International Berkeley Conference

*Berkeley in Context*

Redwood Library and Athenaeum

Newport, Rhode Island, USA

*13-16 June 2018*

ABSTRACTS

**George Berkeley’s Analysis of ‘The Nominal Essence of the Soul’  
*Bertil Belfrage***

In this paper I will focus on the historical situation at TCD, when George Berkeley was a student. Followers of John Locke’s philosophy — John Toland (1696), Thomas Emlyn (1702), Anthony Collins (1707) — brought themselves into direct confrontation with the Anglican establishment, when they applied empiricist criteria of meaning to religious mysteries, such as the Holy Trinity, and rejected them as mere nonsense. Berkeley accepted the Lockean view that ‘all our knowle[d]ge and contemplation is confin’d barely to our own Ideas’ (N 606), but he also accepted—contrary to the freethinkers—that there are unknowable things, such as holy mysteries, which cannot be examined meaningfully in cognitive discourse. This tension between cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of the world caused difficulties that called for modifications which, in turn, led to new difficulties, new changes, et cetera. I will follow this process up to the crossroads, so to speak, where one way leads to the science of vision, the other to idealism. I will illustrate this development by Berkeley’s different approaches to the concept of mind.

**What was the *Manuscript Introduction* an Introduction to?**

***Artem Besedin***

Berkeley’s *Manuscript Introduction* was written in mid-1708, in the period between writing *Notebooks* entries N696 and N750. For long time, the manuscript was thought to be a draft of the introduction to the *Principles*, but some features of it indicate that it was intended to be published in the first stratum. It is unlikely that the manuscript was to be published as the introduction to the *Principles* as we know them, because there are significant inconsistencies between MI and the *Principles*: *e.g.* in MI Berkeley postulates that universal ideas are unintelligible (MI27), while in the *Principles* he says that universal ideas are useful in geometrical demonstrations (PHK126). These considerations raise the question, what was the *Manuscript Introduction* an introduction to? There is a range of possible answers. One option is that MI was to be published as a separate work, and, in this case, the approach to MI must change. I’m going to defend the view on MI as a work, which is to be considered in the context of Berkeley’s moral philosophy. First, some *Notebooks* entries provide support to this view: in the *Notebooks*, Berkeley first saw some entries related to MI as I-entries but then he classified them as Mo-entries. Second, the appearance of MI could be a reaction on the publication of Locke-Molyneux correspondence related to the question of demonstration in ethics.

**Berkeley and Shepherd on Sensible Objects**

***Martha Brandt Bolton***

The early nineteenth century philosopher, Mary Shepherd, is thoroughly acquainted with the work of prominent British philosophers of the previous century. She shares Berkeley’s views about the metaphysical status of sensations and sensible qualities, but is sharply critical of his theory of sense perception. The first part of this talk is a first pass at identifying metaphysical theses on which they agree. The second part focuses on a central issue on which they disagree, that is the constitution of sensible objects. This concerns questions about the components and structure of a sensible object—the relation between an object and its qualities, the unity if the object, its relation to its cause, and its place in the order of nature. I argue that amidst her differences with Berkeley, Shepherd accepts some of his most distinctively modern doctrines.

**Berkeley, Samuel Johnson (Newport), and Divine Causality  
*Dick Brook***

Though there are very few letters between Johnson and Berkeley discussing philosophical cum theological issues, what exists are of interest and my present concern. I discuss two topics. First; the nature of the relation between the hidden (usually) mechanisms of natural (the eye) and artificial (a clock) objects and their manifest properties. Johnson believes God’s power diminished if immediately causing manifest properties without using “subordinate” efficient causes. He suggests that archetypes in God’s mind, which cause our perceptions (ideas or echtypes), do causal work among themselves. Berkeley disagrees with Johnson about what best reflects God’s power but doesn’t consider Johnson’s theory that causality between archetypes underlies relations between non-minded object’s hidden and manifest properties. Second; how should God’s omnipotence be best conceived. I reference late medieval and early modern scholastic views now gaining some attention relating to Berkeley. Jeff McDonough argues though Berkeley didn’t consider himself a concurrentist, concurrentism more easily makes compatible divine and human causality. Sukjae Lee takes Berkeley to generally ignore the fine points of scholastic discussions and is an occasionalist light, so to speak. In the Johnson letters Berkeley touches on well-known scholastic views, e.g., divine conservation, and continuous creation. Here are two passages:

For aught I can see, it is no disparagement to the perfections of God to say that all things necessarily depend on Him as their *Conservator* as well as *Creator*, and that all nature would shrink to nothing, if not upheld and preserved in being by the same force that first created it. (Letter, Nov. 1729, my emphasis)

. . . the divine conservation of things is equipollent to, and in fact the same thing with, a continued repeated creation: in a word, that conservation and creation differ only in the *terminus a quo.* (Letter, Nov. 1729)

I argue concurrentism is, in fact, a requirement for Berkeley and consider whether concurrentism could extend to efficient causality between non-minded objects.

**Swift, Berkeley and Irish Currency**

***Daniel Carey***

In the sphere of economics the work for which Jonathan Swift remains best known is his series of pieces now designated as the *Drapier’s Letters* (1724-25). These seven texts were designed to discredit and block the introduction of halfpence and farthing coins fabricated in base metal, courtesy of a patent awarded in July 1722 to William Wood (1671-1730), an English ironmonger and ironmaster.

Swift raised a number of objections to the coinage. The first of these was the excessive quantity of the issue. The second problem was the poor quality of the coinage in question. But perhaps his most fundamental point of principle came in his objection to the fact that the intrinsic value of the metal in the coin (i.e. its market price as a metal) was drastically below its face value. Swift embeds these concerns in a larger political argument, insisting that the English crown and parliament cannot impose this currency precisely because it is not money: only the precious metals of silver and gold enjoy this status.

An alternative vision for Irish currency was set out by George Berkeley. *The Querist*, appearing more than a decade after Swift’s interventions, reaffirmed the chronic need for small change. In responding to the situation, Berkeley famously regarded money as a ‘ticket or counter’. This made him open to paper money as the solution to the need for an adequate circulating medium, although he still understood the monetary system as requiring land as a form of securitization. For him, Ireland’s distinctive economic problems required the provision of a mint, the formation of ‘a national bank, and plenty of small cash’. The major point is that departed significantly from the focus on ‘intrinsic value’ that characterized Swift and so many others (including John Locke). In part Berkeley’s approach depended on privileging the needs and interests of an island nation, solving its problems according to internal needs, while Swift takes a more international perspective. The two converge in making an ultimately political argument.

From the perspective of later monetary theory, Swift lives in the world of Bretton Woods - the point for him being the convertibility conferred by operating with precious metals possessing their own independent value. Berkeley is more in tune with Irish currency as it developed in the twentieth century: Irish bank notes contained no ‘promise to pay the bearer on demand’ which survives to this day on British bills. (The Euro has likewise abandoned this nicety.) The post Bretton Woods era inaugurated by President Nixon in 1971 is therefore closer to Berkeley’s vision, while Swift is more in tune with a globalized, interdependent system of currencies.

**Locke, Berkeley, and the Nature of Ideas**

***Patrick Connolly***

Many of Berkeley’s most famous views stem from criticisms of Locke. The goal of this paper is to revisit some of the key disagreements between Locke and Berkeley and to argue that they should not be understood as isolated disputes. Instead, a more synoptic view emerges when we notice how these disagreements are rooted in the fundamentally different approaches the two authors have toward the nature of ideas.

Berkeley initially appears to adopt wholesale Locke’s theory of ideas. But closer attention to the way ideas are used in both authors shows that Berkeley’s ideas are *imagistic* in a way that Locke’s are not. Examining the differing views of Locke and Berkeley on abstract ideas, primary and secondary qualities, and the idea of substance will help to make this clear. In each case the core of Berkeley’s critique is similar. He claims that we can form no clear idea of the thing in question and that Locke’s view must therefore be rejected. We cannot form an abstract mental image of a dog that is not a particular breed. We cannot form an idea of an unthinking being with the power to produce ideas in us. And we can have no clear mental picture of a *substratum* supporting sensible qualities. But careful attention to Locke’s discussion of these ideas shows that he never intended these ideas to be perceptual. Rather, his emphasis was on the essential conceptual roles that the ideas play in our cognitive economy. Thus, Locke and Berkeley are really separated by differing conceptions of what ideas are and how they work.

Noting the way in which these three disagreements are caused by a larger structural issue can illuminate a more fundamental difference between Locke’s project and Berkeley’s project. Specifically, it can help us to understand that what Locke offers is a theory of *cognition* whereas Berkeley is fundamentally a theorist of *perception*. This can also help us to understand the sense in which the old claim that Berkeley was more faithful to empiricism than Locke might be true.

**The Role of the Mind in Determining Berkeley’s Un-Lockean Characterization of Ideas**

***Stephen H. Daniel***

Commentators have differed significantly about the “metaphysical status” of ideas for Berkeley. In comparing Berkeley to Locke, for example, Ken Winkler proposes that they are neither substances nor modifications of substances but rather signs whose meanings rely on how they refer to the things they signify. But instead of removing ideas from metaphysical consideration, this seems only to generate new ways of speaking of ideas (e.g. as subject matters of thought, or even intentional objects)—ways that seem to counter the turn to metaphysics in the first place.

Rather than rejecting metaphysics as such, I suggest that Berkeley reorients its treatment of ideas by framing his discussion explicitly in terms of how minds and ideas are intrinsically related rather than separated as subjects and objects. Of course, this challenges the Lockean assumption that mind can be conceived apart from its ideas. But more importantly, it undermines Locke’s attempt to describe ideas as *objects* of mind, as if ideas could be conceived apart from mind.

**The hostile Bishops? Reassessing the Relationship between the Bishops of Cloyne**

**and Cork**

***Manuel Fasko***

For decades the disagreement between George Berkeley and Peter Browne on the problem of divine analogy has been described as a “controversy”. Their disagreement has tended to be understood in terms of a dispute in which the two adversaries exchanged arguments and criticisms. Contrary to this “controversy-reading”, I argue that it is contextually more accurate to understand their disagreement in terms of merely a difference of opinions. For Berkeley neither engaged with nor reacted to Browne’s criticism of his position on divine analogy.

I begin to defend my reading by outlining the problem of divine analogy and the positions of Berkeley and Browne. As I argue in the first section, it is appropriate to describe their positions as incompatible. It is also true that Berkeley criticizes the rationale behind Browne’s position and that Browne felt attacked by this criticism. However, this alone does not constitute a dispute.

Secondly, I provide an overview on the current state of research. For the last 50 years the controversy-reading was shaped by Berman and Pittion’s *New Letter*, which was recently rejected by Daniel and Belfrage respectively. Yet, the controversy-reading – which is already found before the attribution of the *New Letter* – is still widely held. Hence, although the *New Letter* may explain the prevalence of the controversy-reading, it does not depend on it. Rather, it depends on a two-century old misreading of Alc. IV §§ 16-22 – as well as faulty standard interpretation of TVV 6.

In the third and fourth step, I analyze the aforementioned passages respectively. First, I consider and reject possible references to Browne. Then, I argue that if the sections in *Alciphron* were aimed against someone in particular, Anthony Collins and William King are the more likely targets. Finally, I examine TVV 6. As I expound, the controversy-reading is contextually inaccurate even on the assumption that TVV 6 was a jibe at Browne.

Finally, I argue that my reading is not only contextually more accurate but holds a more general exegetical promise. I sketch how reading Browne as a critical Berkeley commentator can generate new insights – e.g. in Berkeley’s notion of analogy.

**Berkeley and Shepherd on Visual Perception: Mental Atomism vs. Mental Holism**

***Keota Fields***

In her defense of knowledge of the external world against Hume’s skeptical arguments, Shepherd was so concerned that her readers would conclude that she is a Berkeleyan idealist that she took pains to distance herself from idealism. Yet Shepherd adopts a number of Berkeley’s signature principles (e.g., his separability thesis) in the course of constructing her own anti-skeptical arguments. I argue that Shepherd was strongly influenced by Berkeley’s theory of vision. In particular, I argue that Shepherd endorsed Berkeley’s claim, grounded in his various Molyneux man thought experiments, that perceivers learn to see external objects through experience. Yet despite this agreement Berkeley and Shepherd differ considerably over the psychological mechanisms they adopt to explain how perceivers learn to see objects. Berkeley adopts a bottom-up compositional explanation, according to which ‘basic’ visual sensations (e.g., *minima visible*) are variously combined and associated with ideas of the imagination in order to produce complex ideas of external objects. Conversely, Shepherd adopts a top-down differentiation explanation, according to which perceivers are confronted with a whole visual array and learn to individuate particulars within that array by identifying their relations to that whole (similar to identifying particular places on a map). I call Berkeley’s bottom-up approach *mental atomism* and Shepherd’s top-down approach *mental holism*. I suggest that this difference helps explain Shepherd’s silence with regard to perhaps the most unique aspect of Berkeley’s theory of vision – his language of vision thesis. Given that language is compositional rather than holistic in structure, it lacks the explanatory force for Shepherd that it has for Berkeley.

**Materialism and Scepticism: Locke, Berkeley, and Shepherd on the External World**

***Melissa Frankel***

In 1827, Mary Shepherd published her *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, in which she argued — especially contra Berkeley — that we have reason to believe, on the basis of our sensory ideas, that a mind independent world exists that is the cause of those ideas. A small but growing number of philosophers (most notably: Margaret Atherton and Samuel Rickless)[[1]](#footnote-1) have begun to address the question of whether Shepherd’s argument is successful, with Atherton taking Shepherd to be misunderstanding the basis of Berkeley’s criticisms of materialism, and Rickless arguing that Shepherd fares better in the exchange than Atherton suggests. In this paper, I propose to take up this question once again, but specifically from the angle of considering Berkeley’s immaterialism as being partly grounded in his anti-scepticism. As is well known, Berkeley takes idealism to have the advantage over materialism (and especially over Lockean indirect realism) in so far as the idealist is “no sceptic with regard to the nature of things, [nor] as to their existence” (3D, W 2:230). What one might want to know, then, is how Shepherd’s materialist argument fares in this regard: can we have knowledge of the nature and existence of the mind-independent world for which she argues? Contra Rickless, who maintains that “the differences between Berkeley’s position and Shepherd’s are, at least epistemically speaking, less significant than one might think,”[[2]](#footnote-2) I will suggest that a careful examination of Shepherd’s views about the external world, especially juxtaposed alongside Locke’s earlier arguments about the relationship between our sensory ideas and the mind-independent world that he takes to be the cause of those ideas, will reveal significant parallels between the two materialist arguments. Thus if one takes Berkeleyan idealism to have an epistemic advantage over Lockean indirect realism, then arguably a similar case can be made for its epistemic advantage over Shepherd’s materialism as well.

**What We Learn from Tracing Reid’s ‘Brave Officer Objection’ Back to Berkeley—and Beyond  
*Jessica Gordon-Roth***

One of the most discussed objections raised against John Locke’s theory of personal identity is Thomas Reid’s “brave officer” objection, which aims to show that if we follow Locke’s view to its logical ends, we find ourselves caught in the midst of a troubling contradiction, wherein one can both be, and not be, identical to the person who committed *x* act. It is now well known that an earlier iteration of this objection was raised by George Berkeley. In this paper I argue that if we consider the broader context of Berkeley’s objection, as it is found in *Alciphron*, we can see that it is actually better understood not as a direct objection to Locke, but as a direct response to a challenge that Anthony Collins raises to Samuel Clarke. This poses interesting questions for how we are to understand and assess both Berkeley and Reid’s objections, and what might qualify as acceptable “outs” for Locke.

I begin by outlining Reid’s “brave officer objection” and then explicate the earlier iteration as found in Berkeley. Thereafter, I show that if we examine the passages directly *preceding* those thought to contain Berkeley’s objection to Locke, with the details of the incredibly influential, but often overlooked, Clarke-Collins Correspondence in mind, we find a passage in *Alciphron* that matches a passage found in a letter penned by Collins almost *verbatim*. I argue that what we get from Berkeley thereafter, then, is *a response to Collins*, rather than a direct objection to Locke. Importantly, it is only if we examine a larger selection of Berkeley’s text with the Clarke-Collins Correspondence in mind that we can come to this conclusion. The mistake that Reid, and perhaps Berkeley, make, then, is thinking that an objection to Collins *is an objection to Locke*.

I conclude the paper by showing why the dialectic of the Clarke-Collins Correspondence provides breeding grounds for the idea that an objection to Collins is an objection to Locke. I also explore what can be done to carve out the space between Locke and Collins, which gives us an opportunity to reexamine which solutions are available to the sympathetic reader of Locke when it comes to Berkeley and Reid’s famous objections.

**The Conception of Knowledge in the *Notebooks*: Berkeley’s References to the Fourth**

**Book of Locke’s *Essay***

***Adam Grzeliński***

The subject matter of the paper is an analysis of Berkeley’s Notebooks and the references to the fourth book of Locke’s *Essay concerning human understanding* and his conception of knowledge. The way Berkeley referred to Locke’s *Essay* evidences the fact that he was well acquainted with the work and oriented in its structure. However, only a few parts of the *Notebooks* allow us to easily track the way Berkeley formulated his own standpoint influenced by his reading of Locke’s work (such is the character of entry 377, *Notebook A*, Luce’s numbering), and the chaotic character of the notes devoted to various problems, repetitions of the same or similar entries make the whole issue even more complicated.

In the paper, I would like to focus on three interrelated questions.

1. The preliminary textual analysis showing that similarities and differences between the two conceptions do not necessarily refer to the two standpoints in general and even not always to their main presuppositions; rather, they are points of convergence and divergence of varied significance. This analysis covers both the *Notebooks* and other parts of the manuscript in which Berkeley refers to Locke; the references found in other texts from the early period (such as the *Principles* or the sermon dated 11 January 1708) are external sources of minor significance.

2. Berkeley’s understanding of knowledge and its kinds found in the *Notebooks* and its dissimilarity from the Lockean conception of knowledge are caused by two different ways of understanding of experience (referring to ideas) and of knowledge (referring to judgments).

3. Such an interpretation allows showing the dynamics of the development of Berkeley’s own standpoint, and thus determining the character and significance of specific entries that refer to the fourth book of the *Essay*. Such an interpretation can also provide us with an argument for more precise dating of the *Notebooks*.

**Berkeley on the Newtonian Concept of Matter**

***Scott Harkema***

In a little-discussed passage from Berkeley’s correspondence with Samuel Johnson, Berkeley criticizes the Newtonian natural philosophers for unnecessarily postulating the being of matter. He claims that they "even pretend to demonstrate that matter is proportional to gravity," and that if it were a successful demonstration, it "would furnish an unanswerable objection [to immaterialism]." Berkeley then proceeds to lay out this purported demonstration

and to argue that it is fallacious. His strategy is to argue that the concept of matter deployed by the Newtonians is ambiguous; taken one way, it makes the conclusion of the argument false, and taken another way, it makes the conclusion of the argument meaningless. In the first part of this paper, I will argue that Berkeley’s argument is successful. In order to defend this, I’ll first identify whom Berkeley takes to be the target of his arguments (Halley, Clarke, Whiston, Derham, and perhaps Newton himself) and show that Berkeley rightly diagnoses this ambiguity in their conception of matter.

While it may seem unsurprising that Berkeley, an immaterialist, took issue with the Newtonian conception of matter, his criticism of the purported argument for the Newtonian conception of matter does reveal surprising information about Berkeley as a critic of Newton and his followers. In the second part of this paper, I will spell out what I take to be the surprising significance of Berkeley’s remarks about Newtonian matter. I’ll explore the similarities between Berkeley’s criticism of the Newtonian concept of matter and the famous criticism offered by Roger Cotes in his correspondence with Newton.

**Moving Our Legs Ourselves: How Berkeley Does Not ‘Differ From Malbranch’**

***Marc Hight***

Berkeley allegedly signals his departure from the occasionalism of Malebranche in an entry in his notebooks: “We move our legs ourselves. ’tis we that will the movement. Herein I differ from Malbranch.” (N548). Nonetheless, many commentators have argued that Berkeley is an occasionalist or “semi-occasionalist” despite this protest (Pitcher, Winkler, Downing, Jolley, and Lee to name a few). I provide a new line of argument as to why Berkeley is a semi-occasionalist who was profoundly influenced by Malebranche. I contend that Berkeley adopts Malebranche’s theory of causation as necessary connection and has separate theological reasons for thinking that finite minds are nonetheless genuine (Malebranchian) causes. The final position is made coherent by his invocation of a distinction between power and cause, which allows him to hold that finite minds cause ideas of imagination, hence enabling finite minds to be morally culpable for their intentions.

**Berkeley and Astell on Passive Obedience and Locke’s Social Contract**

***Nancy Kendrick***

Most contemporary political philosophers who reject social contract theories do so for reasons similar to those offered by Hume in “Of the Original Contract”: very few citizens have expressly or tacitly given the kind of consent that could ground a general obligation to obey the law. George Berkeley in his sermons on *Passive Obedience,* and Mary Astell in her *Christian Religion as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England* took a different approach. Both rejected social contract theories not on the empirical grounds that most citizens neither expressly nor tacitly consent to be political subjects, but on the conceptual grounds that all duties are moral duties, and moral duties can be neither limited nor transactional.

In this presentation, I consider three arguments advanced by Berkeley and Astell against Locke’s theory of the social contract. First, both reject Locke’s attempt to turn moral duties, which are unlimited and absolute, into political duties, which are limited and relative. Second, both reject Locke’s attempt to ground political bonds or obligations in consensual transactions between subjects. Third, both reject Locke’s insistence that self-preservation is a fundamental law of nature, a law that contributes to the justification of political rebellion.

In advancing these arguments against Locke, both Berkeley and Astell mean to offer a justification for passive obedience to political authority. Following G.J. Warnock, I show that passive obedience – as Berkeley and Astell understood it – is not the view that subjects must blindly submit to the law under all circumstances; it is the view that when subjects *dis*obey the law, they must submit to the penalties that attend either the neglect or transgression of the law.

My aim in this presentation is two-fold: first, to highlight the similarities in the arguments Berkeley and Astell advance against Locke’s social contract theory; and second, to show that though their conception of passive obedience is, in some ways, similar to contemporary notions of non-revolutionary civil disobedience, the Berkeley-Astell natural duty account of obligation does not, in the end, account for the specificity of *political*, rather than *moral,* bonds or obligations.

**Berkeley, Newtonian Forces and Underdetermination of Theory by Data**

***A. David Kline***

A main goal of Berkeley’s *De Motu* is to establish an anti-realistic interpretation of Newtonian forces. It is widely recognized that Berkeley’s particular version of an empiricist theory of meaning is the core of his critique of forces. But in section 67 of *De Motu* there appears to be an independent argument for anti-realism. W. H. Newton-Smith understands Berkeley making the argument that since theories are underdetermined by data (for every theory there is a theory incompatible with it that fits the data equally well), semantical instrumentalism, not realism, is the proper account of theories.

The underdetermination thesis reading of section 67 is mistaken for three reasons: 1) The textual support is very weak. 2) Though Berkeley is a semantical instrumentalist about forces he is a realist about many theoretical entities. The underdetermination reading leading to wholesale instrumentalism proves too much. 3) Semantical instrumentalism does not follow from underdetermination.

It is argued that Berkeley’s instrumentalism for dynamics is based on the idealized nature of the central concepts describing motion. He has established this position long before section 67. The proper understanding of this section is not as an argument for semantical instrumentalism, but rather the use of semantical instrumentalism to explain or make sense of a particular case of empirically equivalent theories.

**Moral Motivation in *Alciphron* III and Berkeley’s Contemporaries**

***Jennifer Marušić***

In Alicphron III, Alciphron defends a view that seems to represent Shaftesbury’s position. In particular, Alciphron claims that a person only acts virtuously if he acts for the sake of virtue alone, or out of a sense of the beauty of virtue. Moreover, he claims that it is “a mean and selfish thing to be virtuous through fear or hope.” He concludes that belief in Providence, and the expectation of reward for acting virtuously and punishment for our vices, cannot be a motive to virtue. Euphranor and Crito jointly attack this position. They seem to accept that the highest form of virtue is to act for the sake of virtue alone, or out of an appreciation of the beauty of virtue. However, they insist that the person who is capable of acting for the sake of virtue alone is rare, and they argue that a more democratic kind of morality--one that recognizes that people act out of hope and fear of reward and punishment--must be the norm. Moreover, they argue that the beauty of virtue that Alciphron describes could only exist in a world governed by Providence. Crito concludes that the religious believer is moved to act virtuously both by the beauty of virtue, as the unbeliever may be, but also by the expectation of reward or punishment.

Berkeley’s position is then developed by Butler in his *Analogy of Religion*. Butler attempts to articulate the role the expectation of reward and punishment plays in our moral development, while avoiding the view that we are only motivated by self-interest. Hume, too, takes up these issues in the final section of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, responding at once to Butler and Berkeley, and offering at least a partial defense of Shaftesbury.

**Shepherd and Berkeley: The Logic of Sense Perception**

***Genevieve Migely***

In an effort to avoid Hume’s scepticism about external material causes, Lady Mary Shepherd launches an empiricist position both incorporating and rejecting Berkeley’s immaterialist views. Shepherd employs Berkelian logic in her theory of sense perception to prove her materialist views. Both philosophers use empirical reasoning to discern a necessary causal relation between ideas of sense and their external causes. Based upon the dependent nature of ideas as well as what one perceives in sensory perceptions, Berkeley and Shepherd argue in a shared vein for causes external to the individual perceiver. The causal relation perceived in the act of sensory perception is both a necessary and a cotemporaneous one between the effect and its cause. It is fundamental in Berkeley’s philosophy that a perception is necessarily related to its being perceived, and ideas of sense “speak themselves the effects of a mind more powerful and wise than human spirits” (PHK 36). In her *Essays on the Perception of An External Universe*, Shepherd asserts that “*an object perceived* by the mind is a compound being, consisting of a certain collection of sensible qualities, ‘mixed with an *idea* the *result of reasoning*’ of such qualities being formed by a ‘continually existing outward and independant set of as various and appropriate causes’ ” (PWMS 2. 197-8).[[3]](#footnote-3) For Shepherd and Berkeley, one is aware of the external cause within its internal effect. Commonsense realism of an external, natural world is secured for both within this causal interconnection. And yet, one can see in the details of the empirical reasoning involved in perception how each philosopher’s ontological commitment drives their conclusions about the nature of that external world. This paper will investigate how legitimate the assumptions are that underpin the theory of ideas and the causal reasoning involved in their logic of sense perception, and discern what leads each to such different ends.

**Berkeley’s Debt to Descartes: New Theory of Vision and the Critique of**

**“geometric optics”**

***Ville Paukkonen***

In this paper I intend to offer a reading of Berkeley’s critique of the so-called “geometric optics”, the best representative of which for Berkeley was Descartes. Instead of concentrating on the negative side of the critique, on the problems of innate geometry, I wish to draw attention to the similarities between Berkeley’s account of vision and the one offered by whom Berkeley considered to be the best representatives of geometric optics, namely Descartes and Malebranche. In particular, the threefold distinction that Descartes drew between A) states of the sense organs and brains, B) sensations within the mind and C) judgments concerning those sensations seems to be useful in understanding Berkeley’s theory of vision. Although Berkeley and Descartes disagreed about the status of those judgments, whether they are innate or learned, it is not whether the analysis of vision, that Berkeley offers is radically different from Descartes and Malebranche’s, for whom the senses serve primarily the function of preserving the body (see Malebranche Search I.5 and Descartes’ VI Meditation). Equally for Berkeley, the visual system is first of all designed for the wellbeing and survival of the subject and, more importantly, the visual input it self is perfectly fit for the task although strictly speaking it includes elements that it has only due to learned connection to tactual-haptic system. Perhaps examination of these similarities between Berkeley and Descartes (and Malebranche) will enable us to understand better some of the most puzzling features of Berkeley’s New Theory of Vision, such as the claim that ideas of vision and ideas of touch are completely heterogeneous and have nothing in common. Thinking of the visual system as primarily designed for the survival of the body may help us to better understand the nature of the embodied subject of Berkeley’s theory of vision.

**How did Berkeley Read Newton?**

***Luc Peterschmitt***

Berkeley saw himself as a Newtonian as far as natural philosophy is concerned. Indeed, from the beginning of his philosophical career to the end, he keeps underlining that Newtonianism is the best key for the knowledge of nature. This “key” is the doctrine of attraction. In this paper, I intend to examine how Berkeley elaborates his conception of “Newtonian” attraction, by cleansing it form all that he identifies as a false metaphysics. My working hypothesis that Berkeley’s reading of Newton’s work is progressive. This implies two distinct questions. 1) What did Berkeley really read of Newton and when? 2) How did he read Newton?

At the beginning of his career, Berkeley’s interpretation of Newton is informed by his apologetical aims and presumably by theological readings (especially Bentley and Cheyne). But his understanding of Newton is considerably refined in the *De Motu* (1720). Not that Berkeley has read more texts of Newton at that time; but he has a better knowledge of the theoretical context (he knows Leibnizian dynamics). But this leads him to consider attraction in a non Newtonian way, as a “mathematical hypothesis”. The stake of such a conception is to account for the Newtonian mathematization of mechanics as opposed to the Galilean geometrization of nature. The last step in Berkeley’s reading of Newton is to be found in the *Siris*, where Berkeley shows a more profound knowledge of Newton. But then he reads the Queries of the *Optics*.

Berkeley’s reading of Newton reveals a paradoxical newtonianism. His criticism of Newton’s metaphysics allows him to ground in a non-Newtonian way the Newtonian mathematization of physics. Then, he can use the developments of the *Optics* in order to build his own conception of the role of attractions (in the plural) in nature, which he saw as Newtonian.

**Berkeley, Johnson, and the Problem of Idealist Theodicy**

***Timothy Quandt***

For Berkeley, humans infer knowledge of God’s providence and goodness from the constancy of visual signs and the uniformity of natural laws. Consequently, any theodicy offered for natural defect or surd suffering by appeal to God’s providence and goodness may beg the question of God’s providence and goodness. Recognizing this possible circularity, Berkeley resists, unlike his friend and immaterialist convert Samuel Johnson, appealing to God’s sovereignty to explain natural defect (1752). Refusing appeal to sovereignty avoids the spectre of circularity, yet renders Berkeley’s task of explaining natural defect more formidable, as evidenced by his curious supplanting of the theodicies offered in the closing sections of *Principles* (1710) with alternative responses three years later in *Three* *Dialogues* (1713), and yet again rethinking the adequacy of these offerings as a result of his correspondence with Johnson in 1729.

One way to interpret the progression of these emendations is to consider that Berkeley determined particular theodicies to be inadequate, or worse, incompatible with his immaterialism since “monsters, untimely births, fruits blasted in the blossom, rains falling in desert places, miseries incident to human life” (P 151) do not seem, according to the vulgar, to point to the hand of “an all-wise Spirit who fashions, regulates, and sustains the whole system of beings” (Ibid.). The goal of this paper, therefore, is to determine whether Berkeley succeeds in providing a cogent idealist theodicy preferable to Johnson’s appeal to sovereignty that coheres with immaterialist ontology, yet comports with common sense inferences about God’s nature drawn from an array of visual signs ranging from “the characters of divinity large and legible” (TVV 7) to those that “do not seem to have for their cause the immediate hand of an almighty Agent” (P 151).

**Berkeley’s Early Concept of Toleration in the Irish Context**

***Marta Szymańska-Lewoszewska***

My aim in this paper is to show potential source of inspiration for Berkeley’s thoughts on toleration, as they can be reconstructed from his works written in the 1730s.

In his attitude towards Irish Catholics, Berkeley seems to have followed, though with no direct reference, the irenicism of his friend, and the earlier bishop of Cloyne, Edward Synge (1690-1762) the younger. Synge expressed his views on Catholic toleration in his famous sermon of 1725. There he suggested that Catholics should be tolerated unless they become a threat to the state order because of their religious beliefs.

For Berkeley, Christian religion was of, at least, double importance. On the one hand, understood as faith and referred to as true, it was thought to bring man closer to God. It also meant conforming individual will to the will of God. On the other hand, it was understood as morality and referred to as useful. As such it was believed to serve as a foundation of order and wellbeing in a state. The former was a question of one’s conscience; the latter was a matter of one’s behaviour.

When it comes to Berkeley’s concept of toleration, it regarded the level of faith, which corresponded with the idea of the freedom of conscience. In the context of the Catholic majority in Ireland in 1735, Berkeley suggested a distinction between what he called mere Papists and Recusants (cf. *The Querist*, Q. 329 (1:299)) and proposed toleration only to the former. With their obedience to the Pope in Rome, the latter in his view were thought to have undermined the legitimacy of the Hanoverian power over Ireland (at least up to the year of 1745). Similarly to Synge, “the tolerant Berkeley” did not resign from persuading Catholics into sincere conversion to the true religion, also after 1745.

**Berkeley’s Will: Power vs. Forces in Newton, Berkeley and Hume**

***Ofra Shefi***

Newton’s concept of action includes a dual ontology of causality: God creates active beings of matter. The duality expressed in Newton that force is a causal addition to the divine power, compelled Berkeley to completely reject not only Newton’s idea of matter, but also to argue that no cause is a force other than the power of the will. Berkeley corresponded to the Newtonian metaphysical thought, but negated Newton’s concept of action. Berkeley’s notion of action stands out against the backdrop of his time. Whereas Berkeley’s conclusions that Ideas are completely passive and powerless fully incorporated into Hume’s theory of human nature, Berkeley’s notion of the will was fully rejected by Hume. But even though Hume tried to build his theory of the mind in parallel with Newton’s laws of motion, he did not succeed in eliminating Berkeley’s notion of causal power from his theory. The concept of Humian force as narrow and secular as it could be, is of the type of power. The liveliness and vivacity of the impressions (and the Ideas of memory) are powers, disguised to forces and closer to the notion of Berkeley’s active will than to Newton’s concept of force.

**Berkeley and Browne on Divine Analogy**

***Pascal Taranto***

The question of how do we know the being and attributes of God through Scripture has received in the beginning of the 18th century, following Collins, who thoroughly criticizes it, a “new turn”; notably in archbishop’s King sermon on Predestination. An analogical meaning of the Scripture’s words is here distinguished from the strict or literal meaning, allowing us, as it is asserted, to know God “by analogy”. This method Peter Browne reappropriates in “Things Divine...” (1733), thus engaging a controversy with Berkeley, who leads a battle on two fronts : against the freethinker, who defies anyone to escape the trap of the alternative (either mere metaphors, or proper sense : in both cases, no real knowledge of an infinite being is possible) ; and against the “analogists” like King and Browne, who endanger the christian faith as a *no-meaning faith*, thus paving the way to atheism through negative theology. The proper answer of Berkeley to Browne, we shall try to show, does not lie entirely on the new theory of meaning proposed in *Alciphron*, which leads to undesirable consequences, but on the so-called “doctrine of notions”. But, as we shall see, this solution is highly problematic, the aperception it is founded upon being of no purpose to save the theological language from being purely metaphorical.

**Berkeley, Reid and the ‘Way of Ideas’**

***Peter West***

My aim in this presentation will be to evaluate the notion of a *common sense* account of direct realism, as construed by both Berkeley and Reid – and to assess Reid’s critique of Berkeley as a thinker working within the tradition of ‘the way of ideas’.

Both Berkeley and Reid reject the claim (held by thinkers like Descartes and Locke) that we perceive things in the world *via ideas*; intrinsically representational intermediaries that exist in the mind and are the only immediate objects of perception (what we might call the ‘intermediary account of perception’). Despite this commonality, and despite the fact both thinkers aim to reconcile philosophical accounts of perception with common sense, Reid concludes that Berkeley’s view, “is 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”.

The disagreement lies in the fact that Berkeley maintains that the ‘real things’ that we immediately perceive are *mind-dependent.* Reid takes this as contrary to an axiom of common sense (and, therefore, as implausible): namely, that mind-*independent* objects exist and are the things that we immediately perceive. For this reason, Reid rejects Berkeley as an ‘ideaist’. My aim will be to show that Berkeley’s arguments force us to question whether ‘materialists’ (those who believe that mind-independent objects exist) like Reid are entitled to take it as a given that (i) mind-dependence and (ii) being a ‘real thing’ are mutually exclusive.

1. Margaret Atherton, “Lady Mary Shepherd’s Case Against George Berkeley,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 4 (1996): 347–66; Samuel C. Rickless, “Is Shepherd’s Pen Mightier than Berkeley’s Word?” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* (2017): 1–14 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Rickless (2017), p 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Philosophical Works of Lady Mary Shepherd*, edited by Jennifer McRobert, 2 vols. (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)