle, for Berkeley, is that it excludes the possibility of ideas representing unperceivable, material objects. Much like the resemblance thesis, it is not immediately clear in the text itself why Berkeley accepts the likeness principle or whether he thinks his opponents do too. Unlike the resemblance thesis, there is a considerable amount of scholarly discussion concerning the likeness principle and Berkeley's acceptance of it. The consensus is that Berkeley does provide an argument for the conclusion that "an idea can be like nothing

¹⁸ This phrase was coined by Phillip Cummins (1966) and has been adopted by most, if not all, subsequent commentators.

but an idea”, even if commentators disagree about what this argument looks like. In this chapter, I defend an interpretation of Berkeley’s argument that has not previously been suggested. On my reading, Berkeley’s argument is premised on the following claims: (i) there are no intrinsic properties of an idea that are not conceived, and (ii) for an idea to be like anything but another idea, that idea would have to have at least one intrinsic property that cannot be conceived. From these premises, it follows that an idea can be like nothing but another idea. In this way, I defend a ‘conceptual interpretation’ of Berkeley’s argument.

The third and final part of this dissertation focuses on two important ramifications of Berkeley’s argument against representationalism: first, its implications for his epistemology of mind, and second, its implications for Berkeley’s appeals to common sense. In chapter five, I focus on a problem that seems to arise concerning Berkeley’s account of how we gain knowledge of the mind. Berkeley rejects indirect or mediate theories of knowledge of sensible things, that is, those theories which postulate that our knowledge of the world is mediated by ideas in the mind which represent it. Berkeley argues against such theories on the basis of the likeness principle and the resemblance thesis which together entail that ideas can only represent other ideas. But Berkeley is also committed to the existence of *minds* which are “entirely distinct” from ideas (PHK §2). He thus claims that “human knowledge may naturally be reduced to two heads, that of ideas, and that of spirit” (PHK §86). However, it follows from the likeness principle that we cannot have ideas of minds. It could be argued, therefore, that Berkeley’s views commit him to a form of scepticism concerning knowledge of minds. However, I show that Berkeley does provide an account of the immediate knowledge one has of their own mind (self-knowledge) and the mediate knowledge we can gain of other minds. I argue that self-knowledge is constituted by the awareness we have of ourselves as perceiving beings and of the different ways in which we perceive, which Berkeley calls ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. I then show that it is by means of this experience of ourselves as perceivers that we come to gain knowledge of both the *existence* of other minds and of what those other minds are *like*. Ultimately, I argue that Berkeley avoids falling into the kind of sceptical position about minds that he thinks representationalists are committed to about sensible things.

Finally, in chapter six I address Thomas Reid’s claim that Berkeley’s immaterialism is inconsistent with common sense. This chapter has two aims. First, I

address the nature of Reid's criticism itself. It should be noted that I am less interested in assessing the success of Reid's objection and more concerned with identifying the root of that objection – and, ultimately, the root of Berkeley and Reid's disagreement about the nature of reality. Reid rejects immaterialism because he thinks it goes against the dictates of common sense. I thus compare Berkeley and Reid's accounts of common sense in order to discern whether an inconsistency here explains their disagreement about the nature of reality. I suggest that while there are some important differences in their accounts of common sense this does not get us to the root of Reid's objection. Instead, I argue that Reid's objection can be explained by reference to how both thinkers construe certain 'philosophical prejudices' – certain fundamental commitments which never come into doubt. Reid objects to Berkeley's 'ideism' which he takes to be a dogmatic acceptance of the claim that we immediately perceive only ideas. On the other hand, as Berkeley would see it, Reid is a 'materialist' since he *assumes* that real existence is existence outside the mind. It is their commitment to these 'philosophical prejudices', I argue, that explains why the two thinkers are fundamentally at odds when it comes to their metaphysical views. The second aim of this chapter is to show that Reid, like Berkeley, also ought to be characterised as an anti-representationalist. I argue that despite the differences between these two thinkers' metaphysical views, there are some striking similarities between their epistemological views. More specifically, I demonstrate that both reject representationalist theories of knowledge on the basis that it inevitably leads to scepticism. I thus conclude this chapter similarly to how I conclude chapter one, by developing the claim that Berkeley is part of an early modern anti-representationalist tradition.

CHAPTER ONE: BERKELEY'S ANTI-SCEPTICISM

Introduction

Despite Hume's claim that Berkeley's writings "form the best lessons of scepticism" in that they "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*" (*Enquiry*, 154, footnote 31), Berkeley presents both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* as works of anti-scepticism. On the title page of the *Principles*, the reader is informed that "the grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion are [to be] inquired into", while the title page of the *Three Dialogues* sets it "[i]n opposition to Sceptics and Atheists". Berkeley's anti-sceptical *intentions*, then, (as even Hume acknowledges) are overt. Indeed, it has been widely acknowledged that Berkeley's aim was to prevent the creeping growth of scepticism which he saw as coming out of certain implications of seventeenth-century philosophy.¹

Nonetheless, Hume's comment expresses what is a common reaction to Berkeley's immaterialism, according to which only minds and ideas exist while material substance does not, namely, that to be an immaterialist is to be a kind of sceptic. One response to Berkeley's view is to take him as committed to a kind of solipsism whereby everything exists *in my mind*. Another response takes Berkeley to be committed to a kind of 'dreaming idealism' in which things in the world are reduced to *mere ideas* in the minds of human beings. Both Kant and Reid charge Berkeley with leading his readers towards a position of dreaming idealism.² Even Hylas, in the *Three Dialogues*, charges Berkeley's spokesperson Philonous with "changing all things into ideas" (DHP 244). Clearly aware that he might be read in this way, one of Berkeley's underlying concerns throughout the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* is to avoid being charged with

¹ It is for this reason that A. C. Grayling describes immaterialism as "Berkeley's answer to scepticism" (2005, 168). George Pappas, conversely, plays down the importance of Berkeley's anti-scepticism, arguing that "[Berkeley] *may* also hold that immaterialism outright refutes scepticism... however he does not count that fact as decisive against materialism" (2000, 244, my emphasis). In what follows, I argue that it is a mistake to downplay Berkeley's anti-scepticism.

² As Kant puts it, dreaming idealism "makes mere representations into things" (*Critique*, 293). For discussion of Kant's response to Berkeley, see, e.g., Turbayne 1955; Mattley 1983; Winkler 2008. For a recent overview of this literature, see Pearce 2019, especially §2. Similarly, Reid charges Berkeley with holding that "sun and moon, earth and sea, our own bodies, and those of our friends, are nothing but ideas in the minds of those who think of them" (EIP 157).

scepticism. Thus, the *Dialogues* begin with Hylas giving an account of what it means to be a sceptic, thereby setting the tone for the kind of scepticism Berkeley wishes to deny. Hylas explains that

I was considering the odd fate of those men who have in all ages, through an affectation of being distinguished from the vulgar, or some unaccountable turn of thought, pretended either to believe nothing at all, or to believe the most extravagant things in the world. (DHP 171)

Hylas and Philonous then agree that it is preferable to side with the vulgar, who follow “the plain dictates of nature and common sense” than the philosophers who propagate “paradoxes and scepticism” (DHP 172). However, Hylas goes on to explain that Philonous had been presented “in last night's conversation, as one who maintained the most extravagant opinion that ever entered into the mind of man, to wit, that there is no such thing as material substance in the world”. This, Hylas claims, is “repugnant to common sense” and is a “manifest piece of scepticism”. Berkeley thus frames the *Dialogues* in the context of the view that immaterialism is a kind of scepticism, most in response to the unfavourable reception that, by 1713 (when the *Three Dialogues* were published), the *Principles* had already received.³ This makes Berkeley's professed anti-sceptical aims, and the way that Berkeley seeks to re-address them in the *Dialogues* especially, all the more challenging to interpret – and all the more important.

In this chapter, my aim is to outline Berkeley's anti-sceptical position: both his method of combatting the scepticism he takes his opponents' views to lead to and his attempt to avoid being charged with scepticism himself. I argue that Berkeley associates representationalism, which was the dominant theory of knowledge by the end of the seventeenth-century, with scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world. What's more, I argue that it is *this* kind of scepticism that he sets out to avoid in both the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*. In outlining Berkeley's anti-scepticism, and the association that he identifies between scepticism and representationalism, this chapter sets up the discussion in the chapters that follow, by identifying the motivations behind his argument against representationalism (which I reconstruct in chapters three and four).

³ For example, in a letter to Percival on September 6th, 1710, Berkeley responds to Percival's claim that the *Principles* was met with “ridicule and contempt” (Hight 2013, 43). In Percival's original letter, from August 28th, 1710, he writes: “I did but name the subject matter of your book to some ingenious friends of mine and they immediately treated it with ridicule... A physician of my acquaintance undertook to describe your person, and argued you must needs be mad, and that you ought to take remedies.” (Hight 2013, 42)

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In the first section, I outline the kind of scepticism that Berkeley seeks to undermine. I also demonstrate that the primary motivation for his arguments in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* is combatting the scepticism he saw coming out of representationalism. In section two, I explain *why* Berkeley thinks representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism. I then explain how Berkeley provides a metaphysical solution to this epistemological problem. Finally, in section three, I argue that Berkeley's anti-sceptical arguments ought to be situated within a wider *anti-representationalist* tradition. I do so by comparing Berkeley's arguments with those of John Sergeant, an early critic of both Descartes and Locke whose arguments against representationalism, I show, are strikingly similar to Berkeley's. Ultimately, my aim in this chapter is to demonstrate that Berkeley's arguments for immaterialism are motivated, above all, by his sceptical concerns with representationalist epistemology.

1. Scepticism in the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*

Grayling argues that Berkeley's aim, in arguing for immaterialism, is to refute two kinds of scepticism: what he calls 'epistemological' and 'theological' scepticism. Epistemological scepticism, he explains, "says we cannot know the true nature of things" in the world while theological scepticism either denies "the existence of a deity outright" or says that "the universe subsists without a deity's continual creative activity" (2005, 166).⁴ Theological scepticism thus encompasses both atheism and deism. By equating atheism with this second kind of scepticism, Grayling emphasises that Berkeley's two primary aims, which are explicitly stated on the title pages of both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, are both anti-sceptical: both works are presented as "[i]n opposition to Sceptics and Atheists" (DHP, front matter).

I think Grayling is right to identify the denial of scepticism as Berkeley's chief philosophical aim. However, I think it is more plausible to read epistemological scepticism as the *direct* target of Berkeley's arguments and theological scepticism as his *indirect* target. As I see it, Berkeley's arguments are directed primarily at the

⁴ For further discussion of Berkeley arguments against theological scepticism, see Berman 2005, 88-94.

representationalist claim that the “real nature” of a thing is distinct from “that which falls under our senses” (DHP 167). In turn, however, Berkeley’s direct arguments against epistemological scepticism contribute towards combatting theological scepticism and to demonstrating “the immediate providence of a Deity” (DHP, front matter [1710 edition]). For, as Berkeley sees it, it is our immediate experience of “the works of nature” that bring us closer to God and provides us with knowledge of His existence (PHK §§145-46). By demonstrating that we *do* have immediate knowledge of the real natures of things, then, Berkeley also indirectly combats scepticism regarding knowledge of God. George Pappas supports this way of understanding Berkeley’s aims. As he puts it: “[Berkeley] claims to vindicate commonsensical views about knowledge and certainty and *in the process* establish the existence of God, thereby discharging two tasks at one blow” (1999, 133, my emphasis). For that reason, I take it that Berkeley’s *primary* aim, when arguing for immaterialism, is to overturn the view that we cannot immediately know the true natures of things in the world around us – what Pappas calls “ordinary physical objects”. For that reason, I will be concerned with epistemological scepticism in what follows. My aim in this first section is to outline the kind of epistemological scepticism that Berkeley seeks to deny in the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*.

In the Preface to the first edition of the *Principles* (1710), Berkeley begins by explaining that “[w]hat I here make public... seemed to me evidently true, and not unuseful to be known, *particularly to those who are tainted with scepticism*, or want a demonstration of the existence of God, or the natural immortality of the soul” (PHK Preface, my emphasis). Though this Preface was omitted when the *Principles* was republished in 1734, it is clear that from the start Berkeley’s aim was to combat sceptical views which he saw growing around him. The title page of the final edition also sets the work in opposition to “Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion”. Moreover, Berkeley’s framing of the *Three Dialogues* confirms that combatting scepticism remained his utmost concern in this work too. In the Preface to the *Dialogues*, he identifies the root cause of “paradoxes and scepticism” as “the common principles of philosophers” which imply that “we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived” and that we should “distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our senses” (DHP 167). He continues, explaining that according to these philosophical principles,

It is not enough that we see and feel, that we taste and smell a thing. Its true nature, its absolute external entity, is still concealed... Sense is fallacious, reason

defective. We [philosophers] spend our lives in doubting of those things which other men evidently know, and believing those things which they laugh at and despise. (DHP 167)

It is *this* kind of sceptical view, associated with the epistemological implications of certain philosophical views, which Berkeley sets out to combat. In fact, Berkeley's aim is to prevent such sceptical concerns from ever arising in the first place by developing an metaphysical position in which there is no distinction between the "real nature" of a thing and "that which falls under our senses" at all (I say more about this in chapter two, especially 2.1).

Having provided this outline of the current state of philosophy, whereby the "prejudices of philosophers" prevail "against the common sense and natural notions of mankind" (DHP 168), Berkeley then goes on to consider the beneficial consequences of combatting such views. One such consequence, he suggests, is that "to an impartial reader, I hope, it will be manifest that the sublime notion of a God, and the comfortable expectation of immortality, do *naturally arise* from a close and methodical application of thought" (DHP 168, my emphasis). That is, belief in God and the immortality of the soul ought to arise naturally out of the arguments put forward against scepticism.⁵ Again, Berkeley's rejection of epistemological scepticism is distinguished from his denial of theological scepticism: the former is Berkeley's direct target, the latter is an indirect target. As with the *Principles*, the Preface is omitted from the 1734 edition of the *Three Dialogues*. Similarly, most of the text from the title page was omitted prior to the publication of the third edition of the text (1734). Yet, what Berkeley chooses to retain is telling, since after these omissions the title page simply reads: "[i]n opposition to sceptics and atheists". The anti-sceptical basis for Berkeley's argument, then, is still very much the same. If anything, his aims seem to be concise.

It is possible to trace these core sceptical concerns back to Berkeley's *Notebooks*, which were written prior to any of his published work. There, several entries express Berkeley's dissatisfaction with the conclusions of certain contemporary epistemologies

⁵ Berkeley also diagnoses the rise of atheism as a symptom of 'free-thinking', a brand of 'philosophy' (though Berkeley hardly thinks it deserves that title) which fails to adhere to the proper rules of reasoning. Berkeley explicitly tackles free-thinkers in *Alciphron*.

which argue that there is a distinction between the qualities we experience via our senses and the real natures of things in the world. For example, he writes:

There are men who say there are insensible extensions, there are others who say the Wall is not white, the fire is not hot &c We Irish men cannot attain to these truths (NB 392)

It is clear in this entry that Berkeley is concerned by the fact that what the philosophers tell us – that the wall is not really white, and the fire not really hot – is inconsistent with our everyday experience of things, which is why “we Irish men” cannot attain to such conclusions.⁶ In another entry, Berkeley expresses a similar concern:

The supposition that things are distinct from Ideas takes away all real Truth, & consequently brings in a Universal Scepticism, since all our Knowle[d]ge & contemplation is confin'd barely to our own Ideas. (NB 606)

Berkeley is using the term “Ideas” here to refer to those things which we immediately perceive via our senses which are, according to his opponents, distinct from real things. Berkeley’s concerns about the thing-idea distinction, accepted by many of his contemporaries, plays a central role in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. As we see here, his view is that this distinction inevitably brings with it a “Universal Scepticism”. For Berkeley, the claim that we can only gain knowledge of things in the world via ideas and that ideas are the only things we immediately perceive inevitably lead to scepticism. Immaterialism, which he argues for in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, is Berkeley’s *solution* to this scepticism. As he puts it: “[i]n ye immaterial hypothesis the wall *is* white, fire [*is*] hot etc” (NB 19, my emphasis). In turn, immaterialism is intended to bring us back to common sense.

Berkeley maintains that by accepting immaterialism, we can avoid the sceptical concerns which are thrown up by theories which distinguish between the ideas we immediately perceive and the real natures of things in the world. So far, I have said little

⁶ Just who Berkeley is referring to in this entry is unclear. Kenneth Pearce argues that Berkeley’s targets are the Cartesians: specifically, Descartes and Malebranche. See 2017a, 555-556. It is contested whether Berkeley has Locke in mind here. This part of a larger debate about whether Berkeley misread Locke’s primary/ secondary quality distinction. For that debate, see Wilson 1982, 112-116; Rickless 2013, 124; Downing 2018. Locke maintains that secondary qualities are powers which really do exist in objects. For example, “the power in fire to produce a new color... is as much a quality in fire, as the power it has to produce in me a new *idea* or sensation of warmth or burning” (EHU 2.8.10). Thus, if Berkeley does have Locke in mind, he would seem to have mis-read him. See chapter three (1.1 and 1.2) for more on Locke’s primary/ secondary quality distinction and Berkeley’s reading of Locke.

about which specific views Berkeley thinks give rise to such sceptical concerns and who the intended targets of Berkeley's anti-sceptical arguments might be. In the next section, I demonstrate that Berkeley identified a widespread theory of knowledge, which I will refer to as 'representationalism', as the source of such scepticism. I explain why Berkeley thinks that this view gives rise to scepticism, the arguments that he employs against such a view, and his own solution to scepticism about our knowledge of things in the world.

2. Anti-Representationalism *Qua* Anti-Scepticism

2.1 *Scepticism and false principles*

At the beginning of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke suggests that we should "be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding" the mind's comprehension and that we should "stop when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and... sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities" (EHU 1.1.4). Consequently, Locke explains that one of the aims of the *Essay* is to discover how far the powers of the human mind reach and, as its title suggests, their limits. While Locke endorses this as a form of epistemic humility, Berkeley interprets this as evidence that if we follow certain philosophical principles, we will be led through "intricate mazes" before finding ourselves "just where we were, or, which is worse sit down in a forlorn scepticism" (PI §1).

Berkeley goes on to argue that "[i]t is a hard thing to suppose, that right deductions from true principles should ever end in consequences which cannot be maintained or made consistent" (PHK §3). The inconsistency that Berkeley has in mind is between the sceptical consequences of philosophical principles such as those accepted by Locke and our God-given desire for knowledge of the world around us. He writes:

We should think that God has dealt more bountifully with the son of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach (PI §3).

This inconsistency, Berkeley argues, indicates that a set of *false* principles of knowledge have been accepted, since true principles do not lead to inconsistencies. Thus, when the mind is thwarted in “its search after truth”, Berkeley argues, we can be confident that this is due to reasoning on the basis of false principles (PI §4).⁷ Importantly, for our current purposes, Berkeley’s point is that if our philosophy dictates that we cannot gain knowledge of the real natures of things in the world then that is more likely to be because we have a false conception of what those natures *are* than because there is a “defect” in our understanding. Sceptical conclusions are inconsistent with the nature of God, and inconsistencies, Berkeley argues, can only arise from false principles of knowledge.

At the beginning of the *Dialogues*, Hylas and Philonous agree that scepticism should be rejected. Having been charged with scepticism by Hylas, Philonous responds by claiming that those who hold that matter exists are “greater sceptic[s]” than those “who believe no such thing” (DHP 172). Hylas is incredulous but the two agree to “admit that opinion for true, which upon examination shall appear most agreeable to common sense and remote from scepticism.” Thus, the terms of discourse are set: the most plausible theory is that which is closest to common sense and furthest from scepticism. A theory which leads to scepticism, both agree, is not plausible and ought not to be accepted. Berkeley’s aim, over the course of the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, is to identify these false principles and to provide a set of *true* “first principles of knowledge” that do not lead us into scepticism (PI §25).

Berkeley’s remarks on scepticism make it clear that he takes the main culprit – insofar as advocating false principles of knowledge goes – to be representationalism. It is worth reiterating that by ‘representationalism’, I mean is an epistemological position according to which any and all knowledge that we gain of the things in the world around us via our senses is mediated by ideas in our mind which represent them.⁸ When, for example, I take a walk in the woods, any knowledge that I gain of the trees around me via my senses is mediated by *ideas of trees* which exist only in my mind and represent real trees. Representationalism, in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought, tends to be construed in terms of perception. Most representationalists accept an indirect theory

⁷ Seth Bordner identifies abstractionism and “some problematic views about language” as amongst these false principles (2011, 319). Bordner is referring to Locke’s ideational theory of meaning in language, which leads certain thinkers to conclude from the fact that general terms are meaningful that they refer to abstract general ideas. See Pearce 2017, ch.1, for an outline of this view.

⁸ For more on my characterisation of representation, see my introduction (section three) and chapter two (especially section one).

of perception whereby the only things I immediately perceive are ideas which exist only in the mind. On this view, ideas provide me with mediate knowledge – knowledge that is literally mediated by intermediaries – of things that exist outside the mind.⁹ On some accounts, those ideas are *caused* by qualities of objects in the external world (for example, Descartes and Locke can be said to have held such a view), while on others those ideas are *occasioned* by one’s encountering certain external objects (this is Malebranche’s view). Berkeley is opposed to *any* view on which our knowledge of things in the world is mediated by ideas which exist only in the mind because, as he sees it, such theories inevitably lead to scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world. For the time being, I will stick to this broad characterisation of representationalism. In the next sub-section, I outline Berkeley’s reasons for thinking that representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism.

2.2 Representationalism and scepticism

So far, I have maintained that Berkeley thinks that representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism. Berkeley identifies the root of this scepticism as the proposed distinction between the “real nature[s]” of things and “that which falls under our senses”; what I have called the ‘thing-idea distinction’. Seth Bordner argues that this is the primary reason that Berkeley claims to provide a philosophy consistent with *common sense*. In Bordner’s words:

the Vulgar [those governed by the dictates of common sense] naturally and unreflectively believe that the perceived world is the real world. To the Vulgar, the sensed and sensible world is the real world, and not some copy of a yet-more-real world behind it. (2011, 322)

This reading is supported by Berkeley’s claim that we ought to “admit with the vulgar those for real things, which are perceived by senses” (DHP 246). Drawing a distinction

⁹ For the purposes of this dissertation, I take mediate knowledge to involve gaining knowledge of one thing by means of an intermediary, i.e., an idea. I do so because I think it is central to Berkeley’s reading of representationalists that they accept the thing-idea distinction. For more on this see chapter two (section one). But it should be noted that there are competing characterisations of mediate knowledge and perception in the secondary literature. For an overview of that debate, and a recent interpretation, see Rickless 2013, ch.1.

between (i) our ideas of things, and (ii) the real natures of things is characteristic of representationalist theories of knowledge. As is the view that, in Bordner's words, there is a "yet-more-real world" behind a veil of ideas. By aligning himself with the vulgar, then, Berkeley is situating himself in opposition to representationalism.¹⁰ Berkeley's immaterialism, as Bordner explains, is consistent with common sense in that "it is a rejection of any form of representative realism that might lead to skepticism" (2011, 337).

The representationalists that Berkeley seeks to undermine are, as I suggested, likely to accept an indirect theory of perception.¹¹ Indirect theories of perception are tripartite: they involve *three* kinds of entities: the mind of the perceiver, an idea or ideas which exist only in the mind but which represent the objects of perception, and things themselves which exist outside the mind. According to this picture, perceiving a tree, for example, involves immediately perceiving an idea in the mind (or a collection of ideas) which represents that tree. I immediately perceive ideas of trees and, as a result, if that perception is veridical, I indirectly perceive trees. In §8 of the *Principles*, Berkeley characterises representationalism as the view that

though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist outside the mind in an unthinking substance.

It is worth noting that Berkeley takes it that his opponents understand representation in terms of *resemblance*: he characterises ideas as "copies or resemblances" or "pictures or representations" of things outside the mind. This is an important point, and not necessarily something that his opponents would agree with. However, I will lay this issue aside until chapter three.

It is clear that, for Berkeley, representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism about things in the world. For example, consider the following passage from the *Principles*:

¹⁰ Bordner maintains that Berkeley's esteem for the vulgar come from their resistance to scepticism. Common sense is, he explains, in Berkeley's eyes, "intrinsically anti-skeptical" (2011, 323, footnote 45). For further discussion of Berkeley's account of common sense, and my reading of that account, see chapter six (3.2).

¹¹ As Melissa Frankel puts it, "Berkeley seems to think that he undermines the possibility of scepticism precisely by being committed to a *direct* theory of perception" (2016, 44).

Colour, figure, motion, extension and the like, considered only as so many sensations in the mind, are perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived. But if they are looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then we are all involved in scepticism. We see only appearances, and not the real qualities of things. (PHK §87)

The conditional in this passage is important: *if* ideas are taken as “notes or images” of archetypes external to the mind *then* we are led to scepticism. By rejecting the view that ideas are “notes or image” of archetypes, then, it is possible to avoid scepticism. Insofar as we consider qualities like colour, figure, motion, and extension *as sensations in the mind* they are “perfectly known” – for there is nothing more to a mere sensation in the mind than that which is sensed.¹² But representationalists, as Berkeley sees it, maintain that these qualities represent qualities in mind-independent objects. They should not, then, according to representationalists, be considered *only* as sensations in the mind. In turn, Berkeley argues, this means that these qualities are not, according to representationalists, “perfectly known”. The conditional outlined in the passage above has been violated.

Once we take sensible qualities to representative entities, an epistemological problem unfolds which inevitably leads to scepticism:

Things remaining the same, our ideas vary, and which of them, or even whether any of them represent the true quality really existing in the thing, it is out of our reach to determine. So that, for aught we know, all we see, hear, and feel, may be only phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with the real things, existing in *rerum natura*. All this scepticism follows from our supposing a difference between things and ideas, and that the former have a subsistence without the mind or unperceived. It were easy to dilate on this subject, and show how the arguments urged by sceptics in all ages, depend on the supposition of external things. (PHK §87)

Berkeley’s point is that by distinguishing between ideas and things – the sensible qualities in our minds which exist by virtue of our sensing them and their counterparts outside the

¹² Pappas phrases Berkeley’s point like so: “If X exists only in the mind... then X has all and only those (non-relational) qualities it is perceived to have” (1999, 145). This is consistent with Descartes’ claim that so long as ideas “are considered solely in themselves and I do not refer them to anything else, they cannot strictly speaking be false” (CSM 2:26).

mind which exist externally to us – representationalism deprives us of any firm basis for knowledge of things in the world. If the only things we immediately perceive are “the appearances, and not the real qualities of things” then we restrict ourselves to having a solid foundation of knowledge only of those appearances. In other words, so long as we accept that ideas are merely appearances *of things*, we cut ourselves off from knowledge of those things. Even more alarmingly, this gives rise to the possibility that those things which we are immediately familiar with may simply be “phantoms” or “vain chimera[s]”. By distinguishing between real things and the things we immediately perceive, representationalists threaten to deny the latter *any reality at all*. For, as Berkeley sees it, we can never possibly know that our ideas conform to their archetypes if we never have unmediated access to those archetypes.

This gets us to the heart of Berkeley’s sceptical concerns. Berkeley thinks there is a serious and pressing epistemological problem at the heart of representationalism. This problem is that we could never possibly determine whether our ideas are accurate representations of real things, so long as real things are taken to be distinct from ideas.¹³ In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley uses the example of a statue or picture of Caesar to explain the difference between mediate and immediate knowledge. His aim is to show that to gain *mediate* knowledge of an object, one must already possess prior knowledge of that object. This is not possible with those things that representationalists take to exist mind-independently, for material or external things are, by definition, distinct from ideas which we know immediately. Philonous argues that there is a difference between seeing a statue or picture of Caesar *as* a statue or picture of Caesar and simply seeing it as “some colours and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole” (DHP 203-204). Philonous’ point is that “reason and memory” pertaining to prior knowledge of Caesar himself are required in order to know that those “colours and figures” constitute a representation *of Caesar*. In instances like this, when such prior knowledge *is* available, we mediate know Caesar via such a representation, i.e., the statue or picture. Representationalists, like Hylas, insist that, similarly, we mediate know real things via the ideas in our minds. But Philonous argues the very same criteria ought to apply. That

¹³ For a discussion of this kind of epistemological concern in Berkeley, see Winkler 1989, ch.6. Winkler argues that Berkeley’s argument against representationalism is ‘verificationist’ in that the real things our ideas are purported to represent are in principle unknowable. See also Ryan 2003; Frankel 2016, 50-51. For discussion of this issue in the broader context of anti-representationalist thought in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century, see Benschoep 1997; Adriaenssen 2011, esp. 24.

is, in order to know that our ideas really do represent real things, we would need to apply “reason and memory” to prior knowledge of them. Yet, according to representationalism, such prior knowledge is impossible.¹⁴ Just as familiarity with Caesar (via what Philonous calls “reason and memory”) is required in order to see the statue *as a statue of Caesar*, familiarity with the objects represented is required in order to know just what it is our ideas represent, or whether they do at all. In short, we must be familiar with an object before we can have that object represented to us by another. But according to representationalism, such prior familiarity is impossible since our ideas are supposed to be the very means by which we become familiar with their objects in the first place.¹⁵ Philonous thus states:

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

In doing so, he emphasises that once a distinction is drawn between ideas, which we immediately perceive, and real things we are no longer able to verify how the two relate to one another. We have immediate evidence of the existence of our ideas but we have no immediate evidence of the existence of the things they are purported to represent. As Philonous later puts it:

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

Berkeley accepts that all we immediately perceive are ideas. The difference between Berkeley and his opponents, however, is that he identifies a problem with distinguishing

¹⁴ Pappas frames the same issue in perceptual terminology: “In order to know whether one is in the perceptual presence of an object one has to be able to compare the object’s qualities with the manifest qualities of the immediately perceived ideas. But given the theory [i.e., representationalism], one can never accomplish this” See 1999, 141.

¹⁵ As Pappas puts it, since “*non-perceptual knowledge*” of things in the world is impossible (on the representationalist view), “we reach the fully general sceptical result that there is no knowledge of physical objects, given the truth of any form of indirect realism” See 1999, 142.

those ideas from real things. In order to avoid that problem, Berkeley argues that ideas *are* real things. The ideas we immediately perceive by our senses, for Berkeley, constitute a reality that we have immediate access to.¹⁶

The problem that Berkeley identifies with representationalism is that it precludes any possibility of “real knowledge” of things in the world. If ideas exist as perceptual intermediaries between the mind and the world then avoiding scepticism means explaining how we *know* that ideas represent the things we take them to represent. But no such explanation is forthcoming. As Berkeley puts it, “it is *impossible* to show how far our ideas resemble them, or whether they resemble them at all” (DHP 246, my emphasis).¹⁷ The only things we have immediate knowledge of are ideas. We are thus simply not equipped to know that our ideas are “true representations of those originals”. Therefore, as Berkeley sees it, representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism. In the next sub-section, I explain how Berkeley sets out to avoid the sceptical implications of representationalism by developing a drastically different account of both our knowledge of things in the world and the very nature of those things.

2.3 Berkeley’s solution: changing ideas into things

So far, I have argued that Berkeley maintains that accepting the thing-idea distinction inevitably leads to scepticism. As he puts it: “scepticism follows from our supposing a difference between things and ideas” (PHK §87). It is this concern, I contend, that motivates Berkeley’s arguments against representationalism and his arguments for immaterialism. Ultimately, Berkeley finds a metaphysical solution to this epistemological problem. In §6 of the *Principles*, he makes the striking claim that

Some truths there are so near and obvious to the mind, that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, to wit, that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose

¹⁶ Note that ideas of memory or imagination are *not* constitutive of reality. For more on the distinction between ideas of sensation and ideas of memory and imagination, see chapter two (introduction, 1.4, & 2.1).

¹⁷ Again, this claim depends upon the principle that representation requires resemblance which I discuss in chapter three.

the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known (PHK §6).

It is not immediately clear why Berkeley make this claim, aside from the justificatory comment that

To be convinced of which, the reader need only reflect and try to separate in his own thoughts the being of a sensible thing from its being perceived. (PHK §6)

But this justificatory remark requires having accepted the claim that “sensible things” – things in the world, like tables, chairs, apples, and mountains – are immediately perceived. It is not likely to convince materialists, those who maintain that things in the world are mind-independent and mediately perceived, via our ideas. Not surprisingly, then, it does not take long for Berkeley to tackle this kind of response to his view: just two sections later he considers the view that our ideas are “copies or resemblances” of things “existing outside the mind in an unthinking substance” (PHK §8). This response is, however, quickly rejected on the basis of an argument from the likeness principle which entails that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea”. Along with the resemblance thesis, which entails that representation requires resemblance, it follows from the likeness principle that ideas cannot possibly *represent* external objects.¹⁸ This undermines the representationalist theory of knowledge and leaves Berkeley’s opponents in a position of scepticism. It thus only takes eight sections of the *Principles* for Berkeley to make it clear that once the thing-idea distinction arises, scepticism follows.

In the *Three Dialogues*, the discussion is framed somewhat differently, and it is not until the third dialogue that Berkeley’s solution to the sceptical problem is made explicit. Charged by Hylas with “changing all things into ideas” and thus denying the existence of real things, Philonous responds:

You mistake me. I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which according to you are only the appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves. (DHP 244)

To avoid the representationalist’s mistake of accepting that we do not immediately perceive real things, Berkeley argues that we must collapse the thing-idea distinction and

¹⁸ See chapters three and four for my reading of why Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis and the likeness principle respectively.

change ideas into things. The reason for this is that the term ‘idea’, though not “commonly used for ‘thing’”, is the term used “by philosophers to denote the immediate objects of the understanding” (DHP 235-36). Avoiding scepticism, for Berkeley, requires accepting that we immediately perceive things in the world themselves. If ideas are the things we immediately perceive, as the philosophers maintain, then one way of avoiding scepticism is to accept that ideas *are* real things. This represents something of a concession to the philosophers: for Berkeley uses the term ‘idea’ to refer to the real things we perceive at the cost of using the more common sense friendly ‘thing’. But he emphasises this is the *only* such concession. By turning ideas into things, he does not mean to deny them any reality.¹⁹ He insists: “[i]f any man thinks this detracts from the existence or reality of things, he is very far from understanding what has been premised in the plainest terms I could think of” (PHK §36; see also DHP 244; PHK §§33-34, §40).

Despite the fact that he writes in these terms, it should be noted that Berkeley does not actually take himself to be *changing* anything at all. Hylas is shocked by the conclusion that he sees emerging from Philonous’ arguments and in the third dialogue finally expresses his alarm:

But the novelty, Philonous, the novelty! There lies the danger. New notions should always be countenanced; they unsettle men’s minds, and nobody knows where they will end. (DHP 243)

Philonous is not convinced that novelties, in philosophy at least, are as dangerous as Hylas claims, but whether new notions are to be encouraged or not, he argues, is beside the point.²⁰ In fact, he maintains, his claim that the things we immediately perceive are real things is not a novel view at all. On the contrary, it is his opponent’s view which is full of novelties:

the qualities we perceive are not on the objects; that we must not believe our senses; that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be assured even of their existence... These are the novelties, these are the strange notions which shock the genuine uncorrupted judgement of all mankind and, being once

¹⁹ For a discussion of Berkeley’s *reification* of ideas, see Stoneham 2002, 13-14; Hight 2008, 22-27.

²⁰ In the Preface to the *Principles*, Berkeley accepts that his views may *appear* novel and goes on to suggest they are indeed “newly known”. Seth Bordner reads this as Berkeley admitting that his views are “contrary to the prejudices of mankind” (2011, 318). I read Berkeley as merely admitting that his views *seem* novel. In fact, he goes on to explain, a little thought will render his arguments “clear and obvious” and “capable of demonstration” – so long as his readers “rightly comprehend” them.

admitted, embarrass the mind with endless doubts and difficulties. And it is against these and the like innovations I endeavour to vindicate common sense. (DHP 244)

At the very beginning of the first dialogue, Hylas suggests that sceptics have “an affectation of being distinguished from the vulgar” (DHP 171). Philonous’ point here is that it is in fact *representationalists* who distinguish themselves from the vulgar. For the real innovations, Berkeley argues, are the views of his opponents: those who draw a distinction between real objects and the objects of our senses, and who lead us towards scepticism concerning both the nature and existence of things in the world. *If* novelties are dangerous, then it is the views of his opponents that we ought to be concerned with.

Nonetheless, Berkeley is not blind to the fact that his own view might *appear* to be contrary to common sense or that it *looks* novel. But, he maintains, that is solely down to the unfamiliar use of certain terms, or as he puts it, “some ambages and ways of speech not common” (DHP 244). His use of the term ‘idea’ is the most obvious example, for it does indeed sound strange to say that “the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth” are ideas (PHK §6) or that “we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas” (PHK §38). But a thorough understanding of Berkeley’s claims, he contends, should make it clear that he is not committed to anything novel. In fact, he explains

I do not pretend to frame any hypothesis at all. I am of a vulgar cast, simple enough to believe my senses, and leave things as I find them. (DHP 229)

Far from proposing a novel account of reality, Berkeley claims merely to have left things as he finds them. What we find in the world around us, he argues, are things which we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. To use Berkeley’s own example, consider a piece of bread. When we come across a piece of bread, we find something we can hold, break, smell, and bite into. “A piece of sensible bread”, he argues, “would stay my stomach better than ten thousand times as much of that insensible, unintelligible, real bread you speak of” (DHP 229). *Sensible* bread, constituted by a collection of ideas for Berkeley, is the kind of thing we expect to find out there in the world. The materialists’ real, material bread, on the other hand, is not something we could never taste, touch, smell, or bite into, since material things are unperceivable.

Berkeley acknowledges that it sounds “very harsh to say we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas” since “the word ‘idea’ [is] not being used in common

discourse to signify the several combinations of sensible qualities, which are called ‘things’” (PHK §38). In common discourse, Berkeley explains, the words ‘idea’ and ‘thing’ are used to refer to distinct kinds of entities, so it naturally sounds strange if the word for one is used to refer to the other. He admits, then, that it *sounds* strange to identify ideas with things.²¹ Indeed, *any* expression that “varies from the familiar use of language will seem harsh and ridiculous.” But, again, Berkeley is not committed to anything harsh and ridiculous, for “the *truth of the proposition*”, i.e., what this really means, is that “we are fed and clothed with those things which we perceive immediately by our senses”. Surely, Berkeley, contends, this is a claim that will be accepted by those who follow common sense.

We have seen, then, that Berkeley’s way of avoiding the scepticism that arises within a representationalist framework is to remove the distinction between ideas and things, thereby precluding from the start the possibility of scepticism. Since ‘idea’ is the term used to refer to the things we immediately perceive, we can remove the thing-idea distinction by identifying ideas with things. In this way, Berkeley attempts to avoid the sceptical problems that come out of representationalism.

In this section, I have demonstrated that Berkeley sees representationalism as inevitably leading to scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world. I then outlined Berkeley’s solution to scepticism and fleshed out his claim that immaterialism is not a radical or novel position but one that is available for any of us who choose to follow common sense over the philosophers’ distinction between ideas and things. In the next section, I will demonstrate that Berkeley was not alone in aligning representationalism with scepticism. I compare Berkeley’s anti-scepticism with the arguments of John Sergeant, an early critic of the epistemologies of Descartes and Locke. In doing so, I provide evidence that Berkeley was part of a larger anti-representationalist tradition.

²¹ One might question whether the word ‘idea’ is used in “common discourse” at all – at least in its philosophical sense, here defined as “qualities which exist only in the mind that perceives them” (PHK §38). Perhaps, then, the harshness and strangeness of saying we are fed ideas and clothed in ideas comes from the fact that, in common discourse, it is unclear what ‘idea’ refers to *at all*. Of course, Berkeley’s claim that any expression that “varies from the familiar use of language will seem harsh and ridiculous” still applies even in that case. Note that one of Reid’s complaints against Berkeley is that no individual guided by common sense will claim to have perceived an idea (EIP 26) (see six seven (1.1)).

3. Berkeley and Sergeant's Anti-Representationalism

3.1 Sergeant's arguments against 'ideism'

In this section, I will compare Berkeley's concerns with representationalism with those of the late Aristotelian thinker John Sergeant. Sergeant's *Solid Philosophy Asserted Against the Fancies of the Ideists*, published in 1697, was one of several treatises published in the 1690's aimed specifically at emphasising the problematic elements of Locke's representationalist epistemology²² – though Sergeant is also critical of other 'ideists' such as Descartes and Malebranche.

We can be certain that Berkeley was acquainted with Sergeant and his philosophical writing to some degree or another; that either he read Sergeant's work or, if not, became aware of it second-hand, since 'J.S.' and 'Solid Philosophy' are referenced in one of Berkeley's notebook entries.²³ In other words, we have a *prima facie* reason to believe Sergeant was read by Berkeley. Several commentators have picked up on this and argued that it is very likely that Berkeley did indeed read Sergeant's works and was familiar with his philosophy.²⁴ For the most part, however, discussions surrounding Sergeant and Berkeley are restricted to one specific issue: Berkeley's employment of the term 'notion'. A. A. Luce, Daniel Flage, and Kenneth Pearce are all proponents of the view that Berkeley inherited his account of notions from Sergeant.²⁵ As will become clear, I think this narrow emphasis is misguided and that there is a broader and more important connection between their respective philosophies. I thus move away from focusing on Berkeley's notions and do not discuss the issue here.

In what follows, I will demonstrate that Sergeant's arguments against representationalism are strikingly similar to Berkeley's. This comparison, I contend, should encourage us to situate Berkeley's arguments within a broader context of concerns

²² See also, e.g., James Lowde's *A Discourse Concerning the Nature of Man* (1694), Sergeant's *The Method to Science* (1694), and Henry Lee's *Anti-Scepticism* (1702).

²³ See NB 840: "I say not with J.S. that we see solids I reject his Solid Philosophy. Solidity being only perceived by touch." Sergeant published under the initials 'J.S.'. See Adriaenssen 2017, 198.

²⁴ See Fraser 1871, 45 & 463; Luce 1934, 104; Bracken 1974, 82; McCracken and Tipton 2000, 120; Southgate 2000, 281.

²⁵ See Luce 1934, 104; Flage 1987, 174; Pearce 2014, 425; Pearce 2017, 126. See chapter five (1.2) for a discussion of Berkeley's use of the term 'notion.'

about the relationship between representationalism and scepticism. It will become clear, at the very least, that Berkeley was not alone in taking an anti-representationalist stance due to sceptical concerns. In fact, I contend, this comparison brings to light some central tenets of an anti-representationalist tradition. Before comparing these two thinkers, however, it is necessary to outline Sergeant's arguments against what he calls 'ideism'.

'Ideism' is the term Sergeant uses to describe those thinkers who posit a *tertium quid* in the process of cognizing the external world, i.e., ideas. Ideism, as Sergeant understands it, is a form of representationalism for it entails that we know things in the world only via the ideas in our mind which represent them. Unless we are to fall into scepticism about our knowledge of things in the world, Sergeant maintains, we should only accept an epistemology according to which we have "first knowledge" of those things and not ideas of them. First knowledge is, for Sergeant, certain and foundational in that it comes to form the basis of all other knowledge or science (SP 48-50). The term 'science', for Sergeant, refers to deductive reasoning ultimately grounded in tautological or self-evidently true first principles (Yolton 1951, 536). Attaining first knowledge, as Sergeant understands it, consists in gaining *immediate* knowledge of both the existence and nature of that which is known.

An extended discussion in *Solid Philosophy* concerning the kind of knowledge we can (and cannot) gain via a picture of an object helps clarify Sergeant's position. He asks rhetorically, "who can have the *first* knowledge of a thing by a *Picture*, or *Resemblance* of it?" (SP 20).²⁶ His point is that without prior knowledge of, e.g., what trees are *really* like, a picture or painting of a tree could not provide immediate knowledge of the nature of a tree but merely of, "a Cloth, Board, or Paper, thus figured and colour'd". Likewise, he argues, a picture of a tree in and of itself cannot provide knowledge of the *existence* of that tree, for "it might be some Fancy of the Painter, for ought I know by the Picture" (SP 20). In other words, familiarity with a picture of a thing does not provide any certain knowledge that there is something which exists that is really represented by that picture.²⁷ Sergeant's point, in short, is that a picture or painting can provide first knowledge of its object.

²⁶ Unless otherwise stated, italics are from the original text.

²⁷ Sergeant, like Berkeley, is pressing the same point that we find Wittgenstein making in the *Tractatus*. For example, there Wittgenstein writes: "[i]n order to discover whether the picture is true or false we must compare it with reality" (2.223), that "[i]t cannot be discovered from the picture alone whether it is true or false" (2.224), and that "[t]here is no picture which is a priori true" (2.225).

Furthermore, Sergeant argues that if we can only gain knowledge of the external world via intermediaries then it would be *intermediaries* that we have first knowledge of. In turn, this would entail that it is these intermediaries – or as Sergeant puts it “*Fantastick Resemblances*”, “*Imaginary and Visionary Ideas*”, or “*unsolid Aiery Bubbles*” – that provide the foundation of human knowledge (SP Epistle 6).²⁸ Thus, the fatal flaw of ideism, as Sergeant sees it, is that it takes *ideas* to be “a Competent *Ground-work* to build *Science* on” (SP 49). Science built on mere ideas of things and not the things themselves, Sergeant argues, is no more reliable than knowledge gained via “a Looking-glass” or “a Dream... composed of Fancies pretty well Coherent with one another” (SP 49). In other words, there would be no clear indication that such a science informs us about anything beyond ideas. For that reason, Sergeant’s aim in *Solid Philosophy* is to demonstrate that

Things themselves, and not Ideas, Resemblances, or Fancies, (which can never make us know the Things,) are and must be the only Firm Foundation of Truth, and of our Knowledge of all Truths whatsoever. (SP Preface §13)

Sergeant maintains that any epistemology that wants to avoid scepticism about the external world needs to provide an account of how we gain knowledge of “Things”. Things are distinct from ideas which are, insofar as Sergeant understands them, resemblances, similitudes, or likenesses.²⁹ Sergeant is clear in arguing that we cannot possibly gain *first* knowledge of a thing by its mere likeness.

Sergeant has a specific understanding of both likeness and identity which motivates his arguments against ideism. He maintains that there is no middle ground between being a mere likeness of an object and being identical to that object. An entity cannot be both a likeness of a thing *and* that thing itself, so it must be one or the other. Yet, he maintains, this is precisely how certain Modern thinkers characterise ideas: as both a resemblance of and (in some way) identical to the thing itself (SP 171).³⁰ But a similitude or resemblance, Sergeant argues, is something that is *related to* a thing, and a

²⁸ For a discussion of similar concerns in Aristotelian scholasticism, see Carriero 2003, 29; Adriaenssen 2017, ch.1-2.

²⁹ Sergeant, like Berkeley, accepts the resemblance thesis: the claim that representation requires resemblance (see chapter three). In the marginal notes of his own copy of *Solid Philosophy*, Locke explicitly takes issue with Sergeant’s characterisation of ideas as ‘resemblances’ or ‘similitudes’ on at least three occasions. For example, he writes: ‘he [Sergeant] will have Mr Locke to mean resemblances by Ideas though Mr L. says expresly yt he does not’ (SP [Locke’s copy], 137; see also 23 & 37). For discussion of Sergeant’s characterisation of ideas, see Adriaenssen 2017, 205; Glauser 1988, 586.

³⁰ Sergeant seems to have the Cartesian distinction between formal and objective reality in mind when making this claim. See Glauser 1988.

pre-requisite for being related to a thing is *not being that thing*. A likeness is, therefore, “so far from being that Thing, or the Same as It is, that it is relatively Opposite to it; that is, quite distinct from it” (SP Preface §21). In other words, to be related to an object by way of likeness is to fail to be identical to that object. Gaining first knowledge of resemblances or ideas, then, is not the same as gaining first knowledge of *things themselves*. This means that ideists lack an explanation of how we gain knowledge of things in the world and not their mere likenesses.

Like Berkeley, Sergeant argues that if we accept a representationalist theory of knowledge then we will inevitably end up in a sceptical position. Sergeant’s foremost concern is that we could never actually determine whether our ideas are *accurate* representations of external things. This line of argument should look familiar, as this is precisely the concern that Berkeley develops in *Principles* §87 and the discussion concerning the statue of Caesar in the *Dialogues* (DHP 204). Berkeley’s claim, in both cases, is that *prior* knowledge of the thing represented would be required in order to know that an idea does actually and accurately represent it. But according to the very principles subscribed to by representationalists no such prior knowledge is available since the only knowledge we have of external things is via our ideas. Philonous explains:

Our knowledge [of things in the world] therefore is no farther real, than as our ideas are the true representations of those originals. But as these supposed originals are in themselves unknown, it is impossible to show how far our ideas resemble them, or whether they resemble them at all. We cannot therefore be sure we have any real knowledge.

For Berkeley, we can only be said to have “real knowledge” of things in the world via ideas if we know those ideas are “true representations” – but that just isn’t possible. Sergeant is equally critical of this inconsistency in the representationalist position. He argues that we cannot know for sure that two things, a “Prototype” and its “Likeness”, are alike “unless they be both of them in our Comparing Power” (SP 32).³¹ For example, we cannot know that a painting is an accurate portrayal of its subject unless we are already familiar with both. He explains:

³¹ Berkeley makes a similar claim in *Notebook* entry 378. He writes: “[t]wo things cannot be said to be alike or unlike till they have been compar’d.”

We cannot possibly know at all the Things themselves by the Ideas, *unless we know certainly those Ideas are Right Resemblances of them*. But we can never know (by the Principles of the Ideists) that their Ideas are Right Resemblances of the Things; therefore we cannot possibly know at all the Things by their Ideas (SP 31-32, my emphasis)

Both Berkeley and Sergeant accept the same premise: that having knowledge of an object via a representation requires *knowing certainly* that the representation is an accurate one. Real knowledge via an intermediary requires knowing that the intermediary is a “true representation” (in Berkeley’s words) or a “Right Resemblance” (as Sergeant puts it) of its original. An alternative is to blindly assume that our ideas represent what we take them to represent but this looks unsatisfying even for the representationalist. Naively trusting the ideas received via our senses seems to be precisely what, for example, Descartes’ radical doubt at the beginning of the *Meditations* is set up to deter us from (see, for example, CSM 2:24). Yet, Sergeant argues, without a method for determining whether our ideas are “Right Resemblances”, this is precisely what ideist epistemology inevitably requires of us. Sergeant uses the following example to make this point:

I [may]³² walk in a Gallery, and see a Hundred Pictures in it of Men, and many other Things in Nature; and yet not know one jot the better, any one of the Things represented, unless I had known them formerly... I may *remember* them *again*, indeed, if I had known them *before* (SP 340).

In effect, Sergeant’s point is that while I might be able to judge of a portrait whether it is an accurate likeness of a friend, it would be impossible for me to do so in relation to an individual who I was entirely unfamiliar with. According to ideists, Sergeant argues, our knowledge of things in the world is ultimately closer to the latter case “because those *Ideas* of theirs are to give them the *First Knowledge* of the Thing” (SP 340). As such, if representationalists are right, our knowledge of the external world is like that of a person walking around a gallery unsure whether any of the people and places depicted do or do not exist.

Similarly, Berkeley’s concern is that if ideas – those things we immediately perceive – are taken to be “notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then we are all involved in scepticism” (PHK §87). So long as we

³² The text itself reads ‘way’.

accept the thing-idea distinction, and the epistemological claim that we gain knowledge of *things* via our *ideas*, we open the door to scepticism. One of the most alarming implications for Berkeley is that, on the representationalist picture, the ideas which we immediately perceive might be “phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with the real things, existing in *rerum natura*” because there is just no way of determining the relationship between things and ideas. Sergeant is similarly concerned: if ideism is right and all we have immediate access to are ideas, then all we can gain first knowledge of is ideas which could, for all we know, be merely “our own Fancies” (SP 384). The thing-idea distinction, he contends, places us behind what he calls “the Curtain of the Fancy” and leaves us in a sceptical position regarding the real natures of things (SP Preface §20).³³

3.2 Sergeant’s solution: notions over ideas

Sergeant maintains that the only way to avoid scepticism concerning our knowledge of things in the world is to provide an account in which those very things themselves come to exist in the mind. He argues that his doctrine of *notions* provides such an account. For Sergeant, “[a] Notion is the very thing it self existing in my understanding” (SP 27) and “that Object in my mind which informs my Understanding Power, and about which that Power is Employed” (SP 26; see also *Method*, 100-101). Sergeant explains that notions, unlike ideas, can provide us with “*First Notices* of the Things” (SP Epistle 6). This in turn means that they provide an adequate foundation for solid philosophy of things in the world. As Sergeant puts it, they are the very “*Seeds*” of science (SP Epistle 2) or the “*Embryo’s* of Knowledge” (*Method*, 4). What’s more, notions, being *the things themselves*, allow us to avoid the biggest flaw of ideism which is its unavoidable tendency to build its science upon mere products of the mind.³⁴ Ideas have “*nothing at all* of the Thing” in themselves since they exist in the mind alone (SP Epistle 6). What differentiates

³³ Sergeant thus pre-empts more recent discussions about whether thinkers like Locke are committed to a ‘veil of ideas’ or ‘veil of perception’. For such discussion, see (for example) Bennet 1971, 69 or Newman 2004.

³⁴ It is worth noting that this is very similar to Reid’s concern that thinkers in the way of ideas accept, on the basis of philosophical authority alone, that we immediately perceive ideas and thereby obscure the self-evident truth that what we *really* immediately perceive are things in the world. See, for example, EIP 161-62.

notions from ideas is that when the mind has a *notion* of a thing, that thing is “within her... as the things in Nature *are*” (SP 42). For example, Sergeant explains that to have real, or solid, knowledge of a church bell is to “have the Bell existent in the Steeple *within her* [i.e., the mind], but also... the Bell in the Steeple is *without her*” (SP 43). To have an idea of the church bell, on the other hand, is merely to have a likeness of it, and not *it*, in the mind.

Sergeant’s theory of notions is designed to solve the sceptical problem by providing us with an account of how a thing known exists both externally to and within the mind. But how exactly can Sergeant make sense of the claim that something that exists in the mind is one and the same with something that exists externally? He explains:

I deny that either its Existing, or Manner of Existing do enter into the Notion...but that the Notion is the Thing, precisely according to what is Common to it both in the Understanding, and out of it, abstractedly from both those Manners of Existing. (SP 38)

For Sergeant, a thing – that which comes to be known – is abstracted from *the way* in which it exists.³⁵ God is the only being for whom existence is essential, thus no created being contains its manner of existing in its nature.³⁶ Thus, an exhaustive description of a created being would not include its existing either *in* or *without* the mind. This allows Sergeant to consistently maintain that an object, once known, can exist both within and externally to the mind.

It follows that, for Sergeant, what we come to know are abstract entities, at least insofar as they are abstracted from their manner of existence. Having a notion of a stone means conceiving of the stone and all that is included in its nature – but that does not include any particular manner of existence. This means that Sergeant can consistently maintain that a stone or a church bell (or any other external object that we come to know) exists both within the mind and without it. Thus, a notion is *not* distinct from the thing itself unlike an idea. For this reason, having a notion of, say, an oak tree is sufficient, for Sergeant, for first knowledge of that tree. Furthermore, having the tree itself exist in the

³⁵ See also *Method*, 3, and Yolton 1951, 548.

³⁶ This raises an important question about our knowledge of God: can we have a notion of God and thus have God (for whom his manner of existing is part of his nature) in the mind? Locke raises this issue in a marginal note, writing: ‘It should have been inferred according to wt JS says in this § by wch the soul becomes god’ (SP [Locke’s copy], 40). I think this question is worth addressing, but it is beyond the scope of this discussion.

mind provides a robust basis on which to build demonstrative knowledge and science about trees more generally.

3.3 Two dilemmas

From a Berkeleian perspective, Sergeant's move of positing the existence of abstract entities, even in the mind, is problematic (see chapter three (section one) for an outline of Berkeley's anti-abstractionism). Nonetheless, both Berkeley and Sergeant, albeit in different ways, argue that if we are to avoid scepticism, we must accept that the things in the world that come to be known are the very same things which exist in the mind. I explained in my Introduction that this is Berkeley's "obvious tho' amazing truth" (NB 279). Likewise, Sergeant acknowledges that this conclusion is "as strange as it is true" (SP 27).³⁷ Before concluding, I want to make it explicit how similar Berkeley and Sergeant's arguments are regardless of the inconsistency of their conclusions. I will do so by demonstrating that both thinkers present their opponents with a dilemma. These dilemmas show that, for both thinkers, there is no middle ground between accepting an epistemology in which things themselves are immediately perceived and falling into scepticism.

Reading *Solid Philosophy*, it becomes clear that the argument Berkeley puts forward in §8 of the *Principles* is structured in much the same way as Sergeant's argument against ideism. To anyone familiar with Berkeley's argument from the likeness principle in PHK §8, one passage is particularly striking. There, Sergeant writes:

Philosophy is the Knowledge of Things; But if I have nothing but the Ideas of Things in my mind, I can have Knowledge of Nothing but those Ideas. Wherefore, either those Ideas are the Things themselves, as I put Notions to be, and then I

³⁷ In the Epistle Dedicatory to *Solid Philosophy*, Sergeant addresses the 'strangeness' of his position. He acknowledges that '*Reformation* made by a Single Man, tho' but in *Philosophy*, seldom gains Credit to him who attempts it...[and] that, to pretend to *reform* where there is *no Necessity*, has an Ill Name'. He nonetheless claims that 'I am very confident, that whoever peruses this Treatise, nay, but even the *Preface*, will see, that the Occasion of this Undertaking was not only *Expedient*, but *Cogent*.' (SP Epistle 9) As we saw in section one, Berkeley similarly warns his readers not to be put off by the apparent novelty of his conclusions (DHP 243-44).

have gain'd my Point; or else they are not the Things, and we do not know the Things at all; and so adieu to the Knowledge of Things, or Philosophy. (SP 30)

If we accept Sergeant's premises, what this passage offers is a demonstration of how ideism takes us from "the Knowledge of Things" (i.e., solid philosophy) to scepticism. Indeed, if the premises are accepted, ideists are faced with a troublesome dilemma. The first horn of the dilemma results in Sergeant's own position where "the very thing it self... [exists] in my understanding" (SP 27). If ideists accept this horn then, as Sergeant puts it, "I have gain'd my Point" and the thing-idea distinction goes out the window. Consequently, should they wish to hold on to their own position, and given the commitments of their own doctrine, ideists are forced to take the second lemma, which leads directly to scepticism, and *adieu to philosophy*.

In §8 of the *Principles*, by employing the likeness principle, Berkeley argues that ideas cannot do the job assigned to them by representationalists: they can't resemble and thereby represent non-ideas. The specifics of Berkeley's argument are remarkably similar to Sergeant's own, for he also presents his opponents with a dilemma.³⁸ Having claimed that it is possible to "conceive a likeness...only between our ideas", and thus that it is *impossible* to conceive a likeness between an idea and an external object, Berkeley presses his opponents with a question: "I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no?" So far, Berkeley's point is this: *ideas* are, by definition, perceivable. To be a colour, figure, sound, odour, taste, or tangible quality is to be an idea that is perceived in a certain way (seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or felt) (see PHK §§1-5). The question then is, are the "supposed originals or external things" of which our ideas are "copies or resemblances" also perceivable? Are *they* seen, heard, smelt, tasted, or felt? If the answer is yes and "external things" are (immediately)³⁹ perceivable then, by *definition*, external things will turn out to be ideas (DHP 262). In which case, Berkeley concludes, echoing Sergeant's words, we have "gained our point".⁴⁰ Consequently, by *their own principles*, if his opponents answer in the affirmative they end up as

³⁸ See chapter four for an overview on the secondary literature surrounding the likeness principle (in 1.3) and my own interpretation of why Berkeley accepts it (2.1 and 2.2).

³⁹ Berkeley must be using 'perceivable' to mean '*immediately* perceivable' in this instance in order to avoid the representationalist reply that 'originals' are *mediately* perceivable. He also does this in PHK §2.

⁴⁰ Similarly, when Philonous puts forward the likeness principle in the third dialogue, he claims that "[y]ou [Hylas] are therefore by your own principles forced to deny the reality of sensible things... So *I have gained my point*, which was to show your principles led to scepticism" (DHP 206, my emphasis).

immaterialists. But, Berkeley argues, to deny that the originals are themselves perceivable is no less problematic. For, he writes:

I appeal to any one whether it be sense to assert a colour is like something which invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest.

For Berkeley, there is no *media via* between being visible or invisible, tangible or intangible, and so on. What's more, if there is no likeness between our ideas and their supposed originals then there is, as Berkeley understands it, no relation of representation. This means that his opponents cannot provide an account of how we gain knowledge of external things via ideas. Like Sergeant, Berkeley takes himself to have reduced his opponents to scepticism.

My aim in this section has been to show that Berkeley was not alone in arguing that representationalism leads to scepticism and should thus be rejected. I have done this by showing that Sergeant defends the same line of argument. What's more, framing Berkeley's rebuttal of representationalism in PHK §8 in terms of a dilemma emphasises that he saw his own solution, *changing ideas into things*, as the *only* way to avoid scepticism. Like Sergeant, Berkeley seeks to demonstrate that representationalism does not even succeed in its own aim, namely, explaining how we gain knowledge of things in the world via ideas. For that reason, Berkeley offers only two options: immaterialism or scepticism. *This*, I contend, is why we should view immaterialism as *above all* an answer to the sceptical concerns that Berkeley thinks representationalism gives rise to.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to show the extent to which sceptical concerns motivate Berkeley's arguments for immaterialism. Berkeley's aim is to demonstrate that once we accept that there is no distinction between the ideas we immediately perceive and things in the world, sceptical concerns about our knowledge of those things disappear. This indicates that by arguing for immaterialism Berkeley's aim is to lead us away from the kind of epistemology that generates sceptical problems in the first place. If he can establish the "obvious tho' amazing" truth of immaterialism Berkeley can provide an antidote to the scepticism that he thinks representationalism inevitably leads to (NB 279).

It is for this reason that, I have argued, Berkeley's arguments for immaterialism should be read as chiefly aimed at refuting representationalist epistemology and the scepticism that comes with it.

In this way, I have argued that Berkeley's arguments for immaterialism, a metaphysical position, are also arguments *against* representationalism, which is an epistemological one. As such, those arguments can appropriately be characterised as *anti-representationalist*. This characterisation of Berkeley's arguments should encourage us to re-evaluate how we situate him in relation to other thinkers at the end of the seventeenth- and throughout the eighteenth-century. Furthermore, by comparing Berkeley's anti-representationalist arguments with those of Sergeant, I have provided evidence that both are part of an Early Modern anti-representationalist tradition. It is worth emphasising that both Berkeley and Sergeant reject representationalism on the basis of *sceptical* concerns. For Berkeley, like Sergeant, the key to ridding ourselves of scepticism is to reject representationalism and the thing-idea distinction. In the next chapter, I outline how Berkeley develops his own theory of ideas that is intended to avoid the scepticism that representationalism inevitably leads to.

CHAPTER TWO: BERKELEY'S 'IDEISM'

Introduction

In this chapter, I outline Berkeley's own theory of ideas and show how it is intended to avoid the sceptical problems he thinks representationalism inevitably gives rise to. I will also make the case for thinking that, while he is an *anti-representationalist*, Berkeley can nonetheless appropriately be characterised as an 'ideist' – a term I adopt from John Sergeant (discussed in the last chapter). To be an 'ideist', as Sergeant understands it, is to accept that the only things we immediately perceive are ideas. I will show that what distinguishes Berkeley's ideism, so described, from the representationalism of his opponents is that he does not accept the further claim that those ideas provide us with knowledge of thing *external to the mind*.

In chapter one, I provided an outline of both what representationalism entails and what motivates Berkeley to reject it in favour of a direct theory of knowledge of things in the world. It is worth reiterating that I take representationalism to be an epistemological position, albeit one which often encompasses corresponding views about perception. Looking ahead, in chapters three and four I provide a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument against representationalism and identify the two premises of that argument. The aim of those chapters is to provide an explanation of how Berkeley takes his argument against representationalism to work. However, in this chapter, I focus on the following issues: Berkeley's employment of the term 'idea', the nature of ideas in Berkeley's system, and what role (or roles) Berkeley thinks ideas play in gaining what I call 'general knowledge': knowledge that goes beyond immediate perceptual experience. A sustained discussion of these issues will make it clear that Berkeley's own theory of ideas diverges quite considerably from the kind of theory representationalists are committed to. The most notable difference, I will argue, is that Berkeley rejects the claim that all ideas are *representational intermediaries*.

Reid's characterisation of Berkeley will play an important role in relation to the aims of this chapter. Reid is the likely source of several misconceptions about Berkeley's place in the development of early modern thought, misconceptions which are worth re-assessing and challenging (see Yolton 1984, 207-208, for more on Reid's misreading of Berkeley). Perhaps most notably, Reid characterises Berkeley as part of 'the way of ideas': a philosophical tradition wherein ideas are a means (the *only* means) by which we gain knowledge of things in the world. Reid sees Berkeley's idealism (to be distinguished from *ideism*) as a natural and inevitable but nonetheless mistaken progression from representationalist thinkers who posit an unperceived, material world that we have no immediate, empirical access to.

Scholars have increasingly tended to take Reid's historiography of the early modern period with a pinch of salt.⁴¹ Nonetheless, there remains a tendency to see Berkeley as a secondary step – between Locke and Hume – along the way of ideas. As Samuel Rickless puts it:

⁴¹ For example, Steven Nadler writes: "Reid's interpretation of the history of seventeenth and eighteenth philosophy seems questionable at best, wrong at worst" (1986, 172). See also Yolton 1984, 205-209.

a great deal of philosophical commentary treats Berkeley as a way-station between Locke and Hume, and treats his idealist and anti-materialist arguments as momentarily mesmerizing but ultimately either blatantly fallacious or just plain silly. (2013, vii)

Such a view suggests that Berkeley adopted the account of ideas that Locke developed in his *Essay*, or something similar, before engaging in arguments against the existence of material substance. However, this kind of reading fails to take note of Berkeley's - rejection of the thing-idea distinction, and suggests that Berkeley simply denies the existence of the former. In what follows, I argue that such readings of Berkeley's theory of ideas are straightforwardly inaccurate, building on Katia Saporiti's claim that "the concept of an idea gains a new meaning in Berkeley's philosophy" (2004, 196). I do so by focusing on the nature of ideas and the role they play in knowledge beyond immediate perceptual experience. Berkeley is of course not alone in holding that experience is key to knowledge – there is a reason we talk about early modern 'empiricists' (see, for example, Locke in EHU 2.1.5) – but he is unique in holding that the ideas we perceive are not only immediately indicative but actually *constitutive* of what really exists.⁴² As John Yolton puts it, Berkeley is "the first to try to make ideas play the role of ordinary objects" (1996, 9).

Reid takes Berkeley's ideism to be inherently problematic. The mistake of thinking we immediately perceive ideas, Reid argues, is the "original defect" of the way of ideas and is what sets us on the path to scepticism. For this reason, Reid argues, Berkeley's system cannot help but have "scepticism... inlaid in it and reared along with" (IHM, 29). However, by focusing on his careful employment of the term 'idea' and his remarks concerning the nature and role of ideas, I will argue that Berkeley's ideism has considerably less in common with the standard version of ideism than Reid has in mind when criticising the way of ideas. This is hardly surprising given that, in Berkeley's system, ideas play a more substantial role than his predecessors would have accepted. For example, in §6 of the *Principles* he writes:

⁴² Berkeley is also not alone in holding that we *immediately* experience what really exists. This kind of direct realism can be found in both Sergeant and Reid, for example. However, Berkeley's view that we immediately experience *both* (i) ideas, and (ii) what really exists is distinct from such straightforwardly 'naïve realist' positions.

all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind... their being is to be perceived or known (PHK §6).

And in the following section (PHK §7), he goes on to state that “to have an idea is all one as to perceive”, making it clear that in his theory:

- (i) whatever is (immediately) perceived is an idea,

Or, in other words,

- (ii) that to (immediately) perceive *just is* to have an idea.

Thus, for Berkeley, it is an analytic truth that the objects of perception are ideas. Since Berkeley thinks we immediately perceive things in the world (“the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth”) he argues that the world around us is made up of ideas which exist by being perceived.

Before continuing, it’s worth outlining an important distinction between *ideas of sensation* and *ideas of imagination and memory*. For Berkeley, the world around us is made up of ideas of sensation: ideas “imprinted on the senses by the Author of nature” which we call “real things” (PHK §33). These are to be distinguished from ideas of imagination and memory which are less “vivid and distinct... strong, orderly, coherent” (for the sake of brevity, I abbreviate to ‘ideas of imagination’ in what follows). Ideas of imagination are pure “creatures of the mind” whereas are ideas of sensation “have more reality in them” (PHK §33). This distinction is important for Berkeley, since it provides him with the tools to explain (e.g.) the difference between dreams and reality, but does not detract from the fact that *all* ideas, whether real or imaginary, exist by being perceived (PHK §3).⁴³

It is also worth noting that, for Berkeley, only ideas of imagination are “properly termed ‘ideas’, or ‘images of things’, which they copy and represent” (PHK §33). Representationalism entails that all our knowledge of real things is mediated by ideas which exist only in the mind. For Berkeley, however, ideas of sensation are not

⁴³ It is worth clarifying my understanding of the terms ‘conception’ and ‘perception’ in Berkeley. I take it that in a strict sense, *perception* applies broadly to any act of the mind. All objects of the mind (i.e., ideas) are, then, perceived. However, I think there is a distinction between ‘sense-perception’ and ‘conception’ in Berkeley’s writing. The former describes the act of perceiving ideas of sensation (things ‘external’ to us) while the latter describes the act of perceiving ideas of memory or imagination (things ‘internal’ to us). Keota Fields (2018, 61, footnote 1) also takes Berkeley to use ‘perception’ in this broader sense.

representations of things in the world, rather they *are* those things. To assume that every idea is an idea *of* something else, Berkeley thinks, “is one great cause of mistake” (NB 660). Ideas of sensation, for Berkeley, carry more weight, ontologically speaking, than the purely intermediary or representational role more commonly attributed to ideas by his predecessors in the seventeenth century. In this chapter, I challenge Reid’s reading of Berkeley by showing that his *ideism* is distinct from the *representationalism* he opposes.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section one, I outline Berkeley’s views concerning the nature of ideas. I identify the consequences of Berkeley’s argument against Lockean abstractionism as well as his own more ‘positive’ account of what ideas are like. I also expand on Berkeley’s distinction between ideas of sensation and ideas of imagination. In section two, I focus on Berkeley’s use of the term ‘idea’; first, by considering his remarks about what he means by that term and, second, by examining the extent to which Berkeley’s ideas can be said to *represent*. Finally, in section three, I consider a problem for Berkeley’s theory of ideas. In the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley rejects the Lockean view that the mind can generate abstract ideas. Instead, Berkeley argues that all ideas are particular. For example, Berkeley denies that we can have abstract idea of ‘humans’ in general but only particular ideas of individual humans. Without abstract or universal ideas, the concern arises that Berkeley may not be able to account for knowledge beyond that of the things we immediately perceive. In other words, we might ask how Berkeley explain *general* knowledge? I demonstrate that Berkeley is equipped to provide an explanation and that it relies on his understanding of how ideas can be used as *signs*.⁴⁴ Ultimately, I argue that Berkeley’s is a radically divergent theory of ideas which should not be conflated with the representationalist theories prevalent in the seventeenth century.

1. The Nature of Ideas

1.1 Against abstractionism

⁴⁴ While I do not use it here, I attribute an account of ‘signification’ to Berkeley. It should be noted that by ‘signification’, I do not mean ‘meaning’ (as it would perhaps be understood in contemporary discourse). Rather, I simply mean that he has an account of *sign-usage*.

In chapter one, I argued that Berkeley's solution to the sceptical problem involves changing ideas into things (DHP 244). So long as one posits a distinction between immediately-known ideas which exist only in the mind and mediately-known external things in the world, Berkeley maintains, one will inevitably find oneself on the path towards scepticism (see, for example, PHK §87).⁴⁵ To avoid scepticism, Berkeley collapses that distinction, turning one (ideas) into the other (things). Berkeley's claim that "all the choir and heaven and furniture of the earth" are ideas, and thus exist by being perceived, is the consequence of that solution (PHK §6). If things in the world just are immediately perceived then they are, according to the philosophical definition of the term, ideas (DHP 262). There is no room, consequently, for the sceptical question of whether our perceptual experience reliably represents the real world in and of itself since, for Berkeley, to be part of *rerum natura* just is to be an idea that is perceived by one of our senses. But what, we might ask, is the metaphysical status of those things that make up the world around us? What kind of worldview is Berkeley asking us to accept? Answering this question requires understanding Berkeley's account of the nature of ideas. In turn, doing so emphasises the extent to which Berkeley's ideism diverges from the representationalism attributed to his opponents.

Some of Berkeley's most important remarks on the nature of ideas can be found in the Introduction to the *Principles*, where he develops an argument against Lockean abstractionism. The wider significance of these arguments is contested in recent literature with some commentators arguing that Berkeley's anti-abstractionism has little to no significance beyond the Introduction and others arguing that it is a crucial step towards immaterialism. I say more on this in my Introduction (section two) but, to recap, I take Berkeley's anti-abstractionism to be closely tied to his arguments against representationalism. In this section, I outline the theory of ideas that comes out of this argument.

Abstract ideas, as Berkeley sees it, are those which are purported to represent a set of individual objects of the same kind. Berkeley identifies two varieties of abstract idea which he takes his opponents to be committed to. Firstly, "abstract ideas of qualities or modes" such as extension, colour, or motion – in other words, ideas of what we might

⁴⁵ Berkeley does accept a distinction between things which exist only in the mind and things in the world but both, he explains, "are nevertheless ideas" (PHK §33). It is thus not a metaphysical or, as Yolton puts it, 'specific' distinction (1996, 217).

refer to as properties or universals (PI §§8-9). Following Martha Brandt Bolton (1987, 64) and Samuel Rickless (2014, 731), we can call the process by which the mind produces this type of abstract idea ‘singling abstraction’. ‘Singling abstraction’ describes the mind’s ability to “consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united” and “by that means frame to it self abstract ideas” (PI §7). For example, were I to perceive a red apple, my mind might hold on to the redness of the apple while removing all its other qualities and consequently generate the abstract idea of ‘redness.’ As part of his argument against the existence of abstract ideas, Berkeley denies that the mind can in fact perform this function.

It is worth noting that Berkeley does *not* reject that we can *selectively attend* to qualities such as redness, roundness, and so on when perceiving an apple (PI §10). What he does reject, however, is that an abstract idea is thereby brought into existence. What’s more, such selective attention does not, for Berkeley, involve focusing on ‘redness’ understood as a property or universal *per se* but on the redness *of this or that particular apple*. Selective attention, then, as Berkeley understands it, involves awareness of what, in contemporary metaphysics, would be called *tropes* rather than properties or universals.⁴⁶ Although, again, it should be noted that Berkeley does not think we can have *ideas* of such tropes abstracted from the objects in which they actually exist.

Second, Berkeley claims that according to abstractionists,

as the mind frames to it self abstract ideas of qualities or modes, so does it, by the same precision and mental separation, attain abstract ideas of the more compounded beings, which include several coexistent qualities. (PI §9)

The same mental process is supposed to take place in the case of both singling and generalising abstraction – it is “the same precision and mental separation” – but with two different types of abstract idea being produced as a result. Following Kenneth Winkler (1989, 29) and Rickless (2014, 731), we can refer to the second type of process as ‘generalising abstraction.’ ‘Generalising abstraction’ describes the act of identifying

⁴⁶ In the *Manuscript Introduction* to the *Principles* (MI §19), Berkeley denies the existence of “Universal Natures” and maintains that “Sorts are not determin’d & set out by Nature, as was thought by Most Philosophers” (and, in a paragraph that was crossed out, denies that “it [is] necessary the Kinds or Species of Things should be so very accurately bounded & marked out.”). He also explicitly distinguishes himself from scholastic ‘nominalists’ who, like Locke, maintain that general names stand for “Universal notions or Ideas” (MI §19a).

For a contemporary introduction to ‘tropes’ and ‘trope theory’, see Lowe 2002, 361-365; Loux 2006, 71-78.

multiple individuals that share certain qualities in common and generating an abstract idea thereof. For example, the mind might perceive that many organisms live, breathe, and seek nourishment and, having observed these commonalities, forms the abstract general idea of ‘animal’. It might also be observed that a feature shared amongst a subset of these animals is the ability to think rationally, leading the mind to form the separate abstract general idea of ‘human’, and so on (PI §9). Generalising abstraction occurs, when, as Berkeley puts it, the mind

makes an abstract idea wherein all the particulars equally partake, abstracting entirely from and cutting off all those circumstances and differences, which might determine it to any particular existence. (PI §9)

If, upon observation of several individuals, it is possible to remove any and all differences between them and still be left with some commonalities or shared qualities, then (according to Berkeley’s reading of his opponents) it is possible for the mind to generate an abstract idea of a compounded being.⁴⁷ Again, while Berkeley does not reject that the mind can make such *observations* (via selective attention), he denies that these give rise to a set of genuine entities. As he puts in §24 of the *Principles*, there are “no other than particular ideas”.⁴⁸

Berkeley’s own theory of ideas is thus *anti-abstractionist*. According to this theory, ideas are *not* the kinds of things that can be generated by either of these processes of abstraction. In fact, Berkeley thinks it is a mistake to believe these processes occur, firstly, because it is impossible to have abstract ideas (PI §13) and, secondly, because we never experience ourselves abstracting in this way. Berkeley holds that while we can “compound and divide” our ideas by means of memory and imagination, it is always possible to trace the roots of even our most fantastic imaginings to things we have experienced via the senses (PI §10). Indeed, Berkeley subscribes to the Peripatetic principle that there is ‘nothing in the intellect which is not first in the senses’.⁴⁹ As he puts it in his *Notebooks*:

⁴⁷ Consider the following example. If I gave you a full pack of 52 cards and asked you to remove all the clubs, spades, and diamonds, you would be left with a set of cards that all have something in common (the suit we refer to as ‘hearts’). Selective attention works in a way comparable to this – and indeed Berkeley accepts that it is possible to attend to sets of ideas that share certain properties in common, e.g., all the cards in the ‘hearts’ suit. What Berkeley denies is that the mind generates abstract ideas – in this case, the abstract general idea of ‘hearts’ – as a result.

⁴⁸ Again, this is intended to set him apart from scholastic ‘nominalists’ and Locke (MI §19a).

⁴⁹ The Peripatetic principle can be found, for example, in Aquinas 1952, q. 2 a. 3 arg. 19.

I approve of this axiom of the Schoolmen nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fiut in sensu. I wish they had stuck to it. It had never taught them the Doctrine of Abstract Ideas. (NB 779)⁵⁰

Failure to adhere to this principle, Berkeley argues, leads to the doctrine of abstraction and the view, which he attributes to Locke, that we can have ideas of things which could never really exist. In turn, Berkeley argues, belief in the existence of abstract ideas leads thinkers like Locke to believe in the *processes* of abstraction outlined above – but, as we have seen, Berkeley rejects these too.

In fact, Berkeley develops an argument against the possibility of ‘singling’ or ‘generalising’ abstraction, by picking up on Locke’s claim that engaging in such processes is a difficult task (EHU 4.7.9). As Berkeley explains,

Much is here said [by Locke] of the difficulty that abstract ideas carry with them, and the pains and skill requisite to the forming them... But we are told, if they seem obvious to grown men, ‘it is only because by constant and familiar use they are made so’ (PI §14)⁵¹

Berkeley points out that there is a tension between Locke’s two claims: firstly, that it is no easy task to engage in abstraction and, secondly, that as adults we are already accustomed to the abstract ideas we have of things. This tension arises, Berkeley maintains, because there is no explanation given for *when* the mind actually practices the act of abstraction or when abstract ideas are generated. He argues: “[i]t cannot be when they are grown up, for then it seems they are not conscious of any such pains-taking; it remains therefore to be the business of their childhood”. But this is an absurd position. As Berkeley puts it,

⁵⁰ This is an instance of a general criticism Berkeley has of philosophers who have come before him. In his *Notebooks*, he claims that they have “given good rule tho they perhaps do not always observe them.” He puts forward another example in the *Principles* Introduction, where he suggests that “those men who have so emphatically recommended to others the laying aside all use of words in their meditations and contemplating their bare ideas, have failed to perform it themselves” (PI §23). Berkeley’s general point seems to be that philosophers tend not to follow their own rules. See DM §1, for a similar claim.

⁵¹ Berkeley is citing EHU 4.7.9.

Is it not a hard thing to imagine, that a couple of children cannot prate together, of their sugar-plums and rattles and the rest of their little trinkets, till they have... so framed in their minds abstract general ideas [?]⁵²

In this way, Berkeley presents Locke with a dilemma, based on his own admission that it takes labour and skill to generate abstract ideas. Either we generate abstract ideas as adults, Berkeley argues, but then we ought to be aware of the labour and skill undergone in the process of doing so. Or else we do so as children, a position which Berkeley takes to be absurd. Thus, Berkeley both denies the existence of abstract ideas and provides an argument, via *reductio ad absurdum*, against the existence of the very process of abstraction described by Locke.

1.2 Memory and imagination

Having thus outlined Berkeley's argument against abstract ideas, I now consider its implications for Berkeley's account of what ideas *can* be like. I begin with a discussion of ideas of memory and imagination. In Berkeley's system, both are products of the mind without being the result of abstraction.

As far as Berkeley is concerned, the impossibility of the processes of abstraction outlined above is something that can be verified empirically via introspection. For example, in the Introduction to the *Principles*, he writes:

Whether others have this wonderful faculty of abstracting their ideas, they best can tell; for my self I find indeed I have a faculty of imagining, or representing to my self the ideas of those particular things I have perceived and of variously compounding and dividing them. (PI §10)

In the original 1710 edition of the *Principles*, Berkeley also adds to this; "for my self I dare be confident I have it [i.e. the wonderful faculty of abstraction] not" (this remark was removed in later editions). While this appeal to introspection is clearly intended to

⁵² In the manuscript version of the *Principles* Introduction, Berkeley also adds that "[t]his, surely, is a Task too hard & metaphysical to be perform'd by an Infant, just beginning to Speak" (MI §18).

be part of Berkeley's case against abstraction⁵³, it also provides some important insights into his own 'positive' views.

In the passage above, Berkeley provides us with an insight into his views concerning our conceptual abilities – that is, his views concerning what kinds of ideas we can and cannot conceive. In particular, he provides us with details concerning the kinds of ideas that exist *beyond* those that are immediately perceived by the senses.⁵³ First, there are those ideas of particular things I have previously perceived. These are the ideas that I have in mind when I remember things. Ideas of memory are determinate in nature and are copies or resemblances of ideas of sensation previously received. For example, I am currently perceiving a blue sky and a series of small, slowly moving clouds. But I can also recall instances in which I have perceived a grey sky full of dark clouds. In both cases, the ideas I have in mind, whether of sensation or imagination, are particular. There is no doubt, for instance, as to whether I perceive or perceived the sky to be blue, red, or yellow. For any memory, whether it is veridical or not, there will be a particular set of qualities that I have immediate access to which exhaustively describe it. Put simply, none of the ideas involved will be abstract.

Berkeley also provides an account of the extent to which the mind can produce new ideas or collections of ideas. In the passage cited above, he introduces the process of "compounding and dividing" one's ideas. As an example of the former, he describes how "I can imagine... the upper parts of a man enjoined with the body of a horse" and thus imagine a centaur (PI §10). Note, however, that such an idea of imagination can be broken down into component parts, which are determinate in nature and copies of ideas of sensation. Similarly, I can "consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body." In this way, I can divide the conceptions I have of things previously perceived into separate collections of ideas. I can turn an imagined human body into just an imagined human hand, for example. The images or conceptions that result from both processes are collections of ideas of the imagination. Berkeley makes it explicit that although there is a sense in which 'new' ideas or collections of ideas are formed, they are copies of *ideas of sensation* which are particular. Whatever I imagine, he explains, "must have some particular shape and colour" (PI §10). The same

⁵³ Again, I use 'conceive' here with a particular understanding of how Berkeley construes 'perception' and 'conception' (see footnote 4 above). 'Conception' for Berkeley applies to ideas of memory and imagination and is to be distinguished from 'sense-perception' which applies to ideas of sensation. However, all ideas, in a strict and proper sense for Berkeley, are 'perceived': their *esse* is *percipi* (PHK §3).

applies for all other sensible qualities or ideas. The Peripatetic principle is not undermined, and I could *in principle* come across such objects in nature.⁵⁴

Thus, while Berkeley does allow that the mind can generate new ideas, he denies that these are different in nature from the ideas received via the senses. For Locke and abstractionists, things in nature must be particular while ideas can be abstract. Berkeley, however, denies any such disparity. Rather, both (i) ideas of sensation, and (ii) ideas of the imagination play by the same rules, so to speak. Indeed, Berkeley appears keen to emphasise that his account of the faculty of imagination is distinct from Locke's account of the faculty of abstraction. For example, he writes:

I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit... Thus much is certain, and grounded on experience; but when we talk of unthinking agents, or of *exciting ideas exclusive of volition*, we amuse ourselves only with words. (PHK §28, my emphasis)

Berkeley's claim here is that the process of exciting ideas of the imagination is something we know by experience. Put simply, I know quite clearly when I am imagining something. Meanwhile, it is plausible to suggest that the second half of this passage contrasts the faculty of imagining with the process of abstraction which, according to Locke, we do *not* willingly enact. If indeed this is a reference to the Lockean process of abstraction, then Berkeley's point is that we are not conscious of the mind's capacity to abstract – we do not find ourselves abstracting – and therefore, since the operations of the mind are transparently accessible to a perceiver, there are no grounds on which to suggest that such an operation is taking place. This is consistent with his claim that we ought to be aware of the “toil and labour of the mind” involved in abstraction (PI §14). We can *talk about* exciting ideas without an act of will but in doing so we are simply amusing ourselves with words.

1.3 Real and imaginary existence

⁵⁴ For example, at least as Berkeley sees it, it is contingent fact that I do not perceive unicorns while it is a necessary fact that I do perceive square circles or abstract triangles.

Ideas of sensation are, for Berkeley, the fundamental building blocks of nature: the world around us accessible by experience. He explicitly denies that we can have an idea of being in general (PHK §17) or gain ideas of any other general, universal, or abstract concepts via direct experience. As he puts it:

It is agreed on all hands, that the qualities or modes of things do never really exist each of them apart by it self and separated from all others, but are mixed, as it were, and blended together, several in the same object. (PI §6)

Berkeley's point is that abstract or universal properties like extension, colour, or motion do not really exist in and of themselves but are simply attributed by us to compounded beings or individuals.⁵⁵ This is a claim that Berkeley thinks even abstractionists like Locke would concur with. But, as we've seen, Berkeley also denies that we have *abstract ideas* of such qualities or modes.

This issue is closely related to Berkeley's account of *existence*. For Berkeley, existence cannot be abstracted from perception (PHK §5). As he famously puts it, a sensible thing's *esse* is its *percipi* (PHK §3). Abstract qualities or modes cannot, he argues, be perceived (or conceived) and thus do not exist. For Berkeley, everything we perceive is particular. Thus, to say that a sensible object exists is to say that it is perceived; that it has particular qualities like colour, figure, hardness and softness, smell, taste, sound, and so on (PHK §3, §23). In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley uses the example of the gardener, who follows the dictates of common sense and does not engage in abstract thinking, to illustrate his own account of existence. Philonous, speaking for Berkeley, explains:

Ask the gardener, why he thinks yonder cherry-tree exists in the garden, and he shall tell you, because he sees and feels it; in a word, because he perceives it by his senses. Ask him, why he thinks an orange-tree not to be there, and he shall tell you, because he does not perceive it. What he perceives by sense, that he terms a real being, and saith it *is*, or *exists*; but that which is not perceivable, the same, he saith, hath no being. (DHP 234)

⁵⁵ Berkeley thinks that this linguistic attribution occurs primarily for the sake of convenience in ordinary language discourse. As he puts it elsewhere, “[c]ommon custom is the standard of propriety in language” (DHP 216). See also MI §19 & §19a.

As Berkeley sees it, the gardener correctly commits himself to the existence of things perceived, such as the cherry-tree, and denies the existence of those things that are not perceived, like the absent orange-tree, on the basis of his immediate perceptual experience. For the gardener, and so for Berkeley, a sensible thing's being perceived is both a necessary and sufficient condition for its existing. Like the gardener, Berkeley maintains, we too should base our beliefs about the nature and existence of things in the world on what we immediately perceive.

One consequence of this stance is that it is especially important for Berkeley to differentiate between ideas of imagination, which exist only in *my* mind, and those ideas that can genuinely be said to make up the world around us, like the collection of ideas the gardener perceives when he sees the cherry-tree. That is, Berkeley ought to provide an account of the difference between ideas of imagination and ideas of sensation since both are immediately perceived and thus, by Berkeley's own principles, *really exist* in a strict and metaphysical sense. Materialists (and representationalists) can explain this distinction by reference to the distinction between things and ideas. On this picture, things in the world are mind-independent and imaginary while ideas are mind-dependent and real. But this explanation is not available to Berkeley. Why then, we might ask, do we take experiences such as perceiving a cherry-tree to be 'real' and private ones like imagining an orange-tree not to be?

Berkeley explains this distinction by appealing to the nature of perception itself. More specifically, he appeals to three differentiating factors: (i) the volitional control we have over, (ii) the strength and vivacity of, and (iii) the order and coherence of some, but not all, of our ideas. He explains that although I may have control over my ideas of imagination, "I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on

my will” (PHK §29).⁵⁶ In other words, he explains that I cannot decide, by a mere act of will, which ideas of sensation I perceive. For example, while I have total volitional control over whether and in what circumstances I imagine a centaur, I will only perceive the sky above me if I look outside the window or go outside. Once I am in those circumstances, I have no control over the ideas I perceive beyond, say, closing my eyes or shielding them with my hand.

Furthermore, Berkeley argues that experience makes it clear that ideas of sensation are “more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination” (PHK §30). That is, he holds that there is a difference between the experience of perceiving ideas of sense and ideas of the imagination. We might describe this as a ‘phenomenological’ difference since it concerns the issue of *what it is like* to be perceiving certain kinds of ideas.⁵⁷ For example, the experience of perceiving the sky outside is enough to inform me that it is more than just a figment of my imagination. I perceive it as more robust, vivid, and distinct than if I were simply to close my eyes and imagine it. It also requires some amount of effort, i.e., some mental labour, to imagine a sky that resembles the real sky, while really perceiving the sky via the senses requires no effort at all – in fact, I am, in a sense, *subject to* it.⁵⁸ Finally, there is also a reflective and less immediate side to

⁵⁶ I do not discuss it here, but there is considerable debate as to the metaphysical status of ideas of sensation or ‘real things’ for Berkeley and how or if it differs from that of ideas of imagination or ‘creatures of the mind’. Berkeley claims that the former are “imprinted on the senses by the Author of nature” while the latter are “excited in the [human] imagination” (PHK §33). The matter is complicated by the fact that Berkeley seems to commit himself to the view that ideas of sensation are *archetypes* of ideas of imagination. In the *Dialogues*, Philonous claims to “acknowledge a twofold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archeptypal or eternal... The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God” (DHP 254). In his correspondence with Johnson, Berkeley also writes, “I have no objection against calling the ideas in the mind of God archetypes of ours” (Hight 2013, 318). The problem is that this seems to commit Berkeley to the view that we only *mediately* know the ideas in the mind of God and – since we can never know the ideas in the mind of God immediately – to the same kind of scepticism entailed by representationalism. For recent commentary on this issue, see, e.g., Frankel 2016 or Fields 2018. Frankel argues that these divine archetypes should be seen as *powers* in the mind of God to produce ideas of sensation. Fields argues that Berkeley’s appeals to divine ideas should be taken at face value because they solve other problems with Berkeley’s account of sensible objects. I do not weigh in on this issue here.

⁵⁷ For a similar claim, see Winkler 1989, 12-13.

⁵⁸ One example, which I think helpfully illustrates the phenomenological difference between imagined and real ideas is the experience of listening to music. Consider the difference between really listening to Oasis’ *Wonderwall* and imagining (or mentally ‘playing’) that song in your head. Why is the former preferable to the latter? Why does the latter often give rise to a desire for the former? Why don’t we just go around ‘playing’ songs to ourselves instead of listening via headphones? One explanation is that when we really listen to a song, we are passive in that experience, we are *subject to* the melody, timbre, and so on. ‘Playing’ a song in our head, however, requires some degree (even if it is minimal) of effort. What’s more, we are not *subject to* (or acted on) by anything external to ourselves. A similar example is the difference between being massaged by a third party and massaging oneself. I think it is plausible to suggest that this is the kind of distinction that Berkeley is getting at in PHK §§29-30.

Berkeley's real and imaginary distinction. He explains. "[t]he 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" (PHK §33). Berkeley acknowledges that in the case of a dream or hallucination, for example, it sometimes requires a little reflection on what it is that I have perceived to work out that it was not real. What ensures that this is possible, Berkeley maintains, is that ideas of sense are perceived as steady, ordered, and coherent with one another, and, "are not excited at random".

When Berkeley claims that "all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies that compose the mighty frame of the world" (PHK §6) are ideas perceived by sense, he means it quite literally. He denies the representationalist view that ideas are a step towards knowing the world as it is in itself – for Berkeley, they do not *represent* it. Rather, the ideas we perceive via sense experience make up the world around us. By identifying the ideas that we perceive with the things which exist, Berkeley's system grants us immediate empirical access to the world via ideas of sensation. Importantly, Berkeley's emphasis on *what it is like* to perceive those ideas (his account of the phenomenology of perception), and the extent to which we are volitionally responsible for those experiences, provides him with an account of the difference between real and imagined things.

In this section, I have demonstrated the extent to which Berkeley develops a new theory of ideas that breaks with the representationalist position he opposes. Contrary to his opponents, who maintain that ideas are representative entities which provide us with mediate knowledge of things in the world, Berkeley takes ideas of sensation to be *constitutive* of the real world. I also fleshed out Berkeley's arguments against abstract ideas and the anti-abstractionist theory of ideas that comes out of them. It should be clear that Berkeley denies the representationalist claim that *all* our ideas are representative entities. Thus, Berkeley's ideism offers a major point of contrast to representationalism, which was so prevalent in the seventeenth-century. In the next section, I will outline Berkeley's views on which ideas do and do not represent and, more generally, the role he takes ideas to play in knowledge beyond that which is immediately perceived.

2. Berkeley's Employment of the Term 'Idea'

2.1 *Ideas of sensation as real things*

In the previous section, I outlined two ways that Berkeley's theory of ideas differs from a representationalist theory. Firstly, I demonstrated that ideas of sensation do not, for Berkeley, serve to represent external things and, secondly, that there is no room for abstract ideas in Berkeley's theory. In the remainder of this chapter, my aim is to give a more positive account of Berkeley's own theory by focusing on (i) his remarks on how his employment of the term 'idea' ought to be understood, and (ii) his account of how ideas can be used as *signs*. Both of these issues needs to be addressed if Berkeley's theory is to be the plausible and coherent alternative to representationalism that he takes it to be. I begin, in this section, by considering Berkeley's use of the term 'idea'.

At various points in the *Principles*, Berkeley clarifies that, in his system, ideas of sensation are in fact real things (PHK §33).⁵⁹ Ideas of sensation, unlike ideas of the imagination, are "regular, vivid, and constant" and follow coherent laws of nature. They are, Berkeley explains, "affecting, orderly, distinct, and... are not fictions of the mind perceiving them" (PHK §36). On any plausible, common sense account of reality, Berkeley maintains, ideas of sensation (i.e., the things we immediately perceive by the senses) just are *real things*:

it is evident that every vegetable, star, mineral, and in general each part of the mundane system, is as much a real being by our principles as by another. Whether others mean any thing by the term 'reality' different from what I do, I entreat them to look into their own thoughts and see. (PHK §36)

By maintaining that the world we live in is made up of ideas (of sensation), Berkeley is not trying to establish that things in the world are illusion or fancy.⁶⁰ On the contrary, although all ideas are dependent on some mind, Berkeley explicitly denies that things exist *only* or *merely* in our minds – since that would implies that they are "purely notional" (PHK §34).

Accepting Berkeley's account of real existence, he argues, does not mean accepting that everything is a dream, illusion, or mere product of the human mind. Rather,

⁵⁹ For similar claims, see Saporiti 2004; Stoneham 2017, 102.

⁶⁰ As Kenneth Winkler notes, Berkeley is no more interested in establishing such a position than Kant is. See Winkler 2008, 157-58.

it means shifting our understanding of what it is for a thing to really exist. Although it might appear so, Berkeley does not think this shift is a radical one since it is what the vulgar *and* the philosophers are, in some regard, both already committed to (DHP 262).⁶¹ In fact, (via Philonous) Berkeley professes not “to be a setter-up of ‘*new notions*’” (DHP 262, my emphasis). Instead, his aim is simply to “place in a clearer light” a truth shared by both parties. Things in the world, which the vulgar think we immediately perceive, and ideas, which *philosophers* think we immediately perceive, are one and the same. Reconciling these positions means identifying *real things* and *ideas* – and it is this act of reconciliation that Berkeley claims is central to immaterialism. Berkeley’s theory of ideas, then, is intended to be a synthesis of the vulgar and the philosophical account of perception.

We saw previously how Berkeley insists that immaterialism manages to preserve the distinction between real and imagined things. Even though both sensible things and products of the mind are both *ideas*, the order, coherence, strength, and vividness of ideas of sensation means that there remains a “*rerum natura* [a nature of things]” and that, “the distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force” (PHK §34). That is, there is a way the world really is and a method of distinguishing it from ideas of memory and imagination. For example, he explains that in a sense “the sun that I see by day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is the idea of the former” (PHK §36). Even though both are ideas, there is a genuine sense in which it is appropriate to distinguish between the real sun and my *idea of* the sun. Ideas of sensation, such as the idea of the real sun, have “more reality in them”, while ideas of the imagination or memory are copies or images of them. In fact, in the strictest sense of the term, Berkeley argues that it is only ideas of the imagination or memory that are ideas *of* anything at all (PHK §33).

Berkeley’s notebook entries provide some further insights into his thoughts on the term idea and the role that ideas play in his system. For example, there is evidence that at one point Berkeley considered drawing a terminological distinction between ideas of sense and ideas of imagination:

⁶¹ For discussion of how and if Berkeley’s position is meant to coincide with that of the vulgar see Bordner 2011; Pearce 2017, and chapter six (3.2 and 3.3) of this dissertation.

The distinction between Idea & Ideatum I cannot otherwise conceive than by making one the effect or consequence of Dream, reverie, Imagination the other of sense & the Constant laws of Nature. (NB 843)⁶²

In this instance, Berkeley distinguishes between the terms ‘idea’ and ‘ideatum’. The former refers to ideas of memory and imagination while the latter refers to ideas of sensation. Ultimately, however, the term ‘ideatum’ does not make it into the published works and this version of the distinction is never enforced. The most likely explanation for that is that had Berkeley used the term ‘idea’ in this way he could no longer claim to subscribe to the philosophers definition of ideas as *any* immediate objects of the mind. Indeed, when it comes to his first published work, the *New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley is clearly happy to accept the philosophical definition of idea employed by his predecessors. For example, he writes: “I take the word idea for any [of] the immediate object[s] of sense or understanding, in which large signification it is commonly used by the moderns” (NTV 45).⁶³ Ultimately, the term ‘ideatum’ does not appear in any of his published writings.

Another notebook entry also contains a reminder to apologise for and explain his use of the term ‘idea’ in his published work. He notes, “[e]xcuse to be made in the Introduction for the using the Word Idea viz. because it has obtain'd. But a Caution must be added” (NB 685). We see this reminder acted upon in the *Principles* (although not in the Introduction as suggested) where, having been pressed by an imagined interlocutor about his employment of the term ‘idea’, Berkeley provides a careful explanation of his decision to use the term in this way (PHK §39). This response is characteristically pragmatic and suggests a desire to successfully communicate and be appropriately understood. Specifically, Berkeley takes it to be necessary to explain why he uses the term ‘idea’ and not ‘thing’. Doing so would certainly have helped him to avoid Hylas’ concerns that immaterialism changes “all things into ideas” (DHP 244). However, his first reason for having done so, Berkeley explains, is that ‘idea’ is the term most

⁶² According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, this notebook entry is the first instance of the term ‘ideatum’ written in English. The OED defines ‘ideatum’ as “[t]he external object of which an idea or conception is formed.” Berkeley seems to be responding to this distinction rather than proposing it – and indeed the OED indicates that the term is drawn from Latin texts (perhaps those of the scholastic ‘nominalists’ Berkeley refers to in MI §19a). Of historical interest is the fact that the next citation listed in the OED is from Edmund Law who writes that it is “the first and most distinguishing Property of an abstract Idea, that it neither has nor can have any ideatum or objective reality” (Law 1734, 81). Like Locke, then, Law maintains that the objects of abstract ideas could not really exist (EHU 4.7.9). OED (3rd ed., November 2010) accessed at: <https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90976?redirectedFrom=ideatum&>

⁶³ In this instance, Berkeley uses the term ‘signification’ synonymously with ‘meaning’. This is to be distinguished with his employment of the term in reference to sign-usage, which I discuss in 3.3.

commonly used to refer to “the objects of sense” or “the things immediately perceived” (PHK §39, DHP 262). His second reason is that the word ‘thing’, which tends to be more broadly construed, is usually taken to imply something “thoughtless and inactive” that exists outside the mind. With that definition of ‘thing’ in mind, the term not appropriate for his own purposes.

For Berkeley, *ideas of sensation* and *things in the world* are one and the same. For that reason, A. A. Luce coins the term “idea-thing” to refer to Berkeley’s immediate objects of sense-perception (1912, 20). As Luce puts it, for Berkeley, an “idea of sense is not an image; it does not represent or copy the thing; it is the thing; it is not an *idea of*, but an idea-thing, an idea that *is*; it does not copy reality; it is reality, sensible reality” (1953, 3). Here, Luce emphasises Berkeley’s rejection of the representationalist distinction between things and ideas, as well as Berkeley’s commitment to the view that ideas of sensation are as real as it gets. The term ‘idea-thing’ is useful because it takes into account Berkeley’s insistence that his view reconciles *two* positions: that of the vulgar and the philosophers. In Berkeley’s system, the vulgar can hold on to their ‘things’ while the philosophers can also hold on to their ‘ideas’ – without the sceptical consequences that come out of the representationalist distinction between them.

2.2 *Ideas and representation*

Berkeley explicitly denies that it follows from his view that things in the world are “less real” (NB 807). This remark in his *Notebooks* pre-empts his claim in the *Principles* that: “[i]f any man thinks this [immaterialism] detracts from the existence or reality of things, he is very far from understanding what has been premised in the plainest terms I could think of” (PHK §36). This makes it clear that Berkeley’s intent was never to deny the reality of things in the world. At most, Berkeley explains, his aim is to adjust the way that philosophers use the term ‘exist’ which he thinks has become too far removed from its usage in common sense discourse (PHK §99). For a thing to exist, accordingly to his opponents, is for it to exist independently of any mind. This is made clear in the first dialogue where Hylas defines the real existence of a thing as “real absolute being, distinct from, and without any relation to their being perceived” (DHP 175). But Berkeley’s aim is to show that the view that “[t]o *exist* is one thing, to be *perceived* is another” is

inconsistent with common sense. Berkeley's own view, he maintains, *is* consistent with the common sense view that for a thing to exist just is for it to be perceived. As Berkeley sees it, for an immaterialist, things remain as real as they ever were because we remain able to see, hear, touch, smell, and taste them (PHK §34). However, he *does* deny that for an object to exist is for it to inhere in an unperceivable, material substance.

Berkeley's commitment to the view that ideas are real things leads to his most significant break with representationalism. For he rejects the claim, central to that position, that ideas play an intermediary role in our knowledge of things in the world. Representationalists are committed to the view that there is a gap in our knowledge of what we immediately experience and what really exists. Consider, for example, Descartes' wax argument in the Second Meditation.⁶⁴ Descartes argues that since all the sensible qualities of the wax, those aspects of it with which we are immediately acquainted by the senses, vary, the wax itself must be distinct from those qualities since the wax remains the same (CSM 2: 20). The wax itself, for Descartes, is known via the intellect and not by means of the qualities we perceive via the senses. But why do representationalists, like Descartes, accept this distinction in the first place?

The appearance-reality distinction is motivated by concerns such as; (i) the relativity of perceptual experiences, or (ii) instances of deception or illusion in sensory experience. Concerns of the first kind might motivate arguments of the following form: the way things in the world appear to us varies depending on either circumstances or perspective but the real nature of those things remains the same, and thus there must be a distinction between how those things appear to us and what those things are really like. Those motivated by the second kind of concern might claim that instances of deception or illusion present us with mere appearances of things that do not really exist. For example, the argument might follow like so: if I see a straw in a glass of water that *appears* crooked then I ought to infer that there is difference between how things appear to me and how things really are since the straw is not *really* crooked.⁶⁵ But Berkeley

⁶⁴ I leave aside the question of whether it's appropriate to characterise Descartes as a representationalist here. For discussion, see Cook 1987.

⁶⁵ Berkeley provides an alternative explanation of what is going on when we are subject to deception or illusions. The mistake lies, he explains, not in taking appearances for realities but in making certain inferences based on such appearances. For example, if I see a straw in a glass of water that looks crooked, the mistake would be to infer that when I take it out of the glass it will continue to look crooked or to infer that it would *feel* crooked to touch (DHP 238).

denies that these are compelling reasons to accept a distinction between appearances and reality, or ideas and things.⁶⁶

Berkeley thinks these philosophically motivated arguments lead to conclusions that are inconsistent with, and abstracted from, our ordinary experience of the world. In other words, they are motivated by concerns that never enter into the minds of the vulgar. Conversely, by denying the appearance-reality distinction, Berkeley takes himself to be coming from a starting point that is both empirically grounded and consistent with common sense. Unlike representationalists, Berkeley maintains that the best evidence for a thing's existence and the manner of its existence is my immediate experience of it. Thus, unlike his opponents, Berkeley is not a proponent of the view that ideas – those things we immediately perceive – provide mediate knowledge of what really exists. Instead, he thinks that ideas provide *immediate knowledge* of what really exists because they *just are* what really exists. Reality, for Berkeley, is whatever is given to us in experience.

A traditional claim about representationalism is that it places a veil of perception or veil of ideas between us and things in the world.⁶⁷ As Martha Brandt Bolton (1986, 68), points out, this means that representationalists must concern themselves with explaining what our ideas are *ideas of*. She explains that for representationalists, “an idea must be an idea of something else, for the idea just is the instrument by which thought is directed toward that other thing.” But there is no veil of perception in Berkeley's theory. Thus, if anything, as Bolton puts it, Berkeley's ideas of sensation are ideas are ideas *of themselves* (1986, 68). An idea of sensation is, to use Berkeley's discarded terminology, its own *ideatum*: only thing it represents is itself and its own existence.

Berkeley picks up on this issue in another notebook entry where he writes: “[t]he referring Ideas to things wch are not Ideas, the using the Term, Idea of, is one great cause of mistake, as in other matters so also in this” (NB 660). Here, Berkeley provides a warning not to be misled by the fact that we commonly use the phrase ‘Idea of’. His point is that “Idea of” suggests that what follows is *not* an idea. In other words, the phrase implies a distinction between an idea and something else (its *ideatum*). It is no surprise,

⁶⁶ I don't discuss Berkeley's response to such concerns, which lie outside the scope of my present concerns, here.

⁶⁷ For discussion of whether thinkers like Descartes or Locke are committed to a veil of perception, see Bennet 1971, 69; Yolton 1984 & 1996; Newman 2004. Sergeant is an early proponent of this critique of representationalism which, he claims, places us behind “Curtain of the Fancy” (SP 20).

in light of Berkeley's account of ideas of sensation, that he should wish to avoid any phrases that imply that there is a distinction between things and ideas. And indeed he follows through with this, using the phrase 'idea of' sparingly throughout the *New Theory*, the *Principles*, and the *Three Dialogues*. For Berkeley, when I perceive an idea with such and such particular sensible qualities, all that this warrants me to posit is that those sensible qualities exist. Indeed, Berkeley takes it be one of the benefits of his system that one need only open one's eyes and pay attention to what is immediately perceived to know what exists (PHK §6).

Berkeley replaces the thing-idea distinction, accepted by representationalists, with an identity relation. According to Berkeley: we immediately perceive things in the world, whatever is immediately perceived is an idea, so things just are ideas. Bolton argues that what Berkeley really means, so far as ideas of sensation are concerned, when he talks about an 'idea of', is an "idea, *namely*" (1986, 68).⁶⁸ Ideas are not representations of external objects, they do not stand as a an intermediary or *tertium quid* between ourselves and reality, nor are ideas mediately or proximately caused by external or material things. As Winkler puts it, an idea (for Berkeley) is not an "intentional object" but rather "an entity, a real thing" from which it follows that "the relation between an idea and the mind is a genuine relation between two distinct items" (1989, 7).⁶⁹ Although they exist in the mind, ideas *are* things in the world. Thus, for Berkeley, we have immediate empirical access to reality. As Hugh Hunter puts it, for Berkeley, "our ideas do not point to anything beyond themselves, any more than bodies point to anything beyond themselves" (2016).⁷⁰ To perceive an idea, then, is to perceive an idea in the mind, but also a distinct, real "idea-thing".

In this section, I have argued that Berkeley develops a novel theory of ideas. While it is appropriate to characterise him as an ideist, since he accepts that the only things we immediately perceive are ideas, he denies the representationalist claim that ideas represent things in the world distinct from themselves. Berkeley's aim is to displace the widespread representationalist theory of knowledge with a direct theory of knowledge in which there is no room for scepticism. This requires replacing the representationalists' metaphysical picture, in which there is a distinction between the immediate objects of

⁶⁸ Winkler makes a similar claim. See 1989, 17.

⁶⁹ Similarly, see Luce 1953, 3, and Stoneham 2017, 102.

⁷⁰ Accessed online at https://philosophynow.org/issues/117/Berkeleys_Suitcase [accessed June 13th, 2019].

knowledge and real things in the world, with one in which they are one and the same. In the next section, I will identify an epistemological problem which seems to arise as a consequence of this move. The problem concerns how we gain ‘general knowledge’: knowledge that goes beyond the ideas we perceive via sense experience. I will then explain how Berkeley is able to address this problem and provide an account of general knowledge.

3. General Knowledge

3.1 Locke on general knowledge

In Berkeley’s system, ideas of sensation are the real things which make up the world around us. They are, Berkeley explains, strong, vivid, ordered and coherent, and abide by observable laws of nature (PHK §§29-30). It should now be clear that Berkeley rejects two claims about the nature of ideas that he takes to be widely held amongst his predecessors. Firstly, that abstract ideas can be brought about by either of the processes of ‘generalising’ or ‘singling’ abstraction. Secondly, that ideas are intermediary representational entities which provide us with mediate knowledge of things in the world. Berkeley thus turns away from the representationalist tradition in which ideas are a *tertium quid* in the act of knowledge. Instead, Berkeley, like more traditional direct realists, has a two-part (mind-idea) rather than a three-part (mind-idea-thing) story of perception.

At this point, a question about our knowledge of the world might arise, namely, how we come to know the world around us as one that *seems* to be composed of more than just bare sensible qualities.⁷¹ We might ask why it is that we come to know collections of ideas as physical objects? And why we come to see these physical objects as parts of a system of nature that is regular, coherent, and predictable? In this section, I will first outline how Locke is able to address such questions by appealing to abstract

⁷¹ See Pearce 2017, 1-2, for a similar characterisation of this problem. Pearce’s claim is that “Berkeley’s solution to this problem... lies in his theory of language”. However, I offer an alternative solution in what follows.

ideas. I will then explain how Berkeley can address such issues even though he denies that abstract ideas exist.

Locke's view is that abstract *terms* in language get to be meaningful by signifying abstract ideas. He claims that: "[t]he far *greatest part of words*, that make all languages, *are general terms*: which has not been the effect of neglect, or chance, but of reason, and necessity" (EHU 3.3.1). There is an important reason, Locke maintains, that most of our words are general terms and it concerns the fact that we come to know the world around us as one full of *kinds* of things. What's more, he maintains, this is necessarily the case, since

a distinct name for every particular thing, would not be of any great use for the improvement of knowledge; which, though founded in particular things, enlarges itself by general views; to which, things reduced into sorts under general names, are properly subservient. (EHU 3.3.4)

Locke's claim is that to improve or enlarge our knowledge beyond just the immediate experience we have of particular objects, we need to be able to think and reason in general terms. When it comes to verbal or written discourse, we can do so by using general terms; words like 'human', 'animal', 'being', and so on. Such terms allow us to formulate propositions about the world that apply *generally* and are not restricted to particulars. It is thanks to this ability to reason in general terms that we are able to formulate general or *scientific* accounts of what nature itself is like. For example, we can formulate increasingly general or abstract propositions – starting with, say, propositions about humans, moving to animals, and then beings, and then being in general – until we arrive at a set of propositions which we (rightly or wrongly) take to be true of all things in nature. On Locke's account, we can do this because the *meaningfulness* of general terms is ensured by the fact that they signify abstract ideas. He offers the following explanation of how words become general:

Words become general, by being made the signs of general *ideas*; and *ideas* become general, by separating from them the circumstances of time, and place, and any other *ideas*, that may determine them to this or that particular existence. By this way of abstraction they are made capable of representing more individuals than one; each of which, having in it a conformity to that abstract *idea*, is (as we call it) of that sort. (EHU 3.3.6)

By generating abstract ideas, the mind organises the world into sorts or kinds with varying levels of generality, which then allows us to formulate propositions concerning it that are not restricted to bare particulars. For example, I can make claims about *trees*, rather than just this or that tree. In this way, we come to know the world around us as ordered, coherent, and predictable – and as one of which there are general truths. All of this is possible, in Locke’s system, because of his commitment to the existence of abstract ideas. The question then is how Berkeley, the *anti*-abstractionist, can account for the fact that the world we know consists in more than bare sensible qualities or ideas of sensation? How can Berkeley account for scientific reasoning and the general knowledge we have of the world as organised into kinds, species, processes, and so on? In what follows, I argue that it is Berkeley’s account of sign-usage that helps him to answer this question.

3.2 Berkeley on general terms and universal notions

The first thing to note is that even though Berkeley claims that ideas of sensation are real things, he nonetheless maintains that “exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing”. As such, they deserve to be called ‘ideas’ for the same reason ideas of imagination do. As we have seen, Berkeley accepts the principle held by “the philosophers” that “the things immediately perceived, are ideas which exist only in the mind” (DHP 262). To that extent, Berkeley agrees with representationalists. However, we have seen that he also thinks ideas are not *merely* mental entities; they are not products of the imagination alone. They are real things and follow the same rules as things in the world around us. It follows from this that, in Berkeley’s theory, ideas do not play the intermediary role assigned to them by representationalists. Nonetheless, Berkeley does not deny the possibility of universal or general knowledge. In this subsection, I outline what form he thinks such knowledge takes.

In the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley explains that there is a sense in which “ideas become general” although he is careful to distinguish this from the process of abstraction that Locke is committed to (PI §12). Using the example of the general term ‘triangle’, he acknowledges that if I express the proposition ‘triangles have three sides’, I am not making a statement about a particular triangle but rather triangles *in general*. As such, if I take this statement to be true then I will take it to be true of all triangles. But

how can I formulate a proposition or believe in the truth of such a statement without referring to something more abstract than this or that particular triangle? On the Lockean account, talk of ‘triangles’ in a general sense corresponds with reasoning concerning abstract ideas. There is, in Locke’s account, a clear correlation between *what I am thinking of* and *what I am talking about*. Abstract terms correspond with abstract ideas, just as particular terms of reference (‘this triangle’) refers to concrete particulars out there in the world. A concern for Berkeley’s account, in which all that exists – and, thus, all I am able to reason about – are particular ideas, is how to make sense of general terms.

Despite the fact that Berkeley rejects abstract ideas, he maintains that the meaningfulness of general terms can be explained nonetheless. He argues that if we examine what is really going on when we use terms like ‘triangle’, experience will confirm that all we really refer to is the set of particular ideas to which the term applies. In other words, when I say something is true of ‘triangles’ it will suffice that it is true of all particular triangles without the need for an abstract idea of triangle playing a mediating role (PI §18). In which case, abstract ideas, which Locke maintains *must* exist for general terms to be meaningful, are superfluous to explanation. If we really consider what it is that we are conceiving or thinking of when we make use of and understand general terms, Berkeley maintains, we will find that there is no need for abstract ideas. He makes this clear in the Introduction to the *Principles*, where he writes:

it is thought that every name has, or ought to have, only one precise and settled signification, which inclines men to think there are certain abstract, determinate ideas, which constitute the true and only immediate signification of each general name, and that it is by the mediation of these abstract ideas that a general name comes to signify any particular thing. Whereas, in truth, there is no such thing as one precise and definite signification annexed to any general name, they all signifying indifferently a great number of particular ideas. (PI §18)

This is also suggested in a similar remark from the *Manuscript Introduction*, where Berkeley asks “why a Word may not be made to comprehend a great number of particular

things in it's Signification, without the help⁷² of a General Idea [?]" (MI §18).⁷³ His point is that a word can signify "a great number of particular ideas" without requiring the mediation of an abstract idea (PI §18). And if it turns out that abstract ideas are superfluous to explaining the meaningfulness of general terms then, Berkeley argues, there is no good reason to commit oneself to their existence – especially since introspection confirms that they do not exist.⁷⁴

Berkeley's claim, then, is that particular ideas are 'rendered universal' by being made to signify several particulars. He claims that "an idea, which considered in itself is particular, *becomes general* by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (PHK §12, my emphasis). A particular idea, as Berkeley sees it, "becomes general" or is "rendered universal" when we use it to stand for several or many other particular ideas. Similarly, a *word*, becomes general by signifying such ideas or simply by signifying multiple particular ideas. This combination of Berkeley's account of general names along with his account of general ideas is what Seth Bordner calls the theory of "general signification" (2017, 247). In neither case – that is, general *thought* or general *speech* – does Berkeley think there is any need to posit abstract ideas, since they are superfluous to explanation and are not the kind of entity that can be detected by introspection.

For example, if I am reasoning about triangles, I can do so by using a particular triangle – "whether of this or that sort it matters not" – which signifies others like it (PI §15). Similarly, I can formulate a proposition about triangles by using the term 'triangle' as a sign for that same set of particular triangles. In both cases, the phenomenon in question, i.e., thinking and speaking in general terms, can be explained without appealing to abstract ideas. Berkeley thus takes himself to be equipped to maintain that it is possible to have "universal notions", while at the same time denying that abstract ideas exist. When I talk about triangles, or when triangles are the objects of my reason or thought, I do so with the universal notion of 'triangle' in mind. However, this does not involve

⁷² 'Interposition' is crossed out here.

⁷³ In the same section, he continues: "[l]et any Man take a fair & impartial View of his own Thoughts, & then determine, whether his General Words do not become so ['only' is added here] by being made to mark a Number of particular Existences, without any the least thought of Abstraction. For what, I pray, are Words but Signs of our Thoughts? & how are signs of any sort render'd Universal, otherwise than by being made to signify, or represent indifferently, a Multitude of particular Things?" (MI §18)

⁷⁴ I provide an in-depth discussion of Berkeley's claim that abstract ideas are what I call 'explanatory' and not 'empirical' posits in West 2019.

conceiving of an abstract idea of a triangle, but rather being able to *use* an idea of a particular triangle in a certain way, namely, *as a sign*. Berkeley explains:

it doth not appear to me that those [universal] notions are formed by abstraction in the manner premised; universality, so far as I can comprehend, not consisting in the absolute, positive nature or conception of any thing, but in the relation it bears to the particulars signified or represented by it: by virtue whereof it is that things, names, or notions, being in their own nature particular, are rendered universal. (PI §15)

Berkeley's aim, then, is not to argue against the existence of universal notions, or universal thinking and reasoning in general, but to re-evaluate what a universal notion actually is.

So what *is* universality for Berkeley? What is it that allows us to think and reason in universal or general terms? For abstractionists like Locke, Berkeley argues, a universal notion is “the absolute, positive nature or conception” of a thing *in abstract* (PI §15). But this characterisation of universality requires being able to conceive of abstract ideas – a feat which, Berkeley argues, is impossible. Therefore, universality must consist in something else. Berkeley's answer is that a universal notion is an idea that bears a certain relation to “particulars signified or represented by it”. Universality, then, consists in *relations between ideas* and not the “positive nature” of the ideas themselves. An idea, which is determinate in nature, is “rendered universal” when it is appointed a sign or ‘representation’ (in the loose sense of the term) for other ideas.⁷⁵ In other words, universality is grounded in signification relations between our ideas. These relations, it should be noted, are not natural or necessary but arbitrary. That is, it is a matter of convention and not nature whether one idea signifies another.

It is not entirely true to say that Berkeley thinks *all* the relations involved in universal thinking or reasoning are arbitrary. At some level, resemblance plays a key role – and Berkeley is clear in stating that resemblance relations are *not* arbitrary (see, for example, NTV §147).⁷⁶ Berkeley's view is that when I engage in abstract or universal reasoning about triangles, for example, I do so with the “universal idea of a triangle” in

⁷⁵ In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley claims that “signs of any sort” are “render'd universal... by being made to signify, or represent indifferently, a multitude of particular things” (MI §11).

⁷⁶ I have more to say about resemblance relations and their status as ‘non-arbitrary’ relations in chapter four of this dissertation – especially section three.

mind (PI §15). The universal *idea* of triangle serves the same role as the general *term* ‘triangle’ – namely, it stands for or signifies all triangles whatsoever. However, this universal idea is not a Lockean abstract idea. What, then, we might ask, makes it an appropriate sign for “all rectilinear triangles whatsoever”? Berkeley’s answer is that “an idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same *sort*” (PI §12, my emphasis).

What exactly Berkeley means by “sort” is not immediately clear since he denies both the existence of universals in nature and the existence of abstract ideas in the mind. It seems natural to suggest that sorts, for Berkeley, are sets of ideas that *resemble* one another and indeed this is the view we find Berkeley advocating in the *Manuscript Introduction*. There, he claims that ideas “are said to be of the same sort” when there is “some likeness” between them (MI §25). He is quick to qualify this remark with the claim that “these sorts are not determin’d & set out by Nature, as was thought by most philosophers.” It is plausible to interpret Berkeley as holding that we divide nature into sorts based on likenesses that we observe between them. But Berkeley does *not* think that this should commit us to the real existence of these sorts. Note, however, that there is still a degree of arbitrariness in *how* we delineate between sorts in nature since it is up to us to decide what degree of likeness makes a thing or one sort or another. It is unfortunate that Berkeley is not clearer on his understanding of sorts in the published Introduction but, for both philosophical and contextual reasons, it is reasonable to assume that this is the account he has in mind. It should be noted, then, that while all signification relations are arbitrary, some ideas are designated as signs of others on the basis of pre-existing resemblance relations. For example, as I noted above, Berkeley claims that what we call ‘sorts’ are sets of ideas with “some likeness” between them (MI §25). The word ‘triangle’, then, is a sign for a sort: a set of particulars with a similar shape.

We have seen, then, that Berkeley argues that we can explain general thinking and reasoning simply by reference to particular ideas, albeit used in a certain way, as *general signs*. Signification, for Berkeley, does the work that Locke takes abstraction to do.⁷⁷ In this way, Berkeley is able to explain how we gain general knowledge without the

⁷⁷ I am not suggesting that Locke does not have an account of signification but rather that Berkeley puts signification to work in a way that Locke never does. Both Berkeley and Locke agree that signification is an arbitrary, conventional relation between a sign and a thing signified. However, while Locke explains the meaning of general terms by appeal to abstract ideas, Berkeley explains them by appeal to ‘general signs.’ See chapter three (1.1) for my reading of Locke on signification.

existence of abstract ideas. The case I have made so far indicates that Berkeley's account of general or universal thinking and reasoning is part of his broader theory of *sign-usage*. This is supported by his claim, in *Alciphron*, that, "all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about signs as their immediate object" (AMP 7.16). I outline that theory in further detail in what follows.

3.3 Signification

In the previous section, I outlined Berkeley's account of how general terms get to be meaningful without signifying abstract ideas. Berkeley's claim, as we saw, is that general terms correspond with particular ideas *used by the mind in a certain way*. When employed in this way, ideas play the role of universal notions (they are "rendered universal"). The general term 'triangle', for example, corresponds with an idea of a triangle which, in turn, signifies other triangles. Thus, when we think or reason in general terms, we simply use particular ideas to signify others that share certain similarities with it. In order to understand Berkeley's account of how general terms find meaning, it is worth comparing it with a similar position that Berkeley puts forward in *Alciphron*. Doing so places Berkeley's account of general terms in the Introduction to the *Principles* in the context of his broader account of sign-usage.

Before proceeding, it is worth clarifying how I understand the difference between representation and signification in Berkeley's writing.⁷⁸ I take it that for Berkeley *representation* is a non-arbitrary relation between two objects (or ideas) which is ultimately grounded in the nature of those objects. What's more, as Berkeley sees it, in order for one object to represent another those two objects must *resemble* one another (I call this claim the 'resemblance thesis').⁷⁹ For example, if at night I recall the sun shining in the sky, the ideas which constitute that memory represent the real sun (a collection of ideas of sensation) by means of resemblance (see PHK §33). *Signification*, however, is an arbitrary relation between a sign and a thing signified that has no ground in nature and is independent of any resemblance relations between objects. As Rebecca Copenhaver

⁷⁸ I also take this to apply to other Early Modern thinkers, including Locke. See chapter three (2.1) for more on this distinction.

⁷⁹ See chapter three (2.2 and 2.3) for an in-depth discussion of why Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis.

puts it, “signs [for Berkeley]... need resemble objects no more than words must resemble meanings” (2013, 2). Signification relations are thus arbitrary and conventionally agreed upon. An important difference between signification and representation is that whereas signification relations depend entirely on our designating one thing a sign of another, representation relations require a pre-existing resemblance between objects – which is something we *discover* or *observe* in nature. I take this to at least be a *conceptual* distinction in Berkeley’s writing; that is, while Berkeley himself does not always clearly use the terms ‘representation’ and ‘signification’ in these ways, I take it that he accepts this distinction nonetheless. With that in mind, I now explain where and how Berkeley outlines his account of sign-usage and what this means for his theory of ideas.

In the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron*, Berkeley outlines his account of how particulars can be used as signs of other objects. He identifies our employment of counters in a game of cards as an example of sign-usage and this example is a useful way of understanding exactly what he thinks signification involves. First, he explains that such counters do not *naturally* represent the monetary values that they stand for. No counter is worth £10, £50, £100, or any other value naturally. For example, even if you knew everything there was to know about the nature of a counter, you could not infer that it stood for a certain monetary value. Rather, the value of a counter – that is, the value that it signifies – is *conventionally* agreed on. The value of the counter is thus dependent upon something external to the counter itself (e.g., the rules of poker). In this way, Berkeley explains, we use a counter as a sign for a monetary sum. The counter is a *sign* because there is a convention or agreement which determines that it bears a relation to that sum. The point of the example is, for Berkeley, that signs only signify when they are used by us in conventionally agreed upon ways (AMP 7, §§10-15). The relationship between a sign and the thing signified is arbitrary; it could always have been otherwise.

We have seen already that Berkeley does not think the “enlargement of knowledge” requires abstract ideas (PI §15; see also NTV §125). Rather, he maintains that enlarging or improving our knowledge, from the particular to the general, involves sign-usage. General knowledge does not involve necessary relations between abstract ideas, like ‘human’ or ‘animal’, and sets of particular objects, like individual humans and animals. Instead, it involves establishing systems of arbitrary *signification* relations. For example, having observed a set of individuals that we take to be similar in certain ways (e.g., they live, breathe, and seek nourishment) we might agree to use the term ‘animal’

as a general sign for them. In doing so, we establish a convention. It is not an abstract idea of animals that, in Berkeley's views, makes the term 'animal' meaningful, but rather the fact that it signifies a set of ideas which are conventionally associated with one another.

We have already seen that Berkeley thinks a particular idea can be made to stand for others which it resembles. In this way, Berkeley explains, an idea is "*rendered universal*" (PI §15, my emphasis). This process of rendering an idea universal – of making it stand for other ideas – involves establishing an arbitrary relation between the idea, which is rendered a sign, and others like it, which are the things signified. Berkeley explains that, in the case of the general term 'triangle', "the particular triangle I consider, whether of this or that sort matters not" (PI §15). It is arbitrary which particular idea we choose to render universal but once that relation is established, the idea "equally stands for and represents all... triangles whatsoever and is in that sense universal." Thus, the universal idea of a triangle is not an *abstract idea*. Rather, the universal idea of a triangle is used similarly to a counter at a card-table. There will be some criteria for whether this or that particular idea is appropriate to stand as a sign for all triangles (for example, it must have three sides), just as there are criteria for whether this or that counter stands for £10, £50, or £100 – but in both cases, these criteria are *conventionally* agreed on. In neither case is there a natural or necessary relation between the sign and the thing(s) signified, even if that arbitrary relation is established on the basis of non-arbitrary resemblances between things.

This conception of ideas as conventionally, rather than naturally or necessarily, 'representational' provides further support for the view that Berkeley's account of ideas is radically divergent from that of his predecessors. On the representationalist view, ideas bear a necessary relation to those things they represent; things in the world which are distinct from them. At least according to Berkeley's understanding of that view, this relation is one of resemblance. However, Berkeley develops an alternative account of how we gain general knowledge by arbitrarily or conventionally establishing signification relations between ideas. In this way, Berkeley argues, we use ideas as 'general signs.' The 'representational' capacities of ideas are (for Berkeley) dependent on these signification relations and are thus arbitrary. Ideas only stand for or 'represent' other ideas if we, as perceivers, put them to use in that way as signs in accordance with agreed upon conventions.

Conclusion

I have argued that Berkeley's account of the nature and role of ideas is radically divergent from the theory that representationalists are committed to. While Berkeley accepts the philosophical definition of an idea as an immediate object of the mind he does not take all ideas to be representative entities. Ideas of sensation do not represent at all but *just are* things in the world, while ideas of imagination are "copies or images" of ideas of sensation (PHK §33).

It is worth returning to and reflecting briefly on Reid's reading of Berkeley's place in the story of eighteenth-century epistemology. Reid claims that Berkeley's immaterialism is a "sacrifice to the received philosophy of ideas" (EIP 172). Representationalists take ideas to be immediate objects of knowledge which are key to gaining mediate knowledge of the external world. On Berkeley's reading of the representationalist position, ideas are what I, as a perceiver, am immediately familiar with but they do *not* provide any immediate knowledge of what really exists. In Berkeley's own theory, however, to have an idea – and therefore to immediately perceive something – is to have immediate access to what really exists. Ideas of sensation, which I receive via the senses, do not just inform me about the world but are actually constitutive of it. For Berkeley, there are no "unknown constitutions of things" of the kind posited by Locke (EHU 3.3.15) since to be a sensible thing, for Berkeley, just is to be perceived or known (PHK §3). Thus, we ought to, at best, treat Reid's remarks with caution or, at worst, reject them entirely. For, as Saporiti puts it, the word 'idea' finds "a new meaning" in Berkeley's thought (2004, 196).⁸⁰ It no longer refers to merely mental entities which represent mind-independent things in the world. Instead, it refers to things in the world which cannot be abstracted from our perception. Ideas do not represent mind-independent objects, for Berkeley, but can be used to signify other ideas – thus allowing us to gain knowledge beyond bare particulars and to come to know the world as one full of objects, sorts, kinds, and processes.

⁸⁰ See also Yolton 1996, 9.

CHAPTER THREE: THE RESEMBLANCE THESIS

Introduction

According to Berkeley's reading of his opponents, ideas are "copies or resemblances" or "pictures or representations" of qualities inhering in mind-independent, material substance (PHK §8). I have argued that Berkeley takes this view to lead inevitably to scepticism. In this chapter and the next, I provide a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument against representationalism. This argument rests on what has come to be known as the 'likeness principle' which entails that an idea could not possibly be a copy or representation of something mind-independent because "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (PHK §8). That Berkeley should present his opponents' view in this way, along with his response, reveals that he conceives of the relation of *resemblance* shared between ideas and external objects as crucial to the type of epistemology in which ideas *represent* external objects. It becomes clear that Berkeley believes that for an idea to represent something mind-independent it would need to *resemble* that thing.

Berkeley's argument from the likeness principle rests on a second premise: that *two things must resemble one another in order for one to represent the other*. This is what I will refer to as the 'resemblance thesis': the claim that representation requires resemblance.¹ Berkeley never explicitly justifies his employment of the resemblance thesis. According to Hilary Putnam, it is "generally unappreciated that the premiss from which Berkeley worked - the similitude theory [i.e., the resemblance thesis] – was... the accepted theory of reference before his time and, indeed, for a hundred years afterwards" (2009, 434-44). Putnam claims that the resemblance thesis was widely accepted amongst Berkeley's predecessors and contemporaries, which would explain why Berkeley never explicitly defends it. Yet, it is far from obvious that Berkeley's opponents, seventeenth-century representationalists, would agree that for an idea to represent an object it must

¹ See John Carriero 2003, 21-46. This terminology is not as widely accepted as 'the likeness principle'. For example, Hilary Putnam calls it 'the similitude theory' (1981, 59). Jennifer Marusic calls it the 'resemblance *principle*' (2009, 433-34, my emphasis). George Pappas uses 'the resemblance thesis' to refer to a different view, namely, the view that ideas resemble the qualities of material objects – a view held by Berkeley's opponents (2000, 229-30). My use of the phrase should not be confused with Pappas'.

resemble it. For example, consider Descartes' reply to Hobbes' claim that we do not have an idea of God:

my critic wants the term 'idea' to be taken to refer simply to the images of material things which are depicted in the corporeal imagination; and if this is granted, it is easy for him to prove that there can be no proper idea of an angel or of God. But... I am taking the word 'idea' to refer to whatever is immediately perceived by the mind. For example, when I want something, or am afraid of something, I simultaneously perceive that I want, or am afraid; and this is why I count volition and fear among my ideas. (CSM 2: 127)

If Descartes had accepted that all ideas are images, then it would be plausible to attribute the resemblance thesis to him since an image (like a painting or photograph) *does* represent by resemblance. But Descartes states that while *some* ideas are "as it were, the images of things" (CSM 2:25), this is not true of all ideas. He explains: we have ideas of volition and fear, but it is impossible to conceive of an *image* of volition or fear, which means that not all ideas are images of things. Similarly, Locke, another of Berkeley's targets, explicitly states that many of our ideas, those of secondary qualities, do not resemble their objects. While he maintains that ideas of primary qualities resemble those qualities themselves, Locke takes ideas of secondary qualities to be the effects of certain occasions or causes; powers inherent in various external bodies in nature. He writes:

the ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them, and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the ideas, produced in us by these secondary qualities, have no resemblance of them at all. (EHU 2.8.15)²

Again, like Descartes, Locke denies that all our ideas represent their objects by means of resemblance. When it comes to our ideas of secondary qualities, he writes, "[t]here is nothing like our ideas existing in the bodies themselves." There is evidence, then, that things are not as straightforward as Putnam's historiographical claim suggests.

² Similarly, in the marginal notes of Locke's edition of John Sergeant's *Solid Philosophy Asserted*, he contests Sergeant's characterisation of ideas as 'similitudes' of things. One of Locke's marginal notes reads, "Where is it Mr Locke says Ideas are the similitudes of things, he expresly says most of them are not similitudes" (SP [Locke's copy], Epistle Dedicatory, 6). Another reads: "he [Sergeant] will have Mr Locke to mean resemblances by Ideas though Mr L says expresley yt he does not" (SP [Locke's copy], 137). These comments confirm that Locke does not think that ideas must be resemblances of things.

Berkeley's immediate predecessors do not seem to think it is obvious that representation requires resemblance.

To make matters a little more complicated, there are clear signs Berkeley is aware of this. For example, when discussing the primary-secondary quality distinction, he explains that our ideas of secondary qualities are "not to be the resemblances of any thing existing without the mind" (PHK §9). Yet, at times, he seems to imply that his opponents *do* nonetheless accept the resemblance thesis. For example, in the *Manuscript Introduction* he claims that ideas "are not thought to represent" their objects "any otherwise, than as they resemble them" (MI §12). He goes on to juxtapose the relation between ideas and their objects with the relation between words and ideas. The latter relation, he claims, is one of 'signification', an arbitrary relation, whereas the relation between ideas and their objects is one of 'representation' which depends entirely upon what a certain idea does and does not resemble.³ This passage is not repeated in Berkeley's published Introduction to the *Principles*, and there is no obvious counterpart in any of his published works.⁴ Nonetheless, as Kenneth Winkler emphasises, that does not mean he ceased to accept the resemblance thesis (1989, 12). In sections of the (published) *Principles* Berkeley again seems to assume that his opponents would accept that representation requires resemblance. §8 of the *Principles* is the most famous of these instances but consider, for example, §56 where he explains that according to his opponents

there are certain objects really existing without the mind, or having a subsistence distinct from being perceived, of which our ideas are only the *images or resemblances*, imprinted by those objects of the mind. (my emphasis)⁵

Again, the view Berkeley takes himself to be rejecting is one in which our ideas represent by means of resemblance. It is therefore clear that Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis *and* attributes it to his opponents.

Before proceeding, I think it is worth reflecting on what it means to accept the resemblance thesis and to offer a characterisation of 'representation' that is neutral on the

³ For further discussion of the difference between 'signification' and 'representation' (in both Locke and Berkeley) see Winkler 2005; Daniel 2008a. See also chapter two (3.3) and 2.1 in this chapter.

⁴ However, Berkeley does seem to draw a similar distinction in NTV §144 and Alc. 4.7, 149.

⁵ He repeats this claim in PHK §57. Hylas, who is characterised as a materialist, also commits himself to the resemblance thesis in DHP 205.

question of whether it requires resemblance. A thinker like Berkeley who accepts the resemblance thesis will provide one answer to the question ‘what does it take for one thing to represent another?’ That answer is: those things must *resemble* one another. Those who do not accept the resemblance thesis will provide a different answer.⁶ But there is a separate question – which warrants a separate answer – namely, ‘what does it *mean* to talk of one thing representing another?’ This question need not warrant the same answer, for it is possible to differentiate between what representation *requires* and what representation *involves*. As such, two thinkers might agree on what representation *involves* while disagreeing about what it *requires*. It is worth considering, then, whether there is an answer to this second question which would have been accepted by both Berkeley and his opponents.

My suggestion is that for Berkeley and other Early Moderns representation involves providing a *conception* of an object.⁷ That is, if an object is represented to you, faithfully, then you can conceive of that object without having been previously acquainted with it. In which case, to accept the resemblance thesis is to accept that in order to conceive of an object, by means of another, those two objects must be *alike*. Consider, for example, this remark from William King, the archbishop of Dublin, who was part of the same intellectual milieu in Ireland as Berkeley:⁸

when we would help a Man to some Conception of any thing, that has not fallen within the reach of his Senses we do it by comparing it to something that already has, by offering him some Similitude, Resemblance or Analogy, to help his Conception. (*Divine Predestination*, 10)

King argues that in order to provide another person with a conception of something she is currently unfamiliar with, we must present her with something that *resembles* that thing.⁹ To use King’s own example, I can provide someone with a conception of a country they have never visited by presenting them with a map which resembles it (*Divine*

⁶ Jonathan Hill suggests that for several Cartesian thinkers the answer is that for one thing to represent another, the two things must share a *causal* relation. See Hill 2011, 49.

⁷ For a similar understanding of representation, see Winkler 1989, 21.

⁸ Berkeley and King were both members of the Dublin Philosophical Society, established by William Molyneux. For the history of the DPS, see Hoppen 1970.

⁹ I discuss King’s acceptance of the resemblance thesis, his influence on Berkeley, and the issue of representation amongst Early Modern Irish thinkers in Fasko & West (forthcoming).

Predestination, 10).¹⁰ In this chapter, I will work on the basis that representation involves providing one with a conception of a thing.¹¹ I take the question of why Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis, then, to be a question about why he thinks *resemblance* is required in order to do that.

This chapter has two aims: to explain why Berkeley takes his opponents to accept the resemblance thesis and to identify his own motivations for doing so. In section one, I argue that it is plausible to read Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis. In turn, this provides us with evidence that Berkeley also took Locke to have accepted the resemblance thesis;¹² and that, if so, he was justified in doing so. In section two, I argue that while Berkeley does not provide us with an argument for the resemblance thesis, it is possible to identify his motivations for accepting it. More specifically, I argue that the resemblance thesis is built into Berkeley's strict account of representation. Berkeley's understanding of how representation works, I argue, explains why he never considers the possibility of representation by any other means. Finally, in section three, I consider the consequences of Berkeley's acceptance of the resemblance thesis for (i) his account of how and if our ideas can represent spirits, and (ii) his anti-abstractionism. These issues are important in understanding Berkeley's rejection of representationalism, and the immaterialism that he develops in response.

1. Locke and the Resemblance Thesis

1.1 Does Locke accept the resemblance thesis?

¹⁰ Anthony Collins, a self-professed 'free-thinker' and critic of King, challenges this claim. He argues that King has "plainly mistaken the use of maps" which do not *represent* but *signify* countries (*Vindication*, 23). The mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes that we find in maps, he argues, are not designed to provide us with conceptions of real mountains, valleys, rivers, and lakes but to *signify* those objects due to previously established conventions. For example, he argues that "a River in a Map represents not Water, nor would ever give a Man any Idea of Water, but is a Mark in a Map agreed to signify Water to those who know what Water is" (*Vindication*, 24). Collins, then, like King, accepts both the resemblance thesis and the characterisation of 'representation' outlined above. Representing water, he argues, means providing someone with a conception of water which, in turn, requires being presented with something that resembles water. His disagreement with King lies in the fact that, as he sees it, the marks on a map could not possibly do that.

¹¹ This should also help to distinguish 'representation' in the discussion that follows from its usage in contemporary philosophy, where to represent is simply to have an 'intentional object'.

¹² I am working on the assumption that if I can find reasons to attribute the resemblance thesis to Locke, then Berkeley could have too.

In this section, I demonstrate that it is plausible to read Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis. In turn, I suggest, this provides us with a reason for thinking that Berkeley also attributed the resemblance thesis to Locke. If so, this may help us to understand why Berkeley never justifies his own acceptance of it. I focus on Locke's account of representation and on the distinction between knowledge via ideas of primary qualities and knowledge via ideas of secondary qualities, arguing that it is at least plausible to read Locke as holding that ideas of primary qualities *represent* those qualities while ideas of secondary qualities *signify*.¹³ Since only representation, and not signification, requires resemblance, this would explain why Locke maintains that only ideas of primary qualities resemble their objects. If Berkeley read Locke in this way then his own failure to defend the resemblance thesis is at least understandable, and perhaps less problematic.

Michael Jacovides maintains that “[f]or Berkeley, as for most of his predecessors, the central form of representation is resemblance” and suggests that the resemblance thesis follows naturally from the background of Aristotelian thought in the scholastic period (2009, 417).¹⁴ It may be true that a number of thinkers accepted the resemblance thesis but, as John Carriero explains, many of Berkeley's predecessors “*denied* that ideas of secondary qualities resemble anything in bodies” (2003, 25-26, my emphasis). For example, Locke denies that ideas of secondary qualities resemble the qualities themselves, writing:

the ideas of primary qualities of bodies are resemblances of them [i.e. the qualities they represent], and their patterns do really exist in the bodies themselves; but the ideas, produced in us by these secondary qualities, have no resemblance of them at all. There is nothing like our ideas existing in the bodies themselves. They are in the bodies, we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us (EHU 2.8.15).

Locke's message could not be much clearer: ideas of secondary qualities do not resemble those qualities, or anything in external bodies, *at all*.

¹³ For a helpful overview of Locke's “taxonomy of ideas”, see Bolton 2007, esp. 78-86. Bolton's reading of the distinction between ideas of primary and secondary qualities is at least consistent with the reading I put forward in this section.

¹⁴ See also Putnam 2009, 433-34; Glauser 1988, 586; Carriero 2003.

It is also clear that Berkeley is aware of Locke's view, for he writes:

The ideas we have of these [secondary qualities such as colours, sounds, tastes] they acknowledge not to be resemblances of any thing existing without the mind or unperceived (PHK §9).

This is one of the most puzzling things about Berkeley's treatment of representationalism. He appears to note Locke's view and yet presses on with an argument against the claim that ideas represent by means of resemblance. Assuming that Locke is one of Berkeley's targets, this raises the question of why he puts forward an argument against the view that ideas are "copies or resemblances" (PHK §8) of material things even though this isn't a claim Locke ever endorses. At most, it seems that Berkeley provides an argument against Locke's account of ideas of primary qualities, but not his account of ideas of secondary qualities.

In what follows, I contend that it is reasonable to think that Berkeley intended the argument in *Principles* §8 to be a direct argument only against Locke's account of ideas of primary qualities, and an *indirect* argument against Locke's account of ideas of secondary qualities. This is consistent with Berkeley's arguments in the sections that follow §9, where he argues for the inseparability of primary and secondary qualities.

The first thing to consider is Locke's account of *real knowledge*. Real knowledge is knowledge gained via what he calls 'real' and 'simple' ideas of sensation or reflection. In Book Four of the *Essay*, Locke explains that all "real ideas", those which are not "phantasms" or products of the imagination, conform to the existence of things. As Martha Brandt Bolton puts it, an idea is 'real' if "(1) we suppose the idea represents something that exists in the world and (2) this supposition is correct" (2007, 79). Every real, simple idea conforms to, or answers to, either a quality that it resembles, if it is an idea of a primary quality like size or shape, or a power that it is produced by, if it is an idea of a secondary quality like whiteness or bitterness (EHU 4.4.4). Real knowledge, Locke explains, is not necessarily constituted by our ideas conforming to qualities which they *resemble*, but by the fact that the existence of those qualities conforms to the existence of our ideas. The existence of real ideas, Locke maintains, is isomorphic to the existence of qualities in objects. In other words, we should not read Locke as saying that every real idea resembles a quality out there in the world, but that every real idea can be explained by reference to a quality or power in the world. We can be said to have real

knowledge so long as the cause or origin of our ideas can be explained by reference to a corresponding power in mind-independent reality. Locke writes:

simple ideas, which since the mind, as has been showed, can by no means make to itself, must necessarily be the product of things operating on the mind in a natural way, and producing therein those perceptions which by the wisdom and will of our maker they are ordained and adapted to. From whence it follows, that simple ideas are not fictions of our fancies, but the natural and regular productions of things without us, really operating on us, and so carry with them all the conformity which is intended, or which our state requires (EHU 4.4.4.).

Locke argues that sensible ideas, which are the product of sense-perception, occur in certain regular and repeated patterns which are the result of “the natural and regular productions of things without us”. It is no coincidence that our ideas occur in such patterns since the things which give rise to them are also structured in regular patterns or sequences. So long as our knowledge is real there will always be a conformity between producer and produced; between qualities in the external world and the ideas in our mind. The two sets of patterns will always conform to one another. The reality of our ideas, then, Locke explains, lies not in their resembling qualities in the material world, but

in that steady correspondence they have with the distinct constitutions of real beings... whether they answer those constitutions, as to cause or patterns, it matters not; it suffices, that they are constantly produced by them (EHU 2.30.2).

There is a parallel between the sequence of ideas in the mind and the qualities existing in the external world, but there need not be a *likeness* between idea and quality on an individual level.¹⁵ Simple ideas are “real and true” when they “answer and agree” to their causes, *not* because they resemble them. *If*, then, Locke thinks that all ideas represent, then they do so via this relation of correspondence. If that is Locke’s view, then it is clear he does not accept the resemblance thesis for this is *not* a model of representation by means of resemblance – an idea need not be anything like the quality or power that its

¹⁵ A useful comparison (though of course not available to Locke himself) might be with the relationship between programming code, on which a computer’s software runs, and the features in the user-interface. For every folder, tab, link (and so on) which is visible on my computer screen, there is a corresponding piece of code. When I come across a feature of my computer’s user-interface (say, a folder on my desktop) it informs me (i) that a piece of corresponding code exists, and (ii) that this piece of code has the ‘power’ (to use Locke’s terminology) to generate the folder I am about to click on. There is no *resemblance* between the folder and the corresponding piece of coding. It nonetheless seems appropriate to say that the folder corresponds with the existence, if *not* the nature, of some appropriate coding.

existence can be explained by. We might say that Locke's ideas of secondary qualities (*if* they represent) represent the *existence of* but not the nature of their objects.

But this does not necessarily rule out Locke's having accepted the resemblance thesis. All the resemblance thesis entails is that *if* one object represents another then those two objects must resemble one another. The correspondence model of representation outlined above only holds if Locke thinks that *all ideas* represent qualities in the world. But it is not totally clear that this is Locke's view. For it is also plausible to suggest that Locke believes that *some* ideas (those of primary qualities) represent, and do so by resembling those qualities, while others (those of secondary qualities) do not, strictly speaking, *represent* anything.

One *prima facie* reason to accept such a reading is that it is clear that Locke does not think ideas of secondary qualities are enough to provide one with a conception of their objects – they simply correspond with the *existence* of those objects. If, as I suggested in the introduction to this chapter, representation involves providing one with a conception of an object, then it follows that Locke's ideas of secondary qualities do not represent. For just knowing that an object exists is not enough to form a conception thereof.

There is also textual evidence for this reading since Locke does seem to distinguish between the kinds of ideas that represent and those that do not. In Book Two of the *Essay*, he considers how ideas relate to “things from whence they are taken, *or* which they may be supposed to represent.” (EHU 2.30.1, my emphasis). He then goes on to explain that “our simple ideas are all real, all agree to the reality of things. Not that they all are *all of them* images or representations of what does exist” (EHU 2.30.2, my emphasis).¹⁶ In both cases, it looks like Locke is saying that ideas can conform or agree to the reality of things without necessarily representing or resembling them. This is also supported by a remark in his correspondence with Stillingfleet:

I deny only the simple ideas of secondary qualities to be representations; but do everywhere affirm, that the simple ideas of primary qualities are the images or representations of what does exist without us. (*Works* [Locke] 4, 75)

¹⁶ Perhaps it could be argued that Locke is here referring to phantasms or ideas of the fancy, but this is precluded by the fact that “they” is clearly referring to “simple ideas” (in the previous sentence) which are “all real, all agree to the reality of things.”

Locke seems to use the terms ‘representation’ and ‘resemblance’ synonymously in this instance and, what’s more, clearly states that ideas of secondary qualities are *not* representations. It is reasonable to conclude, then, that for Locke our ideas of primary qualities resemble their objects, and thereby *represent*, whereas our ideas of secondary qualities do not.

It is plausible to suggest, then, that, on Locke’s view, representing real qualities is a sufficient, but not a necessary, condition for conforming or agreeing to the reality of things. If so, it follows that there might be other sufficient conditions for conforming to real qualities – and thus other ways of being a “real idea”. In which case, Locke could have consistently accepted the resemblance thesis, which entails that for one thing to *represent* another, those two things must resemble one another, while denying that ideas of secondary qualities resemble their objects. If so, commentators would be mistaken in reading Locke as holding that all the knowledge we gain via ideas is representational.¹⁷ Quite clearly, on Locke’s view, ideas of secondary qualities do not provide us with a conception of their objects. As Locke sees it, this is because they do not *resemble* those objects. This is compatible both with Locke’s having accepted the resemblance thesis, and his having denied that, in the strict sense of the term, ideas of secondary qualities *represent*.

I have suggested that Locke’s account of real knowledge via the correspondence between ideas and real things is consistent with his having accepted the resemblance thesis. I have also argued that there *is* evidence that Locke only saw ideas of primary qualities as representing their objects. As such, I contend, it is at least possible that Berkeley read Locke in the same way. In which case, the argument in §8 of the *Principles* may be less problematic than it first appears to be. In what follows, I say more about my reading of how that argument works in light of this reading of Locke.

1.2 Re-considering Berkeley’s attack on Lockean epistemology

¹⁷ One such example is Carriero, who claims that “[for Locke] all that the idea of coldness [a secondary quality] *represents* is the power to produce a sort of idea in my mind” (2003, 33, my emphasis).

So far, I have argued that we can read Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis, so long as we take his view to be that only ideas of primary qualities represent their objects. I have argued that there are good reasons to do so. Consequently, we can plausibly take Berkeley to have read Locke in this way (assuming that if we can, then Berkeley could have too).

One of the helpful outcomes of this reading of Locke is that it can help us to understand why Berkeley continues to attack representationalism despite acknowledging the primary-secondary quality distinction in §9 of the *Principles*. In the sections that follow (PHK §§10-15) Berkeley concentrates on demonstrating that it is no more possible that primary qualities could exist outside the mind than it is that secondary qualities could (see DHP 192-194 for corresponding arguments). Nor could *ideas* of primary qualities, he maintains, resemble mind-independent primary qualities: this follows immediately from the likeness principle in §8. While Berkeley acknowledges the distinction between ideas of primary and secondary qualities, he does not accept it. Ideas of sensible qualities being mind-dependent, Berkeley argues, it follows that if they cannot be conceived of as distinct from ideas of primary qualities (like extension and motion) then the latter likewise must exist only in the mind (PHK §10). The structure of this argument is that since primary and secondary qualities are inseparable, and since it is widely accepted by philosophers that the latter exist only in the mind, it follows that the former do too. Thus, in these sections, Berkeley aims to show that *even if a mind-independent reality exists*, our knowledge of it is no more immediate in regard to primary qualities than it is with secondary qualities. This, Berkeley thinks, means that his opponents, representationalists, are committed to scepticism.

Berkeley's argument is meant to show that *none* of our ideas can represent mind-independent qualities. Representing a quality, for Berkeley, requires resembling it. But the likeness principle and the arguments in PHK §§10-15 show that this is not possible. *If* it is plausible to read Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis then this turns out to be a problem for Lockean epistemology. However, we have seen that even a Lockean who accepts the resemblance thesis need not accept Berkeley's claim that we could not possibly gain real knowledge of qualities via ideas. Ideas, for Locke, provide *real* knowledge of qualities so long as they answer to, agree with, or conform to them. *Some of them* do so by resembling those qualities, but others do not – a mere correspondence between idea and quality suffices. If, as I have suggested, Berkeley read

Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis then the argument in *Principles* §8 could plausibly be read as an argument against Locke's account of primary qualities alone. If "an idea can be like nothing but an idea", then, since primary qualities are not themselves ideas, it follows that an idea of a primary quality cannot resemble a primary quality itself. This, however, still leaves Locke with ideas of secondary qualities, which do not represent (i.e., by resemblance) but conform to or agree with their objects.

But avoiding Berkeley's argument may not be that simple. Without the direct or immediate access to the nature of things, via our ideas of primary qualities, which (on Locke's view) really do resemble those qualities, sceptical concerns arise. As Locke himself seems to suggest in his correspondence with Stillingfleet the resemblance relation shared between ideas of primary qualities and their objects is key avoiding scepticism (*Works* [Locke] 4, 75).¹⁸ The point, accepted by both Locke and Stillingfleet, seems to be that if none of our ideas resembled qualities in the world, then this would cast genuine doubt on the reliability of our knowledge of it. It is thus crucial for Locke's epistemology that some of our ideas do resemble their objects – and this is precisely what Berkeley emphasises.

As we saw in chapter one, in the Preface to the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley claims that in order to avoid scepticism concerning our knowledge of the sensible world, we must be able to gain knowledge of "the real nature of things". He thus rejects any view on which "we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived" (DHP 244-45). Locke would disagree with the first of these claims: our knowledge of the nature of things is restricted by the extent to which our ideas resemble real qualities – and only our ideas of primary qualities play this role. Were it not for our ideas of primary qualities, the knowledge we gain via our ideas of sensation would be limited to that of the existence of things with powers to produce certain ideas of secondary qualities. Ideas of secondary qualities, for Locke, do not inform us about what things *are like* but merely what things *can do*. On the other hand, Locke would agree with Berkeley's second claim, for Locke thinks that perceiving ideas in a certain sequence or pattern is enough to infer that a corresponding sequence or pattern exists outside the mind.

¹⁸ Locke claims that since he is "not saying that all our simple ideas are only effects, and none of them representations" Stillingfleet is not justified in his claim that "really we can understand nothing certainly by them." (*Works* [Locke] 4, 75)

It is at this point that Berkeley raises an objection:

I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensies, and the like, puts it beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them. Hence it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas, since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always in the same order we see them in at present, without their concurrence. (PHK §18)

Building on the observation that sometimes we perceive ideas which only *appear* to be the effects of mind-independent causes (e.g., when I dream or hallucinate), Berkeley argues that without prior knowledge (or some kind of guarantee) that ideas must be caused by things outside the mind, we are not entitled to simply assume they are. In other words, unless we can be sure there is a “necessary connexion” between the sequence of ideas we perceive and qualities in the world, we cannot simply assume that those ideas are indeed “real” (DHP 205). But, as Berkeley explains, even “the very patrons of matter themselves do not pretend there is any necessary connexion betwixt them [qualities in the real world] and ideas” (PHK §18). Once again, we find Berkeley’s sceptical concerns playing a key role.

Georges Dicker helpfully develops Berkeley’s argument here. Imagining a scenario in which, even though the real world *does* exist, the ideas we perceive are nonetheless imprinted on us by a Cartesian-style evil deceiver, he writes:

even if the physical world suddenly ceased to exist, we would continue to have the same experiences as if it still existed, since they would continue to be caused in us by the deceiver. It is clear that on this revised scenario – where the material world exists but our sense-experiences are not by it but by the deceiver – we would still be hallucinating... What this shows is that in order for one to perceive a physical thing, it is not enough for the thing to exist, for the content of one’s experience to correspond to the thing in some appropriate way, and for the thing to be, so to speak, accessible for perception; it is also necessary that the thing be the cause of one’s perceptual experience. (2011, 32)

This example helpfully emphasises Berkeley’s point: the thing-idea distinction, accepted by representationalists, is problematic because we cannot know with certainty that our

ideas are caused by and thus conform to “the reality of things”. We could perceive all the same ideas, in the very same order, even if no mind-independent objects existed. Not only that but even if mind-independent objects do exist there is no necessary correlation between the order and regularity of those objects and the ideas that exist in the mind. Locke’s theory, as Berkeley sees it, simply cannot provide us with *certain* knowledge of the reliability of our ideas. Without the resemblance between ideas of primary qualities and their objects, there is nothing to ‘pin down’ the knowledge we gain via ideas to the reality of things.

Thus, Berkeley has a two-pronged approach to undermining Locke’s epistemology. Firstly, he argues that ideas of primary qualities cannot provide us with knowledge of the real natures of things, because “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (PHK §8). Secondly, he argues that if neither ideas of primary qualities nor ideas of secondary qualities inform us about the real natures of things then this threatens to undermine our knowledge of even the existence of those things. It should be clear that even if Locke only saw *some* ideas as representing via resemblance, it is nonetheless possible to read both Locke’s view and Berkeley arguments against it in such a way that Berkeley can be said to have presented Locke’s view with a genuine challenge.

In summary, I have argued that it is plausible to read Locke as having accepted the resemblance thesis without contradicting his commitment to the view that ideas of secondary qualities do *not* resemble their objects. I have suggested that, in turn, this means that Berkeley may also have read Locke in this way. If Berkeley did read Locke in this way, I have demonstrated, then he is equipped with a direct argument against Locke’s account of ideas of primary qualities (from the likeness principle), upon which he can then develop an indirect argument against Locke’s account of ideas of secondary qualities. Ideas of primary qualities cannot represent their objects because “an idea can be like nothing but an idea”, which means we are left in a sceptical position, Berkeley argues, concerning the correspondence between ideas of secondary qualities and their objects. Again, without the resemblance relation between ideas of primary qualities and their objects, Berkeley’s concern is that our knowledge of ideas comes untethered from the reality of things. In the next section, I focus on Berkeley’s own account of representation and argue that Berkeley’s understanding of what representation involves has resemblance built into it. This, I argue, explains Berkeley’s motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis.

2. Berkeley's Account of Representation

2.1 Representation and signification

In section one, I offered as an explanation for how Locke can plausibly be read as having accepted the resemblance thesis. If my reading of Locke is accurate, I argued, then we can make sense of Berkeley's claim that this view leads to scepticism. In this section, I focus on Berkeley's own motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis, which, I argue, requires understanding his account of what representation involves. However, before doing so I say more about the distinction between signification and representation, and the role the resemblance thesis plays in Berkeley's arguments.

In the last section I argued that it is plausible to Locke as having distinguished between ideas which represent qualities in the world (primary qualities) and ideas which do not (ideas of secondary qualities). If ideas of secondary qualities do not *represent* their objects, we might ask, then what is it that they do? Locke's view is that all "real ideas" conform to or agree with "the reality of things". On my reading, ideas of primary qualities do that by representing real things, while ideas of secondary qualities *correspond* with qualities or powers that these things possess. We might then say that, while they don't represent them, ideas of secondary qualities *signify* their objects.

I outlined the distinction between signification and representation in the previous chapter, but it is worth re-iterating.¹⁹ Signification relations are arbitrary: they concern correspondences rather than necessary connections. This is to be distinguished from representation, which, if the resemblance thesis is accepted, requires that two things resemble one another. It is worth clarifying that I take this distinction to be at work in Locke's writing, at least conceptually, even if Locke himself is not explicit in using the

¹⁹ See chapter two (3.3) for more on my understanding of the difference between 'representation' and 'signification' in Early Modern thought.

terms in this way (the same is true, I argued, of Berkeley).²⁰ To say that Locke takes ideas of secondary qualities to signify their objects, then, is to attribute to him the view that the relation between them is one of correspondence and not resemblance. This is consistent with the reading of Locke I have defended so far.

Locke outlines his own account of signification in Book Four of the *Essay*. There, he explains that since things themselves (i.e., external things) cannot exist in the understanding, when we think or reason about them, it must be “a sign or representation of the thing” that we have in mind (EHU 4.21.4). He then goes on to relate signification to language-usage, explaining that words are signs of ideas, and that we choose those signs for the sake of convenience in order to communicate our ideas to one another. This is to be distinguished from Locke’s understanding of *representations*, which are images of their objects and depend on a relation of resemblance.²¹ On my reading, then, Locke conceives of ‘signs’ and ‘representations’, and the corresponding acts signifying and representing, as working in different ways. The former are arbitrary correspondences between things (e.g., words and ideas, or ideas of secondary qualities and powers possessed by external things) while the latter require a relation of resemblance (e.g., between ideas of primary qualities and the mind-independent qualities themselves).

There are also good reasons to believe that Berkeley accepts the distinction between representation and signification. For example, I previously introduced §12 of the *Manuscript Introduction* where the difference between signification and representation is laid out in terms of the difference between the different roles words and ideas play. Words, Berkeley explains, signify arbitrarily depending on correspondence relations that we establish between them and ideas. Ideas, on the other hand, insofar as they *represent*, do so only on the basis of what they *resemble*. Winkler reads Berkeley’s understanding of the difference like so:

signs do not automatically impart conceptions of what they signify.
Representations do. Forming an idea that resembles a colour I saw gives me a

²⁰ One thinker who *does* explicitly use the terms ‘represent’ and ‘signify’ in this way is Anthony Collins. Collins challenges William King’s claim that a map can offer a *representation* of a country to a stranger who has never visited before. Taking the example of marks on a map indicating water (i.e., rivers), Collins explain that “a River on a Map *represents* not Water, nor would give a Man any Idea of Water, but is a Mark in a Map agreed to *signify* Water to those who know what Water is” (*Vindication*, 24, my emphasis). Collins’ point is that the relation between marks on a map and rivers in the country depicted is an arbitrary, signification relation and not a representation relation founded on a necessary connection.

²¹ For similar claims, see Carriero 2003, 29; Winkler 1989, 3.

conception of the colour. Fire is a sign of pain but it cannot impart a conception of it. (1989, 21)

Winkler's claim is that, for Berkeley, simply seeing a fire is not enough to form a conception of being burnt or to understand *what it is like* to be burnt. Perceiving a fire may bring to mind, in a loose sense, one's conception of pain; if, say, one has already experienced being burnt by a fire. But that is not the same as saying that one can understand pain, in and of itself, as a direct result of seeing a fire alone.

For Berkeley, just as fire is not a representation of pain, real things, which are collections of ideas of sensation, are not representations of anything. However, he does think that they can be signs. Consider, for example, the discussion of "hearing a coach drive along the streets" in the *Three Dialogues* (DHP 204). Philonous emphasises that were it not for the familiar experience of hearing a certain set of audible qualities prior to seeing a coach, it would be false to say that *I hear a coach*. For, he explains, "in truth and strictness nothing can be heard but sound; and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested by experience." Berkeley's point is that the sound does not, in strictness, represent the coach but, as he puts it, *suggests* it. For simply hearing a certain sound – without the string of associations that result from having heard that sound and *then* seen a coach – will not provide you with a conception of a coach.

For Berkeley, only ideas of memory and imagination can be strictly said to *represent* because they are the only ideas that are genuine images of things (PHK §33). Ideas of the imagination are formed by "representing to my self the ideas of those particular things I have perceived and of variously compounding and dividing them" (PI §10). Such ideas really are images of things and it is only possible to conceive them as a result of previous perceptual experience. Imagining, Berkeley explains, is an act of framing to oneself ideas that either perfectly resemble, or are copies of, things perceived by the senses. What Berkeley is careful to emphasise, however, is that even those ideas that can only represent *other ideas*. This follows from the likeness principle. Consider the following passage from the *Principles*:

[Sensible ideas] are said to have more reality in them than the former [ideas of imagination]; by which is meant that they are more affecting, orderly, and distinct, and that they are not fictions of the mind perceiving them. And in this sense, the

sun that I see by day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is *the idea* of the former. (PHK §36, my emphasis)

This is one of the very few times that Berkeley uses the phrase “idea of” – a phrase which, in his *Notebooks*, he claims is “one great cause of mistake” in philosophy (NB 660). The reason for this is that, when it comes to ideas of sensation they are, for Berkeley, nothing more than ideas of *themselves* (Bolton 1986, 68). Berkeley’s move from denying that ideas can only *resemble* other ideas to claiming that ideas can only *represent* other ideas is, then, quite clear. As Winkler puts it, Berkeley’s “mechanism of representation is resemblance or similitude” (1989, 14). As a result, what ought to be obvious is that Berkeley himself is committed to accepting the resemblance thesis. In the next section, I will outline Berkeley’s motivation for doing so.

2.2 *The relation between representation and resemblance*

It should now be clear that Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis, that it plays a crucial role in the argument from the likeness principle, and that he also attributes this view to his opponents. But *why* does Berkeley believe that representation requires resemblance? As Putnam (1971), Carriero (2003), and Jacovides (2009) all rightly point out, prior to Berkeley there was a long-standing tradition of understanding representation in terms of resemblance. One answer, then, is that Berkeley saw himself as part of that tradition or, if not, simply took the resemblance thesis to be widely accepted and not worth justifying. On the other hand, as Winkler argues, we ought to be hesitant to accept that Berkeley simply *assumes* the resemblance thesis since it is not obvious that his opponents would have done so (1989, 13). It ought to become clear, in what follows, that by focusing on how Berkeley understands representation to work we can explain his motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis, and why no alternative accounts of representation are addressed in the *Principles* or the *Three Dialogues*. I argue that while Berkeley does not offer an explicit argument in favour of the resemblance thesis, he develops an account of representation that has resemblance built into it. It for this reason, I suggest, that he never seriously entertains the possibility that representation could occur by any other means.

We have seen already that Berkeley thinks that only ideas of memory and imagination *represent* in the strict sense of the term (PHK §33). This is because only ideas of memory and imagination can properly be termed “ideas” or “images of things”. He is also clear in stating that, as a result of the likeness principle, the only things ideas can represent are other ideas. However, Berkeley is happy to accept that any ideas, whether ideas of sensation or ideas of memory and imagination, can *signify*. One common example of signification, in Berkeley’s writing, is the relation shared between certain visual ideas, such as a shapes with corners and pointed edges, and certain tangible ideas, like sharpness (NTV §145).²² This is not an example of representation, but of signification, since, as Berkeley sees it, merely seeing an object with sharp edges is not enough, in itself, to provide one with a conception of sharpness.

In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley claims that what kinds of thing can and cannot represent one another is determined by their resemblance to one another. In fact, he claims that representation is *restricted* by likeness or resemblance:

an idea is *not capable* of representing indifferently any thing or number of things it being limited by the likeness it beares to some particular existence, to represent it rather than any other. (MI §12, my emphasis)

This makes it clear both that representation and resemblance are intricately tied together, for Berkeley, and that there is something about the *pre-existing* resemblances between things that makes it impossible for some to represent others. This is perhaps the reason why Jacovides describes resemblance as the “non-arbitrary backbone of Berkeley’s theory of representation” (2009, 418). Relations of *signification*, for Berkeley, are relatively ‘loose’. That is, in order for A to signify B, the relation between the two need only be enforced by a conventional rule or else by a habitual connection (see, for example, MI §19; NTV §145; see also Winkler 1989, 17). However, for A to *represent* B, there

²² That Berkeley sees the relation between the visual ideas of a cornered shape and the tactile ideas of sharpness (for example) as one of signification, and not representation, explains his answer to William Molyneux’s problem of the ‘blind man made to see’. Molyneux had asked whether a ‘blind man made to see’ would be able to tell between a globe and a cube just by looking at them. Berkeley (like Locke and Molyneux) takes it that such a man could not tell between them. Berkeley takes this to support his ‘heterogeneity thesis’ according to which the objects of vision and touch (as well as the other senses) are distinct and thus cannot be said to resemble one another. For discussion of the ‘Molyneux man’ in the *New Theory*, see §42, §§132-26. See Fasko & West (forthcoming), esp. §3, for discussion of the ‘Molyneux man’ in Berkeley’s philosophy.

must already be a certain relation in place: one of likeness or resemblance.²³ In the next subsection, I explain why Berkeley think that a non-arbitrary relation of resemblance is a pre-requisite for one idea to represent another. Doing so requires understanding how Berkeley thinks representation works.

2.3 Understanding Berkeley's account of representation

In this section, I will demonstrate that Berkeley has a strict understanding of what it means for one thing to represent another. I will argue that, for Berkeley, representing an object literally involves *re-presenting* that object to the mind. This places significant constraints on both (i) what can be represented, and (ii) what kind of a medium representation can take place in. This, I contend, explains Berkeley's acceptance of the resemblance thesis.

To begin, Berkeley's remarks on microscopes in the *Three Dialogues* provide a helpful insight into how he understands the term 'represent'. In DHP 185, Berkeley explains that microscopes "represent objects as they would appear to the eye, in case it were naturally endowed with a most exquisite sharpness". When we look through a microscope, he maintains, what we see in front of us is a "microscopical representation". It's worth noting, in particular, that in his description of what goes on when we look through a microscope, Philonous uses the conditional tense ("as they would", "in case") meaning that the term 'represent' could, in fact, be straightforwardly substituted with 'present' without changing the meaning of the sentence. In other words, it would make just as much sense to say that microscopes '*present* objects *as if* the eye were endowed with a most exquisite sharpness' as it does to say that they 'represent'. This indicates that the microscope is presenting the *object itself*, and not some kind of intermediary, *as if* the

²³ I think there is a useful analogy to be drawn between 'representation' and 'signification' relations, for Berkeley, and the distinction between Fregean *ideas* and *thoughts* (or propositions). Frege's (1956) motivation for this distinction, between the mind-dependency of ideas and the mind-independency of thoughts, is to preserve the notion that there are facts or truths (expressed in spoken or written utterances) which it is possible to apprehend or grasp. This requires that the propositions expressed as such facts or truths be mind-independent and pre-exist our apprehension of them, much as a planet exists prior to our discovering it (1956, 302). I take it that Berkeley's distinction between things represented and things signified is similar, at least structurally: a representation relation is not determined by the mind alone, but a signification relation is. Ideas, for Berkeley, are mind-dependent, but just what that idea does or not does represent is beyond our control. See chapter four (3.2) for more on the non-arbitrariness of resemblance relations in Berkeley's philosophy.

perceiver had extremely sharp vision. Nothing is done to the object and, crucially, so long as the microscope works, what the perceiver sees *resembles* what she would see if she had extremely sharp vision. In this instance, then, the term ‘represent’ literally refers to a re-presentation of the object itself. If what the perceiver saw through a microscope were anything but a presentation of *the object itself* then the microscope would not be doing what it is supposed to do. If I use a microscope in order to get a better look at x, but what I end up being presented with is y, then the microscope has not done what I wanted it to do (and I will learn nothing about x).

What we find throughout both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* is that this construal of representation as *re-presentation* is not restricted to the case of a microscope. Berkeley repeatedly uses ‘representation’ interchangeably with ‘image’ or ‘copy’, and in one instance with “painted forth” (DHP 205-206). It is uncontroversial to suggest that a painting or photograph represents its object by virtue of resembling that object. For example, if I am shown a photograph that accurately depicts (i.e., is a good representation of) an individual then I really am being shown what that individual is like. That very individual is being re-presented to me. This strongly suggests that, for Berkeley, representation involves literally re-presenting an immediate object of perception.²⁴ Consider the following account of the representational capacity of pictures, from Manuel García-Carpintero:

the distinguishing feature of pictures is that they represent properties that they themselves exemplify; they represent thanks to the fact that there is a range of properties they literally share with the represented situations. (2014, 4)

What is particularly helpful about this description is that it emphasises the fact that one thing’s resembling another involves those two things literally sharing properties. In a painting, that might be colours, shapes, proportions, and so on. It is by virtue of these shared properties that a picture can *exemplify* its object. In other words, when you are acquainted with a picture of an object, so long as it is an accurate picture, you are

²⁴ This puts Berkeley at odds with Descartes and Sergeant who both maintain that there must be a distinction between being familiar with an object and being familiar with an image or likeness of that object. Descartes claims “that in no case does an image have to resemble the object it represents in all respects, for otherwise there would be no distinction between the object and its image” (CSM 1:165). In fact, he argues, “the perfection of an image often depends on its not resembling its object as much as it might.” Sergeant argues that there is no *media via* between an idea being identical to its object and being a likeness of an object. In the case of the former, he claims, an idea is “so far from being that Thing, or the Same as It is, that it is relatively Opposite to it; that is, quite distinct from it.” (SP Preface §21)

presented with various aspects of the object itself. The better the picture, the more familiar you are with the object.

Berkeley's view is that ideas, when they represent, do so in the same way as a picture (as his repeated use of terms like 'image' or 'copy' confirm). Hence, perceiving a representation of an object, for Berkeley, must involve perceiving various aspects *of the object itself*. If A represents B, then perceiving A means perceiving a literal re-representation of B. This should help us to understand why Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis: if A is not *like* B, then, we might ask, in what sense can perceiving A be the same as perceiving a re-representation of B. It is for that reason that, as Tom Stoneham puts it, for Berkeley, the *only plausible candidate* for "perceiving something indirectly by perceiving something else" is by means of resemblance (2009, 126).

This reading of how Berkeley understands representation is supported by his insistence that ideas of memory and imagination alone, in the strict sense of the term, represent their objects (PHK §33). The reason being that remembering or imagining involves either re-staging or "compounding or dividing" our ideas of sensation (i.e., the objects of perception themselves). In the *Notebooks*, for example, he explains that "properly speaking Idea is the picture of the Imagination's making" and that such ideas are a "likeness of & refer'd to the real Idea or (if you will) thing" (NB 657a). His claim is that only ideas of the imagination are properly termed 'ideas', since they are likenesses of 'real things', namely, ideas of sensation.

Berkeley claims that something constant and fixed, as material objects are purported to be, could not be represented to us by something fleeting and variable like an idea. It is easy to comprehend what Berkeley is getting at here if we take 'represent' in its literal sense: how could something *fixed* be re-presented to us as something *fleeting*? As Berkeley sees it, this makes no more sense than suggesting that something invisible could be re-presented as something coloured (PHK §8). He writes:

How then is it possible, that things perpetually fleeting and variable as our ideas should be copies or images of anything fixed and constant?... how can any determinate material objects be properly represented or painted forth by several distinct things, each of which is so different from and unlike the rest? (DHP 205-206)

If we were to use a microscope to take a closer look at a leaf, but what we were presented with was not actually the leaf but something of a completely different nature, then we would deny that the microscope was accurately *re-presenting* its object. Similarly, if ideas represent, then the only things fit to be represented are other ideas. To be presented with an idea cannot possibly be the same as being *re-presented* with something that is not an idea.

On my reading, then, Berkeley accepts the resemblance thesis because, as he sees it, representing an object involves a re-presentation of that object itself. In other words, the object represented and its representation must share a relation of resemblance – for to perceive a representation of an object is, for Berkeley, to be acquainted with various aspects of the object itself. Berkeley’s acceptance of the resemblance thesis is thus motivated by his understanding of representation as literal re-presentation of an object.

3. The Consequences of Accepting the Resemblance Thesis

3.1 *Representing spirit*

The account of representation outlined above has some significant implications, especially in terms of epistemology, and plays an important role in establishing both some challenges to and core principles of Berkeley’s immaterialism. We’ve seen that, for Berkeley, a representation is a literal re-presentation of a particular thing or idea. We’ve also seen that, for Berkeley, to perceive a thing or idea is to gain immediate knowledge of its “real nature” (DHP 244-45). Perceiving a representation, then, must, on Berkeley’s account, involve perceiving those features that make up the real nature of the thing represented. In other words, to have perceived a representation of A, I must have perceived A’s intrinsic properties: those properties without which A would not be A.²⁵ Berkeley is quite clear about this in the case of spirits. For example, he explains that

to have an idea, which shall be like that active principle of motion and change of ideas, is absolutely impossible. Such is the nature of spirit, or that which acts, that it cannot it self be perceived, but only by the effects it produces... the words

²⁵ See chapter four for an outline of what I take the intrinsic properties of an object to be.

‘will’, ‘soul’, ‘spirit’ do not stand for different ideas or, in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which being an agent cannot be like unto, or represented by, any idea whatsoever. (PHK §27)

Spirit is not something that can resemble an idea because spirit is an “active being” while ideas are passive entities (PHK §25). Thus, it follows from the resemblance thesis that ideas cannot represent spirits (see Jacovides 2009, 421).²⁶ In the 1734 edition of the *Principles*, Berkeley goes on to explain that we do have “some *notion* of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words” (my emphasis). But this has no bearing on whether spirit can be represented. It would be more appropriate to maintain that when we perceive the effects of a spirit, those ideas are a *signification*, and not a representation, thereof.²⁷

In PHK §137, Berkeley builds on the claim that since an idea can only resemble another idea, an idea could never represent a spirit. He then considers a potential response:

But perhaps you will say that, though an *idea* cannot resemble a *spirit*, in its thinking, acting, or subsisting by itself, yet it may in some other respects, and it is not necessary that an idea or image be in all respects like the original.²⁸

Berkeley’s imagined interlocutor’s claim is that even if ideas are not “in all respects” like spirits they could still resemble and thereby represent them in some respect. His reply is as follows:

I answer, if it [an idea] does not [resemble a spirit] in those [ways] mentioned, it is impossible it should represent it in any other thing. Do but leave out the power of willing, thinking, and perceiving ideas, and there remains nothing else wherein the idea can be like a spirit. For by the word ‘spirit’ we mean only that which thinks, wills, and perceives; this, and this alone, constitutes the signification of that term. If therefore it is impossible that any degree of those powers should be

²⁶ Jacovides explains that “Berkeley assumes that if ideas did represent minds, the mechanism would be through resemblance”. See 2009, 421. See also NB 684, 657.

²⁷ See chapter five (3.1) for more on Berkeley’s view that are certain ideas signify spirits.

²⁸ This suggestion is consistent with Descartes’ account of images (CSM 1:165).

represented in an idea, it is evident there can be no idea [or notion]²⁹ of a spirit.
(PHK §138)

Here, again, likeness is explicitly tied to representation: having an idea of spirit requires having an idea that represents the powers intrinsic to the being of a spirit. In turn, this requires having an idea that *resembles* those powers. But, as Berkeley makes clear, that is impossible (PHK §27, §137).³⁰ Thus, at best, our ideas can, just like the words ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’, *signify* spirit. For ideas are not a suitable medium for the re-presentation of a spirit. The manner of existence of ideas and spirits is so different that, “when we say ‘they exist’, ‘they are known’, or the like, these words must not be thought to signify any thing common to both natures” (PHK §142). To suggest that a spirit could be re-presented to us via an idea is “as absurd as if we should hope to see a sound”. Again, the medium (seeing) does not fit the thing re-presented (a sound). Only certain things are fit to represent others, and this is dependent on pre-existing relation of resemblance. The only things that ideas share such a relation with are other ideas so the only things that ideas are fit to represent are ideas.

Berkeley does address the fact that some of our sensible ideas *seem* to ‘represent’ spirits, insofar as they alert us to their existence. For example, if I see a human body that looks like my own and which communicates with me, I may come to the rational conclusion that I am in the presence of another spirit. But, he explains, in such a case

we do not see man, if by ‘man’ is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do, but only such a certain collection of ideas, as directs us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion like to our selves accompanying and represented by it. (PHK §148)³¹

Berkeley’s use of the term “represented” here is perhaps misleading, but in PHK §27, he makes clear that this is only what *we tend to think* as opposed to what can strictly be said to be the case. What really happens, he goes on to explain, is that a “finite and narrow assemblage of ideas *denotes* a particular human mind” (PHK §148, my emphasis). To see

²⁹ As Desmond Clarke puts it: “[t]he phrase ‘or notion’ was deleted in the 1734 edition, by which time Berkeley wished to defend the possibility of having a notion of spirit.” See Berkeley 2008, 140.

³⁰ In PHK §137 Berkeley even expresses the concern that upon failing to find an idea of spirit, some thinkers will conclude that there is no such thing as spirit, or “any soul at all distinct from their body.” This is an interesting pre-empting of Hume’s own denial of the soul for a similar reason. See *Treatise*, 252.

³¹ Note that Berkeley draws no significant distinction between ‘men’ (or ‘humans’) and minds or spirits. This puts him at odds with both Descartes and Sergeant who take humans to be a combination of both mind and body (see CSM 2:56; SP Preface §14-16).

a body that moves and talks and does the same things that my body does in response to my volitions is to have one's attention drawn to the existence of another spirit. But it is *not* the same as actually perceiving another spirit. Rather, what is going on is that another spirit is being denoted, suggested, or signified to me.

A favourable outcome, for Berkeley, of this account of why spirits cannot be represented is that it has no bearing on whether they exist or not. For other thinkers, such as Locke, we gain knowledge of what exists by means of our ideas which *represent* those things. But if, as Berkeley believes, it is impossible for an idea to represent spirit, then we need an alternative explanation of how we know that other spirits exist. As such, it is unproblematic if none of my ideas represent spirit.³² For the time being, I will leave this question aside – however, I return to the issue of knowledge of other spirits in chapter five (3.1).

3.2 Representing abstractions

The second significant outcome of Berkeley's theory of representation is that it plays an important role in his rejection of abstract ideas. An abstract idea, as Berkeley understands it, is, by virtue of being abstract in nature, supposed to represent an entire set of particulars, all of which have something in common. For example, the abstract idea of 'triangle' is supposed to represent every particular thing that can be said to be 'triangular'. The problem, as Berkeley sees it, is that such an idea would need to resemble each of the particulars that it represents. He famously picks up on Locke's description of an abstract triangle which "must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but *all and none* of these at once" (PI §13). To represent each and every triangle, the abstract idea of triangle would need to resemble many different particulars which, though they all share the property of being triangular, are not only different in many ways, but possess inconsistent properties (e.g., the length of their sides, the size of their angles). Thus, that idea would *itself* be inconsistent. Locke himself admits that an

³² One concern, raised by Hylas' 'parity argument', is that if it is unproblematic that we do not have an idea of spirit, it may turn out to be unproblematic that we do not have an idea of material substance. However, Philonous explains that unlike my notion of spirit "the existence of matter implies an inconsistency" – and since what is inconsistent cannot exist, we ought to conclude that matter does not exist (DHP 234). There is no parity, Philonous argues, between the cases of spirit and matter.

abstract triangle could never really exist outside of the mind: “it is something imperfect that cannot exist, an *idea* wherein some parts of different and inconsistent *ideas* are put together” (EHU 4.7.9). If, as Berkeley holds, representation involves the literal re-presentation of a particular object then it follows that a Lockean abstract idea cannot represent anything. There is nothing in existence that a Lockean abstract idea could possibly be a re-presentation of. Consequently, Berkeley goes on to claim that

If any man has the faculty of framing in his mind such an idea of triangle as is here described, it is vain to pretend to dispute him out of it, nor would I go about it. All I desire is that the reader would fully and certainly inform himself whether he has such an idea or no. And this, methinks, can be no hard task for any one to perform. (PI §13)

An abstract triangle could never be re-presented because, as even Locke admits, it could never really exist in the first place.

Berkeley’s understanding of representation as requiring a pre-existing relation of resemblance also helps to explain why Berkeley insists that “my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception” (PHK §5). For Locke, I can have an abstract idea of a triangle, but every real triangle must be particular. However, Berkeley rejects this kind of view. As he sees it, when our ideas *represent* they simply bring to mind, or recall, something that has *already been presented to us*. For example, he explains that “the sun that I see by day is the real day is the real sun, and that which I imagine by night is the idea of the former” (PHK §36). We can only have ideas of things which resemble the things we immediately perceive; and it turns out, Berkeley maintains, that abstract ideas are not like sensible things at all.

Conclusion

I have argued that Berkeley has a strict understanding of how representation works which motivates his view that the only ideas that can truly be said to represent are ideas of the imagination and memory: those which are products of the mind alone. This is different from the representationalist view that sensible ideas represent to us mind-independent, material objects. Berkeley’s construal of representation as literal re-presentation of the

thing itself explains why he is committed to the resemblance thesis, because he thinks that perceiving a representation of a thing involves being familiarised with a certain presentation of the *thing itself*. In turn, this means that a representation must be *like* the thing it represents. This also helps us to understand why Berkeley thinks that the likeness principle undermines the view that ideas are be copies, resemblances, or representations of non-ideas. If, as the likeness principle dictates, an idea cannot be like a non-idea, then an idea cannot *represent* a non-idea.

The aim of this chapter has been to explain the motivations behind Berkeley's commitment to the resemblance thesis: the claim that in order for one thing to represent another, those two things must resemble one another. This, I explained, is especially important because Berkeley does not explicitly defend or justify the resemblance thesis in any of his published work, despite the crucial role it plays in his argument against representationalism in *Principles* §8.

I explained how the resemblance thesis is derivative of Berkeley's strict account of representation as *re-presentation*. While this does not constitute an explicit argument in favour of the resemblance thesis, I have identified some important commitments which motivated Berkeley to accept it. Thus, by giving both a contextual reading of why Berkeley did not feel the need to explicitly defend the resemblance thesis as well as an exposition of his account of representation, I have provided an insight into why Berkeley took his argument in *Principles* §8 to be successful. However, this explanation is not complete, for there is another premise that needs examining: the likeness principle. In chapter four, I give an account of why Berkeley took himself to be entitled to put forward the likeness principle, which entails that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (PHK §8).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE LIKENESS PRINCIPLE

Introduction

There are two premises in Berkeley's argument against representationalism. The first premise is what I have called the 'resemblance thesis': the claim that for one thing to represent another, those two things must resemble one another. The second premise is the 'likeness principle': the claim that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" (PHK §8). Together these premises entail that an idea can only represent another idea; meaning that ideas cannot be "pictures or representations" of "things exist[ing] without the mind in an unthinking substance" (PHK §8). In this way, Berkeley takes himself to have demonstrated that ideas "do not inform us that things exist without the mind, or unperceived" (PHK §18). Consequently, by showing that ideas cannot represent external objects, Berkeley's aim is to show that representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism.

While Berkeley does not provide us with an explicit argument for the resemblance thesis, in the previous chapter I showed that it is possible to identify his motivations for accepting it. In this chapter, I argue that it is possible to reconstruct Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle, and I focus on outlining Berkeley's reasons for accepting the premises of that argument in what follows. I begin by saying a little about how the likeness principle has been treated in the literature to date, and lay the groundwork for my own interpretation of why Berkeley accepts the likeness principle.

There are several reasons for thinking that, amongst the various claims that play a role in his argument for immaterialism, the likeness principle deserves special attention. For one, §8 of the *Principles*, in which it first appears, is a crucial passage when it comes to understanding Berkeley's theory of representation. And, as I explained in chapter three, this passage makes it clear that the mechanism by which Berkeley thinks an idea represents its object is by means of *resemblance*. It is also remarkable that, despite their objections to idealism and immaterialism, some of Berkeley's best-known critics in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, such as Thomas Reid and Mary Shepherd, accepted the likeness principle.¹ One recent commentator has even gone so far as to suggest that

¹ See Reid 1785, 162; Shepherd 1827, 197.

“no conclusion in the history of philosophy has been as persuasive” (Jacovides 2009, 417). However, the main reason that the likeness principle has attracted so much attention amongst readers of Berkeley’s philosophy is that he appears to leave it unargued-for. To paraphrase Todd Ryan, Berkeley’s treatment of the issue is *extremely economic* (2006, 580). This is all the more striking when we consider the crucial role that the likeness principle plays in Berkeley’s argument against representationalism.

Berkeley’s failure to make it obvious why he accepts the likeness principle has led to several attempts to reconstruct a valid argument for it on his behalf.² Phillip Cummins (1966), who coined the phrase ‘the likeness principle’, develops an argument premised on metaphysical principles about the kinds of entities that can bear a resemblance to one another. Kenneth Winkler (1989) reconstructs an argument grounded upon epistemological principles which results in a ‘verificationist’ reading of the likeness principle. According to Winkler, Berkeley’s view is that if we cannot *know* that two things resemble one another then it is impossible that they ever could. Finally, Todd Ryan argues for a ‘new metaphysical interpretation’ whereby it is Berkeley’s views concerning the metaphysical status of *relations* that explain his acceptance of the likeness principle. I will say more about each reading in what follows, but I want to draw attention to the fact all of these interpretations entail that Berkeley’s reasons for accepting the likeness principle are not located in any of his published writings. While Cummins’ reconstruction is based on §8 of the *Principles*, he also derives at least one crucial premise from metaphysical views that Berkeley never articulated because, Cummins claims, he would have taken them to be philosophically commonplace. Both Winkler and Ryan, on the other hand, claim that Berkeley’s argument for the likeness principle can only be found in his *Notebooks*, which were never intended to be published.

In contrast to these interpretations, in what follows I provide a reconstruction of Berkeley’s argument for the likeness principle that is supported by his published writings. My contention is that Berkeley’s argument for the likeness principle is grounded on his account of our conceptual abilities which he develops in the Introduction to the *Principles* and on his views concerning the relation of *resemblance* espoused in his writings on

² It is also worth pointing out that some commentators think that Berkeley never felt the need to defend the likeness principle at all. Michael Jacovides, for example, states that “[f]or Berkeley the proposition was obvious” (2009, 417).

vision. I will argue that Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle should be reconstructed like so:

Premise 1: There is no intrinsic property of an idea that is not conceived.

Premise 2: For an idea to be like anything but another idea, that idea would need to have at least one intrinsic property cannot be conceived.

Conclusion: Therefore, an idea cannot be like anything but another idea.

I derive Premise 1 from the *Principles* Introduction and argue that Premise 2 from Berkeley's discussion of resemblance relations in the *New Theory of Vision* and the *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section one, I provide a summary of Cummins', Winkler's, and Ryan's reconstructions of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle and show that while my reading builds on elements of those interpretations, I place more emphasis on Berkeley's claim that "we shall find it impossible for us to *conceive* a likeness except only between our ideas" (PHK §8, my emphasis). It will become clear that I take this remark at face value: as a claim about what it is possible for us to conceive. On my reading, Berkeley intends for this claim to justify his acceptance of the likeness principle. Rather than a metaphysical or epistemological interpretation of the likeness principle, I therefore develop a *conceptual* interpretation: one based on Berkeley's views concerning our conceptual abilities, by which I mean Berkeley's account of what it *is* and *is not* possible for spirits or minds like us to conceive.³ In section two, I demonstrate that Berkeley's case against abstract ideas, put forward in the *Principles* Introduction, commits him to a 'transparency thesis' about the intrinsic properties of our ideas – one which justifies attributing to him Premise 1 of the argument outlined above. In section three, I outline Berkeley's views concerning likeness relations in *The New Theory of Vision* as well as *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*. I argue that, for Berkeley, likeness relations are grounded upon the shared intrinsic properties of their relata. It is this account of likeness relations, I argue, that justifies attributing Premise 2 to Berkeley. In this way, I develop an interpretation of

³ By describing my interpretation as 'conceptual', in what follows, I simply mean that (as I see it) Berkeley accepts the likeness principle on the basis of his account of what we are able to conceive.

Berkeley's likeness principle that, appropriately, focuses on his views concerning *ideas* and *likeness*.

1. Previous Interpretations of the Likeness Principle

In this section, I outline three previous interpretations of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle: Phillip Cummins' 'metaphysical interpretation', Kenneth Winkler's 'epistemological interpretation', and Todd Ryan's 'new metaphysical interpretation' which focuses on Berkeley's account of the metaphysical status of relations. The aim of this section is to contrast my own 'conceptual interpretation' with some of the most prominent interpretations available in the literature to date.⁴ I will argue that we should focus on Berkeley's claim that "[i]f we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas" (PHK §8). I will then explain why Berkeley thinks the impossibility of conceiving a likeness except only between our ideas justifies the claim that "an idea *can be like nothing* but an idea" (PHK §8, my emphasis).

Cummins argues that the likeness principle is in fact "shorthand" for three metaphysical claims concerning determinants and determinables. An example of a determinant-determinable relation is the one shared between a shade of colour and colour itself (1966, 64-67). More specifically, Cummins argues, the likeness principle encapsulates three metaphysical claims:

- (a) "all qualities which are determinants of the same determinable have the same ontological status";
- (b) "a necessary condition of resemblance between two entities is that they are or possess qualities which are determinants of the same determinable";
- (c) "none of the qualities we immediately perceive... can occur unperceived".

Cummins claims that establishing (a) and (c) is enough for Berkeley to prove the impossibility of material substance, while all three claims are required if Berkeley is to successfully refute representationalism (1966, 64).

⁴ For the sake of brevity, I do not discuss all the interpretations of the likeness principle available in the literature. For alternative interpretations to those I discuss, see Frankel 2009; Dicker 2011, 149-170.

Cummins has very little to say regarding (a). As he puts it, this claim “is one accepted by anyone engaged in metaphysics or ontology”. Any ontological claim that is true of ‘red’, for example, he claims, will automatically be accepted as true of any other colour. This is a minor point, since I do not have any particular issue with attributing this claim to Berkeley, but it is worth noting that Cummins does not clarify whether he thinks that (a) would have been universally accepted *amongst Berkeley’s contemporaries*, or whether this is a claim about those working in metaphysics or ontology more recently. In other words, it is not clear whether this is a historical or a philosophical claim (or both). In any case, I am more interested in (b). Again, I don’t see any issue with attributing such a claim to Berkeley. What I take issue with, however, is the way in which Cummins defends his attribution of this claim to Berkeley.

Cummins suggests that (b) is, for Berkeley, “a necessary condition of saying that two things stand in the relation of resemblance” (1966, 65). Despite the somewhat ambiguous phrasing, what Cummins really means is that two things *can only be alike* if “they are or possess qualities which are determinants of the same determinable”.⁵ I think Cummins is right to attribute this kind of claim about resemblance to Berkeley. However, I am not convinced that Cummins provides enough textual evidence for us to understand *why* Berkeley held this view. It is in this sense, in my opinion, that Cummins’ interpretation is lacking. In an attempt to provide textual support for attributing (b) to Berkeley, Cummins notes that there is clear evidence that Berkeley thinks only determinants of the same determinable can resemble one another, such as the claim that “a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure” (PHK §8). But there is no textual explanation forthcoming for *why* Berkeley took this to be the case.⁶ One advantage of my interpretation, and particularly the case I build in section three, is that I do provide an explanation for why Berkeley accepts (b), or something like it.

In contrast to Cummins’ ‘metaphysical interpretation’, Kenneth Winkler develops an ‘epistemological interpretation’ of the likeness principle. Instead of trying to extract an argument for the likeness principle from §8 of the *Principles*, or identify metaphysical principles that Berkeley is implicitly committed to in his published works, Winkler

⁵ Cummins’ ambiguous use of ‘saying’ here is noteworthy in light of Kenneth Winkler’s ‘verificationist’ reading of Berkeley’s argument. Elsewhere in his paper, however, Cummins makes it clear that, on his reading, the likeness principle is a metaphysical principle and not a claim about which things we can know or *say* are alike, which confirms we should not read too much into the word ‘saying’ here.

⁶ Similarly, Winkler argues that Cummins’ interpretation ultimately “fails as an explanation of *why* Berkeley embraces the likeness principle” (1989, 145, my emphasis).

focuses on entry 378 of Berkeley's *Notebooks*. While, as he sees it, Berkeley's "only published defence of the likeness principle" (1989, 146, my emphasis) is the dilemma he presents his opponents with in the second half of *Principles* §8,⁷ it is this notebook entry that explains *why* he accepts it. The argument in NB 378 that Winkler has in mind rests on the premise that "[t]wo things cannot be said to be alike or unlike till they have been compar'd" along with Berkeley's characterisation of comparison as "the viewing two ideas together, & marking [what] they agree in & [what] they disagree in". Since "the mind can compare nothing but its' own ideas", Berkeley argues that "[n]othing like an idea can be in an unperceiving thing." As Winkler notes, this conclusion can only be reached if we read Berkeley as holding the verificationist principle that "if it is impossible to find out that two things are alike, they cannot be said to be alike" (1989, 147).

Winkler's reading has the advantage of providing an explanation of *why* Berkeley accepts the likeness principle. It is also supported by the fact that we have strong textual evidence that this *was* Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle (or a very similar claim), at least at time when we was writing the *Notebooks*. Yet, I suggest there are at least two reasons for thinking that the argument in NB 378 is not Berkeley's final word on the matter. First, Winkler's reading implies that, despite having formulated at least one explicit argument for the likeness principle, Berkeley then later decided not to present this argument to his readers or ground the likeness principle on *any* claims about comparison that were available to his readers upon the publication of the *Principles*. This raises the question why, if Berkeley himself developed an argument for the likeness principle, he didn't make it available to his readers? Winkler leaves this question unanswered. Second, Berkeley does not mention comparison in any passages that serve to defend or justify the likeness principle in either the *Principles* or the *Three Dialogues*.⁸ As Todd Ryan notes, "Winkler provides no positive textual evidence [for his reading of Berkeley] apart from the argument at [NB] 378" (2006, 574).

⁷ The dilemma is as follows: "I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? If they are, then they are ideas, and we have gained our point; but if you say they are not, I appeal to anyone whether it be sense, to assert a colour is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest." (PHK §8) See chapter one (section 3) for discussion of this dilemma.

⁸ In PHK §104, Berkeley does claim that a comparison of two phenomena will allow us to "observe some likeness and conformity between them" but this does not appear to be a remark about what ideas *can and cannot* resemble. The term 'compare' does not appear even once in the *Three Dialogues*. The term 'comparison' is used, but in a way that seems much closer to 'analogy' or 'metaphor'.

However, as Winkler himself acknowledges, Berkeley *does* support his acceptance of the likeness principle, in both texts, by reference to claims about what it is possible to conceive. It should be clear by now that I think Berkeley's remark that "we shall find it impossible to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas" is significant. Winkler does too, but only because he reads it as an allusion to the comparison argument in NB 378. I think it is certainly plausible to read this as an allusion to NB 378, but it raises the further question why, if Winkler is right, Berkeley ultimately decided to make a claim about what it is possible for us to *conceive* rather than what we can compare. Without explaining why Berkeley refers to claims about what it is possible to conceive, we cannot be said to have provided an explanation for why he accepts the likeness principle *as it is presented in his published works* – which, I take it, is what a plausible interpretation should be able to do.

Todd Ryan also situates Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle in entry 378 of the *Notebooks*. However, Ryan rejects Winkler's epistemological reading in favour of a 'new metaphysical interpretation' (2006, 574). One feature of Ryan's interpretation that sets it apart from its predecessors is Ryan's claim that NB 378 contains two arguments for the likeness principle – a claim which, he argues, is corroborated by Berkeley's note that: "[t]hese arguments must be proposed shorter & more separate in the Treatise" (NB 378a).⁹ The first such argument is roughly consistent with the Cummins' reading and rests on the premise that only things which are of the same kind can resemble one another. But Ryan does *not* think that this was the argument Berkeley accepted by the time he published the *Principles*. Rather, Ryan argues, Berkeley's mature argument for the likeness principle concerns the metaphysical status of *relations*.

Ryan attributes to Berkeley the same account of relations that he identifies in Locke, namely, the view that all relations are mind-dependent. This is supported by Berkeley's claim in the *Principles* that "all relations including an act of the mind, we cannot so properly be said to have an idea, but rather a notion, of the relations or habitudes between things" (PHK §142). As Ryan reads it, Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle follows like so:

⁹ The conclusion of both arguments is that "nothing like an idea can be in an unperceiving thing", a claim which appears twice in NB 378. This indicates that the aim of the likeness principle is to undermine representationalism, rather than restrict likeness relations to ideas. This is significant since, as I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, Ryan's reading implies that *only ideas* can resemble one another.

If resemblance is taken to be a relation between two objects, and if relations essentially involve a mental act of comparison, then a necessary condition of two things resembling one another is that they either are or have been the objects of a mental act of comparison. (2006, 575)

Since the only possible objects of a mental act of comparison are ideas, it turns out that ideas are the only possible *relata* in the relation of resemblance. If Ryan's interpretation is accurate then two of the key premises in Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle concern his account of comparison. First, the claim that a necessary condition for two things resembling one another is their having been compared. Second, that the only things that can be compared are ideas.

I think Ryan is right to suggest that his reading makes "significant progress" in our understanding of the likeness principle (2006, 580). Berkeley certainly does appear to have started off with two distinct arguments, and the question of what changed prior to the publication of the *Principles* needs addressing. Yet, the fact of the matter is that Berkeley never attempts to justify or defend his acceptance of the likeness principle by appealing to claims about comparison in any of his published writing. This means that, if Ryan (or, indeed, Winkler) is right, then without the *Notebooks* we could not possibly understand why Berkeley accepts – and indeed why Berkeley thinks that we, his readers, should also accept – that "an idea can be like nothing but an idea".

On the other hand, Berkeley clearly does think it is important that we pay attention to what it is possible for us to *conceive* and makes his readers aware of this on more than one occasion. I've referred to Berkeley's claim in the *Principles* that it is "impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas" several times already (PHK §8). But it is also worth considering the following exchange in the *Three Dialogues*:

Phil. But how can that which is sensible be like that which is insensible? Can a real thing in itself invisible be like a colour, or a real thing which is not audible be like a sound? In a word, can anything be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?

Hylas. I must own, I think not.

Phil. Is it possible there should be any doubt in the point? Do you not perfectly know your own ideas?

Hylas. I know them perfectly; since what I do not perceive or know, can be no part of my idea.

Phil. Consider therefore, and examine them, and then tell me if there be any thing in them which can exist without the mind: or if you can conceive of any thing like them existing without the mind.

Hylas. Upon inquiry, I find it is impossible for me to conceive or understand how any thing but an idea can be like an idea. (DHP 206)

Here, Berkeley introduces some similar claims to those we find in *Principles* §8, but he also ties them to the knowledge that have of our ideas and to what it is possible for us to conceive. I think Ryan is probably right that while composing the *Notebooks* it was Berkeley's views on comparison that motivated his acceptance of the likeness principle. But I also think the textual evidence on offer suggests that by the time he was writing the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, it is the somewhat separate issue of what it is possible for us to *conceive* that plays this role. In both texts, Berkeley appeals to our conceptual abilities in support of the likeness principle. In neither text does he mention comparison. For that reason, I develop a conceptual interpretation of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle in what follows.

2. Ideas in the Introduction to the *Principles*

2.1 *The existence of ideas as transparent*

In this section, I will demonstrate that in the Introduction to the *Principles* Berkeley develops an account of our conceptual abilities which, in turn, commits him to two principles. The first is that for an idea to exist it must be conceived. The second is that the intrinsic properties of an idea are transparent to the subject conceiving it. Together, these principles justify attributing to Berkeley Premise 1 of the argument outlined in my introduction: there is no intrinsic property of an idea that is not conceived.

In the *Principles* Introduction, Berkeley provides us with at least three reasons to reject the existence of abstract ideas.¹⁰ First, he argues that they are superfluous to explanation. Locke, who is Berkeley's primary target here, infers from the meaningfulness of general terms in language (such as the word 'red') that we must have abstract general ideas (such as the idea of *redness*). This is based on the semantic principle that all words "stand as outward marks of our internal ideas" (EHU 2.6.9).¹¹ On the contrary, Berkeley argues that "if we speak only of what we can conceive", we ought to realise that the meaningfulness of general terms is down to the fact that arbitrarily chosen particular ideas *become general* simply by "stand[ing] for all other particular ideas of the same sort" (PI §12) (see chapter two (3.2) for more on this). Second, Berkeley argues that abstract ideas would have to possess inconsistent properties and thus rejects them on the grounds that an inconsistent entity cannot possibly exist, even in the mind. For example, he picks up on Locke's own description of an abstract general triangle as one which "must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but *all and none* of these at once" (EHU 4.7.9/ PI §13). Locke himself admits that such an entity is "something imperfect, that cannot exist". Berkeley's goes further than Locke and argues that such an entity cannot exist in the mind either (PHK §5). Finally, Berkeley supports his rejection of abstract ideas by reference to the introspective evidence on offer to him. It is this aspect of Berkeley's anti-abstractionism that is of most relevance to my present concerns.

Berkeley's view is that, despite Locke's claims to the contrary, it is simply impossible to conceive of abstract ideas. In §10 of the *Principles* Introduction, he writes:

Whether others have this wonderful faculty of abstracting their ideas, they best can tell; for my self I find indeed I have a faculty of imagining, or representing to my self the ideas of those particular things I have perceived and of variously compounding and dividing them. (PI §10)

Berkeley's point here is clearly rhetorical; he is convinced that it is impossible for *anyone* to conceive of an abstract idea. While the aim of this passage is to bolster the case against

¹⁰ For more on Berkeley's anti-abstractionism, see chapter two (1.1) and chapter three (3.2).

¹¹ There is much debate in Berkeley scholarship, which I bypass here, about whether Berkeley totally rejects Locke's theory of meaning. For a comprehensive survey of such literature, see Pearce (forthcoming).

abstract ideas, it also serves to clarify which ideas Berkeley thinks it *is* possible for us to conceive. He identifies the following three types of idea as conceivable:¹²

- (i) Ideas which represent those things I have perceived via the senses.
- (ii) Ideas that result from compounding or putting together ideas of type (i).
- (iii) Ideas that result from dividing ideas of type (i).

Ideas of type (i), ideas of *memory*, cannot be abstract since they are copies of things I have perceived via the senses and those things are not abstract either (see PHK §5). Berkeley claims this is a truth agreed “on all hands” (PI §7). Ideas of type (ii) and (iii) are both ideas of the imagination. Again, in both cases, whatever is conceived must have a particular shape and colour along with any other quality the ideas possess, since these imagined ideas are put together or separated from ideas which are themselves particular.

Berkeley’s reasoning in this passage reveals that he is committed to the simple rule of thumb that for an idea to exist, it must be conceived. Since abstract ideas cannot be conceived, he argues, it therefore follows that abstract ideas do not exist. This suggests that Berkeley accepts a ‘transparency thesis’ regarding our ideas. In the words of Martha Brandt Bolton, Berkeley believes that “an idea is fully accessible to the mind that has it” (1987, 69). I consider the scope of this transparency thesis in the next sub-section.

2.2 *The intrinsic properties of ideas as transparent*

So far, I have argued that in the *Principles* Introduction, Berkeley puts forward a rule of thumb concerning the existence of ideas:

- (i) For an idea to exist, it must be conceived.

¹² Berkeley’s treatment of ideas in the *Principles* Introduction is complicated by the fact that he is hesitant to reveal that he thinks even real things – i.e., things we perceive via the senses – are also ideas until the body of the text. Consequently, when he gives a taxonomy of ideas in this passage he does not include ideas of sensation (i.e., ‘real things’). Berkeley’s claim that even real things are ideas is made most explicit in PHK §33. Berkeley does not include this claim in the Introduction because, as he explains in a letter to his friend Percival, he wanted the notion of immaterialism to “steal unawares” on his readers (Hight 2013, 44).

Note that this is not the same as saying that for *anything* to exist it must be conceivable – a claim Berkeley explicitly rejects (see DHP 232-33).¹³ Rather, (i) simply states that for an *idea* to exist in my mind I must conceive it.¹⁴

However, my contention is that the theory of ideas developed in the *Principles* Introduction also entails that the intrinsic properties, and not just the existence, of an idea are transparent to a perceiver. Before proceeding, it is worth clarifying what exactly I mean by this. We can attribute intrinsic and extrinsic properties to an object. We can say of a post box, for example, that it is green, solid, of a certain cylindrical shape, and so on. These are the post box's *intrinsic* properties. We can also say of the post box that it is on Nassau Street, that it is taller than the post box on O'Connell street, and that it is approximately one-hundred metres from where I am currently located. These are *extrinsic* properties of the post box. They concern how the post box is related to other things (like me, the post box on O'Connell street, and the rest of the city). My claim is that, for Berkeley, the *intrinsic* properties of an idea – and not its extrinsic properties – are transparent to a perceiver.

This is an important clarification because Berkeley explicitly maintains that the relations that ideas bear to one another need *not* be immediately perceived even when the ideas themselves are. In the 1734 revised edition of the *Principles*, he writes:

we know and have a notion of relations between things or ideas, which relations are distinct from the ideas or things related, inasmuch as the latter may be perceived by us without our perceiving the former. (PHK §89)

Berkeley's claim is that relations between ideas are distinct from the ideas themselves and that it is possible to perceive ideas *without* being aware of the relations between them. For example, I might be familiar with both the post box on Nassau Street and the post

¹³ Berkeley claims that “[m]any things, for ought I know, may exist, whereof neither I nor any other man hath or can have any idea or notion whatsoever” (DHP 232). My reading does not require the stronger principle, which Pappas, Rickless, and Winkler think Berkeley *does* hold, that if something is inconceivable, then it is impossible. Ott and Holden both argue that Berkeley explicitly rejects this principle (citing, e.g., PHK §81 and DHP 232-33). See Pappas 1995; Rickless 2013, 112, 132, 181-82; Winkler 1989, 30-31; Ott 2015; Holden 2019.

¹⁴ This is consistent with Berkeley's claim that, “there may be, for aught that I know, innumerable sorts of ideas or sensations, as different from one another and from all that I have perceived, as colours are from sounds” (PHK §81). It is true to say, for Berkeley, *my* ideas are transparent *to me* – but that doesn't rule out there being some ideas which I cannot perceive but which are nonetheless perceivable to others. For example, an individual who is born blind ought not to conclude that visual ideas do not exist from the fact that she cannot conceive them.

box on O’Connell street without being aware of how far away from one another they are.¹⁵ This difference between perceiving ideas and perceiving the relations between them is consistent with the *metaphysical* distinction Berkeley posits between ideas and relations. Ideas, Berkeley claims, are passive entities which exist by being perceived (PHK §25). Relations, on the other hand, include “an act of the mind” (PHK §142). For that reason, he explains – just as in the case of spirits (PHK §27) – “we cannot properly be said to have an idea, but rather a notion, of the relations or habitudes between things” (PHK §142). Relations, just like spirits, are “entirely distinct” from ideas (PHK §2); consequently, Berkeley explains, “the term ‘idea’ would be improperly extended to signify every thing we know or have any notion of” (PHK §89). With this clarification in mind, my contention is that Berkeley is committed to the transparency of both the existence and *the intrinsic properties* of an idea to a perceiver.

In the *Principles* Introduction, Berkeley claims if we consider our ideas “bare and naked” and keep out of our thoughts words or names which we have come to associate with them due to “constant use”, we will find that there are three benefits (PI §21). First, we will avoid “controversies purely verbal”. Second, we will avoid looking for abstract ideas “where there are none to be had” (PI §24). Third, he explains:

so long as I confine my thoughts to my own ideas divested of words, I do not see how I can easily be mistaken. The objects I consider I clearly and adequately know. I cannot be deceived in thinking I have an idea which I have not. It is not possible for me to think, any of my own ideas are alike or unlike which are not truly so. To discern the agreements and disagreements there are between my ideas, to see what simple ideas are included in any compound idea,¹⁶ and what not, there is nothing requisite but an attentive perception of what passes in my own understanding. (PI §22)

This passage reveals that Berkeley is concerned with more than just the *existence* of our ideas; he also thinks there is an important connection between our conceptual abilities and resemblance relations. One of the upshots of this passage is that if I cannot conceive

¹⁵ For more on Berkeley’s view that distance is not immediately perceived, see, e.g., NTV §§1-3.

¹⁶ Berkeley does not talk of ‘compound ideas’ in the body of the *Principles* but rather ‘collections of ideas’ (as in PHK §1). This is another instance in which Berkeley seems to be hiding the extent of his break with contemporary views in the Introduction so that his own view will “steal unawares” on the reader (see Hight 2013, 44). Here, for example, he appears to align himself with Locke’s account of simple and compound ideas.

a resemblance relation between two (or more) ideas, then such a relation cannot exist. For, as he puts it, “[i]t is not possible for me to think, any of my ideas are alike or unlike which are not truly so.” Likewise, if I *do* conceive of such a resemblance relation, then I can know with certainty that the ideas in question *are* alike.

It seems remarkable to me that neither Winkler nor Ryan pick up on this passage as it is surely the closest Berkeley comes to talking about comparison in the *Principles*. Here, we learn that, according to Berkeley, it is impossible to think that ideas are alike or unlike *unless they really are alike or unlike*. We also learn that all I have to do to discern whether my ideas agree or disagree with one another is pay attention to “what passes in my own understanding” – in other words, what I am conceiving. But Berkeley does not use any of the language of comparison from the *Notebooks* here. Instead, he presents his view as a set of claims about what it is possible for us to conceive. I suggest that this is strong evidence that prior to writing the *Principles*, Berkeley made the decision to re-package his views on comparison (in NB 378) in terms of our conceptual abilities.

Along with his repeated encouragement to reflect on our ideas “bare and naked”, “divested of words”, “undisguised”, and to “obtain a clear view of the ideas [we] consider” (PI §§21-25), I think the passage above justifies attributing to Berkeley a second claim:

- (ii) The intrinsic properties of an idea are transparent to the subject conceiving it.¹⁷

For further evidence that Berkeley accepts this claim, it is possible to identify instances where it is explicitly put to work in the body of the *Principles*. For example, in §25 Berkeley defends the claim that ideas are passive entities by claiming that “[t]o be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas”. Notice the emphasis, familiar from the Introduction, on bare observation. He then puts forward the following argument:

For since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived. But whoever shall attend to his ideas,

¹⁷ In support of this reading, see Rickless 2013, 42. There, Rickless attributes to Berkeley the claims that “it is a fundamental truth that when a sensation is directly and wholly present to the mind, there is nothing in the sensation that could possibly be hidden to the mind” and that “the mind cannot make a mistake about what the sensation is like”. See also Dicker 2011, 33. This transparency claim is also suggested by Berkeley’s remark in the *Notebooks* that “I cannot err in matter of simple perception” (NB 693).

whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them. (PHK §25)¹⁸

The first premise of this argument, that there is nothing in our ideas but what is perceived, is precisely what Berkeley establishes in the Introduction and puts to work in his case against abstractionism. Phillip Cummins (in a later paper) calls this premise the ‘Manifest Qualities Thesis’ and characterises it as the view that “a sensation [or idea] has no qualities besides those which it is perceived to have” (1990, 287).¹⁹ As Cummins notes, Berkeley’s claim, in PHK §25, is that since we do not perceive in our ideas any power or activity, we ought to conclude that there is no power or activity contained in them. For this reason, it is plausible to attribute to Berkeley the view that *if a property is not perceived to be in an idea, then that property is not an intrinsic property of that idea*. In turn, we can plausibly attribute to Berkeley the view that the intrinsic properties of an idea are transparent to a perceiver.

In summary, I have argued that we can attribute two principles to Berkeley:

(i) For an idea to exist, it must be conceived.

And:

(ii) The intrinsic properties of an idea are transparent to the subject conceiving it.²⁰

The question is, then, how do these transparency claims justify Berkeley’s employment of the likeness principle? If resemblance is a relation, and if it is true of all relations that they are *not* known along with their *relata*, then it seems to follow that an idea’s resemblance relations need not be transparent upon reflection. In the next section, I will argue that the second conditional in this statement (‘it is true of all relations that they are *not* known along with their *relata*’) is false since, for Berkeley, our knowledge of

¹⁸ For a similar line of argument, see PHK 87: “[c]olour, figure, motion, extension and the like, considered only as so many sensations in the mind, are perfectly known, there being nothing in them which is not perceived.” This is reiterated in the *Three Dialogues* (DHP 206). The general form of both arguments is:

P1. There is nothing in our ideas that is not perceived.

P2. X is not perceived in our ideas.

C. Therefore, X is not in our ideas.

¹⁹ One of Cummins’ central aims in this paper is to determine why Berkeley accepts the Manifest Qualities Thesis (MQT). I defer to Cummins’ explanation in this instance, since my aim is understanding why Berkeley accepts the likeness principle. It is enough, for my purposes, to establish that Berkeley does indeed accept MQT and that it is at work in the *Principles* Introduction, which should now be evident.

²⁰ Cummins attributes virtually the same pair of transparency claims to Berkeley (1990, 391-92).

likeness relations is immediate. Consequently, I will argue that, as Berkeley sees it, reflecting on the intrinsic properties of our ideas informs us that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea”. The reason being that a *resemblance* relation is grounded on the intrinsic properties of ideas, which are, as (ii) entails, transparently known. Returning to the question of why Berkeley accepts the likeness principle, it is for *this* reason, I contend, that he appeals to the fact that “[i]f we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas” (PHK §8).

3. Likeness Relations

The aim of this section is to justify attributing to Berkeley Premise 2 of the argument I reconstructed at the beginning of this chapter: for an idea to be like anything but an idea, that idea would need to have at least one intrinsic property that cannot be conceived. I have argued that Berkeley accepts the likeness principle on the basis of this premise in conjunction with Premise 1: there is no intrinsic property of an idea that is not conceived. Together these premises entail that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (PHK §8). I will justify this reading by showing that, for Berkeley, resemblance between two (or more) objects involves their having intrinsic properties in common, drawing on his works on vision for textual support. I will also justify attributing to Berkeley the view that only ideas have intrinsic properties that *can* be conceived. Since, as Berkeley sees it, anything that is not an idea would possess intrinsic properties that cannot be conceived, it follows that for an idea to resemble a non-idea it would also need to have at least one intrinsic property that cannot be conceived.

In the *New Theory of Vision* and the *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, Berkeley uses the phrase “identity of nature” to refer to a property that two objects have in common and which makes them alike. This phrase is used sparingly (once in NTV §147 and twice in TVV §47 and §52) but Berkeley’s employment of it is nonetheless significant because it provides us with a good reason to believe that he thinks likeness relations are grounded in the intrinsic properties of their relata. NTV §147 is an important passage in Berkeley’s corpus because it is his first attempt to articulate the ‘divine language hypothesis’, his view that God speaks to us via the language of vision and informs us how to act so that we can “attain those things that are necessary to the

preservation and well-being of our bodies” and “avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them”. Towards the end of this section, Berkeley clarifies that, just as with any other language, the connection between the ‘words’ (our visual ideas) and their significations (tactile ideas of pleasure and pain) is not necessary but “habitual”. More specifically, he explains that our visual ideas do *not* signify tactile ideas “by any likeness or identity of nature”.

The first question that arises is whether Berkeley takes ‘likeness’ and ‘identity of nature’ to be synonymous, or whether he is stating that visual and tactile ideas are not alike *because* they lack an identity of nature. If we look to Berkeley’s use of the phrase in the *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*, the latter option is more strongly suggested. In TVV §47, for example, Berkeley claims that when we mistakenly assume that the objects of vision and touch are homogenous, as a result of the constant conjunctions we experience between the two,²¹ we “suppose an identity of nature, or one and the same object common to both senses”. That is, we suppose that we can see and feel one and the same sensible object – a supposition which Berkeley rejects.²² I suggest that this constitutes strong evidence that for two (or more) objects to have an *identity of nature* is, for Berkeley, for them to have at least one intrinsic property in common. If, for example, the visual corner of the desk which I see before me and the tangible corner which I can reach out and touch with my hands really did possess the same property of ‘sharpness’ then it would follow that, in accordance with Berkeley’s use of the phrase, those two objects *do* share an identity of nature. What’s more, were that the case it would be appropriate to say that they are alike. But they do not, Berkeley argues, and hence we should conclude that they are entirely heterogenous objects.

What does this mean for likeness relations? It indicates that likeness relations, unlike other relations between objects in Berkeley’s system, are grounded upon the shared intrinsic properties of their relata. For this reason, Michael Jacovides is right to call resemblance the “non-arbitrary backbone of Berkeley’s theory of representation” (2009, 418). In terms of Berkeley’s wider theory of intentionality, it is this aspect of likeness relations (their grounding in the intrinsic properties of their relata) is also

²¹ For example, I might (mistakenly, Berkeley thinks) claim to ‘see’ the sharp corner of a cube because objects which are shaped in a certain way have always been accompanied by a tactile sensation of sharpness.

²² Establishing the Heterogeneity Thesis, the claim that the objects of sight and touch are entirely distinct, is one of the Berkeley’s two professed aims in the *New Theory of Vision* (NTV §1).

significant because it makes for the difference between ideas that *represent* one another and those which arbitrarily *signify* in the same way that words conventionally signify their meanings. For Berkeley maintains that two things must resemble one another – which requires having at least one intrinsic property in common – for them to represent one another. What is important for my current concerns is that this means likeness relations are unique since they, unlike other relations, must be grounded on an identity of nature.²³

We've seen already that in §89 of the *Principles*, Berkeley tells us that we can perceive two (or more) relata *without* perceiving the relations between them. For example, I might perceive the post box on Nassau Street and the post box on O'Connell Street, without perceiving the distance at which they stand from one another. But I suggest that Berkeley's account of what grounds likeness relations should encourage us to re-think this passage. We know, from the *Principles* Introduction and the discussion in section two, that Berkeley thinks the intrinsic properties of an idea are transparent to a perceiver. But PHK §89 tells us that our knowledge of relations between ideas is distinct from our knowledge of the ideas themselves. We might wish to infer from this that there is nothing about the intrinsic properties of an idea that informs us about the relations it stands in. However, we also now know, from an examination of the relevant sections in the works on vision, that this is *not* the case when it comes to likeness relations. Likeness relations are grounded on the intrinsic properties of their relata and, what's more, Berkeley thinks that those things which resemble one another share an *identity of nature*. This sets likeness relations apart from other relations.

It is true that Berkeley thinks *all* relations *include* an act of the mind (PHK §142), but there is a genuine sense in which while other relations, such as the distances between things, are *constituted by our perceiving them*, likeness relations are there to be *discovered*. As Wilfred Sellars notes, for Berkeley, resemblances between things are *given* in perception (1997, 62-63). They are not habitual or based on past experience, nor are they something we 'project' onto the world around us. This is because likeness

²³ It was pointed out to me by Kenny Pearce that other relations, such as one object's being taller than another, are also dependent on the intrinsic properties of their relata (i.e., each object's height). But this would not constitute an 'identity of nature' since those objects would not have an intrinsic property *in common*. If the two objects were *the same height*, the case would be different, since this would be an instance of a resemblance relation.

relations, uniquely, can only hold between two (or more) objects which share an identity of nature: one or more shared intrinsic properties.

There is plenty of textual support, in the works on vision, for attributing to Berkeley a distinction between likeness relations, which he describes as “natural” (NTV §144), and those which are the result of the “habitual connexions” we observe between things. In TVV §20, for example, he contrasts those ideas which share a “likeness of nature” with those whose relations are grounded “merely in experience and custom”. For that reason, I do not think we should read Berkeley’s claim in *Principles* §89 as axiomatic and intended to apply to all relations whatsoever. Rather, we should take it to apply only to those relations (which, admittedly, is the majority of them) which are *not* grounded on an identity of nature.²⁴

Finally, in order to justify attributing to Berkeley Premise 2 (for an idea to be like anything but another idea, that idea would need to have at least one intrinsic property that cannot be conceived), it remains to be shown that he believes that *only* ideas have intrinsic properties that can be conceived. The first thing to note, is that Berkeley is committed to the claim that ideas, by definition, are the immediate objects of the understanding (NTV §45). In subscribing to this claim, Berkeley argues that he is simply adopting the position of “the philosophers... that ‘the things immediately perceived, are ideas which exist only in the mind’” (DHP 262). The definition of an idea, then, Berkeley maintains (and thinks his opponents will agree), is that which is an immediate object of the mind. This is important because Berkeley also thinks that to be an immediate object of the mind *just is to be conceived*. It’s for this reason that the inconceivability of abstract ideas leads Berkeley to deny that they exist. It follows, then, that for Berkeley any entity that is immediately conceived is, by definition, an idea. There is textual evidence that Berkeley also thinks that ideas are the only entities that have intrinsic properties that can be conceived. Berkeley restricts the kinds of properties that we can conceive to those which could, in principle, be *perceived* via the senses. As he puts it *Principles* §5: “my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception.” An entity that is not an idea, Berkeley maintains, cannot possess any such properties *by definition*. For if we were to attribute those properties to an entity then it

²⁴ It’s also worth noting that Berkeley explains that ideas “*may* be perceived by us without our perceiving [the relations between them]” (PHK §89, my emphasis). His use of the word ‘may’ here might be taken to support my claim that this is not *necessarily* the case for all relations.

would be rendered perceivable. In turn, Berkeley argues, this would mean that, as he puts it, “they are ideas, and we have gained our point” (PHK §8).²⁵ So, for Berkeley, the very definition of an idea ensures that only ideas have intrinsic properties that can be conceived.

We are now in a position to understand why it is appropriate to attribute to Berkeley Premise 2. Berkeley’s account of resemblance tells us that for two (or more) things to resemble one another, those things must share at least one intrinsic property. For a likeness relation can only be grounded on an “identity of nature”. As Berkeley understands it, only ideas have intrinsic properties that are conceived. Thus, for an idea to be like anything but another idea, that idea would *have* to have at least one intrinsic property that cannot be conceived. We now know, of course, from the *Principles* Introduction and the discussion in section two, that Berkeley does not think this is possible.

Conclusion

I have argued that in order to understand why Berkeley felt entitled to claim that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” we need to focus on the justificatory comment that, “[i]f we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas” (PHK §8). My approach has been to work out why Berkeley took this claim about conceiving a likeness to be enough to justify his employment of the likeness principle.

What exactly does it mean to ‘conceive a likeness’? If Winkler and Ryan are right, and Berkeley accepts the likeness principle on the back of the argument in NB 378, then

²⁵ Admittedly, while there is evidence that Berkeley accepts this claim, it is not necessarily one that his opponents would accept. Perhaps this is a weakness of Berkeley’s argument. In any case, I don’t take this to be a particular problem for my reading. For example, the success of Berkeley’s argument on both Winkler and Ryan’s reading depends on the premise that “the mind can compare nothing but its’ own ideas” (NB 378). But neither Berkeley, nor Winkler or Ryan, attempt to justify this claim. Rather, it seems part and parcel of Berkeley’s understanding of the term ‘idea’. I think the same is true, on my reading, of the claim that only ideas have intrinsic properties that can be conceived. It’s also worth noting that Cummins attributes a very similar claim to Berkeley. As he puts it, for Berkeley, “none of the qualities we immediately perceive... can occur unperceived” (this is claim (c) as outlined in section one). Cummins also notes that Berkeley doesn’t defend this claim in the *Principles* but suggests that there is an attempt to do so in the *Three Dialogues* (1966, 67). Elsewhere, Cummins suggests that this claim is justified by Berkeley’s “implicit characterization” of ideas as “sensations which exist only in consciousness” (1990, 397) which suggests a similar reading to my own.

to conceive a likeness would be to compare two ideas and note that they “agree” in a certain way. One of the implications of this reading, as Ryan acknowledges, is that since “[t]he mind can compare nothing but its’ own ideas”, and since the only things which can be said to be alike are things which have been compared, it seems to follow that only ideas can resemble one another. Ryan is careful to explain that “although Berkeley formulates his argument in terms of ideas, what is really at issue are the immediate objects of awareness” (2006, 578). So what Ryan thinks follows is that only the immediate objects of awareness can be alike. His intention is for this reformulation of Berkeley’s claim to allow for likenesses between volitions.

It’s worth noting that on my reading, the question of whether Berkeley’s account of resemblance is too restrictive does not arise in the first place. To *conceive a likeness*, on my reading, is to conceive the intrinsic properties that make two things alike – their ‘identity of nature’. Berkeley’s view is that since all the intrinsic properties that we can conceive belong to ideas, the only kind of likeness we can conceive is between two (or more) ideas. But that does not mean that likeness itself can only *hold* between ideas. For likeness relations are grounded on shared intrinsic properties and ideas need not be the only entities with intrinsic properties in Berkeley’s system – minds, for example, could be alike.

We are now, finally, in a position to appreciate why Berkeley accepts the likeness principle *as it is presented to us* in his published works. The evidence that Berkeley at one point accepted the likeness principle on the basis of the comparison argument(s) in the *Notebooks* is convincing. But any such reasoning is absent in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. Instead, in both texts, Berkeley appeals to the impossibility of conceiving a likeness between anything but our ideas. Having followed this important clue as to what Berkeley’s reasoning involves, I have shown that we can reconstruct an argument on Berkeley’s behalf that is premised on his account of our conceptual abilities in the *Principles* Introduction and his account of resemblance in the works on vision. If we conceive of a likeness between two things, then we know that what *makes* them alike – their identity of nature – is their having at least one intrinsic property in common. But it is simply impossible for an idea to share an intrinsic property with a non-idea. And for Berkeley this is made evident by the fact that “it is impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas”. It is on the basis of this conceptual evidence, then, that Berkeley accepts that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea”.

Over the last two chapters, I have identified the two premises of Berkeley's argument against representationalism, which can be reconstructed like so:

1. [The resemblance thesis] For one thing to represent another, those two things must resemble one another.
2. [The likeness principle] An idea can resemble nothing but another idea.
3. Therefore, an idea can represent nothing but another idea.

From which it follows that, unless representationalists are willing to identify 'things in the world' with ideas (in which case, as Berkeley puts it, "we have gained our point" (PHK §8)), ideas cannot represent things in the world. To be clear, Berkeley's point, as I emphasised in chapter one, is that ideas cannot represent things in the world *if* those things are taken to be mind-independent, external objects. This is why Berkeley maintains that representationalism, and the thing-idea distinction it brings with it, inevitably leads to scepticism.

I have now outlined Berkeley's motivation for accepting the resemblance thesis; the explanation, I argued, lies in his account of representation as involving the *re-presentation* of an object. I also provided a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle, providing textual support for both premises in that argument. Having thus shown *how* Berkeley argues against representationalism, in the final part of this thesis I consider two important *ramifications* of his having done so.

CHAPTER FIVE: BERKELEY'S EPISTEMOLOGY OF MIND

Introduction

In chapters three and four, I argued that Berkeley develops an argument against representationalism that rests on two premises: the resemblance thesis and the likeness principle. In this chapter, I consider what the conclusion of that argument (an idea can represent nothing but another idea) means for another area of Berkeley's epistemology, that of the mind.

It follows from Berkeley's argument that spirit cannot be represented to us by means of ideas (PHK §25). This also means that spirits cannot be *perceived* since "to have an idea is all one as to perceive" (PHK §7). In PHK §1, Berkeley lists the "objects of human knowledge" and spirits do not appear to be among them. In fact, PHK §2 begins by juxtaposing those objects of knowledge with the spirits that know them: "[b]ut besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them" (PHK §2). Does that mean that Berkeley thinks we cannot gain knowledge of spirits? Such a conclusion does not sit well with Berkeley's anti-sceptical intentions.

Reid argues that ultimately Berkeley is a sceptic when it comes to other minds. He writes:

I can find no principle in BERKELEY'S system, which affords me even probable ground to conclude, that there are other intelligent beings, like myself, in the relations of father, brother, friend, or fellow-citizen. (EIP 168)¹

Yet, Berkeley does have an account of how we gain knowledge of spirits, even if Reid does not take it to be satisfactory. Berkeley's epistemology of spirit is twofold and can be divided along the following lines. First, he provides an account of self-knowledge:

¹ In fact, Reid claims that he was, at one point, willing to "embrace the whole of Berkeley's system" (EIP 162). But, he explains, *this* consequence of doing so lead him ultimately to reject it.

knowledge that we have of our own mind.² Self-knowledge is immediate and certain. Second, he has an account of knowledge of other minds. This kind of knowledge is *mediate* and requires a level of reasoning not found in self-knowledge. It is the latter form of knowledge that Reid argues Berkeley does not account for. I will demonstrate that, *contra* Reid, Berkeley is equipped with an account of knowledge of other minds, albeit one that is heavily dependent on his account of self-knowledge.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In section one, I outline the central tenets of Berkeley's philosophy of mind. I outline the distinction between the essential passivity of ideas and activity of minds from which Berkeley thinks it follows that the two are "entirely distinct" (PHK §2). It should become clear that the likeness principle plays an important role in determining the nature of Berkeley's epistemology of mind. Since "an idea can be like nothing but an idea" it follows that our knowledge of minds cannot be ideational (that is, *gained via ideas*). Berkeley therefore needs an alternative account of how we know spirits. In section two, I develop an interpretation of Berkeley's account of self-knowledge. I begin by contrasting what I call Berkeley's 'anti-abstractionist' account of the mind with Descartes' account. I then argue that since Berkeley does not allow for even a conceptual distinction between the mind and its acts, knowledge of the mind must consist in knowledge of mental acts. I argue, accordingly, that Berkeley's account of self-knowledge should be understood in terms of the *phenomenology* of mind. In other words, on my reading, self-knowledge is constituted by the immediate awareness I have of myself as a willing and understanding perceiver. I then outline some strengths of this reading and pre-empt a potential objection. Finally, I explain how this reading ought to affect our reading of Berkeley's answer to the problem of other minds. Before concluding, I consider another possible concern with Berkeley's account, namely, that his account of knowledge of other minds is analogous to the representationalist account of knowledge of sensible things. Since Berkeley thinks the latter results in scepticism, we might worry that the same is true of his own account of other minds. I argue that there is a crucial difference between these two accounts which means they are *not* analogous, thus precluding such a concern.

² In what follows, 'self-knowledge' refers to the immediate knowledge we have of ourselves *as spirits*. Like Berkeley, I use the terms 'spirit' and 'mind' interchangeably (see PHK §2).

1. Knowing Minds

1.1 *Passive ideas and active spirits*

Berkeley argues that we cannot have ideas of spirits, since ideas cannot represent spirits. Instead, he claims, we have *notions* of spirits. In this section, I explain why Berkeley maintains that ideas cannot represent spirits, before outlining his account of notions.

In chapters three and four, I focused on Berkeley's argument against representationalism. The conclusion of that argument is that our ideas cannot represent anything but other ideas. However, ideas are not the only entities in Berkeley's ontology; he is also committed to the existence of minds. This is made clear in a passage from the beginning of the *Principles*:

But besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them, and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them. This perceiving, active being is what I call 'mind', 'spirit', 'soul' or 'my self'. By which words I do not denote any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them, wherein they exist, or, which is the same thing, whereby they are perceived; for the existence of an idea consists in being perceived. (PHK §2)

For an idea to exist is for it to be perceived. It follows from this, since being perceived requires that there be something to do the perceiving, that something else exists which its existence depends on. That is, to be perceived is to be subject to something which is actively perceiving. It further follows, then, that as well as ideas there are perceivers: what Berkeley calls 'spirits', 'souls', 'minds', or 'my self'. As such, if he is to avoid scepticism completely, then Berkeley will need to provide an explanation of how we gain knowledge of minds.

Spirits, Berkeley maintains, are "entirely distinct" from ideas. In fact, ideas and spirits are so different that "when we say, *they exist, they are known*, or the like, these words must not be thought to signify any thing common to both natures" (PHK §142).³

³ As Kenneth Pearce puts it, "there are [for Berkeley] two distinct senses of 'know', and in one of these senses it is correct to say 'spirits are known' and in the other it is not". See Pearce 2017, 126. See also Winkler 2011, 227-229; Daniel 2018, 660.

As he puts it in his *Notebooks*: “[t]hings are two-fold active or inactive, The Existence of Active things is to act, of inactive to be perceiv'd” (NB 673). Ideas exist by being perceived, their “*esse is percipi*” (PHK §3) while spirits exist by perceiving, their *esse* is “*percipere*” (NB 429).⁴ Spirits are not ideas. Nor are they *like* ideas. The distinction between ideas and spirits, and their heterogeneity, is also made clear in the following passage:

‘Thing’ or ‘being’ is the most general name of all, it comprehends under it two kinds entirely distinct and heterogeneous, and which have nothing common but the name, to wit, spirits and ideas. (PHK §89)

Berkeley’s point is that to be a ‘thing’ or a ‘being’, in other words, to exist, is to be either a spirit or an idea. There are two kinds of ‘thing’ or ‘being’ in existence, and the terms ought not to be applied to anything above and beyond them.

Ideas, Berkeley argues, are, unlike spirits, “passive and inert” and “visibly inactive” (PHK §27). This is something he thinks is confirmed by introspection:

To be satisfied of the truth of this, there is nothing else requisite but a bare observation of our ideas. For since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them but what is perceived. But whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them. A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it (PHK §25).

There are two things going on in this passage. Firstly, Berkeley is putting forward an empirical claim about what we will find when we mentally reflect on our ideas. Such “bare observation” of them, he argues, provides us with empirical evidence of their passive natures. But it is also possible to discern a premised argument which relies on what we might call the ‘transparency thesis’. According to the transparency thesis, ideas, which are mental entities, are nothing more than what we perceive them to be. They are, in other words, transparent in nature. The transparency thesis, then, dictates that if an idea

⁴ The full *Notebooks* entry reads: “[e]xistence is percipi or percipere or velle i.e. agere [to will, i.e., act]” (NB 429).

possesses a feature X, then I will perceive X when reflecting on that idea.⁵ With this thesis in mind, we might reconstruct Berkeley's argument like so:

1. Ideas are transparent in nature.
2. When I reflect on my ideas, I perceive no power or activity.
3. Therefore, there is no power of activity contained in my ideas.

On this basis, Berkeley concludes that “the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness”. If A is an idea, A is, by its very nature, passive and inert. So, Berkeley here draws on two intimately related but nonetheless distinguishable lines of argument. The first is demonstrative: just reflect on your ideas and you will see that they are passive. The second requires being committed to the transparency thesis, from which it follows that since it is impossible to perceive any power or activity in them, ideas must be passive.

For Berkeley, this means that spirits and ideas cannot be alike one another. Since spirits and ideas are entirely distinct, to the extent that they can even be said to exist in different ways, it follows that they cannot be like one another. As Berkeley puts it, an idea could not possibly “be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from *Sect. 8* [where Berkeley puts forward the likeness principle]” (PHK §25). As we have seen, Berkeley is also committed to the resemblance thesis, which entails that unless two things resemble one another those two things cannot *represent* one another. As such, an idea cannot represent a spirit, or *vice versa*.

It is worth noting that Berkeley rejects the Lockean claim that ideas are the result of *both* sensation and reflection, rejecting the latter. For example, Berkeley would reject the claim expressed in the following passage from the *Essay*:

when [the mind] turns its view, inward upon itself, and observes its own actions about those *ideas* it has, [it] takes from thence other ideas, which are as capable to be the objects of its contemplation, as any of those it received from foreign things. (EHU 2. 5. 1)

Locke goes on to specify that we have ideas of acts like perception, willing, understanding, volition as well as “*remembrance, discerning, reasoning, judging, knowledge, [and] faith*” thanks to the mind's ability to reflect on them. However, this

⁵ I provide a more in-depth reading of Berkeley's ‘transparency thesis’ in chapter four (2.1 and 2.2).

notion of reflection as a kind of ‘inward perception’ is something Berkeley rejects. Instead, he maintains that we can only have ideas of things external to us, that is, things which do or could in principle exist in nature.

Ideas, for Berkeley, can be exhaustively categorised into either (i) sensible ideas, or (ii) ideas of memory and reflection. The former, such as my perception of the sun, actually exist, while the latter could in principle, e.g., if I remember the sun or imagine a centaur.⁶ However, Berkeley does *not* think we can have ideas of mental operations or of the mind itself. In what follows, I outline exactly what this means for Berkeley’s wider epistemology of mind.

1.2 Swapping ideas for notions

Berkeley’s distinction between the passivity of ideas and the activity of spirits has important ramifications for his epistemology. He explains:

there can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit: for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert, *vide Sect. 25*, they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts. A little attention will make it plain to any one, that to have an idea which shall be like that active principle of motion and change of ideas, is absolutely impossible. (PHK §27)

Tracing the implications of the likeness principle through PHK §25, where in turn he cites §8, Berkeley acknowledges that accepting the premises of his argument against representationalism means that he must provide an account of knowledge of spirits that is non-ideational. Ideas can only resemble ideas (§8), spirits are not ideas (§25), so ideas do not resemble spirits. Gaining knowledge of spirits, therefore, cannot involve their being represented to us via ideas. As he puts it later in the *Principles*, “our souls are not to be known in the same manner as senseless inactive objects, or by way of *idea*” (PHK §142). In fact, Berkeley suggests, the two are so different to one another that “to expect that by any multiplication or enlargement of our faculties, we may be enabled to know a spirit as we do a triangle, seems as absurd as if we should hope to *see a sound*.” It is a

⁶ By ‘in principle’ here I simply mean that such things could be perceived because they are particular and not abstract in nature.

contradiction in terms, Berkeley maintains, to suggest that we could know a spirit “by way of idea”. Even if our perceptual faculties were enlarged or multiplied (by any degree or magnitude) we could never perceive a spirit as we do our ideas. Just as sounds are, by definition, heard and not seen, spirits, by their very nature, cannot be represented to us by ideas.

So what kind of knowledge do we have of spirits? Berkeley’s answer, even on the most charitable interpretation, is somewhat ambiguous. Famously, in the 1734 edition of the *Principles*, Berkeley introduces knowledge by ‘notions’ as an alternative to knowledge via ideas.⁷ For example, he writes:

the words ‘will’, ‘soul’, ‘spirit’, do not stand for different ideas, or in truth, for any idea at all, but for something which is very different from ideas, and which being an agent cannot be like unto, or represented by, any idea whatsoever. Though it must be owned at the same time, that we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words. (PHK §27)

And elsewhere:

We may not I think strictly be said to have an idea of an active being, or of an action, although we may be said to have a notion of them. I have some knowledge or notion of my mind, and its acts about ideas, inasmuch as I know or understand what is meant by those words. What I know, that I have some notion of. (PHK §142)

Berkeley’s view, then, is that while we cannot be said to have an idea of spirit, we *can* be said to have a notion of it. It is not immediately clear what exactly we are to take from this. Berkeley suggests that having a notion of something means knowing or understanding the meaning of the words used to refer to it. This implies that having a notion of a spirit means knowing what the *word* ‘spirit’ means.

‘Notion’ also appears to have a broader application than ‘idea’. As Berkeley puts it, “[w]hat I know, that I have some notion of”. But what possible objects of knowledge

⁷ In the original 1710 edition of the text, the term ‘notion’ seems to mean roughly the same thing as ‘idea’. For example, he writes (in the 1710 edition): “it is evident there can be no idea *or notion* of a spirit” (PHK §138, my emphasis). The term ‘notion’ was omitted from this section in the 1734 edition. See Berkeley 2008, 140.

are there beyond ideas? Berkeley suggests that these include spirits, relations, and acts (PHK §89 and §142). What (if anything), we might ask, do spirits, relations, and acts have in common beyond the fact that they are known? The answer, at least as Berkeley construes it, is that they all involve acts of the mind or perceptual activity, unlike “passive and inert” ideas. It has been suggested that notional knowledge is knowledge of active rather than passive entities.⁸ It is possible, then, to draw out a characterisation of ‘notions’, as Berkeley employs the term, but it remains vague. There seem to be two features of notional knowledge:

- (a) Knowing the meaning of a word.
- (b) Knowing in a way that does not involve ideas.

Beyond that, Berkeley’s theory of notions (if, indeed, there is a substantial ‘theory’ on offer) remains unclear. Indeed, whether Berkeley has a theory of notions and whether, if so, that ‘theory’ is a robust one remains contested amongst commentators. It’s worth considering the most prominent contributions to this debate.

The most extensive interpretation of Berkeley’s employment of the term ‘notion’ is developed by Daniel Flage in his book-length treatment of what he calls *Berkeley’s Doctrine of Notions* (1987). Flage argues that an accurate reading of Berkeley’s notions ought not to contravene his ontology in which, as Flage sees it, there are *three* distinct kinds of existent: ideas, minds, and acts of mind.⁹ Thus, Flage argues, we should identify which of these three categories notions fall under. In other words, Flage maintains that we ought to avoid reifying notions to the degree that they undermine the parsimony of Berkeley’s metaphysics. Although, note that he does reify them enough to be part of Berkeley’s ontology.

Accordingly, Flage takes notions to be acts of mind; more specifically, *intentional acts of mind*. He claims that “it is reasonable to suggest that notions are... acts by which the mind directs itself towards an object” (1987, 183). Flage observes that this reading puts Berkeley’s use of the term at odds with the way it was employed by thinkers like Locke and Sergeant (1987, 191-92). However, he argues that this explains Berkeley’s

⁸ Reinhardt Grossman claims that this is the crucial difference between notions and ideas as Berkeley understands them. In his words, “[w]hatever is known notionally, existent or not, is known through acts. Conversely, whatever is not known through acts is not a notion” (1960, 27, emphasis in original).

⁹ It will become clear that on my reading Berkeley’s is a two-part, not a three-part ontology, consisting only in ideas and minds, the latter of which I (unlike Flage) argue are reducible to *acts of mind*. However, I will leave this issue aside until section two.

initial hesitation to use the term in the first editions of the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* (1987, 192). What's more, Flage justifies this reading by pointing to a passage in the *Dialogues* where Philonous claims that we know the mind by a "reflex act" (DHP 232).¹⁰ He grounds this reading on an interpretation of Berkeley's theory of meaning whereby terms are meaningful if and only if they refer to an object of knowledge, that is, a roughly Lockean theory.¹¹ Meaning, he states, "is an action of the mind whereby the mind 'maps' a word onto an object or objects" (1987, 181). Since Berkeley maintains that we know what words like 'soul', 'mind', or 'spirit' mean when we hear or utter them (PHK §27), Flage argues that Berkeley thinks this indicates that we have an intentional object in mind. Having a notion, or having notional knowledge, then, Flage argues, means engaging in an intentional act of mind (1987, 189). Flage then argues that Berkeley is committed to there being two kinds of notion: 'positive' notions, which are analogous to Russellian knowledge by acquaintance, and 'relative' notions, which are analogous to Russellian knowledge by description (1987, (e.g.) 1, 8, 173).¹² The only things we have positive notions of, Flage claims, are causation relations and perceptions. Self-knowledge, on the other hand, on Flage's reading, is a kind of relative notion.

Robert Adams defends a more deflationary reading of Berkeley's notions. As he puts it, Berkeley's employment of the term 'notion' simply indicates "that there is another basic way of being aware of something, besides awareness by way of ideas" (1973 [in 1991], 425). Adams equates 'notional knowledge' (in the 1734 revisions of the *Principles* and *Dialogues*) with the having of an idea in a 'broad sense' that Berkeley refers to in the first edition of the *Principles*. As Adams sees it, Berkeley went from using the term 'idea'

¹⁰ Flage also supports his reading with references to later works including *Siris* and *Alciphron*. As Flage sees it, the doctrine of notions was fully worked out in these later works and then 'read back in' to revised editions of the *Principles* and *Dialogues*.

¹¹ It should be noted that Berkeley's theory of meaning in language is a hotly contested issue in contemporary scholarship. While some remain committed to the view that Berkeley held a roughly Lockean theory of meaning (Bennett 1971, 54; Belfrage 1986; Berman 1994, ch.6; Ott 2003, 121; Bordner 2017, 256) others argue that he rejected that theory in favour of something akin to a 'use theory' of meaning (see Flew 1974; Roberts 2007, ch.2; Pearce 2017, 63). Two things should be noted: (i) this is very much a broad-strokes characterisation of the debate and the relevant sources should be consulted themselves for detail, and (ii) most commentators who think Berkeley's theory of meaning is roughly Lockean (including those listed above) accept that it is a somewhat *modified* Lockean theory (for example, see Frankel 2009; Williford and Jakapi 2009, 104; Jaffro 2013, 136). For my own thoughts on that debate, see West 2019.

¹² For Russell's own remarks on the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, see 1905, 479-80. There Russell claims: "[t]here seems no reason to believe that we are ever acquainted with other people's minds, seeing that these are not directly perceived; hence what we know about them is obtained through denoting. All thinking has to start from acquaintance; but it succeeds in thinking *about* many things with which we have no acquaintance." It should be clear that on this particular issue (regardless of whether Flage's reading is accurate) Berkeley and Russell are in agreement.

in both a narrow and a broad sense initially, to using it in narrow sense alone once the term ‘notion’ was introduced (1973 [in 1991], 433). Adams takes notional knowledge to be more direct than Flage does and even compares it to imagistic knowledge (albeit, again, in a ‘loose’ sense). Adams argues that, for Berkeley, non-ideational acquaintance with an object, like one’s own mind, provides us with a notion of that object. Having such a notion, he explains, mean being able to conceive of what that object is like:

We might say that to have the notion of a mental state or act of which we have no idea is in part to know what it is like, or to be able to represent to ourselves what it is like, to do that act or experience that state. (1973 [in 1991], 434)

What’s more, Adams emphasises that, for Berkeley, our notions, like our ideas, allow us to gain *mediate* knowledge of things beyond themselves: they “can serve us as ‘images’ for the conceiving of other things” (1973 [in 1991], 434-35). To adopt Flage’s terminology, on Adams’ reading we gain ‘relative knowledge’ (or knowledge by description) of other minds like ourselves by means of the notions (knowledge by acquaintance) we have of our own mind.

More recently, Melissa Frankel has developed an interpretation of Berkeley’s notions that, like Flage’s reading, is grounded on an analysis of Berkeley’s theory of meaning. Frankel acknowledges that it is natural to think that

‘notions’ are to reflective experience what ‘ideas’ are to perpetual experience, so that where ideas ground the meaningfulness of talk of objects of perceptual experience, notions ground the meaningfulness of talk of minds. (2009, 384-45)¹³

This certainly seems to capture the gist of Adams’ interpretation, although it should be noted that he is not overly concerned with Berkeley’s views on meaningful speech and is more interested in how notions help us to *conceive* of those things which we are not immediately acquainted with in experience (i.e., other minds).

Frankel seeks to modify the account of notions defended by Adams, expanding Berkeley’s application of the term ‘notion’ beyond just the objects of reflective experience (e.g., my own mind) such that it also encompasses non-ideational things one has a *reason* to believe in the existence of (2009, 386). Frankel thus takes it that the term ‘notion’ can also apply to other minds since we have good reasons to believe they exist.

¹³ Williford and Jakapi 2009 advocate such a reading.

We cannot have a notion of matter, she explains, because, as Berkeley argues, there is no reason to believe it exists: it does not explain any phenomena that can't already be explained by appeal to minds. The distinction between ideational and notional knowledge, Frankel argues, ought to be understood as the distinction between two “*kinds of access*” we have to things. Ideational knowledge is immediate perceptual or experiential access to things while notional knowledge applies to things we have purely *rational* access to (2009, 400). Like Flage, Frankel argues that since Berkeley thinks self-knowledge is notional, it follows that we have rational and not experiential access to our own mind.

My own view is that we ought to be as deflationary as possible while also acknowledging the important role that Berkeley clearly felt notions play in our epistemology.¹⁴ I do not think any of the above commentators are guilty of overly reifying notions or rendering them a kind of existent unto themselves; something that would not be consistent with the textual evidence on offer. However, I do think there is a danger of introducing complexity into Berkeley's ‘doctrine of notions’ that simply cannot be found in Berkeley's writing.

In particular, I think Flage's account is guilty of attributing a doctrine to Berkeley that he would not have recognised. Consider, for example, Berkeley's *treatment* of notions. In the case of, say, the likeness principle (PHK §8) or the passive-active distinction between ideas and minds (PHK §25), Berkeley repeatedly acknowledges that these are important principles with significant ramifications. There is no such acknowledgement when it comes to notions which, instead, seem to have been introduced as something of an afterthought (albeit an important one). Even so, there is no explicit textual evidence that he saw this is a fully-fledged *doctrine*. It will become clear in what follows that I am most sympathetic to Adams' interpretation. Firstly, because, unlike Flage and Frankel's readings, it is consistent with the metaphysical reading of Berkeley's philosophy of mind which I take to be most accurate. Secondly, because it acknowledges the epistemological burden that Berkeley places on the immediate knowledge we have of our own mind in our gaining mediate knowledge of other minds. In the next section, I

¹⁴ For an understanding of Berkeley's notions that is, in my view, overly deflationary, see Jacovides 2009, 421. Jacovides claims that, “[n]otions are mostly just *façons de parler* to avoid the embarrassment of saying that we have no idea of F but we understand the meaning of the corresponding word.”

develop my reading of Berkeley's account of self-knowledge before outlining some strengths of that reading and defending it from a potential objection.

2. Knowing Me

2.1 Cartesian self-knowledge

As I see it, outlining Berkeley's epistemology of mind is a two-stage process. It involves first understanding what he takes self-knowledge to be like, and second working out what he takes knowledge of *other* minds to be like. This is because as Berkeley puts it, "we know other spirits *by means of our own soul*" (PHK §140, my emphasis). The aim of this section is to get clear on what kind of knowledge Berkeley thinks we have of our own mind and how, in turn, that knowledge can be used to gain knowledge of other minds. To begin, I emphasise the extent to which Berkeley's account of self-knowledge presents a move away from abstract conceptions of the self and inferential accounts of self-knowledge.¹⁵ I use Descartes' account of self-knowledge as an example of this kind of approach. I focus on this contrast because I think it is the best way of getting to grips with what Berkeley takes self-knowledge to be like.

Throughout this section, I contrast Berkeley's account with an inferential account of self-knowledge which I attribute to Descartes.¹⁶ It is worth justifying my characterisation of Descartes' account as inferential; especially since, in the Replies to the Second Set of Objections, Descartes himself maintains that the 'cogito' is not an argument or inference but rather a "primary notion". As he puts it:

¹⁵ 'Inferential', here, applies to the self-knowledge itself rather than the *account* of self-knowledge. Berkeley, I will argue, does not think the process of gaining self-knowledge requires an inference.

¹⁶ I use Descartes as an example of a thinker who accepts an inferential account of self-knowledge. However, it is worth noting that Peter Browne, Berkeley's provost at Trinity College Dublin and a thinker with whom he explicitly engages in *Alciphron* (see dialogue IV), also endorses an account whereby our knowledge of the self is inferential. In his *Procedure*, Browne claims that "[w]e have not even the least *Direct Idea* or Perception of the purely spiritual Part of us" and that "[w]e are so far from an exact view or intuitive knowledge of it, that we are forced to argue and infer its very *Existence* from our Observation only of such Operations as we conclude could not proceed from mere Matter (*Procedure*, 97; see also *Analogy*, 29). This move from observation of certain sensible ideas to inferring the existence of an intelligent spirit is structurally similar to Berkeley's own account of knowledge of *other* minds (see 3.1) but is the kind of account of *self*-knowledge that, I will argue, he rejects. For discussion of Browne's influence on Berkeley, see Berman 2005, ch.3.

When someone says ‘I am thinking, therefore I am, or exist’, he does not deduce existence from thought by means of a syllogism, but recognizes it as something self-evident by a simple intuition of the mind. (CSM 2: 100)

Descartes claims that we do not arrive at the *cogito* by means of a syllogism but by “a simple intuition of the mind”. He thus seems to deny that we make an inference from the existence of thought to the existence of a thinker. Yet, despite this claim, there are good reasons for thinking that Descartes is nonetheless committed to a distinction between (i) knowledge of oneself as thinking, and (ii) knowledge of oneself *as oneself*, i.e., as a *thinking thing*. In turn, this indicates that self-knowledge, for Descartes, involves moving from awareness of thought to knowledge of oneself as thinker. Consider, for example, this claim in response to Hobbes:

I do not deny that I, who am thinking, am distinct from my thought, in the way in which a thing is distinct from a mode... And when I add, 'Which of them can be said to be separate from myself?', I simply mean that all these modes of thinking inhere in me. (CSM 2:123-24)¹⁷

While Descartes is explicit in claiming that I am *inseparable* from my thoughts and claims that I exist “as long as I am thinking” (CSM 2:18), it is nonetheless clear that there is some kind of distinction, between agent and action, at work here. That is, Descartes certainly seems to posit the existence of both (i) thought and (ii) thinker and distinguish between the two. This is also suggested by his claim that “[t]he fact that it is I who am doubting and understanding and willing is so evident that I see no way of making it any clearer” (CSM 2:19). Again, Descartes seems committed to a distinction between the subject (‘I’) and its modes of thought: doubting, understanding, and willing.

In the *Principles of Philosophy*, Descartes clarifies that while there is no ‘real distinction’ between the mind and its modes of thought, there is a ‘modal distinction’. A real distinction is one that “exists only between two or more substances” (CSM 1: 213). A modal distinction, however, exists between a substance and its modes, or between the various modes of a substance themselves. A modal distinction “can be recognized from the fact that we can clearly perceive a substance apart from the mode which we say differs from it” (CSM 1:213). Just as there is a modal distinction between “shape or motion [two

¹⁷ See also CSM 1;196, 1:210, 1:215.

modes of extension] and the corporeal substance in which they inhere”, Descartes claims, “there is a modal distinction between affirmation or recollection [two modes of thought] and the mind.” So Descartes is committed to the view that we can clearly perceive, or understand, the mind separately from its various modes of thought. It is *this* kind of claim, I will argue, that Berkeley rejects for, as he sees it, there is nothing to perceive or understand about the mind beyond its perceptual activities. For Berkeley, I will argue, the modal distinction between modes of thought and the mind is an illicit abstraction. For that reason, it is appropriate to use Descartes as a foil for what I take to be Berkeley’s anti-abstractionist account of self-knowledge.

I should also note that while my focus is on Berkeley’s *epistemology* of mind, this epistemological reading is consistent with what I take to be the most plausible reading of Berkeley’s *metaphysical* account of the mind. My own reading of Berkeley’s metaphysics of mind is largely consistent with that of Stephen Daniel who denies that Berkeley sees spirits as subjects in a perceptual relationship but rather as “the activity or principle whereby objects are identified in relation to one another” (2018, 660).¹⁸ Daniel notes that many commentators take it for granted that Berkeley adopts a largely Cartesian view of spiritual substance and selfhood (2018, 660, footnote 2). Again, while my concerns are primarily epistemological, it will become clear that, like Daniel, I reject this kind of assumption. My own aims are primarily epistemological, but I will defend this reading of Berkeley’s metaphysics of mind as this chapter progresses.

2.2 Berkeley’s anti-abstractionism about mind

So far, I have outlined Descartes’ inferential account of self-knowledge, whereby we infer that we exist from our awareness of thought. In what follows, I contrast that account

¹⁸ See also Daniel 2008, 204-205. Adams also supports this kind of reading. See 1973 [in 1991], 437. Other commentators, however, develop a more traditional reading of Berkeley whereby spirits are subjects that perform (and are distinct from) acts of perception. See, e.g., Bettcher 2007, 42-54; Frankel 2009, 395; Pearce 2017, 132.

with what I will refer to as Berkeley's 'anti-abstractionist' account of self-knowledge.¹⁹ One way of understanding this contrast, I contend, is to think of it as the difference between an abstract account of self-knowledge and an anti-abstractionist account. Thus, on my reading Berkeley is not just an anti-abstractionist about ideas (and sensible things) but also minds.

Berkeley is consistent with Descartes (CSM 1:127) in maintaining that "the soul always thinks" but goes even further, claiming that "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 task" (PHK §98). This looks like a criticism of inferential accounts of self-knowledge of the kind I have attributed to Descartes. Descartes argues that it is impossible for a mind to exist without thinking (CSM 2:18) but also claims that there is a modal distinction between my mind and my individual modes of thought (CSM 2:123-4). Berkeley's view, however, is that a spirit cannot be distinguished, even conceptually, from its cogitation. As we've seen, for Berkeley the *esse* of the mind just is its perceptual activity, its *percipere* (NB 429). When it comes to knowledge of the mind, his point is that there is nothing to be gained by attempting to understand it as abstracted from its actions.

Berkeley compares inferential accounts of self-knowledge with attempts to conceive of extension or motion abstracted from sensible thing, thus drawing on his arguments against abstract ideas in the Introduction to the *Principles*. Berkeley argues that, contrary to the views of abstractionists, once we abstract away the qualities by which we come to know extension and motion, there is nothing left for us to conceive of and thus no further knowledge to be gained. As he puts it, when we try to conceive of the qualities of things abstractedly from the things themselves "we presently lose sight of them and

¹⁹ Melissa Frankel develops a reading of Berkeley's epistemology of mind in which even our self-knowledge is inferential. As she puts it, "[w]e comprehend *the fact that our mind exists* on the basis of the information that we get via introspection – on the basis of the inference that we can make from the conscious nature of our ideas... to the fact that we exist qua conscious agents" (2009, 395). For Frankel, there is nothing 'given' (beyond the existence of ideas) in perceptual experience. I hope to show that such a reading is inconsistent with Berkeley's metaphysical remarks on the mind and his anti-abstractionism about the mind. In particular, Frankel's reading of self-knowledge is dependent on the assumption that mental acts (like willing and perceiving) are distinct from the mind itself. But I hope to have shown that that is not a premise that can be taken for granted. Frankel also assumes that 'knowledge' of the mind and 'experience' of the mind are distinct (2009, 399-400, esp. footnote 55) – another assumption I take to be questionable. Seth Bordner also accepts this distinction in Berkeley's thought (2017, 241). For readings in a similar vein, in which the self is *not* known 'by acquaintance', see Grossman 1960, 28-9 and Flage 1987, e.g., 1, 8, 173.

run into great extravagancies” (PHK §99). This reference to *losing sight of things* can be taken figuratively, in the sense that it draws our attention away from what is really important (the observable world) into the inconsistencies that result from abstract thought. But there is also a sense in which Berkeley means this literally: extension and motion really are nothing over and above the extended and moving things we see (and hear, and touch, and so on) in the world around us. For that reason, considering such things abstractly or looking for knowledge of their existence that is distinct from our knowledge of their particular qualities, he insists, is “barren speculation” (PHK §156).²⁰ To look for something over and above the sensible qualities we attribute to things (the heat of the fire, the white of the snow) is to look for something that does not exist. As he puts it in the Preface to the *Three Dialogues*:

Upon the common principles of philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived. And we are taught to distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our senses. Hence arise scepticism and paradoxes. It is not enough that we see and feel, that we taste and smell a thing. Its true nature, its absolute external entity, is still concealed. (DHP 167)

The folly of such philosophical endeavours, Berkeley argues, is that the ‘real natures’ being searched for do not really exist. Materialists and representationalists are, Berkeley argues, on a wild goose chase. There are no absolute external entities, just the sensible things we taste, touch, smell, see, and hear.

What is important for our current purposes is that Berkeley thinks the same mistakes are made when it comes to knowledge of the mind. He explains:

the doctrine of abstract ideas has had no small share in rendering those sciences intricate and obscure, which are particularly conversant about spiritual things. Men have imagined they could frame abstract notions of the powers and acts of the mind, and consider them prescinded, as well from the mind or spirit it self as

²⁰ In PHK §156 (the final section of the *Principles*) Berkeley is talking about the “barren speculations” which have hindered “the learned” from embracing “the salutary truths of the gospel”. After all, the chief aim of the text, Berkeley explains, is to “inspire my readers with a pious sense of the presence of God”. But his rejection of abstract thought, which makes us “lose sight” of the things in nature, is closely tied to this aim. Berkeley maintains that an appreciation of nature, and its “numerous and considerable effects”, demonstrates that “God is known as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit whatsoever” (PHK §147).

from their respective objects and effects. Hence a great number of dark and ambiguous terms, presumed to stand for abstract notions, have been introduced into metaphysics and morality, and from these have grown infinite distractions and disputes among the learned. (PHK §143)

Abstractionism, Berkeley argues, has caused “infinite” problems in discussions about the mind, just as it has caused innumerable problems concerning our knowledge of sensible things in the world. The parallels that Berkeley draws between self-knowledge and attempts to gain knowledge of sensible things in abstract are important, and can help us understand Berkeley’s views concerning knowledge of the mind. I explain how in what follows.

At the beginning of the *Principles*, where Berkeley is reacting to the “strangely prevailing opinion” that sensible things exist independently of the mind, he puts forward two questions. First, whether there can be “a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived?” Second, whether it is “possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception?” To which he answers that, “[f]or my part I might as easily divide a thing from itself” (PHK §§4-5). Berkeley’s view is that when it comes to sensible things, *to exist is one and the same as to be perceived*; one cannot be divided from the other. After all, a sensible (“unthinking”) thing’s *esse* just is its *percipi* (PHK §3).

What I want to show is that there are signs that this claim, namely, that existence cannot be abstracted from perception, applies not only to sensible things, but also to minds. Consider, for example, the following warning against attempts to conceive of existence in abstract: “[t]he general idea of being appears to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all” (PHK §17). There is no indication that Berkeley thinks this claim is restricted to sensible things alone. Indeed, I think there is reason to believe that, for Berkeley, existence is *always* tied to perception: both when it comes to sensible things *and* when it comes to minds. This interpretative claim is supported by various remarks from entries in Berkeley’s *Notebooks*, where he is quite explicit about the relationship between existence and perception. In entry 646, for example, he writes, “[e]xistence not conceivable without perception or volition not distinguish’d therefrom.” As before, his claim seems to be that once we abstract the existence of things from the acts of perceiving

there is nothing left for us to gain knowledge of.²¹ While sensible things exist by virtue of *being perceived*, spirits exist by virtue of *perceiving*. This is likewise suggested by Berkeley's remark that, "[e]xistence is percipi or percipere... or velle i.e. agere"; to be is to be perceived, to perceive, or to will (or act) (NB 429). For this reason, I think it is plausible to attribute to Berkeley the view that to exist is *either* to be passively perceived (to be an sensible thing) *or* to actively perceive in one way or another (to be a spirit).

Although 'exist' means different things when applied to spirits and ideas, it can nonetheless, in both cases, be cashed out in terms of *perception*. In the *Principles*, Berkeley explains that "spirit is one simple, undivided, active being" and later describes it as "that which acts... that active principle of motion and change of ideas" (PHK §27). He explains that 'understanding' is what we call the spirit when it perceives, and 'will' is what we call it when it either produces ideas or "operates about them." Furthermore, he argues that it is not possible, even conceptually, to distinguish these ways of perceiving from the perceiver. He denies, for example, that, on top of the awareness we have of 'willing' and 'understanding', there is

a third idea of substance or being in general, with a relative notion of its supporting or being the subject of the aforesaid powers, which is signified by the name 'soul' or 'spirit'. (PHK §27)

This claim is significant since it indicates that to inquire into what terms like 'soul' or 'spirit' signify, aside from their operations, is what Berkeley would call "barren speculation". The view that we can gain knowledge of the 'subject', the 'soul', or 'spirit' abstracted from its actions is "what some hold" but is refutable, Berkeley argues, on the basis of both experience and the limits of our conceptual abilities. It thus ought to be rejected. Although this argument need not be read straightforwardly as a rejection of the Cartesian view, it is enough to differentiate Berkeley's account of self-knowledge from that position.²² Unlike Descartes, Berkeley thinks it is unintelligible to suggest that we could *first* be certain that 'I' exist before *then* asking what 'I am'. (CSM 2:19). He also

²¹ It might be objected that Berkeley talks of perception *and* volition here. However, I think Berkeley's remarks in PHK §142 demonstrate that volition, or 'willing', just is an act of perception. There he explains that 'willing' is a name by which we refer to the mind as it perceives in a certain way. I say more on this below. See also NB 674 which suggests the same thing: "[d]istinct from or without perception there is no volition; therefore neither is their existence without perception."

²² For discussion of how Berkeley's claims undermine both Cartesian and Lockean accounts of spiritual substance, see Daniel 2008 & 2018.

denies that there is a modal distinction between the mind and its activities. As he writes in the *Notebooks*, “[t]ake away Perceptions & you take away the Mind put the Perceptions & you put the mind” (NB 580). For Berkeley, the mind and its operations are one and the same thing.

These metaphysical claims make it clear that the existence of a spirit consists in its perceptual activities: its *esse* is nothing over and above its *percipere*. The epistemological implications of this view are that to gain knowledge of spirit, it is sufficient that we gain knowledge of those activities. Berkeley re-iterates this view in the *Principles* when he attacks attempts to “abstract the existence of a spirit from its cogitation” (PHK §98). As such, self-knowledge must consist in immediate knowledge of our perceptual *activities*. I explain what that means in what follows.

2.3 Comparing self-knowledge with knowledge of sensible things

So far, I have argued that Berkeley is committed to an anti-abstractionist metaphysics of mind whereby the mind is not distinct from its mental and perceptual acts. I have also contrasted Berkeley’s account of how we gain knowledge of the self with the kind of inferential account I attributed to Descartes. I now want to clarify my reading of what Berkeley takes self-knowledge to consist in by drawing a comparison with his account of knowledge of sensible things.

We have established that Berkeley does not see self-knowledge as something that can be abstracted from knowledge of one’s perceptual activity. To know the self is to know the distinct features of the mind which Berkeley calls ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. Since, according to Berkeley, for a mind to exist just is for it to perceive, it follows that the different ways it perceives are different ways in which it exists. This suggests that it is not possible to *conceive* of the self as separate from its perceptual activities. For Berkeley, we can no more come to know the mind over and above its perceptual activities than we can come to know a sensible object abstracted from its sensible qualities, something which he takes to be impossible. It’s worth reiterating Berkeley’s insistence that spirit is not something that exists abstracted from its acts. Consider, for example, the following claim from the *Notebooks*:

[the] substance of a spirit is that which acts, causes, wills, operates, or if you please (to avoid the quibble that may be made on the word *it*), to act, cause, will, operate (NB 829, my emphasis)²³

To be a spirit, Berkeley claims, is to act. The substance of a spirit is not something behind its mental acts, causes, volitions, and operations but is constituted by the *doing* of those very acts. For that reason, Berkeley avoids positing a metaphysical subject (an “it”) behind the actions of causing, willing, operating, and so on. Berkeley is clearly distancing himself the kind of position, which I attributed to Descartes, whereby “thought alone *belongs to it*” (CSM 1:195, my emphasis). As Stephen Daniel explains:

Understanding, willing, and spirit are thus not three things of which we just happen not to have ideas, for to say that would fall into the very abstractionist way of speaking about spiritual substance that Berkeley repeatedly rejects. In his eyes, just as there is no abstract material substance that underlies or supports sensible qualities, so there is no spiritual substance abstracted from willing or understanding. (2018, 661)

Note that Daniel argues that we should treat Berkeley’s account of the nature of minds and his account of the nature sensible things analogously. If there are no abstract ‘its’ behind sensible qualities, why should there be an abstract ‘it’ behind perceptual acts? If we take his anti-abstractionism seriously then we should take it that there are no abstract ‘its’ in Berkeley’s philosophy at all. Consider his response to those thinkers committed to the distinction between substances and modes:

For instance, in this proposition ‘a die is hard, extended and square’, they will have it that the word ‘die’ denotes a subject or substance, distinct from the hardness, extension, and figure, which are predicated of it and in which they exist. This I cannot comprehend. To me a die seems to be nothing distinct from those things which are termed its modes or accidents. And to say a die is hard, extended and square, is not to attribute those qualities to a subject distinct from and

²³ Similarly, see NB 499a & 658-59, where Berkeley claims (respectively) that “we are cheated by these general terms, thing, is etc.” and “it should be said nothing but a Will, a being wch wills being unintelligible.”

supporting them, but only an explication of the meaning of the word ‘die’. (PHK §49)

Berkeley’s point is that the language we use to refer to things can be misleading. We *talk* as though modes and accidents were distinct from their subjects (i.e., we refer to ‘its’) but that should not commit us to the reality of such distinctions (see DM §1-3 for a similar claim about terms like ‘force’ and ‘gravity’ as employed in the natural sciences). Berkeley explicitly denies that the die is something (an ‘it’) in which certain qualities (colour, shape, extension, and so on) inhere. Rather the die is *constituted* by those very qualities.²⁴ To use an analogy, the solar system is constituted by a group of planets rather than containing or possessing those planets. We *say* ‘the solar system has eight planets’ even though there is no solar system above and beyond those planets. Similarly, Berkeley takes sensible things to be constituted by what we *refer to* as modes and accidents, even though we say things like ‘the die has six sides.’ Just as the solar system is nothing over and above the planets ‘within’ it, the die is nothing over and above ‘its’ qualities of hardness, extension, and figure.

Returning to Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge, there’s reason to believe that Berkeley thinks minds should be treated in precisely the same way. *Words* like ‘mind’, ‘soul’, and ‘self’ ought not to commit us to the existence of something over and above perceptual acts any more than the word ‘die’ should be taken as something distinct from its modes and accidents. In both cases, Berkeley denies there is an ‘it’ to be known. Instead, he maintains, to know a set of features, whether those be the sensible qualities of the die or the different operations of the mind, is to know the thing itself (just as once we are acquainted with the planets, we are acquainted with the solar system). The substance of the mind is its perceptual acts, just as the ‘substance’ of a die is its sensible qualities. Again, consider the following passage:

If any man shall doubt of the truth of what is here delivered, let him but reflect and try if he can frame the idea of any power or active being; and whether he hath ideas of two principal powers, marked by the names ‘will’ and ‘understanding’, distinct from each other as well as from a third idea of substance or being in

²⁴ For more on the relation between subject and their properties in Berkeley’s philosophy, see Cummins 1963.

general, with a relative notion of its supporting or being the subject of the aforesaid powers, which is signified by the name ‘soul’ or ‘spirit’. (PHK §27)

Berkeley’s point is that our using the terms ‘soul’ and ‘spirit’ should not commit us to the existence of a “third idea of substance or being in general” distinct from “principal powers” attributed to it. Just as in the case of sensible objects like the die, there is no ‘it’ beyond the acts or operations we attribute to the mind. Having established my reading of what Berkeley thinks self-knowledge consists in, I will now explain how this can help us understand Berkeley’s account of knowledge of other minds.

2.4. Self-knowledge as ‘immediate data’

As I stated at the beginning of this section, Berkeley claims that self-knowledge is key to gaining knowledge of other minds. In what follows, I introduce the notion of ‘immediate data’ in Berkeley’s philosophy (a term I borrow from Bertrand Russell) and use it to outline what it means, on Berkeley’s view, to gain immediate knowledge of one’s own perceptual activities. In turn, I will explain how this notion of immediate data can help us to better understand Berkeley’s account of knowledge of other minds.

In his chapter on ‘Idealism’ in *The Problems of Philosophy*, Russell claims that:

[Berkeley] gives the name ‘idea’ to anything which is *immediately* known, as, for example, sense-data are known. Thus a particular colour which we see is an idea; so is a voice which we hear, and so on. But the term is not wholly confined to sense-data. There will also be things remembered or imagined, for with such things also we have immediate acquaintance at the moment of remembering or imagining. All such immediate data he calls ‘ideas’. (1912, 20)

Russell’s characterisation of Berkeley, in general, is not especially reliable. In this passage, for instance, he claims that “anything which is *immediately* known” is, for Berkeley, an idea.²⁵ A little later he also claims that, for Berkeley, “whatever is known is necessarily an idea” (1912, 20). But this reading cannot be accurate if, as Berkeley

²⁵ Perhaps, if Adams is right and Berkeley initially accepted a distinction between ideas in a ‘narrow’ and ‘large’ sense, Russell’s characterisation is true of the first edition of the *Principles*. Russell’s omission of any reference to notions also suggests he may have been familiar with an early version of the text.

suggests, minds are also known. In the 1734 edition of the *Principles*, he is quite explicit about this:

To me it seems that ideas, spirits, and relations are all in their respective kinds the object of human knowledge and subject of discourse, and that the term ‘idea’ would be improperly extended to signify every thing we know or have any notion of. (PHK §89)

In light of such remarks, Russell’s claim that whatever is known is an idea for Berkeley looks to be a gross mischaracterisation. For one thing, Russell seems to ignore entirely Berkeley’s claim that we have ‘notions’ of minds (and relations).

Nonetheless, I do think that Russell’s use of the phrase “immediate data” is helpful; both in terms of capturing the immediacy of perceptual knowledge and Berkeley’s view that this immediate knowledge can be put to use in mediate knowledge acquisition. We saw in chapter two (3.2 and 3.3), for example, that Berkeley’s thinks we can use our ideas as signs or representations of other ideas, such as when I use an idea of a triangle to stand for “all rectilinear triangles whatsoever” (PI §15). My contention is that the same holds when it comes to our immediate knowledge of the mind.²⁶ Berkeley’s view is that “we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which is in that sense the image or idea of them” (PHK §140). What needs clarifying, then, is the nature of the ‘data’ we are drawing on when we gain knowledge of other minds.

In the third *Dialogue*, Berkeley lays out the parallels between immediate knowledge of sensible things and immediate knowledge of the mind. Though they exist in categorically different ways, which means our knowledge of them is likewise categorically different, there nonetheless *are* parallels to be drawn. He writes:

I own I have properly no idea, either of God or any other spirit; for these being active, cannot be represented by things perfectly inert, as our ideas are. I do

²⁶ For instance, note the similarity between these two claims: (i) “the particular triangle I consider... equally stands for and represents all rectilinear triangles whatsoever, and is *in that sense* universal” (PI §15, my emphasis) and (ii) “we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which *in that sense* is that image or idea of them” (PHK §140, my emphasis). Clearly, Berkeley thinks there is a sense in which (i) an idea of a triangle, and (ii) my own mind, represent others like them – but (Berkeley maintains) that is dependent on our *using* them in a particular way.

nevertheless know that I, who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist as certainly as I know my ideas exist. (DHP 231)

This latter claim is especially important: our self-knowledge is *as certain* as knowledge of our ideas. Concerning the knowledge we have of the *existence* of our ideas, Berkeley claims that “I cannot be deceived in thinking I have an idea which I have not” (PI §22). Likewise, Berkeley’s view is that I cannot be mistaken when it comes to their *nature*. As Hylas puts it, “I know them perfectly” (DHP 206) (see chapter three (2.1 and 2.2) for more on Berkeley’s view that both the existence and nature of our ideas is transparently known). Regarding self-knowledge, Berkeley claims (this time via Philonous) that

I know what I mean by the terms ‘I’ and ‘myself’; and I know this immediately, or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, colour, or a sound. (DHP 232)

Here Berkeley reiterates the claim that although I do not *perceive* whatever it is that is signified by the terms ‘I’ and ‘myself’, my knowledge thereof is no less immediate than the knowledge I have of my ideas.

When it comes to ideas, either of sensation or memory and imagination, immediate knowledge, for Berkeley, means immediate experience of determinate qualities, while *mediate* knowledge involves using that immediate knowledge – these ideas – as *signs* in order to make more general or universal claims about the world.²⁷ The *esse* of ideas is *percipi*, while the *esse* of spirits is *percipere* (or *velle i.e. agere*). Thus, in either case, gaining immediate data ought to involve perception. Perception, for Berkeley, can be construed in two ways: either in terms of what is perceived (ideas) or in terms of acts of perceiving (which we attribute to spirits). It ought to follow, then, that perceptual *data* takes the form of either perceived ideas or knowledge of the acts of perceiving. The question, then, is whether Berkeley provides an account of immediate perceptual data concerning the self. I think he does and, while this immediate data doesn’t take the form of ideas, it is nonetheless grounded in perception.

So what exactly is our ‘immediate data’ concerning the mind? I will argue that it is Berkeley’s account of the *phenomenology* of willing and understanding that constitutes

²⁷ See chapter two (3.2 and 3.3) for a discussion of sign-usage and ‘general knowledge’ in Berkeley.

his account of immediate self-knowledge. By outlining the difference between the spirit as it is called ‘willing’ and the spirit as it is called ‘understanding’, i.e., the different ways we *perceive ideas*, I contend, Berkeley outlines the immediate data available to us pertaining to the existence and nature of our own mind. We might call this Berkeley’s account of ‘sensing-data’ (in contrast with Russell’s ‘sense-data’). On this reading, knowledge of the self does not take the form of ideas but is constituted by the *experience* of perceiving those ideas in different ways.²⁸

As it is affected by ideas, Berkeley tells us, the spirit is called ‘understanding’, while as it produces ideas or “operates about them”, it is called the ‘will’.²⁹ It is worth noting, however, that Berkeley insists these are two different terms *for the same thing*: a thinking, active principle which can perceive ideas in different ways. In Adams’ words, “they are not properly regarded as parts or components, but as the mind-operating-in-a-certain-way” (1973 [in 1991], 440).³⁰ These different perceptual activities are simply different ways in which a single, individuated thing goes about perceiving and therefore (as Berkeley sees it) existing.³¹ Berkeley defines spirit as, “that active principle of motion and change in ideas”, “that which acts”, and as something that produces certain effects (PHK §27). He explains that we have notional knowledge of soul or spirit insofar as “we know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK §27) and he makes it clear that even though we cannot have an idea of spirit, this does not preclude our *knowing* it.³²

What exactly does understanding the meaning of the word ‘spirit’ involve? Berkeley’s answer is that it means understanding *what it does*. We frequently perceive series of ideas that could only have been caused by a spirit (PHK §145-47). Some of those ideas are caused by our own spirit while some are not, and thus we learn to differentiate between what our own spirit does and does not do. A second question that arises is what

²⁸ Like Berkeley, Peter Browne claims that we have an “immediate internal Consciousness... of the Mind’s different manner of *Acting* or *Operating*” (*Analogy*, 24). The difference is that Browne does *not* think this constitutes immediate self-knowledge but rather a basis on which to infer the existence of the self.

²⁹ This puts Berkeley at odds with Locke’s understanding of these terms. Locke characterises ‘understanding’ as “the power of thinking” and ‘will’ as “the power of volition” (EHU 2.6.2).

³⁰ See also NB 848 & 871 where (respectively) Berkeley writes: “I must not Mention the Understanding as a faculty or part of the Mind, I must include Understanding & Will etc in the word Spirit by wch I mean all that is active” and “I must not say the Will & Understanding are all one but that they are both Abstract Ideas i.e. none at all. they not being even ratione different from the Spirit, Qua faculties, or Active.”

³¹ The ‘will’ and the ‘understanding’ are not powers of a “third kind of substance or being” distinct from them but rather two descriptions of the mind depending on its relation to the ideas it perceives (PHK §27).

³² It is a mistake to claim (as Russell does) that, in Berkeley’s system, having an idea of something is the only kind of knowledge. In PHK §89, he writes: “the term ‘idea’ would be improperly extended to signify every thing we know or have any notion of.” See also PHK §27, §142.

it means to gain immediate knowledge of the ‘will’ and the ‘understanding’? And *how* do I gain such knowledge if it is not represented to me by my ideas? Berkeley’s answer to this question is that, although we do not have ideas that represent the activity of our spirit, we are nonetheless able to experience the different ways the spirit perceives. There is, for Berkeley, a distinction between the experience of being a willing agent and the experience of being an understanding one – and our awareness of this distinction is dependent on the nature of the ideas perceived. While self-knowledge is not entirely reducible to the perception of ideas it does *require* that perception. For Berkeley, self-knowledge consists in perceiving those ideas in different ways and an awareness of *what that is like*. It is for this reason, I have suggested, that Berkeley’s account of the phenomenology of being a willing and understanding agent is key to his account of self-knowledge.

In §§28-30 of the *Principles*, Berkeley describes the difference between ‘willing’ and ‘understanding’. It is in these passages, I suggest, that Berkeley provides us with an account of the phenomenology of being a perceiving agent. Again, I think the importance of Berkeley’s account of ‘what it is like’ to be a perceiving being is perhaps underplayed in discussions in the secondary literature.³³ Yet, while I acknowledge that Berkeley was not engaged in ‘phenomenology’ in any robust sense, his writings exhibit a recurring interest in the nature of our experiences and the issue of ‘what it is like’ to be a perceiving being, especially in these passages. Berkeley develops this account by explaining what these two perceptual acts are like, as well as the kinds of ideas that are involved in these experiences. First, he describes ‘willing’:

I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy; and by the same power is obliterated, and makes way for another. This making or unmaking of ideas very properly denotes the mind active. Thus much is certain, and grounded on experience (PHK §28)

³³ Adams is one commentator who does pick up on what I am calling the phenomenological aspect of Berkeley’s discussion of self-knowledge. He claims, “[w]e might say that to have the notion of a mental state or act of which we have no idea is [for Berkeley] in part to know *what it is like*, or to be able to represent to ourselves *what it is like*, to do that act or experience that state”. See 1973 [in 1991], 343 (my emphasis). I think this reading of Berkeley’s ‘notions’ is about right. Winkler also claims that Berkeley distinguishes between the “*phenomenological*” features of ideas of sensation and imagination. See 1989, 12-13.

Berkeley explains that spirit is appropriately termed ‘will’ in cases where it has total control over the ideas it perceives. In other words, knowledge of oneself as ‘willing’ is constituted by the awareness we have of ourselves as actively exerting voluntary control over our ideas. To experience oneself as ‘willing’ is to find oneself able to “excite ideas in my mind at pleasure” by literally making and unmaking ideas. Berkeley maintains that it is clear in such cases that there is a contrast with our experience of sense-perception. What’s more, he maintains that this contrast is something we are immediately aware of:

But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find the ideas actually perceived by sense have not a like dependence on my will. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view; and so likewise as to the hearing and other senses, the ideas imprinted on them are not creatures of my will. (PHK §29)

In this passage, Berkeley describes the spirit as it is ‘understanding’, i.e., when the ideas I perceive are involuntary.³⁴ In this instance, I have no determination over the ideas I see, hear, and so on. The experience of ‘understanding’ is one of perceiving ideas that “are not creatures of my will”. Again, Berkeley argues that our experience of perceiving these ideas will make the distinction between the will and the understanding immediately clear. For, this is not the kind of knowledge that requires reflection or inference but is immediately given. Thus, the way we perceive our ideas, and what that is like, constitutes immediate data – not of sensible things but of the mind. It is not sense-data but what I have called *sensing*-data. As Robert Adams puts it, “there is [for Berkeley] another basic way of being aware of something, besides awareness by way of ideas” (1973 [in 1991],

³⁴ It is worth noting that Berkeley thinks that willing can produce more than just ideas of imagination in that, by means of volition, we can move our own limbs and thereby produce a restricted set of ideas of sensation. Beyond ideas of imagination, he explains, “the will of man has no other object than barely the motion of the limbs of his body” (PHK §147). Bodily movements, therefore, constitute a kind of idea of sensation that is voluntarily produced. Whether or not Berkeley thinks human agents have genuine causal efficacy, even in a limited sense, is contested by commentators. Some (such as Lee 2012) have argued that Berkeley is an occasionalist and that genuine causal agency is, for humans, limited to causing ideas of imagination. McDonough 2008 argues that Berkeley is a ‘concurrentist’; that both God and human agents concurrently cause human bodily movements. Others (such as Roberts 2007, 111-123) have argued that Berkeley’s metaphysics is in fact incompatible with occasionalism. Falkenstein is committed to Berkeley being an occasionalist ‘in a sense’ (as he puts it). His reading entails that human agents determine or choose which bodily movements will take place while God causes them. See 1990, 437-38. For the most part, I leave aside the issue of bodily movement in what follows.

425). Likewise, I think Kenneth Winkler is reading Berkeley in the same vein when he writes:

Berkeleyan self-consciousness is knowledge based on experience (or what we might call ‘phenomenological fact’), but it is not (insofar as it is self-consciousness) object-involving.” (2011, 224)

Winkler’s remark conveys both the anti-abstractionist (non-Cartesian-subject involving) nature of Berkeley’s account of the mind as well as the important role phenomenology plays in Berkeley’s account of perception. Thus, we might say that, for Berkeley, while knowledge via ideas is knowledge of what something else is like *to me*, knowledge of the mind is knowledge of what it is like *to be me*.³⁵ So, again, while I think his employment of the term is useful, Russell is wrong to attribute to Berkeley the claim that *only ideas* constitute “immediate data”.

2.5 Strengths of this reading

There are at least three reasons why this reading of Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge as immediate experience perceptual acts is a plausible one. First, it is consistent with the most plausible reading of Berkeley’s metaphysics of spirit: the anti-abstractionist account advocated by Daniel (2008 & 2018). Second, this reading is compatible with Berkeley’s broader claim that existence is not to be conceived of separately from perception. I will not go through the arguments for these claims again in detail, but, briefly, if the mind just *is* its perceptual acts then it follows that knowledge of the mind consists in knowledge of those acts (see sections 2.1. and 2.2), which I was I argued in the previous sub-section. Third, this reading helps to resolve a potential inconsistency that arises at the very beginning of the *Principles*. I will focus on this third strength of my reading in what follows.

³⁵ Recall that on Flage’s reading of notional knowledge (knowledge via notions as opposed to ideas) even the knowledge we have of our own mind is ‘relative’ and not ‘by acquaintance’. He claims that since such knowledge is relative it cannot provide us with knowledge of “the inherent nature of a mind”. See 1987, 173. I hope to have shown that (a) Berkeley *does* provide an account of our immediate knowledge of the nature of a mind, and (b) that had he not done so this would have serious repercussions for his wider epistemology of other minds.

In the opening line of the *Principles*, Berkeley writes:

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

Amidst his now familiar taxonomy of ideas, consisting of ideas of sensation (“actually imprinted on the senses”) as well as those “formed by help of memory and imagination”m Berkeley seems to suggest that some ideas are “perceived by attending to passions and operations of the mind”. This looks like a standard Lockean claim, but it turns out to be one that Berkeley rejects later in the *Principles* where he denies that we can

frame abstract notions of the powers and acts of the mind, and consider them prescinded, as well as from the mind or spirit it self as from their respective objects and effects. (PHK §143)

Similarly, Berkeley states that “it is impossible that any degree of those powers [of the mind] should be represented in an idea” (PHK §148).³⁶ In light of Berkeley’s rejection of the Lockean view that ideas representing the operations of the mind can be produced by reflection, the question arises how we should interpret the opening line of the *Principles*/

The first thing to note is that this question only arises if the clause in question (“or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind”) is taken to refer to “ideas” and not “objects of knowledge”. For some commentators, this is evidence that the opening of the *Principles* contains a taxonomy of *objects of knowledge* rather than ideas (e.g., Winkler 2011, 234).³⁷ I am inclined to agree. Even so, a further question still remains, concerning what exactly Berkeley means when he says that “the

³⁶ As Adams explains, Berkeley rejects the Lockean view, holding “that only ideas of sense are properly called ‘ideas’ and there are no ideas of reflexion”. See 1973 [in 1991], 429. Browne also rejects this Lockean claim. He argues that it is a mistake to think that the mind “has a native Faculty for a *Direct View* and *Immediate Idea* of its own immaterial Principle and its Operations” (*Analogy*, 29).

³⁷ Winkler claims that Berkeley is here using the term ‘object’ in an “undemanding sense” in reference to anything about which I can make a propositional claim. See 2011, 234. Adams (1973 [in 1991], 442 [endnote 7]) also supports this claim. See E. J. Furlong 1960 for a full discussion of this ambiguity.

passions and operations of mind” are objects of human knowledge. A strength of the reading that I have developed is that it provides an answer to this question.

I think the most plausible way to resolve this issue is to take the term ‘attending’ in this passage, not as synonymous with ‘perceiving’ but closer to ‘being aware of’ or ‘experiencing’. Again, I think this is Berkeley’s attempt to develop a phenomenological account of perception. In the opening section of the *Principles*, on my reading, Berkeley offers a taxonomy not of ideas but of the objects of human knowledge more generally. This is consistent with the claim, introduced in the 1734 edition, that “[w]hat I know, that I have some notion of” (PHK §142) and the claim (in PHK §89) that ideas, spirits, and relations are all the objects of human knowledge. Thus, my reading of Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge can help us to understand just what is going on in the opening of the *Principles*, where Berkeley’s outlines all the objects of human knowledge.

I have argued that Berkeley’s account of self-knowledge provides us with immediate data, i.e., knowledge of the different ways we perceive. As such, I contend, we can now make more sense of the claim that it is by means of self-knowledge that we come to gain mediate knowledge of other spirits (DHP 231). *By virtue of its being a spirit*, I can say of another spirit: it must, at times, be ‘willing’, and, at others, ‘understanding’. Of course, I cannot necessarily make claims about *just what it is* another spirit is willing or understanding (i.e., the specific ideas it is perceiving), but this is no more problematic than not being able to mediate apprehend the accidental features (e.g. the colour or size) of a triangle I have not yet perceived.³⁸ I can still know what it means to say ‘I say perceive a triangle’, even if I cannot conceive of the particular triangle in question. Likewise, Berkeley thinks, I know what it means to say ‘I am willing’ or ‘I am understanding’, if I cannot conceive of the particular ideas being perceived. I will continue to develop this line of interpretation in the next section and emphasise why this is a strength of my reading. Before doing so, however, I will outline Talia Mae Bettcher’s reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge as *non-perceptual* before explaining why such a reading is incompatible with both my account and, more importantly, Berkeley’s own remarks.

³⁸ I can know what a triangle is, in a ‘universal’ sense, Berkeley claims without knowing the accidental features of any particular triangle or triangles (PI §16).

2.6 Self-knowledge as perceptual

Thus far, I have argued that according to Berkeley's account of self-knowledge, we gain immediate knowledge of our own spirit by means of our immediate experience of the will and the understanding. On my reading, immediate awareness of the ways in which we perceive ideas constitutes immediate self-knowledge. In this sub-section, I anticipate an objection to this reading. The type of objection I anticipate is likely to be derived from the following remark:

But *besides* all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something that knows or perceives them, and exercises divers operations, as willing, imagining, remembering about them. (PHK §2, my emphasis)

In this passage, Berkeley seems to suggest that spirit, which “knows and perceives” ideas, is distinct from the objects of knowledge. This suggests not only that spirits are not the kinds of things we can have ideas of, but that they are not the kinds of things we can have immediate knowledge of at all. In that case, it would be more plausible to take Berkeley to hold that we have a notion of spirit *only* insofar as we, “understand the meaning of the word” (PHK §140). Talia Mae Bettcher is a proponent of reading Berkeley in this way, and I focus on her interpretation in what follows.

I think it would be very surprising, and problematic, if this turned out to be Berkeley's view – especially since he places such an emphasis on the role of self-knowledge in our knowledge of other minds. This much is acknowledged by Bettcher who writes:

Does Berkeley think ‘What I am myself’ and ‘that which I denote by “I”’ is unavailable to awareness? It seems hard to believe, especially when he then writes... we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is the image or idea of them (2007, 46)

So Bettcher, like me, is convinced that Berkeley must have an account of knowledge of oneself as spirit. But in contrast to my reading, Bettcher then claims we can avoid this concern if we see self-knowledge as a piece of “self-evident” information; something we, in effect, get for free when we realise that we are neither *nothing* nor an idea (nor a

collection of ideas). As Bettcher puts it, self-knowledge is a kind of “inward feeling” or “immediate awareness that accompanies all our thinking (the ‘I’)”. In this way, Bettcher defends a reading in which the self, or spirit in general, should be understood neither as an object of knowledge nor in terms of perception. Rather, Bettcher argues, Berkeley’s account of knowledge of one’s own mind should be construed as a kind of “*non-perceptual awareness*” (2007, 46, emphasis in original).

Despite this disagreement, in some ways Bettcher’s interpretation is consistent with my own. For example, she argues that if Berkeley thinks that self-knowledge is the kind of awareness that can easily be confused for an idea, then it is most likely “a kind of datum or inner feeling”. Likewise, she affirms the claim that Berkeley rejects inferential accounts of the mind and its operations, according to which thought, or perception, is key to knowledge of a thinker or perceiver (2007, 47-48).

However, unsurprisingly, I take issue with Bettcher’s claim that Berkeleian self-knowledge is non-perceptual. The way that we become aware of ourselves *as ourselves*, on Bettcher’s reading, is by becoming conscious of the difference between (i) what is distinct from oneself, and (ii) what is not. Bettcher places a great deal of emphasis on the relationship between perceivers and the perceived and maintains that for Berkeley it is by acknowledging this relationship that we come to appreciate the self-evidence of the existence of the *relata*. That is, our awareness of the relation between perceiver and perceived comes first and our awareness of those *relata* second. For that reason, on this reading, the manner of perceiving and the variability of that which is perceived, i.e., our ideas, does not play a role in providing immediate data pertaining to the self. For self-knowledge, all that is required is knowledge of the relationship between perceivers and perceived things. In Bettcher’s words, “[w]e know that spirit perceives ideas and once we know that we know all that we need to know” (2007, 51).

The first concern I have with this reading is that since the *existence* of spirit is, for Berkeley, to be construed in terms of perception, there ought to be a good reason why *knowledge* of it is not. To suggest otherwise threatens to reduce self-knowledge to a kind of abstraction: an unnecessary attempt to distinguish a thing, in this case spirit, from the means by which we come to know it. Certainly, Berkeley gives us good reasons why one’s own spirit cannot be immediately *perceived*: because spirits are active entities (PHK §27). But it seems to me that Bettcher takes an unwarranted step from (i) self-

knowledge is not perceived, to (ii) self-knowledge is not *perceptual* at all. Winkler, responding to Bettcher, suggests that such a move might be informed by Berkeley's claim that spirit, "cannot be of itself perceived" (PHK §27; Winkler 2011, 234). However, as I have stressed, for Berkeley there is more to perceptual knowledge than just what is perceived; we also gain immediate knowledge of the *acts* of perception – by being the subject of those acts.

The final reason to question Bettcher's reading is that later in the *Principles* Berkeley claims that spirits *can* be objects of knowledge. He writes: "[t]o me it seems that ideas, spirits, and relations are all in their respective kinds the objects of human knowledge." (PHK §89). This means that Bettcher's interpretation of the ambiguity in PHK §1 ends up contradicting Berkeley's more explicit claim later in that work. Overall, then, there is as much textual support against her reading as there is for it.

Bettcher's reading also gets us no closer to understanding how it is I use knowledge of my own spirit to gain mediate knowledge of other spirits. If self-knowledge is constituted merely by the self-evidence of oneself as a subject in a perceiver-perceived thing relationship, it is hard to see how we could get any further than the inference that other spirits exist. But Berkeley wants to say more than this: his claim is that we know the *meaning* of the word 'spirit' – whether applied to myself or another agent. What's more, in the case of God's spirit, it is key to Berkeley's metaphysics that we know more than just that he exists, but that we can make claims about his nature and compare him with ourselves. I previously emphasised the importance of self-knowledge and the key role it plays in gaining mediate knowledge of both infinite and other finite spirits. As such, it is a problem for any reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge if it leaves us unclear as to what other spirits are like. I think these concerns are enough to undermine the force of this objection and to bring into question Bettcher's non-perceptual reading of self-knowledge. In the next section, I provide further support for my reading by demonstrating that it is consistent with Berkeley's claims about knowledge of other minds.

3. Knowing You

3.1 Mediate knowledge of other minds

The reading of Berkeley's account of self-knowledge develop in the previous section is informed by his claim that it is only by virtue of having immediate knowledge of one's own spirit that we can gain knowledge of other spirits. It is worth reiterating two claims confirm that this is Berkeley's view. Firstly, in the *Three Dialogues*, he explains that

My own mind and ideas I have an immediate knowledge of; and by help of these, do mediately apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas.
(DHP 231-32)

And in the *Principles*, he claims that

we know other spirits *by means of our own soul*, which is in that sense the image or idea of them (PHK §140, my emphasis)

The first claim indicates that Berkeley thinks we use the immediate knowledge we have of ourselves as spirits to gain knowledge of the existence of others. The second indicates that self-knowledge is key to understanding what other spirits are like. Together, these claims make it clear that knowledge of both the existence and nature of other minds depends upon the immediate knowledge we have of our own mind. As Adams puts it, “[o]ur notion of ourselves enables us to conceive of other spirits” (1973 [in 1991], 434). Worth noting, then, is the significant epistemological burden Berkeley places on his account of self-knowledge. With it stands or falls not just the knowledge we have of our own mind but of any minds whatsoever.

I hope to have shown by this point that Berkeley *does* provide us with an account of self-knowledge which is consistent with both:

- (i) His commitment to the view that existence cannot be abstracted from perception, and
- (ii) His acceptance of the likeness principle and the thesis that ideas cannot be represented by spirits.

But how should we understand Berkeley's account of knowledge of *other* minds? Answering this question will be the task of this section. I take it to be a strength of my interpretation that it clarifies how Berkeley thinks we gain knowledge of both the existence and the nature of other minds.

Regarding the existence of other minds, the first thing Berkeley argues is that just because we cannot be said to have an idea of them we should not conclude that they do not exist. Berkeley thus pre-empts the kind of objection, voiced by Thomas Reid, that his philosophy leaves us with no “ground to conclude, that there are other intelligent beings, like myself” (EIP 162). Such objections, Berkeley argues, are based on a false premise, namely, that *all* knowledge is derived from ideas:

From the opinion that spirits are to be known after the manner of an idea or sensation have arisen many absurd and heterodox tenets, and much scepticism about the nature of the soul. It is even probable, that this opinion may have produced a doubt in some, whether they had any soul at all distinct from their body, *since upon inquiry they could not find they had an idea of it.* (PHK §137, my emphasis)

This passage indicates that Berkeley does not see it as a problem for his system that it rules out having ideas of spirits. Only if we take it that we *should* have ideas of spirits, he argues, do problematic conclusions follow – but Berkeley’s epistemology makes it clear we should not. We might reconstruct the kind of argument Berkeley is combatting here like so:

1. If I cannot have an idea of X, then I cannot have knowledge of X.
2. I cannot have an idea of the mind.
3. Therefore, I cannot have knowledge of the mind.

It’s clear that Berkeley would reject premise (1) of this argument. As we have seen already, Berkeley thinks we can have notions where we cannot have ideas. Indeed, Berkeley suggests that many unorthodox and absurd conclusions have been drawn from the kind of reasoning outlined above; most notably, the sceptical conclusion that there is no soul (or mind, spirit, self) distinct from the body at all.³⁹ But as we have seen already, to look for an idea of spirit is an error and involves looking for a particular kind of

³⁹ While Berkeley is most likely here alluding to materialists like Hobbes he also seems to pre-empt Hume’s denial of the self, which proceeds along similar grounds. Hume writes: “For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception...If any one, upon serious and unprejudiced reflection, thinks he has a different notion of *himself*, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continued, which he calls *himself*; though I am certain there is no such principle in me.” (*Treatise*, 252) In other words, from the fact that he cannot perceive a self but only its acts and objects Hume concludes that no self exists.

knowledge where there is none to be had. Looking for an idea of spirit, Berkeley argues, is like trying “to comprehend a ‘round square’” (PHK §136).

Even so, Berkeley argues that even though we cannot have an idea of spirit, we can nonetheless gain knowledge of them. He explains that while spirits cannot be known “by way of idea” (PHK §142) our knowledge of their existence is nonetheless dependent on our perception of ideas in some regard. This is an important distinction and worth carefully clarifying. Berkeley denies that we have ideas that represent spirits. I can perceive a sensible thing like the sun and later have an idea of the sun when I remember or imagine it (PHK §33). But spirits are “entirely distinct” from ideas and it is impossible for one to represent the other (PHK §2) (since, Berkeley thinks, representation requires resemblance). Nonetheless, our perception of ideas and our knowledge of spirits are not *entirely* unrelated. For, Berkeley explains, while idea cannot represent spirits, they can nonetheless inform us of their existence. He writes: “it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits, otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. (PHK §145) This claim, that ideas provide us with knowledge of the *existence* of other spirits, is the culmination of Berkeley’s having traced the ramifications of the likeness principle through from PHK §8, via §§25-27, to §135 where he eventually concludes that “it is manifestly impossible there should be any such idea [i.e., of spirit]”. But what does it mean to know the existence of other spirits “by their operations”? He continues:

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

This passage contains some important claims. First, my perception of certain “motions, changes, and combinations of ideas” tells me that there are other agents out there *like myself*. With that in mind, it follows that if I know what *I* am like (as outlined in section 2.3), and I know that these agents are like me, I know what these other agents are like. In this way, Berkeley is able to account for our knowledge of not just the existence but also the nature of other minds.

It is in this sense, then, I suggest, that Berkeley thinks we have a notion of other spirits or minds, “in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK §27). When, for example, I affirm or deny something about a ‘mind’ or ‘spirit’, I know what kind of thing I am talking about. Why? Because I know *what it is like* to be a spirit. Berkeley also clarifies that our knowledge of other spirits is “not immediate” and thus, unlike the knowledge I have of my own mind, is *not* analogous to the knowledge I have of my ideas. Finally, he maintains that it is thanks to the “intervention” of ideas “by me referred to agents or spirits distinct from myself” that I gain knowledge of the existence of other minds. He thus clarifies both that knowledge of other minds is mediated by ideas and also that it depends on my attributing certain ideas to the action of spirits like myself. In this way, Berkeley contends, our perceptions of certain ideas in nature “convince us, human agents are concerned in producing them” (PHK §146).

In the *Principles*, Berkeley does not specify in any great depth which kinds of ideas can convince us of the existence of other human minds. This is perhaps because, as he suggests in his *Notebooks*, the second part of the *Principles* (which never appeared) was intended to deal with nature of mind in greater depth (see NB 878; see also Flage 1987, 2). However, he does explain that:

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

That is, we perceive a collection of ideas which we call a human body (although he qualifies this with the remark that “we do not see a man, if by ‘man’ is meant that which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do”) and marks out the existence of spirits like ourselves. Such perceptual experiences signify the existence of spirits like us because *we too* have an intimate relationship with a collection of ideas we call a human body. Thus, according to Berkeley, we make an inferential move from the perception of such ideas to the existence of spirits like us. That is, from the fact that

- (i) my spirit shares a causal relationship with a collection of ideas I call a ‘human body’

we take the existence of a similar collection of ideas to be part of an analogous situation in which

- (ii) another spirit shares a causal relationship with a collection of ideas I call a 'human body'.

There is also a brief discussion of our knowledge of the existence of other minds in *Alciphron*, where the titular figure explains:

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

Alciphron's claim is that speech, or language-use, is evidence of "an intelligent, thinking, designing cause" (AMP 4.7). The conclusion of Alciphron's argument, in the context of the dialogue, is that "the like whereof cannot be applied to prove the existence of God". As he puts it to Euphranor (Berkeley's spokesperson), "you will not, I suppose, pretend that God speaks to man in the same clear manner as one man does to another?" In response, Euphranor does not contest the claim that language-usage is the best evidence of the existence of an intelligent mind but argues that God *also* "speaks to men by the intervention and use of arbitrary, outward, sensible signs, having no resemblance or necessary connexion with the things they stand for and suggest". The two thinkers therefore agree that sign-usage, which Berkeley calls "the true nature of language" (AMP 4.12), is the best evidence of the presence of an intelligent mind. Berkeley thinks this applies to both the mind of God and other finite minds, the difference being merely the scale and complexity of the "articulation, combination, variety" of those signs (AMP 4.12).

While the specific details vary across the two accounts (the former in the *Principles*, the latter in *Alciphron*) Berkeley's point remains the same: we gain knowledge of the existence of other minds by means of certain ideas which we take to be signs thereof. This applies both in the case of other finite, human minds like our own and in the case of the divine spirit, God. Again, the role of self-knowledge – the immediate knowledge we have of our own mind – is crucial. It is only because of the prior knowledge we have of the relationship between ourselves and the ideas we cause (e.g. our own bodily movement, our own speech) that we can make the inference from a similar set of ideas to a similar cause. For, as Euphranor puts it, "in general, to know one thing by means of another, must I not first know that other thing?" (AMP 4.8).

3.2 *Representationalism about other minds?*

My final aim in this chapter is to address a possible concern about Berkeley's account of other minds. This concern arises in light of the fact that Berkeley's account of our mediate knowledge of other minds and the representationalist model of knowledge of sensible things (outlined in chapter one) are structurally analogous. Since Berkeley takes representationalism to inevitably lead to scepticism about our knowledge of sensible things, then the concern arises that Berkeley's view (by his own reasoning) leads to scepticism about other minds.⁴⁰ In which case, Reid's claim that Berkeley's system affords no "ground to conclude, that there are other intelligent beings, like myself" may turn out to be justified (EIP 168).

In what sense is Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds analogous to the representationalist model of knowledge of sensible things? To begin, it is worth reiterating what representationalists take knowledge of sensible things to consist in.⁴¹ Representationalism is the view that our knowledge of things in the world is necessarily mediated by ideas which exist only in the mind and which represent them. Berkeley characterises representationalists as those who maintain that

though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind in an unthinking substance. (PHK §8)

⁴⁰ Kenneth Winkler raises this concern, arguing that at the very least Berkeley's epistemology of mind undermines his professed aim of demonstrating 'the reality and perfection of human knowledge' (2011, 228). Similarly, Jonathan Bennett thinks Berkeley cannot avoid scepticism when it comes to other minds (1971, 219-20).

⁴¹ See my introduction (section three) for some precursory remarks on my use of the terms 'representationalist' and 'representationalism'.

He goes on to explain that, according to those committed to such a view, our ideas are “pictures or representations” of “those supposed originals or external things”. Figure 1 is an attempt to depict the representationalist model of knowledge of sensible things. In this diagram, a perceiver or mind is depicted as having immediate knowledge only of her ideas. The ideas, of both primary qualities (size, shape, motion) and secondary qualities (light, colours, warmth), bear a certain relation, which might be a causal relation, an inherence relation or a resemblance relation, depending on the specifics of the theory, to the sensible object – in this case, the sun. In this way (“by way of ideas”) the perceiver gains *mediate* knowledge of the sun.

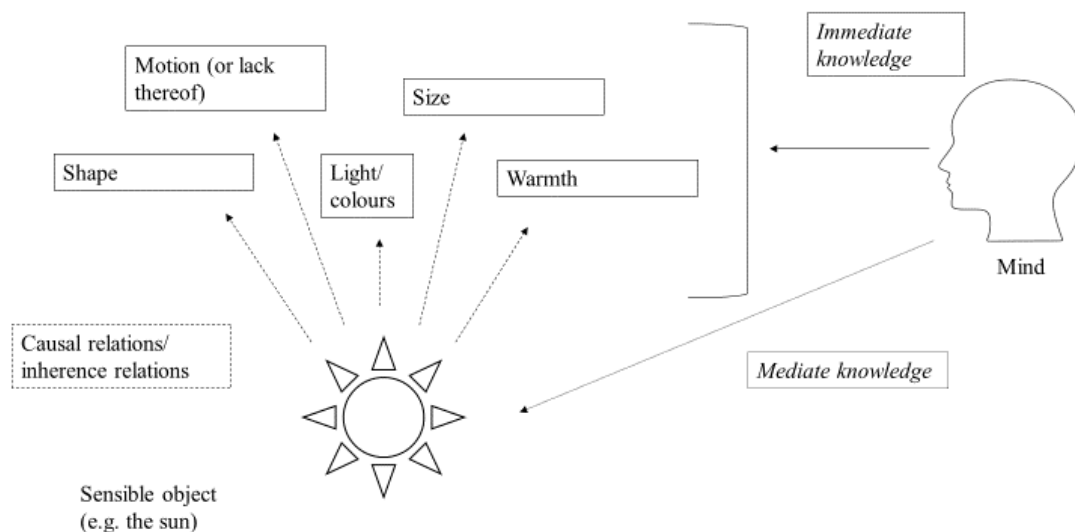


Figure 1. *The representationalist model of knowledge of sensible things.*

There is a sense in which Berkeley’s account of knowledge of other minds is analogous to that model. As Melissa Frankel explains:

One might note at this point that the indirect experience that we purportedly have of the mind-independent world [i.e. according to representationalists], which involves assuming a likeness between the world and the ideas that we immediately perceive, is structurally analogous to the indirect experience of other minds that Berkeley seems to be proposing (2009, 388).

Figure 2 is an attempt to capture the structure of Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds. The similarity between these two models is the reason why Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds can be compared with the representationalist account of knowledge of sensible things:

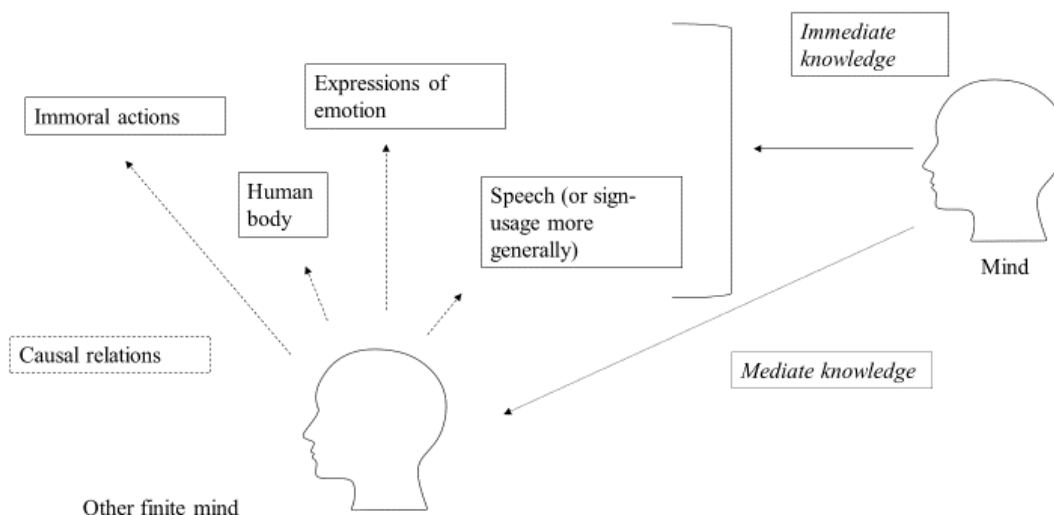


Figure 2. Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds.

In this diagram, the perceiver or mind is depicted as having immediate knowledge of perceptual phenomena; collections of ideas such as the human body and its various displays of emotion, as well as speech and meaningful sign-usage more generally. Berkeley's claim is that we infer that there is a causal relation between these phenomena and another finite mind. This inference, Berkeley argues, "convince[s] us, human agents are concerned in producing them" (PHK §146). For that reason, the phenomena are, he explains, taken as "signs and effects indicating distinct finite agents like ourselves" (DHP 233). Thus, we find the perceiver gaining mediate knowledge of the existence of another finite mind like herself – not "by way of idea" but "depending on the intervention of ideas" (PHK §145).

I have included immoral actions amongst the signs of the existence of other finite, human minds – although, it should be noted that in the case of God this does not apply. I do so in light of a reading of Berkeley's argument for other minds developed by Lorne Falkenstein (1990). As Falkenstein explains, according to Berkeley, there is something important to be inferred from the fact that

among our ideas of reality [i.e. ideas of sensation] there are some, those of the motions of animate bodies, which exhibit a degree of irregularity, inconstancy of purpose, greed, stupidity, and sheer perversity which is simply inconsistent with the notion that these ideas are produced by a wise and benevolent being. (1990, 438)

Berkeley argues that while in a strict sense the ideas which make up our experiences of wrong-doing and immoral action are, like all ideas, ultimately caused by God, the moral praise- or blame-worthiness of human actions nonetheless lies with the wills of finite agents (Lee 2012, 568-71).⁴² As Philonous explains in the *Dialogues*,

It is true, I have denied there are any other agents besides spirits: but this is very consistent with allowing to thinking rational beings, in the production of motions, the use of limited powers, ultimately indeed derived from God, but immediately under the direction of their own wills, which is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their actions. (DHP 237)

Berkeley's point is that while all causal agency is ultimately derived from God, finite agents like ourselves have "limited powers" and are therefore able to alter, in a restricted manner, the series of sensible ideas that make up the world around us. This is part of Berkeley's answer to the problem of evil, a particular problem for Berkeley since, as Hylas points out, if you make God "the immediate author of all motions in nature" then you also make him "the author of murder, sacrilege, adultery, and the like heinous sins" (DHP 236).⁴³ Berkeley's claim is that God is not the *immediate* cause of such "motions", which he permits human agents to affect in a limited way, thus gifting humans some degree of freedom. This means that when we will for something immoral to happen, as is often the case in a world full of imperfect agents, we (and not God) are entitled to the

⁴² Sukjae Lee points to remarks in Berkeley's correspondence with Johnson where he claims that "[d]ifficulties about the principle of moral actions will cease, if we consider that all guilt is in the will, and that our ideas, from whatever cause they are produced are alike inert" (see Hight 2013, 289 & 303). As Lee puts it, Berkeley here offers his answer to the 'author of sin' problem: "the claim that all guilt is in the will" (2012, 571). Berkeley concludes from this that I am equally guilty of murder, for example, "whether I kill a man with my hands or an instrument; whether I do it myself or make use of a ruffian" (Hight 2013, 303). Likewise, I am guilty of whatever immoral action I will, whether I am the proximate cause of that action or God is. It is questionable, however, whether this account of moral responsibility is compatible with Berkeley's account of human agency. As Lee suggests, occasionalist readings of Berkeley on human agency are hard (but not impossible) to reconcile with the claim that humans, and not God, are responsible for immoral action (2012, 569-70).

⁴³ More accurately, this is Berkeley's answer to the problem of *human* evil. He provides an answer to the problem of *natural* evil in PHK §§152-53.

guilt of our actions. As a result, when we witness immoral action, and are not the cause of it ourselves, we can reasonably take ourselves to be in the presence of another finite, *imperfect* being.

Beyond the resemblance shared between these two diagrams in what sense can these two models of knowledge be said to be similar? The key feature which appears to be shared between them is that we gain mediate knowledge of one thing by means of another: ideas. The problem is that Berkeley rejects indirect theories of knowledge because they inevitably lead to scepticism concerning the thing *mediately* known.⁴⁴ The problem would then be that if Berkeley thinks representationalists are committed to scepticism about sensible things then, according to his own reasoning, the parity of these two cases means that Berkeley is committed to scepticism about other minds.

However, it turns out that such an objection is only superficially relevant. That is, the two models of knowledge only *appear* to be analogous. For there is one key difference between representationalism about sensible things and Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds.⁴⁵ Berkeley's key concern with the representationalist model is that in order to gain knowledge of one thing via another, one must *already* know that there is a representation relation shared between the two. As Euphranor puts it, "to know one thing by means of another, must I not first know that other thing?" (AMP 4.8). I discussed this in depth in chapter one, but it is worth re-iterating. In the *Dialogues*, for example, Philonous explains to Hylas that in order to see a statue or picture of Caesar *as a statue or picture of Caesar* one must "proceed from reason and memory" pertaining to some prior knowledge of Caesar (DHP 204). In other words, if one had never heard of Caesar, nor observed a depiction of him, one would not see that statue as one *of* Caesar. Rather, it would simply represent "some colours and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole" (DHP 203).⁴⁶ Berkeley's point is that in order to gain knowledge of sensible things via ideas which represent them, one would need to *already*

⁴⁴ See chapter one for a full discussion of Berkeley's anti-representationalism *qua* anti-scepticism.

⁴⁵ Thanks to Clare Moriarty for pointing me in the direction of this important difference.

⁴⁶ Although, in truth, to see a statue of Caesar as nothing but some colour and figures, one would probably have to be in a situation like that of Molyneux's 'man born blind made to see' since even if you had never heard of Caesar, you would presumably take the statue to be 'of a Roman' or simply 'of a man'. As Berkeley himself notes, it is very difficult to disentangle the various associations we form as a result of habit and repeated experience. In the *New Theory*, for example, he writes: "we find it so difficult to discriminate between the immediate and mediate objects of sight, and are so prone to attribute to the former, what belongs only to the latter. They are, as it were, most closely twisted, blended, and incorporated together. And the prejudice is confirmed and riveted in our thoughts by a long tract of time, by the use of language, and want of reflexion" (NTV §51).

know that there is a representation relation shared between them. But, he argues, no such knowledge is available. With these claims in mind, Philonous throws the gauntlet down to representationalists:

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

And a little later he continues,

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

Berkeley takes these to be unanswerable questions for his opponents. He points out that according to the principles of representationalists themselves, material objects cannot be immediately known. In Frankel’s words, “the mind-independent world is not a possible object of direct experience” (2009, 39). It follows from this, he argues, that we can never be sure that they share an appropriate relation with the ideas which are purported to represent them. Hence, those principles cannot help but lead representationalists into scepticism. If representationalists are right, Berkeley argues, then it is impossible to quell the fear that the *only* things we can gain knowledge of are ideas and not things.

However, Berkeley’s account of knowledge of other minds is different, because I *do* have immediate knowledge of the relation between a mind and its ideas: I have immediate knowledge of *myself* as a perceiver and of the relationship between myself and the ideas I perceive. That is, I *do* have “reason and memory” pertaining to prior knowledge of the fact that certain ideas are indeed caused by a mind.⁴⁷ Representationalists, who take ideas to be representations of material things, can never possibly confirm that the appropriate relation between ideas and material things exists, because they can never gain immediate knowledge of the latter. One reason for this is

⁴⁷ As George Pappas puts it: “[i]t is easier to understand how a spirit might cause ideas [than how a material thing might], Berkeley insists, because we all have first-hand introspective access to such causation in our own cases” (2000, 221). Falkenstein, on the other hand, plays down the importance of analogy in Berkeley’s account of the existence of other minds. He claims that it is ‘incidental’ that other spirits are “like myself” (1990, 432). However, as I see it, the analogous move from the relation between myself and my ideas and the relation between other spirits and their ideas is crucial in avoiding scepticism.

that they cannot *compare* ideas with things in order to discern whether the former do indeed represent the latter since, as Berkeley puts it in the *Notebooks*, “[a] man cannot compare 2 things together without perceiving them each” (NB 51). Our knowledge of the relationship between ideas and minds, however, is different since it has just the kind of foundation that our knowledge of the relation between ideas and material things lacks. As a result, when “I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas” this “inform[s] me there are certain particular agents like my self, which accompany them and concur in their production” (PHK §145). But on the representationalist account of knowledge of *sensible things*, ideas do not really “inform me” of the existence anything except themselves. He writes:

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

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

Thus, while the representationalist model of sensible knowledge and Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds are structurally similar, there is an important difference. The former lacks a foundation of certainty, grounded in immediate experience, which would help it to avoid falling into scepticism. The latter, Berkeley's account of knowledge of other minds, *does* have such a foundation. Again, Berkeley's account of self-knowledge is crucial in providing the basis for his wider epistemology of mind.

Conclusion

I have argued that, for Berkeley, self-knowledge is immediate knowledge of the operations of one's own spirit as it is perceiving, and that it is in our experience of willing and understanding ideas that we come to be immediately familiar with our own spirit. The operations of willing and understanding provide us with immediate data concerning the nature of our own spirit, and a basis for our knowledge of both the existence and nature of other spirits.

My concerns throughout this chapter have been primarily epistemological rather than metaphysical. In light of Berkeley's claim that self-knowledge is the means by which we come to gain knowledge of other spirits, my foremost concern has been to give an exposition of Berkeleian self-knowledge. Nonetheless, there are some metaphysical upshots of my reading. In particular, my reading of Berkeleian self-knowledge as non-abstract relies on a reading of Berkeley's metaphysics in which the mind is not something abstracted from its perceptual acts. But, it should be noted, this does not imply that Berkeley's account of the mind is Humean: knowledge of oneself is *not* reducible to the 'bundle' of ideas that one perceives.⁴⁸ Self-knowledge, I have argued, consists in identifying the different ways that perception occurs and *what that is like*. My reading thus implies that the self is a set of perceptual *acts*, each of which has distinct phenomenological content. That phenomenological content is dependent on, but *not* reducible to, the ideas perceived. For Berkeley, experience is not only key to knowledge but a kind of knowledge in itself. Hence the experience *of perceiving* is also a kind of

⁴⁸ See Daniel 2018, 668, for a similar claim.

knowledge.⁴⁹ I argued that this is why Berkeley claims that the objects of human knowledge include not only ideas produced by sensation, imagination, and memory, but also the kind of knowledge we have of “the passions and operations of the mind” (PHK §1).

When Berkeley claims we know the meaning of the words ‘spirit’ and ‘mind’, he does not mean that the terms signify distinct ideas (PHK §142; AMP 7.13). Rather, on my reading, Berkeley’s view is that I know what the word ‘spirit’ means because I know what my own spirit is like. Sometimes, it voluntarily perceives either ideas of the imagination or, in a much more limited way, sensible ideas, i.e., those that make up the collection of ideas which constitute my body. When my spirit perceives in this way, it is called the ‘will’. At other times, my spirit involuntarily perceives ideas, such as the sun in broad daylight, my desk when I enter my study, or the sounds another human makes when they talk to me. In such cases, my spirit is called the ‘understanding’. In this way, when I make an existence claim about another spirit (whether divine or human) I am doing more than just making a claim about what exists, I am saying that it exists in a certain way. Once I have good evidence to believe that other spirits exist and that they are indeed spirits, I can make the further claim that they *will* and *understand*. This reading therefore allows for a more robust understanding of Berkeley’s claim that we have a ‘notion’ of spirit, “in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words” (PHK §27).

Finally, I considered the objection that Berkeley’s account of knowledge of other minds constitutes a form of representationalism about the mind. This would be problematic, if true, because Berkeley takes representationalism to entail scepticism. However, I argued that Berkeley’s account possesses one feature that representationalism about sensible things lacks: a way of being immediately acquainted with the relation between the signs and the thing signified. I know that certain ideas signify the presence of a mind because I *am* a mind and experience myself giving rise to certain collections of ideas. In this way, Berkeley’s account can avoid the scepticism inherent in representationalist theories of knowledge about sensible things.

⁴⁹ Frankel identifies a distinction between experience and knowledge (at least when it comes to the mind) in Berkeley’s system, but I see little justification for drawing doing so. See 2009, 399-400, esp. footnote 55.

CHAPTER SIX: REID’S OBJECTION, COMMON SENSE, AND PHILOSOPHICAL PREJUDICE

Introduction

The central thesis of this dissertation is that Berkeley can be appropriately characterised as an *anti-representationalist*. I have argued that the arguments he develops in the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues* are chiefly motivated by sceptical concerns arising from a widespread acceptance of representationalism amongst his predecessors and contemporaries. I have also suggested that Berkeley is part of an anti-representationalist tradition consisting of thinkers similarly concerned by the sceptical implications of representationalism. In chapter one, I argued that John Sergeant is another thinker who ought to be considered part of this tradition.¹ In this chapter, I offer a comparison of Berkeley’s anti-representationalism and Thomas Reid’s arguments against the way of ideas. By outlining Reid’s own sceptical concerns, his rejection of the way of ideas, and the specific problems he identifies with Berkeley’s views, I conclude, perhaps surprisingly, that Reid should also be considered part of the same anti-representationalist tradition.

Reid is famously critical of Berkeley’s philosophy on the grounds that it leads to a kind of solipsism. Yet, I will show, the two thinkers much in common when it comes to their concerns about human knowledge and scepticism. One of my aims in this chapter will be to show that *both* accept the ‘anti-representationalist’ argument, introduced in chapter one, that:

- P1. Any epistemology that results in scepticism should be rejected.
- P2. Representationalist epistemology inevitably results in scepticism.
- C. Therefore, representationalist epistemology should be rejected.

¹ A full account of anti-representationalism in Early Modern thought is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, as I hope to have shown, the task of tracing anti-representationalist thought amongst Berkeley’s predecessors and successors is one worth pursuing.

Yet, there is also an important difference between the way that Reid and Berkeley attempt to develop an epistemology that does not lead to scepticism. Berkeley's approach (as we saw in chapter one) is to change ideas into things, thereby precluding the possibility that we do not gain immediate knowledge of those things. Reid, meanwhile, develops an epistemology in which we have direct access to mind-independent, external objects. With this difference in mind, another aim of this chapter will to explain why, despite their shared concerns about representationalism, Berkeley and Reid develop different solutions to the sceptical problem. The answer, I will argue, lies in identifying the 'philosophical prejudices' that motivate their views.

Tying Berkeley and Reid together under the banner of 'anti-representationalism' might be surprising given Reid's famous criticisms of Berkeley's immaterialism and, more pressingly, the fact that he considers Berkeley, like Descartes and Locke, complicit in furthering the way of ideas. Reid does admit to having once embraced "the whole of Berkeley's system" (EIP 162). But his mature and published view is that

Of all the opinions that have ever been advanced by philosophers, this of Bishop Berkeley, that there is no material world, seems the strangest, and the most apt to bring philosophy into ridicule with plain men who are guided by the dictates of nature and common sense. (EIP 168-69)

Thus, it is quite clear that Reid does not think Berkeley contributed in a positive way to philosophical inquiry concerning epistemology or metaphysics.² Reid also argues that, despite his protestations to the contrary, Berkeley fails to provide a successful defence of common sense (EIP 165). This particular criticism points towards another area of common ground concerning how Berkeley and Reid frame their arguments. Both provide what they take to be a defence of commonsensical views concerning perception. That is, both thinkers attempt to provide a theory of perception that entitles the vulgar, those who are not engaged in philosophical discourse, to plausibly maintain their pre-theoretical approach to the relationship between ourselves and the world. Relatedly, both also depict themselves as attending to philosophy gone astray. Berkeley sees his philosophy as the

² Reid does, however, claim that Berkeley's *New Theory*, in which the existence of a tangible world outside the mind is admitted (at least as Reid reads it – though this is contentious), "contains very important discoveries" (EIP 159).

solution to the problems of abstract and materialist thought (PHK §4), while Reid aims to get philosophy back on track after its having spent almost a century theorising about “mere fictions”: ideas (EIP 27; IHM 11-12). Yet, Reid’s criticism suggests that the two differ on what they take a common sense account of perception to entail; at the very least it indicates that Reid takes his account of common sense to differ from Berkeley’s. With this observation in mind, the final aim of this chapter will be to identify the similarities and differences between Berkeley and Reid’s accounts of common sense.

The structure of my argument is as follows. In section one, I compare Berkeley and Reid’s anti-representationalist arguments. I also consider the role that common sense plays in these arguments and outline the key differences between Berkeley and Reid’s accounts thereof. In section two, I demonstrate that they are both reacting to the same epistemological concern: that representationalism inevitably leads to scepticism about our knowledge of things in the world. I thus emphasise the importance, for both, of combatting scepticism and developing an anti-sceptical epistemology. In section three, I consider both Reid and Berkeley’s accounts of common sense and their understanding of the relationship between common sense and philosophy. I first provide an exposition of Reid’s account of common sense before comparing that with three recent interpretations of Berkeley’s account.³ Finally, in section four, I focus on explaining how, despite their shared epistemological views, Berkeley and Reid end up with such different pictures of reality. The explanation, I suggest, lies in the way each construe certain philosophical *prejudices*.⁴

It is worth saying a little about what it means to talk of ‘philosophical prejudices.’ In short, to be philosophically prejudiced, as both Berkeley and Reid understand it, is to accept certain unargued-for commitments. From Reid’s point of view, Berkeley makes the crucial mistake of accepting the key premise of the way of ideas: that to be immediately perceived is to be an idea. For this reason, Reid sees Berkeley’s attempt to change ideas into things (DHP 244) as, ultimately, a philosophical rather than a commonsensical endeavour. From Berkeley’s perspective, Reid is committed to the

³ Unlike Berkeley, Reid is explicit in both outlining what he takes common sense to be and how it relates to philosophy. Berkeley’s own remarks on common sense are considerably vaguer and his ‘account’ (if, indeed, he has one) is subject to conflicting interpretations in the secondary literature. Since there is no settled opinion of how Berkeley’s account should be understood it is more appropriate to compare *interpretations* of that account with Reid’s than to try and compare Berkeley’s account *per se*. This is the approach I take in section three.

⁴ Sections 1, 2, and 4 of this chapter appear in the *Journal of Scottish Philosophy* as West 2019a.

materialist prejudice that to be real is to be mind-independent. This discussion of philosophical prejudices reveals that there are certain commitments at work which push these thinkers in different directions. Understanding these commitments, I argue, explains why Berkeley and Reid end up in divergent positions *metaphysically* but should not affect our reading of both as reacting to the same *epistemological* concerns. For that reason, I conclude that they should both be characterised as anti-representationalists.

By the end of this chapter it should be clear that Berkeley's anti-representationalist stance places him within the same epistemological tradition as Reid. This, I contend, should encourage us not only to reconsider Berkeley's place in eighteenth-century thought but our understanding of the progress of early modern epistemology more generally. What's more, this connection between Berkeley and Reid should encourage us to question Reid's own historiographical account of the rise and fall of the way of ideas, and his own place in relation to early modern thought.

1. Against Perceptual Intermediaries

1.1 Reid's refutation of 'the Way of Ideas'

In this section, I outline Reid's arguments against what he calls 'the way of ideas': Reid's name of the view that we immediately perceive are ideas which represent external objects. Note that to subscribe to 'the way of ideas' is to accept a form of representationalism. Although I outlined Berkeley's own concerns with representationalism in chapter one, I provide further exposition of Berkeley's arguments against representationalism in what follows. I do so in order to compare and contrast them with Reid's own arguments.

Reid characterises the way of ideas as the view that:

The external thing is the remote or mediate object; but the idea, or image of that object in the mind, is the immediate object, without which we could have no perception, no remembrance, no conception of the mediate object (EIP 26)

As Reid understands it, to subscribe to the way of ideas is to accept, without demonstration, that the immediate objects of perception are necessarily or by definition ideas.⁵ Furthermore, on this view, it would not be possible for us to perceive objects in the real or external world, or remember things about it or conceive of things in it, were it not for the fact that we immediately perceive ideas which represent it in some way or another.

Reid explicitly criticises Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke in both his *Inquiry* and his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* and argues forcefully against the inclusion of ideas as intermediary steps in the act of perception.⁶ As Reid sees it, none of these thinkers does enough to justify the claim that it is ideas that we immediately perceive and not physical objects. Unless this claim is self-evident, then, he maintains that there is no reason to accept it. Reid's central objection to the way of ideas is that including ideas in one's account of perception goes against the Newtonian 'rules for philosophising' (or "*regulae philosophandi*", see IHM 3).⁷ In line with Newton's commitment to feigning no hypotheses,⁸ at the beginning of the *Inquiry* Reid explains that "there is *but one way* to the knowledge of nature's works; the way of observation and experiment" (IHM 2-3, my emphasis). Induction, grounded in observation and experience, is, he argues, "a just interpretation of nature [and] is the only sound and orthodox philosophy" (IHM 4). Hypotheses that stretch themselves "beyond a just induction from fact, are vanity and folly." Reid also characterises these rules for philosophising as "maxims of common sense", thus tying them to our everyday observation and experience of things (IHM 3). The way of ideas, in Reid's view, is a hypothesis that is *not* grounded in observation and experience. In everyday life we do not find ourselves perceiving *ideas*, but real things in the world.

Reid denies that ideas are what we might call an *empirical posit*; something that we posit the existence of based on observation or experience. He justifies this claim by appealing to the way that we pre-theoretically *talk* about our perceptual experiences. For Reid, the structure of language is a kind of empirical data from which we can make

⁵ One might point to Malebranche and Locke, for example, as the kinds of thinkers who accept this claim without any explicit justification for doing so. See SAT 3.2.1 and EHU 4.1.1.

⁶ See, e.g., EIP 135-42, 115-24, 143-55 respectively. Hume bears the brunt of Reid's criticism, since, as Reid sees it, he is the thinker who took the way of ideas to its inevitable sceptical conclusion. See, e.g., EIP 183-89, 697-712.

⁷ Newton 2004, 87. See also Greco 2006, 138; Copenhaver 2013, 117.

⁸ Newton 2004, 92.

inductive judgements. He argues that language is framed for “the common affairs of life” (EIP 20) and “is the express image and picture of human thoughts” (EIP 573; see also EIP 32).⁹ More specifically, he argues that *commonalities* across languages are a testament to “the natural judgement of mankind” (EIP 14). Anything which is common in “all ages, and in all languages” can provide us with an insight into those views which are naturally attested to by human agents. Regarding our perceptual experiences, it is significant, then, for Reid, that in common sense discourse when we are said to perceive something we only commit ourselves to talking about: (i) “a mind that thinks”, (ii) “an act of the mind”, and (iii) “an object which we think about” (EIP 26). In short, since the language surrounding perceptual discourse only justifies accepting a *mind - mental act - physical object* story of perception, Reid argues that that is the account that we should accept. To go any further would be to feign a hypothesis which is not based on observation and experience.

Yet, as Reid observes, “besides these three, the philosopher conceives that there is a fourth – to wit, the *idea*, which is the immediate object” (EIP 26).¹⁰ Reid explains that ideas are “supposed to be a shadowy kind of beings, intermediate between the thought, and the object of thought” (EIP 155). But he maintains that there is no ground in either the structure of language or observation and experience for positing such an entity. Thus, when philosophers claim that what we immediately perceive are ideas, which are distinct from the physical objects they represent, they introduce a metaphysical entity that is *not* reflected in language pertaining to perceptual discourse. No person “guided by the dictates of nature and common sense” (EIP 169) will, upon seeing a tree, say something like ‘I see a tree *by virtue of immediately perceiving an idea of the tree*’ or ‘I see an idea which represents a tree’.¹¹ As Reid sees it, that this is true of anyone who is not part of the way of ideas, in other words, anyone guided by common sense, is testimony to the fact that the philosophers’ picture is a problematic one. For this reason,

⁹ While Reid’s emphasis on observation and experience invokes Newton, the connection he draws between common sense and language echoes Francis Bacon. Like Reid, Bacon maintains that “words are imposed according to the apprehension of the vulgar” (Bacon 1873, 54). It is also worth noting that Berkeley likewise accepts that “[c]ommon custom is the standard of propriety in language” (DHP 216). Berkeley also alludes to Bacon when he claims we should “*think with the learned, and speak with the vulgar*” (PHK §51). Desmond Clarke claims this is a quote from Bacon’s *Two Books on the Advancement of Learning* (1605). See Berkeley 2008, 102, footnote 18.

¹⁰ See also EIP 184-85.

¹¹ As part of his argument against ‘ideism’, Sergeant makes a similar appeal to ordinary language discourse when he writes: “when a Gentleman bids his Servant fetch him a Pint of Wine; he does not mean to bid him fetch the Idea of Wine in his own head, but the wine it self which is in the Cellar” (SP 33). Like Reid, Sergeant’s point is that meaningful utterances refer to things and not ideas.

Reid argues that ideas, construed in the philosophical sense, are “mere fictions[s]” (EIP 27). They are “the offspring of fancy” and not facts of real experience or common sense (IHM, 11-12; see also EIP 268).

1.2 Berkeley's rejection of the thing-idea distinction

Berkeley does not accept a four-part (*mind - mental act – idea - physical object*) account of perception any more than Reid does. Nor does Berkeley accept the thing-idea distinction that he thinks Descartes and Locke are committed to. While Berkeley does not employ the Newtonian approach as strictly as Reid, he does explicitly and consistently ground his reasoning in both sensible and introspective experience. There is also a clear allusion to Newton's rules for philosophising in the *Three Dialogues* where Philonous states: “I do not pretend to frame any hypothesis at all. I am of a vulgar cast, simple enough to believe my senses, and leave things as I find them” (DHP 229).

Berkeley argues that no amount of experience will confirm that there is a distinction between real qualities of things in the world and the sensible qualities with which we are immediately familiar. For, as he explains, the very nature of experience is such that it can only confirm or deny hypotheses concerning the immediate objects of the senses and not unperceivable material objects. As he puts it, “I do not see how the testimony of sense can be alleged, as proof of the existence of any thing, which is not perceived by sense” (PHK §40). In fact, Berkeley argues, it is impossible to distinguish, even conceptually, the things that really exist from the things we immediately perceive. Consider the following passage:

Light and colours, heat and cold, extension and figures, in a word the things we see and feel, what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas or impressions on the sense; and is it possible to separate, even in thought, any of these from perception? For my part I might as easily divide a thing from it self. (PHK §5)

Berkeley's view is that to say of a sensible object ‘it exists’ is to say nothing more than ‘it is perceived.’ This is confirmed by his famous remark that a sensible thing's “*esse percipi*” (PHK §3). For Berkeley, our notion of existence is *exhausted* by our notion of a thing's being perceived. Like Reid, he appeals on the testimony of common sense in

support of his argument. As Philonous puts it: “I am content... to appeal to the common sense of the world for the truth of my notion” (DHP 234). He goes on to characterise a gardener as paradigmatic of those who are guided by common sense:

Ask the gardener why he thinks yonder cherry tree exists in the garden, and he shall tell you, because he sees and feels it; in a word, because he perceives it by his sense. Ask him why he thinks an orange tree not to be there, and he shall tell you, because he does not perceive it. What he perceives by sense, that he terms a real being, and says it ‘is’ or ‘exists’; but that which is not perceivable, the same, he says, has no being. (DHP 234)

Like Reid, Berkeley appeals to not only to our everyday experience of things, but also to the kinds of claim the vulgar feel entitled to make based on that experience, in support of his argument. Reid, we saw, emphasises that common sense existence claims make no mention of perceptual intermediaries. Likewise, Berkeley argues that the only sensible things of which we say ‘it exists’ are the things we immediately perceive – and, what’s more, that *whenever* we perceive a thing we take it to exist.¹²

Berkeley’s most famous argument against the possibility of distinguishing the existence of an object from its being perceived is his so-called ‘master argument’ which appears in both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. The role of this argument is to demonstrate that it is impossible to conceive of existence and perception separately. Representationalists, and materialists more generally, Berkeley suggests, will maintain that “there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and no body by to perceive them” (PHK §23). If his opponents are right, and a tree or a book can exist independently of its being perceived, then clearly Berkeley is wrong to claim that a sensible thing’s *esse* is *percipi*. However, in the *Dialogues* it is clear that he is confident that reflection will reveal that no such distinction is possible; that to conceive of something existing unperceived is impossible. Philonous presents Hylas with the following challenge:

I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatsoever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so (DHP 200)

¹² See Pearce 2017, 15-16.

Soon enough, having initially claimed to be able easily “conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independent of, and unperceived by, any mind whatsoever”, Hylas admits that this was a mistake. For he realises that he cannot conceive of the difference between a thing that *exists* and a thing that *is perceived*. Though he took himself to be conceiving an unperceived tree, Hylas realises that what he is conceiving of is a tree *as if it were perceived by him* (DHP 200). He is simply conceiving of what it would be like to stand in front of the tree and see it or feel it. This is made particularly clear in the corresponding passage in the *Principles*, where Berkeley explains that to imagine a tree unperceived is simply to frame an idea of a tree in the mind while “at the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive [it]” (PHK §23). When we imagine an ‘unperceived tree’ we imagine ourselves perceiving a tree, and then remove ourselves from the picture. But, Berkeley, argues, that does not render the tree *unperceived*. Experience, Berkeley thinks, even under such reflective scrutiny, supports the view that the things we immediately perceive just are one and the same as the things that exist. We are not equipped, he maintains, to even *conceive* of things as if they were unperceived.¹³ As Martha Brandt Bolton puts it, according to Berkeley, “[a]n unconceived, mind-independent sensible object is literally *unthinkable*” (1987, 75).

Having collapsed the distinction between the things we immediately perceive and things that really exist and established that a sensible thing’s “*esse is percipi*”, Berkeley has one final move to make. To avoid the conclusion that we do not immediately perceive real things, Berkeley argues it is necessary to change ideas into things (DHP 244). The reason for this is that the term ‘idea’, though not “commonly used for ‘thing’”, is the term used “by philosophers to denote the immediate objects of the understanding” (DHP 235-36). If ideas are the things we immediately perceive, then ideas just are things. This, then, is Berkeley’s concession to the philosophers: he uses the term ‘idea’ to refer to the real things we perceive, at the cost of using the more common sense friendly ‘thing’. But he

¹³ This reading of the ‘master argument’ is based on Seth Bordner’s currently unpublished paper ‘Master or Apprentice? A New Reading of Berkeley’s (In)Famous Argument’ presented at a Berkeley workshop in Milwaukee (USA) in October 2018. Bordner hints at this reading of the master argument elsewhere when he writes, “Berkeley’s realisation is that *to think of an object as existing* is just to *think of the object*” (forthcoming, 24). Similarly, Winkler writes, “whenever we frame an idea of a purportedly mind-independent object, what we have managed to do is, as far as the idea is concerned, no different from what we do when we conceive of something mind-dependent”. See 1989, 187.

emphasises this is the *only* such concession. By turning ideas into things, he does not mean to deny them any reality (see DHP 244; PHK §§33-34, §36, §40).¹⁴

Berkeley and Reid both reject the philosophical view that we mediate perceive things in the world via intermediaries. Contrary to representationalists, both argue that perception grants us *immediate* knowledge of things in the world. They develop different arguments in order to refute this picture, though both are developed on the basis of both sensible and reflective experience.¹⁵ What's more, both sets of arguments are driven by a commitment to common sense and ordinary language claims about perceptual experience. Reid emphasises that the existence of ideas as perceptual intermediaries is not a common sense belief by emphasising that we do not experience ourselves as perceiving *ideas*. Berkeley, focusing on our individual reflective experience, argues that we are not equipped to conceive of a thing's existence abstracted from our perception of it. Both are consistent in arguing that, outside of philosophical discourse, the vulgar never *talk* of having perceived intermediaries but rather things in the world. In the next section, I will demonstrate that Berkeley and Reid develop these arguments in response to a shared concern about the relation between perception and knowledge: that to allow for the existence of perceptual intermediaries is to inevitably fall into scepticism about our knowledge of things in the world.

2. Anti-Representationalism Qua Anti-Scepticism (Again)

2.1 Reid's anti-scepticism

In this section, I will demonstrate that Berkeley and Reid's arguments against intermediary accounts of perception are motivated by the same epistemological concern. Both take it that to be a representationalist – to accept that our knowledge of things in the world is indirect – is to inevitably open the door to scepticism. Thus, both develop an account of perception whereby our immediate experience is immediate experience of

¹⁴ For an outline of Berkeley's changing of ideas into things, see chapter one (2.3). For a discussion of Berkeley's employment of the term 'idea', see chapter three (2.1).

¹⁵ See Greco 2006, 140.

things in the world themselves. In turn, both argue that our immediate perceptual experiences entitle us to make claims about the nature of those things.

Both Berkeley and Reid explicitly situate themselves in opposition to scepticism. At the beginning of the *Inquiry*, Reid condemns the “theory of ideas” for, though “it is indeed very ancient, and hath been very universally received”, it nonetheless “hath produced a system of scepticism, that seems to triumph over all science, and even over the dictates of common sense” (IHM 4). The way of ideas undermines science, for Reid, because it makes it impossible to identify the *first principles* or *common sense maxims* that form the foundations of knowledge.¹⁶ As he puts it, “Des Cartes taught men to doubt even of those things that had been taken for first principles”, while Locke “acknowledges, that the existence of a material world is not to be received as a first principle” (EIP 169-70). First principles, for Reid, are self-evident statements which “are no sooner understood than they are believed” (EIP 555). *All* our knowledge, so far as it is reliable, Reid maintains, rests upon first principles: “[t]his is as certain as that every house must have a foundation” (EIP 558; see also EIP 10). Examples of such first principles, relevant to our current concerns, include the existence of one’s own mind and the existence of the external world. When it comes to such fundamental principles of knowledge, Reid argues,

There is no searching for evidence, no weighing of arguments; the proposition is not deduced or inferred from another; it has the light of truth in itself, and no occasion to borrow it from another. (EIP 558)

First principles are the kinds of propositions that need not, and in fact *cannot*, be argued for (EIP 12). They are self-evident and are thus, once understood, intuitively and immediately seen to be the case. Common sense, for Reid, helps us to identify first principles of knowledge (EIP 523, 556), but the danger of philosophy, in the wrong hands, is that it can lead us to a place where we find ourselves trying to provide arguments for them. As Steven Nadler puts it, for Reid it is a “logical error” to find oneself arguing for a self-evident principle (1986, 167).¹⁷ For Reid, this renders any argument for the existence of things in the world a “logical error”. Such propositions are not the kinds of things that we can successfully provide an argument for. Rather, as first principles, they

¹⁶ Note that this is a similar complaint to one put forward against ideism by Sergeant. See chapter one (3.2).

¹⁷ See also van Cleve 2017, 300. Similarly, Richard Rorty writes: “Any theory which views knowledge as accuracy of representation, and which holds that certainty can only be *rationaly* had about representations, will make scepticism inevitable” (1979, 133, my emphasis)

are the kind of propositions that should have arguments *grounded upon them* (EIP 277-78). That the existence of things in the world is a first principle is attested to, Reid maintains, by the fact that, in practice “a man may as soon, by reasoning, pull the moon out of her orbit, as destroy the belief of the objects of sense” (EIP 274). In fact, Reid argues, it is “the most evident of all truths, and what no man in his senses can doubt” (EIP 157).

Reid maintains that it is impossible to reason away our natural conviction that the things we perceive really exist and that the world is full of objects and qualities perceived via our senses. For this reason, it is clear from the very beginning of the *Inquiry* that he is not satisfied by those philosophical views on which one must qualify descriptive statements about the nature of things in the world. He writes:

I am resolved to take my own existence, and the existence of other things, upon trust; and to believe that snow is cold, and honey sweet, whatever they may say to the contrary (IHM 31).

In making this claim, Reid targets the likes of Descartes and Locke, who, he maintains, accept that there is an epistemological gap between the mind and the world (EIP 145). That is, gaining knowledge of our ideas is not enough to constitute knowledge of things in the world.¹⁸ For Descartes, this gap can only be bridged by rational argument derived from clearly and distinctly perceived ideas and grounded in the benevolent nature of God (CSM 2:54).¹⁹ Locke, on the other hand, argues that while we can gain an *insight* into what is on the other side of this gap, by means of our perceiving sensible qualities, we can never gain genuine knowledge of the natures or real essences of physical things (EHU 3.3.15-17). However, Reid does not think that the existence and nature of things in the world can be adequately argued for. Thus, as he sees it, to deny their self-evidence is inevitably to set oneself on a path towards scepticism.

2.2 Berkeley's anti-scepticism

¹⁸ See Ayers 2007, 11-28.

¹⁹ For Reid's critique, see EIP 169-70.

Like Reid, it is chiefly sceptical concerns that motivate Berkeley's refutation of indirect theories of perception. In the front matter and the opening sections of both the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley attributes sceptical conclusions to a philosophical mistrust of the senses whereby "we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived" (DHP 167).²⁰ This association is particularly clear in §87 of the *Principles*, where Berkeley writes:

if they [ideas] are looked on as notes or images, referred to things or archetypes existing without the mind, then we are all involved in scepticism. We see only the appearances, and not the real qualities of things... Things remaining the same, our ideas vary, and which of them, or even whether any of them at all represent the true quality really existing in the thing, it is out of our reach to determine. So that, for aught we know, all we see, hear, and feel, may be only phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with real things, existing in *rerum natura*.²¹

Berkeley's concern is that if representationalism is right then we have no firm basis for knowledge of *real things*. If the only things we immediately perceive are "the appearances, and not the real qualities of things" then we restrict ourselves to having a solid foundation of knowledge only of those appearances. Berkeley is also concerned that if we take it for granted that the immediate objects of perception are, *by definition*, mere appearances then we will inevitably be left needing to justify the claim that they provide us with knowledge of anything but themselves. In other words, if, by definition, real things in the world (the "archetypes" of our ideas) are unperceivable and therefore off-limits to us, then we will need a very good reason to believe that we can know those things *at all*. As Philonous puts it in the *Dialogues*:

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

Like Reid, Berkeley believes that it is, in Nadler's words, a "logical error" to try and provide an argument for the existence of real things in the world. What's more, Berkeley

²⁰ The front matter of the *Principles* explains that "the Chief Causes of Error and Difficulty in the Sciences, with the grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion" will be inquired into while the front matter of the *Three Dialogues* situates it "[i]n opposition to sceptics and atheists".

²¹ See also PHK §40 & §86. See chapter one (esp. 2.2) for a more extensive discussion of this passage.

insists that trying to rationally prove the existence of real things is an endeavour that will inevitably fail. His most in-depth treatment of this issue comes in §8 of the *Principles* where, from the fact that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” and “a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure”, Berkeley argues that we could never get from knowledge of *ideas* to knowledge of their “originals or external things”.²² To accept that the immediate objects of perception are “copies or resemblances” of real things is, for Berkeley, to commit oneself to scepticism about those things. It’s for this reason that Berkeley develops a view according to which, in Tom Stoneham’s words, “the objective world is subjectively available in perception, so once perception occurs, there can be no further gap that needs to be bridged” (2002, 32).

In fact, as we have seen, Berkeley develops a view in which we perceive things in the world immediately. Like the gardener, who believes the cherry tree exists because he can perceive it, Berkeley states that “[t]he table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see it and feel it” (PHK §3). Similarly, he accepts that when I judge a thing to exist, based on my perception of it, the belief that forms as a result is irrefutable and self-evident. Reid, we saw, is willing to take the existence of things perceived “upon trust” and “to believe that snow is cold, and honey sweet” (IHM 31). Berkeley shows the same commitment to knowledge via the senses, emphasising that “I cannot for my life help thinking that snow is white and fire hot” (DHP 230). This is a theme that goes right back to his formative notebook entries. Two entries in particular are of note:

In ye immaterial hypothesis the wall is white, fire hot etc. (NB 19)

There are men who say there are insensible extensions, there are others who say the Wall is not white, the fire is not hot &c We Irish men cannot attain to these truths. (NB 392)

It is quite clear that this common sense commitment to things being as we perceive them to be motivates Berkeley’s thought even in its formative stages. Anti-scepticism, as it is for Reid, is at the heart of Berkeley’s anti-representationalist arguments.

So far, I have introduced and defended the claim that Berkeley and Reid, despite their differences, ought to be read as part of the same anti-representationalist tradition. I have done so by emphasising the similarities between Reid’s refutation of the way of

²² See chapters three and four for my reconstruction of that argument.

ideas and Berkeley's attempt to collapse the thing-idea distinction. Both forcefully deny that we ought to accept the claim that in any act of perception, we immediately perceive an intermediary by means of which we mediate perceive a real quality or thing in the world. I then demonstrated that both reject indirect theories of perception on the grounds that they inevitably lead us to scepticism. Their methods diverge but their motivations and preliminary conclusions are the same: accepting that there are perceptual intermediaries means inevitably falling into scepticism. For that reason, representationalism must be rejected.

Yet, ultimately, Reid reads Berkeley's philosophy as contributing to the erroneous way of ideas and as an affront to common sense and the dictates of nature. In the following sections, my aim is to identify the root of Reid's objection to Berkeley. I do so by focusing on both thinkers' treatment of two issues: common sense and philosophical prejudices. I argue that understanding how Berkeley and Reid deal with these two issues is key to understanding why, despite their shared anti-representationalists views, their own 'positive' views are fundamentally at odds with one another.

3. Common Sense and Perception

3.1 Reid's account of common sense

The aim of this section is to compare Berkeley and Reid's understanding of common sense. More specifically, my aim is to explain what both take a defence of common sense to entail and why they think it is something worth defending. Doing so will help us to understanding why Reid claims to have rejected Berkeley's immaterialism *on the basis of common sense*. I first outline Reid's account of the relationship between common sense and philosophy. I then outline what it is possible to discern about Berkeley's views on common sense from his own remarks, before considering three recent interpretations of Berkeley's account of common sense and comparing those interpretations with Reid's account.

I began this chapter by introducing Reid's critique of Berkeley's immaterialism where he claims that:

Of all the opinions that have ever been advanced by philosophers, this of Bishop Berkeley, that there is no material world, seems the strangest, and the most apt to bring philosophy into ridicule with plain men who are guided by the dictates of nature and common sense. (EIP 168-69)

This criticism is striking because, famously, Berkeley takes his philosophy to be a *vindication* of common sense (DHP 244).²³ Berkeley situates himself in opposition to the “novelties” and “strange notions which shock the genuine uncorrupted judgement of all mankind” (DHP 244). Yet, Reid clearly remains unconvinced of his having done so. In fact, his attitude towards Berkeley’s purported vindication of common sense is, at times, derisive. For example, he writes:

It is pleasant, to observe the fruitless pains which Bishop Berkeley took to shew that his system of the non-existence of the material world did not contradict the sentiments of the vulgar, but those only of the philosophers. (EIP 570)

Here, Reid seems to accept that Berkeley sincerely tried, but failed, to align his philosophy with common sense. At other times, however, Reid implies that Berkeley’s appeal to common sense is merely a tactical move. Aware that “the common sense of mankind is the most formidable antagonist”, Reid claims, Berkeley sought to bring the vulgar view ‘nearer’ to his own (EIP 167). As he puts it,

Berkeley foresaw the opposition that would be made of his system, from two different quarters; *first*, from the Philosophers; and, *secondly*, from the vulgar, who are led by the plain dictates of nature. The first he had the courage to oppose openly and avowedly; the second he dreaded much more, and therefore takes a great deal of pains, and, I think, uses some art, to court into his party. (EIP 163)

²³ As Seth Bordner points out, while most discussion in the literature concerns Berkeley’s ‘defence’ of common sense, Berkeley himself never explicitly claims to defend it but rather ‘vindicate’ it, or ‘recall’ or ‘reduce’ philosophers back to it. See Bordner 2011, 327 & (forthcoming), 2. See also NB 751; DHP 168. When I use the term ‘defend’ in what follows, I do so with this observation in mind.

As Reid sees it, Berkeley's appeals to common sense are simply intended to fend off or appease common sense *objections*.²⁴ Reid, however, is unconvinced and takes his criticisms of Berkeley to be consistent with common sense. Perhaps, then, it is a disagreement about what common sense entails that leads Reid to his rejection of Berkeley's philosophy. This would certainly fit with Reid's claim that it will be met with "ridicule" by "plain men who are guided by the dictates of nature and common sense" (EIP 168-69). However, in order to understand Reid's criticism of Berkeley's appeals to common sense it is first necessary to outline why Reid himself takes common sense to be important to philosophy.

Reid begins his account of common sense with a reflection on the term 'sense', outlining how it is used in ordinary language discourse and juxtaposing this with the way it is employed by modern philosophers. He writes:

modern Philosophers consider sense as a power that has nothing to do with judgment. Sense they consider as the power by which we receive certain ideas or impressions from objects; and judgment as the power by which we compare those ideas, and perceive their necessary agreements and disagreements. (EIP 519)

According to Reid, modern philosophers differentiate between sense and judgement: sense being understood as the power by which we receive ideas, prior to our doing any reasoning about them, and judgement as the perceiving of agreements and disagreements between them.²⁵ Reid, however, aligns himself with the way that 'sense' is used in ordinary language discourse. He writes:

²⁴ It is perhaps worth noting that while there are a range of contemporary interpretations of why Berkeley claims to defend common sense, none (so far as I know) take this line of interpretation. Like Reid, some recent commentators take Berkeley's appeals to common sense to be largely rhetorical. David Yandell, for example, claims that as employed by Berkeley, "*according to common sense* turns out to be roughly synonymous with *in agreement with me*" (1995, 418). Jonathan Bennet claims that when it comes down to it, "Berkeley had little interest in rescuing the plain person's beliefs about sensible things" (2001, 177). For discussion of such 'dismissive' readings of Berkeley on common sense see Bordner 2017b, 344; Holtzman 2013, 3-4. But no recent interpretations take the line that Berkeley was hoping to mitigate common sense objections. Perhaps this was a particular concern for Reid because of his own investment in common sense philosophy, which is something that most contemporary commentators are not committed to. Even so, it is interesting to note that most recent scholars, unlike Reid, take Berkeley to be providing some kind of 'defence' of common sense rather than defending *himself* against it.

²⁵ Consider, for example, the following claim from the Port-Royal *Logic* (written by Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole): "[a]fter conceiving things by our ideas, we compare these ideas and, finding that some belong together and others do not, we unite or separate them. This is called *affirming* or *denying*, and in general *judging*" (*Logic*, 82). Similarly, Locke characterises judgement as "*the perception of the connexion and agreement, or disagreement and repugnancy of any of our Ideas*" (EHU, 4.1.2). For a helpful outline of judgement in seventeenth-century thought, see Pearce 2017a, 561-64.

On the contrary, in common language, sense always implies judgment. A man of sense is a man of judgment. Good sense is good judgment. Nonsense is what is evidently contrary to right judgement. Common sense is that degree of judgment which is common to men with whom we can converse and transact business. (EIP 519)

We have seen before that ordinary language usage, and the way that vulgar *talk* about things, is important for Reid. He maintains that language is framed for “the common affairs of life” (EIP 20) and that commonalities across languages are testimony to “the natural judgement of mankind” (EIP 14). In everyday discourse, he maintains, we do not recognise a difference between sense and judgement. This ordinary language understanding of ‘sense’, he argues, ought to be preferred to that of the philosophers. Thus, *common sense*, for Reid is a faculty of judgement shared amongst those who are considered rational and responsible members of society. He explains that while “[t]his inward light or sense is given by Heaven to different persons in different degrees”, there is nonetheless

a certain degree of it which is necessary to our being subjects of law and government, capable of managing our own affairs, and answerable for our conduct towards others: This is called common sense, because it is common to all men with whom we can transact business, or call to account for their conduct. (EIP 522)

To possess common sense, for Reid, is to be a subject of law and government, i.e., to be a legal and political agent and to be responsible for one’s actions towards others.²⁶

Regarding knowledge, common sense plays a fundamental role for Reid. For it is by means of this almost universal human faculty that we discover first principles: self-evident truths which cannot be doubted (EIP 522; also EIP 555). Without the self-evident first principles that common sense allows us to discover, Reid argues, there would be no genuine knowledge at all. He explains:

²⁶ This suggests that Reid thinks some people are not in possession of common sense. While it is not immediately clear who he is referring to, he likely means children and those would not have been considered mentally able to take responsibility for their actions. In practice, he argues, it is not difficult to differentiate between those who do and do not possess common sense: “when it is made a question, whether a man has this natural gift or not, a judge or jury [presumably using *their own* common sense], upon a short conversation with him, can, for the most part, determine the question with great assurance” (EIP 522).

All knowledge, and all science, must be built upon principles that are self-evident; and of such principles, every man who has common sense is a competent judge when he conceives them distinctly.

First principles, Reid argues, are comparable to the foundations of a house (EIP 557-58); without them we cannot expect our knowledge or science to be reliable enough to hold up under scrutiny.

Reid argues that we discover first principles of knowledge either directly or indirectly. When we directly discover a first principle it is by means of encountering a proposition, either in speech or writing, that is no sooner understood than believed (EIP 55). As Reid puts it, such a proposition “has the light of truth in itself, and has no occasion to borrow it from another”. In such cases, we *just see* that the proposition at hand is true and cannot bring ourselves to doubt it. He lists propositions such as ‘the material world exists’, ‘that change happens in nature’, and ‘that there is a right or wrong in human conduct’ as such first principles (EIP 573). More often than not, however, Reid explains, we discover self-evident principles indirectly, for “the province of common sense is more extensive in refutation than confirmation” (EIP 531). In such cases, we encounter propositions or conclusions that are self-evidently *false*. For example, if one was to conclude that $x = y$ but also that $x \neq y$ this would be deemed absurd since it contravenes the maxim that ‘what is, is’. An absurd conclusion thus alerts us to the fact that a first principle has been contradicted. In this way, Reid endorses and explains the utility of *reductio ad absurdum* as a means of undermining an argument. Some arguments can be shown to result in conclusions that common sense deems absurd which indicates that somewhere along the line that argument is inconsistent with a first principle.²⁷ We can thus undermine an argument by identifying absurd conclusions which follow from its premises.

The role that absurdity plays in Reid’s account of common sense is important for our current purposes. He claims that “the opinions which contradict first principles are distinguished from other errors by this; that they are not only false but absurd” (EIP 566). As Reid sees it, an absurd conclusion is the best possible indicator that an argument is at fault because it tells us a first principle has been contradicted. Absurdity can be a useful

²⁷ For example, Reid suggests that Zeno’s argument against motion can be undermined via a *reduction ad absurdum* since the conclusion (‘the arrow does not move’) is absurd: “[n]o man is now moved by the subtle arguments of ZENO against motion, though perhaps he knows not how to answer them” (EIP 566).

tool in the hands of those who are naturally guided by common sense (and in possession of a little wit) for, as Reid explains:

to discountenance absurdity, Nature hath given us a particular emotion, to wit, that of ridicule... This weapon, when properly applied, cuts with as keen an edge as argument. (EIP 566)

Citing satirical writers like Voltaire and Swift, Reid explains that an effective way to undermine an argument is to point out the absurdity of its conclusion. This is exactly what is going on with Reid's critique of Berkeley. While Reid does engage with Berkeley's argument for immaterialism elsewhere (I discuss this in the next section) he repeatedly points out the absurdity of Berkeley's conclusion "that there is no material world" (EIP 168-69), thus employing ridicule to highlight the absurdity of immaterialism.

There is no doubt that Reid takes Berkeley's immaterialism to be inconsistent with a first principle of common sense, namely, that the material world exists. But is it Reid's account of common sense that explains *why* he takes this to be the case? In what follows, I outline Berkeley's explicit remarks on the nature of common sense and its role in philosophical discourse before considering three recent interpretations in secondary literature. I then consider how these interpretations of Berkeley's account about common sense compare with Reid's account as outlined above. Ultimately, I will argue that Reid's account of common sense is not the root of his disagreement with Berkeley.

3.2 Berkeley's 'account' of common sense

Berkeley, unlike Reid, does not provide anything like a straightforward exposition of what he means by 'common sense.' It is unclear whether he takes common sense to be equivalent to universally or popularly held opinion or whether it is more closely connected to the proper use of one's mental faculties.²⁸ One thing that is discernible, albeit indirectly, from Berkeley's remarks on the nature of the mind, is that he does not understand common sense as a distinct mental power or faculty. For Berkeley, "spirit is

²⁸ Bordner argues that Berkeley's appeals to common sense are not appeals to popularly held opinion, citing various disparaging remarks Berkeley makes about popularly held views. See 2011, 318-18; (forthcoming), 3-8.

one simple, undivided, active being” (PHK §27). Berkeley does accept that there is an important difference between the mental acts of willing and understanding but argues that these are not distinct faculties but rather different ways by which we refer to the mind depending on the kind of ideas that it is perceiving. He explains that “[a]s it perceives ideas, it is *called* the ‘understanding’, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the ‘will’” (PHK §27, my emphasis).²⁹

It is also important to note that Berkeley falls into the category of the “modern Philosophers” who, according to Reid, distinguish between sense and judgement. This is made clear at the beginning of the *New Theory*, where Berkeley argues that “the estimate we make of the distance of objects considerably remote, is rather an act of judgment grounded on experience, than of sense” (NTV §3). Here Berkeley is setting out one of the two chief aims of the *New Theory*, namely, establishing the conclusion that distance is not perceived immediately by sight (NTV §§1-2). But what is important for our current purposes is the dichotomy Berkeley’s imposes between “judgement grounded on experience” and “sense”. This dichotomy is precisely what Reid rejects.

What’s more, unlike Reid, Berkeley is happy to use the term ‘sense’ in two disparate ways. In a strict sense, for Berkeley, the term ‘sense’ only applies to touch, sight, taste, smell, and hearing.³⁰ But Berkeley also, at other times, uses the term consistently with the ordinary language usage that Reid endorses (EIP 519). For example, in *Alciphron*, Euphranor claims that “but to infer from thence that there are no true inspirations would be too like concluding that some men are not in their *senses* because other men are fools” (AMP 7.9, my emphasis). Similarly, in §8 of the *Principles*, as part of his argument against representationalism, Berkeley asks “whether it be *sense*, to assert a colour is like something which is invisible; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest” (my emphasis). *Common* sense, as Berkeley understands

²⁹ See chapter five (2.3) for my discussion of the difference between willing and understanding. ‘Perceives’ in this instance means ‘perceives via the senses.’ As he explains in PHK §§28-29, the difference between willing and understanding is grounded in the difference between perceiving ideas of sensation and ideas of imagination. This is supported by an entry in the *Notebooks* where Berkeley indicates that the activities of the mind are only differentiated by their effects: “[w]e see no variety or difference betwixt the Volitions, only between their effects. Tis One Will on Act distinguish’d by the effects.” (NB 788) See Lee 2012, 568, for further discussion of this notebook entry.

³⁰ There are so many references to perception via the senses in the *Principles* that it is not worth citing them all. But see, for instance, PI §8 where “perceived by sense” is used three times and PHK §3, §4, §7 where Berkeley talks of ideas “imprinted” on the senses.

it, is aligned with this second, ‘improper’ way of using the term. So common sense, for Berkeley, should not be understood as a genuine *sense*.

The closest thing to a definition of common sense, in Berkeley’s writings, comes in dialogue six of *Alciphron* where Crito explains: “[b]y common sense, I suppose, should be meant, either the general sense of mankind, or the improved reason of thinking men” (AMP 6.12). However, this is a problematic definition on two counts. Firstly, because it involves an ambiguity regarding the fact that this is a disjunctive statement. *Either* common sense is the “general sense of mankind” *or* “the improved reason of thinking men” – but which is Berkeley’s view, if any? Even if we could answer that question, “the general sense of mankind” does not help up any further because it is still unclear what ‘sense’ (in this case) refers to. It could also be that “or”, in this sentence, is not disjunctive but conjunctive. In which case, it would be more accurate to read Crito as suggesting that common sense is ‘the general sense of mankind, or *in other words* the improved reason of thinking men’. But this seems an odd thing for Berkeley to say, especially in light of his frequently employed distinction between the vulgar and the philosophers (see, e.g., PHK §37, §51, §56).

The second problem is that it is not clear how representative the figure of Crito is of Berkeley’s own philosophical views. For the most part, while Euphranor stands for Berkeley’s philosophical views, Crito is an apologist for traditional Christian monotheism.³¹ As is often the case in *Alciphron*, in the passage in question, Crito is defending certain religious beliefs – this time, in response to Alciphron’s accusation that they are contrary to common sense. These include “the Christian doctrines of grace, self-denial, regeneration, [and] sanctification” (AMP 6.12). Crito denies that such doctrines are “repugnant to the reason of mankind” by appealing to both “poets and philosophers” from ancient Greece, scholastic thought, and antiquity who defended them. Even if this was Berkeley’s view, it is not hugely enlightening. For, what we really want is a definition of what Berkeley takes ‘common sense’ to refer to in the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*. Unfortunately, Berkeley is not forthcoming in providing one.

One thing that is clear, when it comes to Berkeley’s treatment of common sense in the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, is that he takes it to be consistent with a certain

³¹ In short, Euphranor tends to represent Berkeley the philosopher (and is more similar to Philonous in the *Dialogues*) while Crito tends to represent Berkeley the bishop.

understanding of the relationship between the senses and reality. At the very beginning of the *Principles* Introduction, Berkeley explains that since philosophy is “the study of wisdom and truth”, we should expect to find that philosophers are “less disturbed with doubts and difficulties than other men” (PI §1). And yet, what we actually find is that

it is the illiterate bulk of mankind [and *not* philosophers] that walk the high-road of plain, common sense, and are governed by the dictates of nature, for the most part easy and undisturbed. To them nothing that’s familiar appears unaccountable or difficult to comprehend. They complain not of any want of evidence in their senses, and are out of all danger of becoming sceptics. (PI §1)

The reason for the doubts and difficulties that philosophers find themselves facing, Berkeley explains, is a set of false principles of knowledge (including the doctrines of abstraction and materialism) which have introduced “absurdities and contradictions into the several sects of philosophy” (PI §4; see also Pappas 2000, 209).³² But the vulgar, who follow common sense and the dictates of nature, do not find themselves with any such difficulties. For that reason, in the *Dialogues*, Philonous asks whether “it be not the wisest way to follow nature, trust your senses, and laying aside all anxious thought about unknown natures and substances, admit with the vulgar those for real things, which are perceived by the senses?” (DHP 246)

Berkeley clearly thinks that when it comes to trusting the senses, the vulgar have got it right. They do not recognise a distinction between appearances and reality, and never question the testimony of their sense experience. They are, as Berkeley puts it in the *Principles*, minds “not yet debauched by learning” (PHK §123). Regarding Berkeley’s views about what common sense tell us about perception and reality, then, some things are clear:

- (i) Following common sense is a natural thing to do – in fact, it consists in following nature.
- (ii) Following common sense entails trusting one’s senses.
- (iii) Those who follow common sense take things perceived by the senses and real things to be one and the same.

³² Like Reid, Berkeley emphasises the danger of knowledge that is grounded on false principles and the importance of identifying true principles of knowledge. Berkeley nowhere states that such principles are self-evident but a candidate first principle (I suggest) is the *esse is percipi* thesis (PHK §3).

Beyond that, however, Berkeley's view remains unclear. Specifically, it remains unclear what exactly Berkeley thinks 'common sense' refers to and thus what exactly it is that he takes his philosophy to be a vindication of.

It is left, therefore, to commentators to reconstruct Berkeley's account of common sense and to explain how it relates to his theory of perception. Unsurprisingly, then, Berkeley's claims about common sense have been the subject of much discussion in secondary literature. I will not provide an exhaustive overview of that literature – primarily because this has been done at least twice recently by Seth Bordner (see 2011, 2017b; see also (forthcoming)). However, I will outline some important recent interpretations, focusing primarily on the connection between Berkeley's claims about common sense and perception.³³

3.3 Interpretations of Berkeley's account

I will focus on three interpretations of Berkeley's account of common sense. Whilst acknowledging that this does not constitute an exhaustive overview of the literature on this issue, I focus on these interpretations because they are helpful in drawing out the connection Berkeley identifies between common sense and perception. Depending on which interpretation is preferred, it turns out there may be some important points of overlap with Reid's account. My aim will be to tease out such points of agreement but also to identify the extent to which Berkeley and Reid's accounts of common sense differ.

The central questions that have occupied commentators on this issue are how and if Berkeley's philosophy is meant to provide a *defence* of common sense? And why, if so, that would be philosophically desirable for Berkeley? To address such questions, George Pappas develops what is generally referred to as a 'propositional' reading of

³³ My overview omits one prominent interpretation of Berkeley's account of common sense: that of John Russell Roberts. Roberts claims that "Berkeley is only interested in defending his view as common sense insofar as a commitment to a traditional Judeo-Christian monotheism is considered a part of common sense". I omit Roberts' reading because it is less concerned with the relationship between common sense and perception than other interpretations. It is also less easily comparable with Reid's account of that relationship. For Roberts' reading, see 2007, 124-146. For critical discussion of Robert's reading, see Bordner 2011, 336; 2017b, 348-49. It is worth noting, however, that if Roberts' interpretation is accurate that would explain why Berkeley puts a definition of common sense in the mouth of Crito (the Christian apologist) in *Alciphron*.

Berkeley's account.³⁴ Pappas argues that, despite his apparent protestations to the contrary,³⁵ Berkeley does not think there is any intrinsic value in providing a defence of common sense. Rather, Pappas argues that Berkeley's appeals to common sense are simply meant to emphasise an advantage that his immaterialism has over materialist philosophy. In Pappas' words:

agreement with common sense has no special epistemic status or weight, except to the extent that such agreement may be used to break ties between competing philosophical theories which come out equal to all other marks of evidence. (2000, 210)

On Pappas' reading, then, Berkeley is not defending common sense *per se*, but rather advertising a feature of his theory boast over the alternatives. As Pappas sees it, Berkeley's vindication of common sense is employed, in effect, to settle a tie-break scenario. As Pappas puts it, "other factors are given the lion's share of attention, and agreement with common sense is brought in at the end" (2000, 227). This explains *why* Berkeley thinks defending common sense is philosophically advantageous, but it is still not clear what his defence consists in.

Pappas claims that, for Berkeley, 'common sense' refers to a very large set of propositions which are accepted by the vulgar. Defending common sense, on this reading, means advocating a philosophical view consistent with some or all of these propositions. Within the "truly vast number" of common sense propositions, Pappas claims there is a sub-set, which he calls 'set C', which Berkeley actually cites (2000, 217). These include the propositions 'that we have direct and certain knowledge of things in the world', 'that objects have the qualities they are perceived to have', 'that when objects are perceived, they are perceived as they are', and 'that we have intuitive knowledge of objects' (2000, 211-12). Pappas also claims that there are "some philosophically important C-propositions which Berkeley does not accept" (2000, 213). These include the propositions 'that physical objects and some of their qualities exist independently of perception', 'that no physical object has ideas as constituents', and 'that there is real causation between events in the physical world'. As Pappas sees it, Berkeley's appeal to common sense is

³⁴ I focus on Pappas' most recent (2000) defence of this interpretation.

³⁵ For example, his claim in the *Notebooks* that "I side in all things with the Mob" (NB 405).

an appeal to the fact that immaterialism is consistent with *more* of these propositions than materialism (2000, 214).

One of the textual sources in which Pappas grounds his reading is a passage in the *Dialogues* where Philonous lists several propositions that he takes to be inconsistent with common sense. He writes:

That the qualities we perceive, are not on the objects: that we must not believe our senses: that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be assured even of their existence: that real colours and sounds are nothing but certain unknown figures and motions: that motions are in themselves neither swift nor slow: that there are in bodies absolute extensions, without any particular magnitude or figure: that a thing stupid, thoughtless and inactive, operates on a spirit: that the least particle of a body, contains innumerable extended parts. These are the novelties, these are the strange notions which shock the genuine uncorrupted judgment of all mankind; and being once admitted, embarrass the mind with endless doubts and difficulties. And it is against these and the like innovations, I endeavour to vindicate common sense. (DHP 244)

Now, a list of propositions that Berkeley *rejects* does not automatically equate to a set of propositions that (a) he takes to constitute common sense, and (b) he defends. As Bordner points out, Berkeley here describes the propositions he is *attacking* rather than those he is *embracing* (2011, 328). However, this list of beliefs does provide Pappas with plausible grounds on which to argue for his propositional reading. Even with Bordner's concern in mind, Berkeley clearly sees several propositions entailed by his opponents' views as contrary to common sense, and thus worth undermining. On Pappas' reading, Berkeley's account is not far from Reid's own view that common sense serves to root out those claims which contradict self-evident first principles. Like Berkeley, Reid maintains that certain philosophical positions will be met with ridicule (or as Berkeley puts it, "shock") and that such claims should be rejected in favour of those consistent with the dictates of common sense. Reid claims that some opinions stand "upon a higher opinion than that of philosophy, and philosophy must strike sail to it, if she would not render herself contemptible to every man of common understanding" (EAP 29-30). If it is accurate then Pappas' propositional reading of Berkeley draws out some important similarities with Reid's own account.

Kenneth Pearce has more recently developed a reading according to which Berkeley's defence of common sense is a defence of the *epistemic practice* of the vulgar – represented in the *Three Dialogues* by the figure of the gardener (DHP 234).³⁶ As Pearce puts it, “Berkeley's defense of common sense is, first and foremost, a defense of the gardener's claim to know that a cherry tree does, and an orange tree does not, exist in the garden” (2017, 553). On this reading, following common sense means using one's faculty of sense-perception in the right way. I will refer to this as an ‘epistemic’ reading of Berkeley's account of common sense, although it should be noted that Pearce takes Berkeley to be defending both the epistemic and the *linguistic* practice of the gardener.³⁷ Pearce's reading is not propositional, at least not in the sense that Pappas' is, although he does emphasise that the *esse* is *percipi* principle (or ‘EIP’) is central to Berkeley's account of common sense. Pearce's is not strictly a propositional reading because, as he reads it, because Berkeley does not take the vulgar to be conscious of their acceptance of this principle – it is not a *de dicto* belief. Accordingly, there would little to be gained, for Berkeley, in defending a view that is consistent with propositions that the vulgar are committed to. Rather, on Pearce's reading, Berkeley is promoting the fact that the vulgar's epistemic *practice* is in accordance with EIP. Berkeley's appeals to common sense, on this reading, are directed at philosophers, such as abstractionists and materialists, who “must learn to imitate the gardener's virtuous epistemic practice of trusting his senses” (2017, 554). As Pearce sees it, Berkeley accepts that the vulgar do not explicitly accept or endorse EIP but nonetheless act in accordance with it (2017, 564). As he puts it, “EIP is not a proposition the gardener believes. It is a rule the gardener follows” (2017, 560).

This reading is consistent with Reid's account of common sense in some important ways. As we have seen, Reid maintains that when common sense and philosophy are at odds, it is the latter that should make way for the former. For Reid, when inconsistencies between common sense and philosophy arise, “philosophy must strike sail to” common sense or risk rendering itself “contemptible to every man of common understanding” (EAP 29-30). Pearce's reading does not entail that the vulgar

³⁶ I do not discuss it here, but Pearce takes his reading to be largely consistent with another developed by Matthew Holtzman (2013). On Holtzman's reading, Berkeley defines common sense as the proper use of one's mental faculties. As he puts it, “to say that someone possesses common sense is to praise them for being psychologically or spiritually healthy” (2013, 17).

³⁷ That is, the gardener both believes that the cherry tree exists when he perceives it but will also makes existence claims about the tree (such as ‘it exists’) on the basis of perceiving it (2017, 569-70).

and the philosophers have competing views *per se*, because on Pearce's reading the vulgar need not have any explicit opinions concerning what 'existence' means or on the relationship between the senses and reality. On Pearce's reading, Berkeley is nonetheless identifying a tension between the vulgar and philosophers, albeit a tension between their epistemic practices. The vulgar apply the predicate 'exists' to whatever they immediately perceive while materialist philosophers do not.³⁸ If Pearce is right, then, like Reid, Berkeley is arguing that philosophy ought to "strike sail" to common sense. On the other hand, this reading of Berkeley does not share Reid's commitment to the first principles of knowledge revealed by common sense. Thus, Pearce's 'epistemic' reading indicates a point of departure from Reid's own account.

The final interpretation I will discuss comes from Seth Bordner. As well as providing helpful overviews of the literature on Berkeley's account of common sense, Bordner has advocated his own reading across several publications (2011, 2017a, 2017b, (forthcoming)). The first thing to note about Bordner's reading is that he does *not* take Berkeley to have provided a 'defence' of common sense. Rather, he argues that what Berkeley offers is a *vindication* of it. He explains, "Berkeley's strategy was not to defend common sense by arguing for it, but to protect common sense by arguing against views he regarded as threats to it" (2017b, 350). The margins are fine here – for example, it is not obvious what the difference between defending and protecting a position is – but Bordner argues that the implications are significant. On Bordner's reading, Berkeley is neither defending a set of widely-held propositions nor an epistemic practice which the vulgar engage in. As Bordner sees it, there is nothing especially virtuous or praiseworthy, in Berkeley's eyes, about the beliefs or the practices of the vulgar in and of themselves. They do not understand why their epistemic practice is right; in fact, they have never even considered it. There is, however, something about common sense, and those who are guided by it, worth protecting, which is their "natural credulity" (2017b, 352). The vulgar are naturally disposed to believe the testimony of their senses – and this natural disposition remains uncorrupted by abstract and materialist philosophy. As Bordner sees it, Berkeley thinks that this provides the vulgar with a resistance to scepticism (2011, 322). As Bordner puts it:

³⁸ The difference, as Pearce sees it, is that the philosophers differentiate between the things immediately perceived and things that really exist because of a propositional (*de dicto*) belief whereas the vulgar *unreflectively* take things perceived and real things to be one and the same – they have no such propositional belief.

Berkeley only seems concerned with one such belief [the unreflective belief that the perceived world is the real world], and what is more, his focus on this belief has nothing to do with its being commonly held as such. Rather, his concern to defend this belief stems from its anti-sceptical value. (2011, 323)

As Bordner sees it, Berkeley *vindicates* but does not ‘defend’ common sense, because he does not think there is anything inherently praise-worthy about this natural credulity beyond the fact that it makes the vulgar resistant to scepticism. Since the alternative is to follow the philosophers, doubt the senses, and wind up in a sceptical position, Berkeley takes it to be worthwhile to defend common sense which is preferable by a long shot. Unlike Pearce, then, Bordner claims that Berkeley is more concerned with identifying what it is that materialist philosophers do wrong. Berkeley’s vindication of common sense, on this reading, involves pointing to the fact that the vulgar do not make the same mistakes that philosophers do. As Bordner sees it, Berkeley is more interested in recalling philosophers *back* to common sense, via philosophical reasoning, than in putting the vulgar *forward* as exemplary of any particular epistemic practice.

To the extent that it involves downplaying the intrinsic value of common sense, Bordner’s reading renders Berkeley’s account of common sense quite different to Reid’s. On Bordner’s reading, it does not necessarily follow that Berkeley would choose common sense over philosophy in any and all instances where the two are at loggerheads. As Bordner sees it, Berkeley does not advocate trusting in the testimony of the senses *because* it is what common sense dictates nor does he see it an inherently positive aspect of his philosophy that it coincides with common sense. Rather, Berkeley simply endorses the common sense account of perception in the face of a sceptical alternative. This is a far cry from Reid’s claim that common sense stands as a “higher opinion” than philosophy (EAP 29-30).

On Bordner’s reading – but also on those of Pappas and Pearce – it becomes clear that common sense does not occupy the same space in Berkeley’s philosophy as it does in Reid’s. Reid explicitly ties common sense to the underlying self-evident principles that form the bedrock of all human knowledge. He also maintains that when common sense and philosophy are at odds, it is the former that ought to be preferred to the latter. Ultimately, Reid maintains, philosophy that fails to reconcile itself with common sense risks falling into absurdity.

Sometimes, Berkeley appears to take common sense and the views of the vulgar as seriously as Reid does. That he begins the Introduction to the *Principles* with a diatribe against the philosophers, the propagators of abstract thought who raise a dust and then complain they cannot see (PI §3), is a testament to the fact that common sense has an important role to play in philosophy, “the study of wisdom and truth” (PI §1). Yet Berkeley, unlike Reid, does not take the time and pains to characterise common sense and explain why (or if) it is something worth defending or vindicating. Common sense plays a role *throughout* Reid’s philosophy, factoring into his views on a wide range of issues including morality, free will, and natural science – as well as his views on perception and reality discussed previously. On all the interpretations outlined above, Berkeley appeals to common sense only in regard to perception and the reality of sensible things. Berkeley’s explicit remarks on common sense, at least in the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*, are consistent with this.

What’s more, Reid’s view is that common sense helps us to discover the self-evident truths on which our knowledge is founded. Even on a propositional reading, such as that of Pappas, Berkeley is not committed to any such claim. If Pappas is right and Berkeley is defending a set of commonly accepted propositions, there is still no indication that Berkeley saw these principles as self-evident. Berkeley simply thinks that accepting these principles is a means of avoiding scepticism (DHP 244). Pearce and Bordner both take this to be key to Berkeley’s defence of common sense. Pearce argues that, as Berkeley sees it, the vulgar unreflectively follow the *esse is percipi* principle by applying the predicate ‘exists’ to whatever is presently perceived, thereby precluding the possibility of falling into scepticism about sensible things (2017, 560). While Bordner takes Berkeley to be endorsing “the central, anti-skeptical tenet of the Vulgar – that the perceived world is the real world”. A tenet, which, in Bordner’s words, “is threatened by bad philosophy” (2017, 328). Both, then, albeit in different ways, argue that Berkeley appeals to common sense strictly in support of his account of perception. This is despite his claim to “side in *all things* with the Mob” (NB 405, my emphasis). In other words, however you read it, Berkeley’s is a considerably narrower conception of what it means to defend common sense than that of Reid.

While there may be some similarities between Reid and Berkeley’s accounts of common sense there are also some notable differences in the scope of and weight placed on common sense in regard to philosophy – on any of the above interpretations. But does

this get us to the root of their disagreement as to the ‘positive’ nature of reality? I suggest it does not. For one thing, we still need an explanation of *why* Reid thinks immaterialism contravenes a first principle of common sense. Nothing in Reid’s (or Berkeley’s) account of common sense provides us with such an explanation. In the next section, I argue that this disagreement is ultimately motivated by both thinkers’ views concerning philosophical prejudices.

4. Two Philosophical Prejudices

4.1 Berkeley’s ‘ideist’ prejudice

The most important difference between Berkeley and Reid’s metaphysics is that while Reid claims it is a material, mind-*independent* world that we immediately perceive, Berkeley argues that all “the furniture of the earth” are ideas which are mind-*dependent* (PHK §6). Nonetheless, I have argued that both can be appropriately characterised as part of the same anti-representationalist tradition. This is because anti-representationalism, as I understand it, is an *epistemological* tradition. Both thinkers identify the same epistemological problems in representationalism and develop their own theories in response to those concerns. For that reason, differences between the *metaphysical* pictures they arrive do not undermine this claim.

Yet, we still need an explanation for why Berkeley and Reid arrive at such different pictures and, in particular, what it is that led Reid to see Berkeley’s view as both conducive to scepticism and contrary to common sense. In this final section, I will argue that the methods by which each develops their metaphysics are driven by what both thinkers identify as ‘philosophical prejudices’: certain commitments on which neither is willing to be moved. This is perhaps surprising, given the fact that both Berkeley and Reid so frequently set themselves in opposition to philosophy and on the side of common sense. Yet, I contend, by identifying these prejudices we can understand how two anti-representationalist thinkers came to give such contrary accounts of the reality of things. In other words, I explain how from a shared ‘negative’ position, Berkeley and Reid arrive at different ‘positive’ positions.

Despite their shared commitment to the importance of evidence provided by the senses, and the fact that both reject the four-part story (*mind - mental act – idea - physical object*) of perception maintained by representationalists, Reid nonetheless sees Berkeley as emblematic of the problems entailed by the way of ideas. Reid maintains that while Berkeley is “no friend to scepticism... the result of his inquiry was, a ferocious conviction, that there is no such thing as the material world” (IHM 21).³⁹ That is, like Hume, Reid identifies a contrast between Berkeley’s anti-sceptical intentions and (as he sees it) his sceptical conclusions. Reid argues that Berkeley adopts the *wrong* three-part story of perception. In doing so, Reid argues, Berkeley takes this already problematic account of perception to its inevitable, but regrettable, endpoint: rejecting the existence of real things. As Reid puts it:

[Berkeley] maintains, and thinks he has demonstrated, by a variety of arguments, grounded on the principles of philosophy universally received, that there is no such thing as matter in the universe; that sun and moon, earth and sea, our own bodies, and those of our friends, are nothing but ideas in the minds of those who think of them (EIP 157)

Reid thinks it hardly surprising that Berkeley should arrive at this conclusion since, he thinks, as long as one accepts that ideas are the only things we immediately perceive, there will always be justifiable reasons for doubting the existence of anything which is not an idea. He states: “if philosophers will maintain that ideas in the mind are the only immediate objects of thought, they will be forced to grant that they are the sole objects of thought” (EIP 152). This goes for all ‘ideists’ and not just *idealists* like Berkeley.

It’s worth noting, however, that this is precisely the same criticism Berkeley has of his own opponents. In §8 of the *Principles*, Berkeley argues that we cannot reliably move from our immediate perception of ideas to knowledge of their supposed archetypes or originals. In fact, he argues, if we are committed to the view that we cannot immediately perceive things in themselves, then we will inevitably end up in the sceptical position. In response, his aim is to change ideas into things, thereby collapsing the thing-idea distinction and ensuring that we have immediate access to things in the world (DHP 244). If Berkeley and Reid put forward the same criticism of their opponents, what explains Reid’s own critique of Berkeley?

³⁹See Hume’s *Enquiry* 155, footnote 31.

Ultimately, the reason Reid cannot accept Berkeley's solution to the sceptical problems of representationalism comes down to the *principles* on which Berkeley develops his argument. Reid thinks that Berkeley's idealism, in which all that exists are minds and ideas, is contrary to our common sense commitment to the existence of the material world (EIP 169-70, 274). But elsewhere Reid indicates that a proposition's being contrary to common sense does not *necessarily* rule out its being true (EIP 523, 531). So its failure to cohere with the dictates of common sense is not sufficient in itself, for Reid, for rejecting Berkeley's system. Rather it comes down to the fact that Berkeley inherits what Reid calls the "original defect" of the way of ideas (IHM 29). This "defect" in Berkeley's system, Reid explains, means that "scepticism is inlaid in it and reared along with". From Reid's point of view, the *prejudice* that Berkeley has succumbed to, and which renders his system vulnerable to scepticism, is to accept that the immediate objects of perception are ideas. *Granted this premise*, Reid accepts, "the existence of the material world must be a dream that has imposed on mankind from the beginning of the world" (EIP 161). But, he argues, for that argument to be successful its foundation must be "solid, and well established".

For Reid, Berkeley's failure to provide such a foundation reveals his philosophical prejudice and the inconsistency between his position and the dictates of common sense. "If he means that it is self-evident", Reid states (referring to Berkeley's claim that what we immediately perceive are ideas), "this, indeed, must be a good reason for not offering any direct argument in proof of it" (EIP 161). Reid has no problem with self-evident truths *per se*. In fact, as we saw previously, he argues that self-evident truths, propositions that carry the "light of truth" within themselves, form the very basis of human knowledge. But self-evident truths are those which "appear evident to every man of sound understanding who apprehends the meaning of them distinctly, and attends to them without prejudice" (EIP 161). It is on this count that Reid accuses Berkeley, like his predecessors in the way of ideas, of mis-identifying a self-evident truth. For, he argues, to "any man uninstructed in philosophy, this proposition will appear very improbable, if not absurd". It is especially concerning for Reid that the only evidence Berkeley provides in favour of this proposition is "the authority of philosophers" (EIP 162).

Berkeley's idealism, Reid maintains, is the perfect example of why *properly* identifying self-evident truths, or first principles, is so important. All knowledge must be built on a foundation of first principles. Conversely, mis-identifying first principles can

lead one to develop an entire system of knowledge which is absurd. Such is the case, Reid argues, with Berkeley's immaterialism. Berkeley's prejudicial acceptance, as Reid sees it, of the claim that ideas are the immediate objects of perception means that he cannot accept his solution to the sceptical problems raised by representationalism.

4.2 Reid's 'materialist' prejudice

As Reid reads it, Berkeley's appeal to common sense is not really an attempt to defend it but rather an attempt to mitigate *common sense objections*. As Reid puts it, Berkeley was motivated by "a just apprehension that, in a controversy of this kind, the common sense of mankind is the most formidable antagonist" (EIP 167). In other words, Reid maintains that in order to avoid the objection that his view is *contrary* to common sense, Berkeley brought common sense nearer to his own. What's more, Reid argues, Berkeley accepts something common sense simply does not permit: that we immediately perceive ideas.

Berkeley is very careful to qualify his employment of the word 'idea' and to clarify his aims in collapsing the thing-idea distinction.⁴⁰ At the end of the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley accepts that it is the view of the philosophers that "*the things immediately perceived, are ideas which exist only in the mind*", while the vulgar believe "*those things they immediately perceive are real things*" (DHP 262, emphasis in original). Earlier in the dialogue, when Hylas charges Philonous with endorsing scepticism by "changing all things into ideas", Philonous responds:

You mistake me. I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception, which according to you, are only appearances of things, I take to be the real things themselves." (DHP 244)

Things in the world retain their reality, for Berkeley. They are still the things we see and feel *immediately*. It is also not the case, as Reid suggests, that, in Berkeley's system, things only exist when you or I conceive them (EIP 162) or that the world around us is reduced to the status of a dream or illusion (EIP 161). As Berkeley puts it:

⁴⁰ For more on Berkeley's employment of the term 'idea', see chapter two (2.1 and 2.2).

Whatever we see, feel, hear, or any wise conceive or understand, remains as secure as ever and is as real as ever. There is a *rerum natura* and the distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force (PHK §34).⁴¹

Berkeley, then, sees himself as a realist: there is a natural order of things, and the distinction between the things which make up that natural world and those that *merely* exist in our minds remains as clear and obvious, and as *real*, as ever. What's more, Berkeley takes himself to have provided a metaphysics consistent with an anti-representationalist epistemology. Since ideas are things, and ideas exist only in the mind and are immediately perceived, there is simply no room for scepticism concerning our knowledge of the nature and existence of those things.

It could also be argued that although Reid claims that the “defect” of the way of ideas is accepting that we immediately perceive ideas, his criticisms reveal that what he really thinks leads us to scepticism is accepting that we immediately perceive ideas *which represent external objects*. This second clause is what gets us into a sceptical position since it entails that there is a distinction between the things with which we are familiar, ideas, and those we *want* to be familiar with, external objects. If *this* is Reid's central concern then it should not, despite his claims to the contrary, automatically tie Berkeley's position to scepticism. For, as Copenhaver explains, “Berkeley did *not* hold what Reid objected to most... that the mind is directed towards ideas that are representations of extra-mental objects” (2013, 116).⁴² As Marina Folescu puts it, *this* is “Reid's key antirepresentationalist criticism” (2015, 33, footnote 1); but it is not obvious that it actually applies to Berkeley.

So why can't Reid accept this picture? And why does he go so far as to claim that it is “the most apt to bring philosophy into ridicule with plain men who are guided by the dictates of nature and common sense”? (EIP 169) His claim is that there is no justification for the philosophical view that we immediately perceive *ideas* and that to accept this view is to undermine one of the first principles of common sense. This first principle is that there is a material, *mind-independent* reality. To a degree, Berkeley himself is also willing to accept that the vulgar are committed to the existence of a material world – depending

⁴¹ The distinction between “realities” and “chimeras”, for Berkeley, is grounded in the distinction between ideas of sensation (which are ‘real’) and ideas of the imagination (which are ‘ideas or images’ of them). For this distinction, see PHK §§28-29. Reid discusses this distinction in EIP 178-182.

⁴² For a similar claim, see Yolton 1984, 208-209. For more on Berkeley's rejection of the view that ideas are *representative* entities, see Bolton 1987 and chapter two (2.2).

on what they take ‘material world’ to refer to. For example, in the *Principles*, he tackles the claim that common sense commits us to the existence of material *substance*.⁴³ In response, he writes:

if the word ‘substance’ be taken in the vulgar sense, for a combination of sensible qualities, such as extension, solidity, weight, and the like, this we cannot be accused of taking away. (PHK §37)

This is relevant to Reid’s criticisms, for Reid emphasises that common sense commits us to the existence of extended, tangible, solid objects. As Berkeley sees it, his system allows for the existence of such things. “To be plain,” he explains, “it is my opinion that the real things are those very things I see and feel, and perceive by my sense” (DHP 229). It is the existence of “*what the philosophers call ‘material substance’*” that Berkeley seeks to refute (DHP 172, my emphasis).⁴⁴ While Reid maintains that ideas are “mere fiction[s]” employed by philosophers (EIP 27), for Berkeley it is material substance or material things, *as defined by materialist philosophers*, which are the mere fictions.

Faced with Reid’s criticisms, then, Berkeley is likely to put them down to the philosophical prejudice which he is most eager to address: materialism. Berkeley’s characterisation of materialism is best encapsulated in §4 of the *Principles*, which reads:

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this principle may be entertained in the world; yet whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question, may, if I mistake not, perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?

⁴³ I take it that Berkeley’s discussion of ‘material substance’ applies equally in this instance to ‘material things’ or ‘the material world’ too.

⁴⁴ It is for this reason that Samuel Johnson’s infamous ‘refutation’ of immaterialism, in which he kicked a stone and exclaimed ‘I refute it thus!’, ultimately misses the point. See Boswell 1791, 333. As James Frederick Ferrier explains, Berkeley “never denied the existence of matter in the sense in which Johnson understood it”. See 2011, 90. Similarly, John Yolton claims that: “Reid’s equating of ‘matter’ with the ordinary objects of our experience entirely misses Berkeley’s careful and labored distinction between them” (1984, 206).

Throughout both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley's aim is to vindicate the common sense view that real things are the immediate objects of our senses. Reid argues that common sense commits us to the existence of a material world that is *mind-independent*. To that extent, Reid is, from Berkeley's perspective, a materialist and thereby caught up in his own philosophical prejudice. Berkeley encourages his readers to re-evaluate what is meant by the term existence and render existence claims consistent with those made by, for example, the gardener who, when he says of an object 'it exists', means nothing more than that "he sees and feels it" (DHP 234).⁴⁵ Reid's failure to deviate from the position that real existence means existence outside the mind is, from Berkeley's perspective, indicative of the fact that he still thinking within the constraints of this "strangely prevailing opinion".

It is these two philosophical prejudices, the way of ideas and materialism, as they are characterised by each thinker respectively, that lead Berkeley and Reid to tackle the sceptical problems thrown up by representationalism in such different ways. Reid develops a view on which we immediately perceive things in the world which are *mind-independent*,⁴⁶ while Berkeley argues things in the world are ideas which are, by definition, immediately perceived. In both cases, when perception occurs, there is no room for scepticism about the knowledge that results. It is nonetheless the case that both thinkers are motivated by anti-sceptical concerns which are raised by the representationalist epistemology they identify in thinkers like Descartes, Malebranche, and Locke.

Conclusion

It is clear that both Berkeley and Reid aim to provide a philosophical account of perception that does not detract our common sense picture of the relationship between ourselves and the real world. Instead, both aim to defend our pre-theoretical account of perception without intermediaries. For that reason, I have argued that both Reid and Berkeley can be appropriately characterised as anti-representationalist thinkers. Both, I have shown, argue against the view that our perception of things in the world is mediated

⁴⁵ For similar claims in Berkeley's *Notebooks*, see NB 408, 593, 604.

⁴⁶ Reid is thus a 'direct realist' about perception. See Hoffman 2002, 163; van Cleve 2006, 112.

by ideas which exist only in our minds. Both associate this theory of perception with representationalism; an epistemological view which, they both argue, leads to scepticism. Thus, it is sceptical concerns that motivate their rejection of representationalism and their respective moves towards a direct theory of perception.

However, Reid and Berkeley's metaphysical views are incompatible. Reid takes it that the things we immediately perceive are material objects distinct from the minds which perceive them. Berkeley, on the other hand, argues that ideas of sensation (sensible qualities which exist in the mind) just are the things in the world around us. I compared both thinkers' respective accounts of common sense and their views concerning the relationship between common sense and philosophy. I concluded that while Reid takes common sense, and the self-evident principles that we discover by means of it, to be fundamental in all areas of discourse, Berkeley's defence of common sense is primarily a defence of naïve realism about perception. That said, there are no obvious inconsistencies between Berkeley and Reid's treatment of common sense – at least regarding the nature of perception. Most importantly, both defend the common sense practice of trusting the testimony of the senses over the views of philosophers who distinguish between things immediately perceived and real things. Consequently, I argued that it is not an inconsistency between their accounts of common sense that constitutes the fundamental point of disagreement between Berkeley and Reid.

So it is neither epistemological concerns nor Berkeley's treatment of common sense *per se* that motivates Reid's objection to immaterialism. Rather, I have argued, the inconsistency between Berkeley and Reid's 'positive' views are motivated by certain commitments that neither thinker is willing to deviate from. I called these commitments 'philosophical prejudices.' Berkeley is committed to the philosophers' claim that ideas, which exist only in the mind, are the only immediate objects of perception, while Reid is committed to what Berkeley identifies as a materialist commitment to the mind-independence of real things. Both develop their positive views within these constraints. We can conclude, therefore, that despite both thinkers' attempts to solve the sceptical problems thrown up by representationalism, neither is entirely successful in clearing the way for a theory of knowledge that is *solely* grounded in common sense, observation, and experience. The reason being that neither Reid nor Berkeley manages to provide an account of things free from philosophical prejudice. Thus, one might argue, despite their protestations to the contrary, neither Reid nor Berkeley can help but *feign hypotheses*

CONCLUSION

My Aims

I began this dissertation by citing Anne Berkeley's remark:

had he built as he has pulled down, he had been a master builder indeed; but unto every man his work: some must remove rubbish, and others lay foundations (*Works* VII, 388).

By now, it should be clear that I think Anne Berkeley is right to emphasise that (George) Berkeley's project is largely a negative one, concerned with identifying and correcting what he calls "false principles" of human knowledge (PI §4). This is not surprising, given that the Introduction to the *Principles* begins with a discussion of certain philosophical principles which, he claims,

have introduced all that doubtfulness and uncertainty, those absurdities and contradictions into the several sects of philosophy; insomuch that the wisest men have thought our ignorance incurable, conceiving it to arise from the natural dullness and limitation of our faculties.

These false principles of knowledge are worth rooting out, Berkeley argues, because they lead to "doubtfulness" and "uncertainty". In fact, if we accept these principles and ground our thinking and reasoning upon them "we are insensibly drawn into uncouth paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow upon us as we advance in speculation". So long as our reasoning is based upon false principles, the more we speculate into the nature of things, the more doubtful and uncertain things become until, finally, "having wandered through many intricate mazes, we find our selves just where we were, or, which is worse, sit down in a forlorn scepticism." (PI §1) Whatever these philosophical principles turn out to be, Berkeley maintains that accepting them ultimately leads to scepticism.

For Berkeley, the emergence of sceptical conclusions is enough to bring into question the truth of these supposed "first principles of knowledge" (PI §25). Scepticism, Berkeley maintains, is an incoherent position to find ourselves in because it is

inconsistent with the nature of God to give us “a strong desire” for knowledge of things in the world but then place it “quite out of [our] reach” (PI §3). Thus, Berkeley claims that there is an inconsistency between the scepticism entailed by certain philosophical principles and our natural, God-given desire for knowledge of things in the world. As he puts it: “[i]t is a hard thing to suppose, that right deductions from true principles should ever end in consequences which cannot be maintained or made consistent” (PI §3). That is, if one’s reasoning were based on *true* principles, then such an inconsistency would never arise in the first place. Berkeley’s task, then, is to “discover” and root out the *false* principles of human knowledge – to remove rubbish and lay some foundations that do not lead us towards scepticism.

I set out with three aims at the beginning of this dissertation. The first was to show that, while it is appropriate to characterise Berkeley as an idealist, an immaterialist, and an anti-abstractionist, he is, above all, an *anti-representationalist*. I have argued that it is the principles of representationalism, which were widely accepted in the seventeenth-century, that Berkeley thinks lead to scepticism and which should thus be rejected. His argument can be characterised like so: since scepticism is inconsistent with our God-given desire to gain knowledge of the natures of things, any position which leads to scepticism should be rejected. Representationalism leads to scepticism; therefore, representationalism should be rejected. The principles of representationalism cannot be *true* principles of human knowledge because they lead to “consequences which cannot be maintained or made consistent” (PI §3). I have argued that Berkeley’s idealism, immaterialism, and anti-abstractionism are all subordinate to the epistemological issue of anti-representationalism because it is *representationalism*, specifically, that, as Berkeley sees it, leads to scepticism.

My second aim was to establish that Berkeley’s anti-representationalism is not an isolated incident but rather that he was working within the context of an Early Modern anti-representationalist tradition. To make the case for this claim, I focused on two other thinkers, John Sergeant and Thomas Reid, who also reject representationalist theories of knowledge on the grounds that they inevitably result in scepticism. In chapter one, I demonstrated that Berkeley’s arguments against representationalism are strikingly similar to those which Sergeant develops against ‘ideists’: his term for thinkers who accept that we can only gain knowledge of things in the world via ideas which exist only

in the mind. Both Berkeley and Sergeant, I argued, reject the thing-idea distinction which is a central tenet of representationalism. As Berkeley puts it:

Upon the common principles of philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived. And we are taught to distinguish their real nature from that which falls under our senses. (DHP 167)

It is this view which Berkeley, like Sergeant, rejects because of its sceptical implications. In chapter six, similarly, I demonstrated that despite Reid's criticism of Berkeley's idealism, the problems that he identifies with the way of ideas are the same problems that Berkeley discovers in the philosophy of his own opponents. Both Reid and Berkeley, I argued, deny that ideas are a *tertium quid* in our perception of the external world and both defend the view, accepted by those who are guided by "the dictates of nature and common sense" (EIP 169), that we immediately perceive things in the world.

My final aim was to explain why, despite their shared anti-representationalist views, Berkeley and Reid differ in their 'positive' accounts of reality. Again, the issue of first principles of knowledge is important in regard to this aim. My answer was that both thinkers' reasoning is grounded on certain philosophical prejudices: unargued-for commitments which never come into doubt. Reid, as Berkeley would see it, is committed to the "strangely prevailing" view that real existence of a sensible thing is to be distinguished from its being perceived. He is, in Berkeley's understanding of the term, a 'materialist'. Meanwhile, Berkeley, as Reid sees it, is committed to the false principle of the way of ideas: that *whatever* is immediately perceived is an idea.

Outcomes

My reading of Berkeley as an anti-representationalist has ramifications for both Berkeley scholarship and Early Modern scholarship more generally. First, my reading entails that issues which have always been central to scholarly treatment of Berkeley's philosophy – his idealism, his immaterialism, and his anti-abstractionism – are subordinate to a single epistemological argument which runs through both the *Principles* and the *Three Dialogues*. According to this argument, any epistemology which leads to scepticism

should be rejected, and since representationalism leads to scepticism, representationalism should be rejected.

As part of my characterisation of Berkeley's anti-representationalism, I provided a reconstruction of his argument against representationalism. It follows from my reading that Berkeley puts forward a valid argument which is justified by his views concerning representation and resemblance. The conclusion of Berkeley's argument, that an idea can only *represent* an idea, undermines the representationalist claim that our knowledge of things in the world is gained via ideas which represent them. Berkeley argues that this means that representationalism leads to scepticism and should therefore be rejected. I reconstructed Berkeley's argument like so:

P1. For one thing to represent another those two things must resemble one another (the resemblance thesis).

P2. An idea can only resemble another idea (the likeness principle).

C. Therefore, an idea can only represent another idea (representationalism leads to scepticism).

My aim in chapters three and four was to outline why Berkeley accepts these premises. In chapter three, I argued that the resemblance thesis is built into Berkeley's understanding of representation as involving the literal re-presentation of an object. I thus provided an account of Berkeley's *motivations* for accepting the resemblance thesis. In chapter four, I argued that the likeness principle is justified by Berkeley's views concerning our conceptual abilities which are laid out in Introduction to the *Principles*, thereby providing a reconstruction of Berkeley's argument for the likeness principle.

A study of Berkeley's epistemology would not be complete without a discussion of Berkeley's account of our knowledge of minds. In chapter five, I considered the implications of Berkeley's argument against representationalism for his philosophy of mind. It follows from the argument outlined above that, for Berkeley, an idea could not possibly resemble and thereby could not possibly *represent* a mind, since minds and ideas are "entirely distinct" from one another (PHK §2). This gives rise to the question of whether there is room in Berkeley's epistemology for knowledge of minds at all. I argued that Berkeley *does* provide an account of how we gain immediate knowledge of our own mind and mediate knowledge of other minds. On my reading, Berkeley maintains that we

gain immediate knowledge of ourselves in the form of the immediate awareness we have of ourselves as perceiving in different ways. This knowledge does not take the form of knowledge “by way of idea” but is nonetheless immediate (PHK §142). In turn, this immediate knowledge of what it is like to be a mind provides the basis for mediate knowledge of other minds. I also argued that despite some structural similarities between Berkeley’s account of mediate knowledge of other minds and the representationalist account of knowledge of sensible things, Berkeley’s account does *not* lead to scepticism.

My reading also has implications for Early Modern scholarship more widely. In particular, it entails that there was an anti-representationalist tradition present in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century thought. This is an as-yet under-appreciated issue in Early Modern scholarship. I have focused predominantly on Berkeley’s anti-representationalism and how it relates to Sergeant and Reid’s epistemological views. However, all three, I have argued, accept an argument along the following lines:

P1. Any epistemology that results in scepticism should be rejected.

P2. Representationalist epistemology inevitably results in scepticism.

C. Therefore, representationalist epistemology should be rejected.

I also suggested, though this claim would need to be defended, that all three accept P1 on the basis of the theistic claim that God would not instil us with a desire for knowledge that could not be satisfied. Berkeley’s justification for this claim is that: “[w]e should believe that God has dealt more bountifully with the sons of men, than to give them a strong desire for that knowledge, which He had placed quite out of their reach” (PI §3). I suggest, though speculatively at this point, something similar is also at work in the case of Sergeant and Reid.

Looking forward, I think there is more work to be done identifying anti-representationalist thinkers, characterising what it means to be an anti-representationalist, and charting the rise and development of anti-representationalism throughout the Early Modern period. Han Thomas Adriaenssen has recently (2017) charted the progress of debates about scepticism and representation from Aquinas to Descartes. I suggest a similar project should be carried out spanning the period between Arnauld and Reid. As John Yolton notes, Arnauld’s concerns with Malebranche’s theory of ideas are the same concerns Reid has with the way of ideas more generally: both take the view that ideas are

perceptual intermediaries to lead to scepticism. Thus, as Yolton puts it, the period from Arnauld to Reid “starts and ends with the same issue” (1984, 221). This offers at least a *prima facie* reason to bookend such a survey with these thinkers. A particularly important moment within that period is the publication of Locke’s *Essay* which was greeted, in the years that followed (from 1694 to 1702), with a number of critical publications that took his epistemological views to entail scepticism.¹ These texts would be crucial to a survey of Early Modern anti-representationalist thought.

My chief aim, over the course of this dissertation, has been to establish that while the canonical issues in Berkeley’s philosophy – his idealism, immaterialism, and anti-abstractionism – are related in important ways to his main project, and no doubt deserve the attention they have received from scholars, he is, above all, an anti-representationalist thinker. I have argued that, for Berkeley, it is epistemology first, metaphysics and ontology second. It is for that reason that his immaterialist works are constituted by *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and a *Three Dialogues* explicitly set, as he puts it, “[i]n opposition to sceptics and atheists.”

¹ E.g., James Lowde’s *A Discourse Concerning the Nature of Man* (1694), Sergeant’s *The Method to Science* (1694) and *Solid Philosophy* (1697), and Henry Lee’s *Anti-Scepticism* (1702). Other figures that may be of relevance include John Norris, William King, Peter Browne, and Anthony Collins. For more on the early reception of the *Essay*, see Yolton 1956, ch.1 & 1996, 4-5.

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