

TAKING BERKELEY SERIOUSLY

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy
in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2013

Urbana, Illinois

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I develop a line of thought that Berkeley had only started to develop in his published works and in his personal Notebooks. This line of thought concerns the role played by Spirit, or active volitional awareness, in the cognition of everyday objects, and also in the meaning of any given Sign, whether Natural or Artificial. Berkeley began to develop this line of thought in his earliest publication, *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* (1709), when he wrote of a “prejudice” that must “insinuate itself” into one’s understanding. This “prejudice” transforms raw sense-data into ‘qualities’ or ‘properties’ of underlying ‘objects.’ According to Berkeley’s *New Theory of Vision*, it is the active volition of the perceiver that makes this transformation possible; it is also what gives meaning to any Natural Sign. Extending this to Artificial Signs, we may conclude that artificial signs acquire meaning by serving as signs for the regulation of volition according to various sensory-motor expectations, just as with Natural Signs. Therefore, words may be meaningful without calling forth any associated ideas, provided words serve to regulate volition/behavior, which is a view that Berkeley held, but again, failed to fully develop. Several criticisms of Berkeley’s overall approach can be addressed with this developed doctrine of spirit. First, Berkeley’s treatment of ideas as ‘mental images’ is required to distinguish ideas from active know-how, which is often mistaken for an ‘idea’ (according to Berkeley). Second, any claim that Berkeley’s “Master Argument” commits him to solipsism can be addressed by pointing out that our knowledge of other minds is an active volitional awareness and, thus, not relevant to the “Master Argument.” Finally, the cost of this extension is that Berkeley’s argument for God-as-Perceiver must be jettisoned, for reasons already put forward by John Stuart Mill.

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CHAPTER 1

BERKELEY'S INCOMPLETE WORKS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I shall identify and elaborate upon a line of reasoning that can be found in George Berkeley's published works as well as in his personal Notebooks. This line of reasoning is one that concerns the important role played by active volition in the cognition of everyday objects and also in the function and mechanics of language and meaning. Berkeley failed to fully develop and then capitalize on this line of reasoning, and I shall argue that this was unfortunate for Berkeley, as developing this line of reasoning may have answered many of the common criticisms that have been leveled against Berkeley's overall philosophical position. Of course, I do not pretend to be able to salvage all of Berkeley's arguments from criticism, as there are many serious difficulties and problems to be found in Berkeley's various arguments. However, we will achieve a different and hopefully clearer view of Berkeley's fundamental insights, and one that I hope will bolster the viability of his overall philosophical position.

First, then, I shall present a brief summary of Berkeley's published career, followed by an explanation of some key terminology used by Berkeley. In Chapter II, I shall examine Berkeley's arguments for rejecting the philosophical doctrine of Abstract Ideas, and I will also examine a particular argument against Material Substance. I shall also examine some of the common criticisms of these arguments. In Chapter III, I shall explore Berkeley's New Theory of Vision and then re-examine Berkeley's writings, so that we may tease out this hidden line of reasoning concerning the role played by active volition in cognition and language. Finally, I will attempt to show how recognizing, and then further developing, the role played by active volition in Berkeley's New Theory of Vision can resolve the criticisms addressed in Chapter II.

I have chosen to embark on this re-examination of Berkeley's philosophical arguments and overall project because I find Berkeley to be a most curious and puzzling figure in the history of Western Philosophy. On the one hand, he is lauded as having been a genius; while, on the other hand, his arguments have never been fully embraced or accepted by the philosophical

community in general, and at least some of his arguments have been met with extreme hostility.¹ Hence, he can be seen as having been something of a brilliant failure. Berkeley's case is made more intriguing by the fact that his published philosophy is incomplete, which I shall elaborate upon in a moment.

What I find most curious about Berkeley, however, is the fact that he anticipated that his views and arguments would be grossly misunderstood, and he often attributed this to a fault in language. Moreover, his stated target was often treated as being something more akin to a linguistically inculcated "delusion" rather than relatively simple mistakes of reasoning.

Berkeley is, of course, most well-known for denying the existence of what philosophers called "Material Substance" and for claiming that the existence of any unthinking thing is synonymous with its being perceived, that its *esse* is *percipi*. Moreover, Berkeley claimed that God somehow maintains the existence of things when they are not being perceived by any finite mind(s). If there is any overall position that Berkeley is (in)famous for, that's the one, and I shall discuss this in detail in Chapters II and III.

However, a careful reading of Berkeley's various writings (both published and unpublished) reveals a persistent undercurrent of thought regarding a problem inherent in language. For example, in §6 of the Introduction to his 1710 *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley wrote: "[i]n order to prepare the mind of the reader for the easier conceiving of what follows, it is proper to premise somewhat, by way of introduction, concerning the nature and abuse of language." He then went on to denounce the philosophical doctrine of abstract ideas, which I shall discuss in detail in Chapter II. We may also consider Berkeley's Notebook entry 642: "[t]he chief thing I do or pretend to do is only to remove the mist or veil of words" (§642). We may also consider the following from §24 of the Introduction

¹ See e.g., J.S. Mill, "Berkeley's Life and Writings" in Mill, *Collected Works*, Vol. vii, J.M. Robson (ed.), (Toronto, 1978), p. 451, where Mill refers to Berkeley as "one of greatest philosophical genius." We may also consider Hume's description of Berkeley's rejection of Abstract Ideas as being "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years." *Treatise of Human Nature*, I vii, (1739). See also K.R. Popper, "A Note on Berkeley as Precursor to Mach", *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, Vol. 4, No. 13, George Berkeley Bicentenary (May, 1953), pp. 26-36, at p. 26: "I admire Berkeley without agreeing with him." See also Margaret Atherton, "The Coherence of Berkeley's Theory of Mind", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. XLIII, No. 3, March 1983, pp. 389-399, at p. 389: "Berkeley's theory of mind has not, in the general run of things, commanded much respect. In fact, it has, more often than not, been perceived as something of an embarrassment." For examples of extreme hostility, consider J.F. Thompson's description of one of Berkeley's arguments as "contemptible" and J.O. Wisdom's description of the same argument as "entirely specious and not worth a moment's academic discussion." These are both quoted in Tipton's *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism* (Methuen & Co Ltd, London: 1974), at p. 160. The argument Thompson and Wisdom were deriding is commonly known as the "Master Argument" and I shall discuss it below, in Chapters II and III.

to the *Principles*: "we need only draw the curtain of words, to behold the fairest tree of knowledge, whose fruit is excellent and within the reach of our hand." Statements such as these can be found throughout Berkeley's published works, but it is not at all clear what Berkeley intended by these statements, as he never fully developed an account of meaning.

Nevertheless, statements such as these hint at a deeper issue at work in Berkeley's thinking, one intimately related to the logic of language. Therefore, I have chosen to follow Alan White's suggestion, that we take a "linguistic approach" to understanding Berkeley.² Before exploring this in more detail, I shall first briefly describe Berkeley's published career, since it is important that we recognize that Berkeley's published philosophy is incomplete.

1.2 BERKELEY'S MAJOR WORKS

Berkeley's earliest major work, entitled *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*, was first published in 1709 when Berkeley was only twenty-one years old. In that work, Berkeley argued, *inter alia*, that the distance, magnitude, and situation of objects are not immediately perceived by vision; instead, Berkeley argued, visual sense data should be treated as signs in a language (the author of which is God) that indicate what non-visual (e.g., tactile) sensations we may encounter should we act in one way or another. As a result of this Sign to Thing-Signified relationship, people come to perceive visual data as though it were one and the same with the various tactile, kinesthetic and other sensory possibilities signified by the operative visual signs, thus giving rise to an immediate sense of distance from the perception of visual data. I shall discuss this theory in detail in Chapter III, since the line of reasoning I shall develop, regarding the role of active volition in cognition and meaning, is central to this Theory of Vision.

As stated above, however, Berkeley is most well-known for rejecting the philosophical notion of Material Substance. He is also very well-known for rejecting the philosophical Doctrine of Abstract Ideas. Both of these rejections were set forth in his second major publication which appeared just one year after his *Essay* on vision. This was the 1710 publication of the Introduction & Part I to what was intended to be a grand treatise, to be

² See Alan White, "A Linguistic Approach to Berkeley's Philosophy", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Dec., 1955), pp. 172-187. White's article does not set out any radical reinterpretations of Berkeley but merely suggests that the best way to understand Berkeley, to make his arguments more viable, is to view him as being interested, first and foremost, in the logic of language. White's suggestion was that this attitude regarding the supreme importance of the logic of language was one that "Berkeley often, consciously and unconsciously, took, and also one which enable us to understand his philosophy more clearly." (p.172).

published in successive Parts over a period of years, entitled *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.

It should also be noted that sometime between 1705 and 1708, Berkeley recorded his developing thoughts in two Notebooks that we still have at our disposal today. While there is debate amongst Berkeley scholars and historians concerning the precise dating of these Notebooks, it is generally agreed, and it is clear from the content of those Notebooks, that the thoughts recorded therein are immediately relevant to Berkeley's two earliest major works: the 1709 *Essay* on vision, and the 1710 Introduction & Part I of the *Principles*.

In the Preface to the 1710 Introduction and Part I of the *Principles*, Berkeley cautioned his readers against passing summary judgment on the arguments contained therein. "For," he explained, "there are some passages that, taken by themselves, are very liable (nor could it be remedied) to gross misinterpretation, and to be charged with most absurd consequences." He further warned that if the reading of his work "be done transiently, it is very probable my sense may be mistaken." With these cautionary notes in place, Berkeley maintained that "the thinking reader" would not only understand his arguments, but would find them "throughout clear and obvious."

In fact, Berkeley's philosophy has more often than not been "charged with most absurd consequences." Consider, for example, G.J. Warnock's description of the initial reaction to Part I of Berkeley's *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*:

On the publication in 1710 of his most important book, the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, a doctor diagnosed insanity in the author; a bishop deplored his vain passion for novelty; some said his fantastic paradoxes were at any rate amusing, and were inclined to excuse him on the ground that he was an Irishman. Even his friends, though respectful of his talents, were quite unconvinced. Dean Swift is reported (perhaps apocryphally) to have left him standing on the door-step when he came to call, saying that if his philosophical views were correct he should be able to come in through a closed door as easily as through an open one. This tale is indeed typical of the common view of Berkeley's doctrines.³

The question should immediately arise: who was mistaken? Was Berkeley confused about the nature of his own views, or were his early critics guilty of a catastrophic failure of interpretation, similar to what Berkeley had anticipated and warned against? In fact, this question extends to modern times as well. As Warnock indicated in the passage above, such a

³ G.J. Warnock, *Berkeley* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford. 1982), p. 17.

negative reaction to Berkeley's views is "typical of the common view" of Berkeley's philosophy. Dr. Tipton aptly summarized the general mood amongst Berkeley scholars when he wrote that "the problem is that there seems at first sight to be a striking discrepancy between the judgement most of us want to make on his general position and the judgement he seems to have expected us to make on it."⁴

While Berkeley had initially anticipated some difficulty in conveying his views, he probably did not expect the extremely negative reactions, described above, to his 1710 Introduction & Part I of his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Since this 1710 publication contained only the "Introduction" and "Part I" of his *Treatise*, we should look to the later parts of his *Treatise* to further clarify his views. Unfortunately, the 1710 Introduction and Part I were the only parts of the *Treatise* that Berkeley ever completed and published.

We know from Berkeley's Notebooks that his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* was originally intended to be a grand work, spanning at least three separate publications: the Introduction and Part I (both published in 1710), followed by a Part II, and then a Part III. We also know from Berkeley's notebooks that each Part would have focused on a specific aspect of his whole philosophy. Part I was to address the existence of 'unthinking' objects, or ordinary sense-objects like tables and chairs.⁵ Part II seems to have been designed to focus primarily on volition, and related topics.⁶ As to what Part III would have addressed, we

⁴ Ian Tipton, *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 15.

⁵ We know this because Part I was actually published, and it does, in fact, deal primarily with the existence of unthinking sense-objects, or "external" objects, e.g., tables, chairs, trees, cars, etc.

⁶ At entry 792 of his notebooks, Berkeley recorded the following: "The Existence of any thing imaginable is nothing different from Imagination or perception. Volition or Will [which] is not imaginable regard must not be had to its' existence at least in the first Book." This indicates, not only that volition would be covered in a later Part of the *Principles*, but also that each Part would focus on a specific subject. We also have notebook entry 508: "The 2 great Principles of Morality, the Being of a God & the Freedom of Man: these to be handled in the beginning of the Second Book." We know from his published writings, that Berkeley equated God with a Volition or Will that causes sense-objects to be experienced at all, and that "Freedom of Man" is a reference to issues related to free will (i.e., volition). Thus, we have another indication that Part II of the *Principles* would have addressed issues related to volition. We can also look to the following two notebook entries, in conjunction. First, there is entry 807: "Say you, at this rate all's nothing but Idea meer [sic] phantasm. I answer every thing as real as ever. I hope to call a thing Idea makes it not the less real. truly I should perhaps have stuck to [the] word thing and not mention'd the Word Idea were it not for a Reason & I think a good one too [which] I shall give in [the] Second Book." From this entry alone, we cannot discern what this 'good Reason' was for using the word "idea" rather than "thing" to refer to sense-objects. To settle this, however, we can look to entry 644: "Thing & Idea are much what words of the same extent & meaning, why therefore do I not use the word thing? Answ: because thing is of greater latitude than Idea. Thing comprehends also volitions or actions. now these are no ideas." Thus, it would appear that Part II would have addressed, in detail, Berkeley's motivations for clearly distinguishing volition from idea. All of these passages, then, support the conclusion that Part II would have focused on Volition, while Part I was resigned to dealing only with the nature and existence of (unthinking) sense-objects, or what Berkeley would refer to generally as "Ideas."

can only guess; Berkeley indicated some plans for a Part III in his notebooks, but these indications are too vague and sparse to allow for any definite conclusions.⁷

Naturally, we would like to know why Berkeley abandoned his planned project. While we cannot answer this with certainty, we do know the following. First, in response to the "apparently complete failure of [Part I of] the *Principles*,"⁸ Berkeley stopped work on Part II in order to draft and publish his *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713). In the Preface to those *Dialogues*, Berkeley referred to the recently published Part I of his *Treatise* and explained that "before I proceed to publish the Second Part, I thought it requisite to treat more clearly and fully of certain Principles laid down in the First, and to place them in a new light - which is the business of the following *Dialogues*." The *Dialogues* failed to remedy the negative reaction to Berkeley's proposals, and the philosophical community remained largely unimpressed.⁹

A few years later, during a trip to Italy, Berkeley lost the manuscript to Part II. Several years later, in a letter to Dr. Samuel Johnson dated Nov. 25, 1729, Berkeley recounted this loss: "As to the Second Part of my treatise concerning the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, the fact is that I had made a considerable progress in it; but the manuscript was lost about fourteen years ago, during my travels in Italy, and I never had leisure since to do so disagreeable a thing as writing twice on the same subject."

There are some scholars who maintain that Berkeley declined to rewrite and publish Part II, not just because he would have had to "do so disagreeable a thing as writing twice on the same subject," but also because of difficulties he had discovered in his own philosophical approach. For example, Tipton has argued that "it is very difficult to escape the conclusion that Berkeley would have found it far from easy to produce this volume, and that he was genuinely

⁷ The only indication of Berkeley's plans for Part III can be found in Notebook entry 583: "That which extremely strengthens us in this prejudice is that we think we see an empty space, which I shall Demonstrate to be false in the 3d Book." This is an odd entry, only insofar as it seems to address an issue related to the visual perception of distance, a topic Berkeley had already dealt with at length in his earliest publication of 1709, *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*. Thus, it is very hard to conclude anything from this single notebook entry, other than the fact that Berkeley had originally intended to include a Part III in the complete *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*.

⁸ Warnock, p. 146. See also Harry Bracken, *Berkeley* (St. Martin's Press, New York: 1974), p.37: "Berkeley tried to find out what others thought was wrong with his position, but to no avail. If there were arguments, they were not revealed. Berkeley's immaterialism was treated as a joke – and a bad one at that."

⁹ See Bracken, *supra* n. 7, at p. 37: "By and large, however, readers failed to take the *Three Dialogues* any more seriously. For several decades Berkeley's philosophical reputation was primarily in the hands of people who never read him."

worried about paradoxes and serious problems arising from what he wanted to say."¹⁰ According to such a view, Berkeley realized that his critics were right: that his overall approach was not as viable as he had once thought and, consequently, he quietly admitted defeat by simply abandoning the entire project.

I do not agree with this assessment, for three reasons. First, there is no evidence that Berkeley ever came to seriously question the truth of his own views. For example, in the same 1729 letter to Johnson in which Berkeley recounted the loss of his manuscript, he also wrote: "What you have seen of mine [Part I] was published when I was very young, and without doubt hath many defects." However, he immediately went on to write: "For though the notions should be true (as I verily think they are), yet it is difficult to express them clearly and consistently, language being framed to common use and received prejudices." So, in 1729, we find Berkeley still committed to the truth of the views he put forward in the 1710 Introduction and Part I of the *Treatise*, and the failure of that initial publication being attributed to a fault in language, which made it difficult, if not impossible, for Berkeley to clearly express and clarify his views.¹¹ Furthermore, in his subsequent publications, which include *De Motu* (1721), *Alciphron* (1732), *The Essay on Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733), *The Analyst* (1734), *A Defense of Free-Thinking in Mathematics* (1735), and *Siris* (1744), he continued to develop the same views he had put forward in his 1709 *Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* and his 1710 Introduction & Part I of the *Treatise*, with no drastic corrections or reversals of position. In fact, a copy of his 1709 *Essay* on vision was appended to the 1732 publication of *Alciphron*.

If Berkeley had truly abandoned his original project, one would expect that his subsequent publications would advocate a different approach, or at least that they would address topics far removed from those addressed in his earlier publications. Instead, we find a continuing development and application of the points made in those earlier works. Granted, this continuing development is surely less direct than what might have been contained in Parts II and III of his originally planned *Treatise*. Indeed, these subsequent publications seem more concerned with applying the points that had been put forward in his earliest publications, rather

¹⁰ Tipton, *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 260. See also J.L. Stocks, "What Did Berkeley Mean by *Esse is Percipi*?" *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 45, No. 179 (Jul., 1936), 310-323, at p. 319: "it may be doubted whether Berkeley's failure to write [Part II] was not due more to his failure to think out what was to be said to his own satisfaction than to the loss of a partially completed manuscript."

¹¹ Recall Berkeley's statements in the Preface to Part I of the *Principles*: "there are some passages that, taken by themselves, are very liable (nor could it be remedied) to gross misinterpretation, and to be charged with most absurd consequences." The line that should attract our attention here is "nor could it be remedied."

than to greatly expanding on them. For example, *De Motu* (1721) represents an application of Berkeley's anti-abstractionist principles to the study of motion. In *Alciphron* (1732), Berkeley, *inter alia*, reiterated and expanded upon views he had put forward in his earliest works concerning the true function and mechanics of language and meaning. The title of Berkeley's 1733 publication, *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language, Vindicated and Explained*, should speak for itself; in that publication, Berkeley presented a renewed argument for the same points he had put forward in his 1709 *Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*. Finally, in *The Analyst* (1734) and *A Defense of Free-Thinking in Mathematics* (1735), Berkeley launched a critical attack against mathematicians and philosophers who had been "wonderfully deceived and deluded by their own peculiar signs, symbols" into taking the Newtonian concept of an "infinitesimal" too literally. (§8 of *The Analyst*).

The second reason for disagreeing with the claim that Berkeley failed to redraft the lost manuscript to Part II because of problems he saw in his own approach is very simple. Anyone who has ever labored to produce such a work as would have been Berkeley's Part II will know that the loss of such a manuscript would have been nothing short of traumatic. Imagine that you had "made considerable progress" on a lengthy and difficult manuscript only to have every trace of it destroyed by, e.g., a computer crash, with no backups. How easy would it be to start over from scratch and "write twice on the same subject"? This, coupled with the ridicule Berkeley was being made to suffer for his views, allows us, I think, to forgive Berkeley for abandoning his grand *Treatise*. We should also bear in mind, as A.A. Luce has pointed out, that Berkeley "had other things to do in life besides philosophy." As Luce explains, "He always remained a philosopher; but there was nothing of the professor of philosophy in him. He had no motive for 'developing' his philosophy, or for gathering round him a school of adherents."¹² Indeed, Berkeley told Johnson that his intention was only to give "hints to thinking men, who have leisure and curiosity to go to the bottom of things, and pursue them in their own minds," rather than "trouble the world with large volumes." (Nov. 25, 1729).

The final reason for excusing Berkeley for abandoning his originally planned *Treatise* concerns Berkeley's repeated but cryptic references to a "delusion" tied up with language and meaning. We have already seen, in his 11/25/1729 letter to Johnson, that Berkeley blamed a fault in language for his failure to adequately explain his philosophical position(s) in Part I of the

¹² A.A. Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism* (Russel & Russel, New York: 1968), p. 11.

Principles. In that same letter, Berkeley also wrote: "I do not indeed wonder that on first reading what I have written, men are not thoroughly convinced. On the contrary, I should very much wonder if prejudices, which have been many years taking root, should be extirpated in a few hours' reading." We may also consider the closing section of the Introduction to the *Principles*: "Unless we take care to clear the First Principles of Knowledge from the embarrass and delusion of words, we may make infinite reasonings upon them to no purpose; we may draw consequences from consequences, and be never the wiser." (Introduction, §25).¹³

Now, one could argue that Berkeley's reference to a "delusion of words" was simply rhetorical flourish on his part. However, Berkeley himself confessed to having once firmly believed in the two doctrines that he would so confidently attack in his published works: the doctrine of Abstract Ideas, and the tenet of Material Substance. First, in an early draft of the Introduction to his *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, we find the following two confessions of Berkeley's prior adherence to the doctrine of Abstract Ideas:

I am apt to think that some of those who fancy themselves to enjoy that privilege [of being able to frame abstract ideas], would, upon looking narrowly into their own thoughts, find they wanted it as much as I. *For there was a time when, being banter'd and abus'd by words, I did not in the least doubt my having it.*¹⁴

...whether it be that those speculative gentlemen have by earnest and profound study attain'd to an elevation of thought above the reach of ordinary capacities and endeavours, or whatever else be the cause [for adhering to the doctrine of Abstract Ideas], sure I am there are in their writings many things which I now find myself unable to understand. *Tho' being accusom'd to those forms of speech, I once thought there was no difficulty in them.*¹⁵

Second, with regard to the tenet of Material Substance, we may consult the following exchange from his 1713 *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (and, keep in mind that Berkeley put forth his own views through the character of Philonous):

Hylas: Pray, Philonous, were you not formerly as positive that Matter existed, as you are now that it does not?

¹³ See also Berkeley's Notebook entry 406: "I know there is a mighty sect of Men will oppose me. but yet I may expect to be supported by those whose minds are not so far overgrown wth madness..."

¹⁴ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p.412, my emphasis.

¹⁵ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p.422, my emphasis.

Philonous: I was. But here lies the difference. Before, my positiveness was founded, without examination, upon prejudice; but now, after inquiry, upon evidence.¹⁶

To better appreciate the significance of these confessions, we should take into account that Berkeley seemed to have prided himself on being a true "free-thinker," i.e., one who takes nothing on faith, or on the authority of others, but accepts claims only after thoroughly examining and weighing all the reasons pro and con. Consider, for example, the following eloquent passage from his Notebooks:

I am young, I am an upstart, I am a pretender, I am vain, very well. I shall endeavour patiently to bear up under the most lessening, vilifying appellations the pride and rage of man can devise. But one thing, I know, I am not guilty of. I do not act out of prejudice and prepossession. I do not adhere to any opinion because it is an old one, a receiv'd one, a fashionable one, or one that I have spent much time in the study and cultivation of.

So, the young Berkeley, who prided himself on his independence of thought, came to realize – at some point – that two prevailing doctrines of philosophy, which he himself had endorsed, were completely false. Moreover, at least in the case of abstract ideas, he seemed to blame language for beguiling him into accepting that false doctrine.

In fact, so adamant was Berkeley that "most parts of knowledge have been strangely perplexed and darkened by the abuse of words, and general ways of speech wherein they are delivered" (Introduction, §21), that he apparently felt forced to adopt a very awkward methodology in his *Principles*: "Since therefore words are so apt to impose on the understanding, I am resolved in my inquiries to make as little use of them as possibly I can: whatever ideas I consider, I shall endeavour to take them bare and naked into my view, keeping out of my thoughts, as far as I am able, those names which long and constant use hath so strictly united with them." (Introduction, §21).¹⁷

I think it is safe to conclude from these statements that Berkeley felt that adherence to the doctrines of abstract ideas and material substance were not mere mistakes, but were the products

¹⁶ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p. 334. [Third Dialogue]

¹⁷ The line, "I am resolved in my inquiries to make as little use of them as possibly I can" can only be found in the First Edition of Berkeley's Introduction to the *Principles*. It was likely dropped from subsequent editions because of the sheer oddity of proposing to explain something in writing, but without using words. Of course, Berkeley knew this would seem strange, and he acknowledged that if taken too literally, his method would "presuppose an entire deliverance from the deception of words, which I dare hardly promise myself." (Introduction, §23).

of a delusion that was intimately related to language. If this is true, then the failure of Berkeley's philosophical project may be blamed on Berkeley's readers, since we are each ultimately responsible for extirpating our own prejudices and seeing past this "delusion of words." Indeed, that readers of Berkeley need to do significant *work* on their own to comprehend Berkeley's insights becomes a recurring theme throughout his writings. Consider, for example, the following:

"I desire & warn [my reader] not to expect to find truth in my Book or any where but in his own Mind. whatever I see my self tis impossible I can paint it out in words."
- §696, Notebooks (1708-1709)

"[A]s for those that will not be at the pains of a little thought, no multiplication of words will ever suffice to make them understand the truth, or rightly conceive my meaning."
- §134, *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* (1709)

"Whoever therefore designs to read the following sheets, I entreat him that he would make my words the occasion of his own thinking, and endeavour to attain the same train of thoughts in reading that I had in writing them."
- §25, Introduction to the *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710).

"In the pursuit of truth we must beware of being misled by terms which we do not rightly understand. That is the chief point. Almost all philosophers utter the caution; few observe it. . . . Laying aside, then, as far as possible, all prejudice, whether rooted in linguistic usage or in philosophical authority, let us fix our gaze on the very nature of things."
- §1, *De Motu* (1721)

"As I pretend not to make any discoveries which another might not as well have made, who should have thought it worth his pains: so I must needs say that without pains and thought no man will ever understand the true nature of Vision, or comprehend what I have wrote concerning it."
- §70, *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733).

"But if we remove the veil and look underneath, if, laying aside the expressions, we set ourselves attentively to consider the things themselves which are supposed to be expressed or marked thereby, we shall discover much emptiness, darkness, and confusion; nay, if I mistake not, direct impossibilities and contradictions. Whether this be the case or no, every thinking reader is intreated [sic] to examine and judge for himself."
- §8, *The Analyst* (1734)

"I entreat my reader to think. For, if he doth not, he may be under some influence from your confident and positive way of talking. But any one who thinks may, if I mistake not, plainly perceive that you are deluded, as it often happens, by mistaking the terms for ideas."
- §48, *A Defense of Free-Thinking in Mathematics* (1735).

Of course, it is not uncommon to find philosophers pleading with their readers to pay close attention and to think carefully when reading their works. Berkeley's case, however, is somewhat unique; for, it may have been the very nature of this "delusion of words" that forced him to adopt a methodology that left so much up to his readers.

Thus, no reader should expect to find the "delusion of words" directly exposed in any of Berkeley's texts. For, we can only expose this delusion ourselves, in our own minds.¹⁸ Given this, it should not be difficult to accept that, after the disastrous reception of the Introduction and Part I of his *Treatise*, and the failed attempt at a remedy that was his 1713 *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley declined to "do so disagreeable a thing" as to completely redraft the lost manuscript to Part II because he believed that "for those that will not be at the pains of a little thought, no multiplication of words will ever suffice to make them understand the truth." (§134, *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*). We should also keep in mind that despite abandoning further work on the three-part *Treatise*, he did continue, in later publications, to explore and apply the same topics that he had put forward in his earliest works.

Therefore, we should not judge Berkeley too harshly for abandoning his *Treatise* and for his failure to adequately express the nature of this "delusion of words." At the very least, we should withhold judgment until we are certain that the fault is not our own.

Now, before examining some of Berkeley's central arguments against Abstract Ideas and Material Substance, as well as some of the more common criticisms of these arguments, we need to clarify some terminology, as these terms will be used throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

1.3 "IDEA," "SPIRIT," "MIND" AND "PERCEPTION"

Understanding Berkeley's use of the terms "idea", "mind", "spirit" and "perception" are essential to understanding Berkeley's writings; therefore, to avoid confusion in later chapters, I shall end this chapter by explaining Berkeley's use of each of these terms. I shall start with "idea" but note that in explaining Berkeley's use of "idea" I will be forced to employ the word "perceive." This cannot be helped, but all should become clear by the end of this section.

¹⁸ Recall Notebook entry 696: "I desire & warn [my reader] not to expect to find truth in my Book or any where but in his own Mind. whatever I see my self tis impossible I can paint it out in words."

To understand Berkeley's use of "idea," we may consider John Locke's use of "idea," since Berkeley's use represented a subtle but crucial revision of Locke's. In Book II, Chapter VIII, §8, of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke defined an "idea" as "[w]hatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding." According to this definition, whatever anyone is *actually aware of* at any given moment shall be called an "idea."

Locke went on to divide this most general category into the two sub-categories of "Ideas of Sensation" and "Ideas of Reflection," but before discussing these, we must first be aware that Locke specifically distinguished "the power to produce any idea in our mind" from the idea itself.¹⁹ Accordingly, "ideas" are to be treated as mere passive *effects*, as the end-result(s) of whatever causal power, force, or process, is ultimately responsible for producing them. As such, an "idea" is a quantum of inert experiential data, which is to say that no idea has, in itself, any power to *do* anything at all. Thus, whatever might be causing us to experience anything at any moment is left out of the word "idea." In short, the term "idea" only refers to *what* we experience, at any given moment, and not the *why* or *how* of it.

Berkeley had no apparent problem using "idea" to signify "whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding,"²⁰ and he also treated ideas as being wholly inert and passive effects of some active power that produced them.²¹ In fact, it was because of these points of agreement that he found it necessary to reject, or at least drastically revise, Locke's division of ideas into the two sub-categories of "Ideas of Sensation" and "Ideas of Reflection."

To understand Berkeley's motivations here, we must briefly review these sub-categories, as described by Locke. The "Idea of Sensation" category was meant to encompass whatever one

¹⁹ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter 8, §8.

²⁰ See e.g., Notebook entry 427a: "The Horse it self the Church it self is an Idea i:e object immediate object of thought"; and, entry 808: "Idea is the object or Subject of thought; that I think on whatever it be, I call Idea." See also *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, §45: "Note that, when I speak of tangible ideas, I take the word idea for any the immediate object of sense, or understanding - in which large signification it is commonly used by the moderns."

²¹ See e.g., §25 of Part I of the *Principles*: "[W]hossoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflection, will not perceive in them any power or activity," and one line later: "A little attention will discover to us that the very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it, insomuch that it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything." See also Notebook entry 653: "Folly to enquire what determines the Will. Uneasiness etc are Ideas, therefore unactive, therefore can do nothing therefore cannot determine the Will."

may come to be aware of through one's various senses; so, whatever one actually hears, smells, sees, tastes, etc. at any given moment can be called "ideas of sensation." The other category - "Ideas of reflection" - Locke described as follows:

[T]he other fountain, from which experience furnisheth the understanding with ideas, is the *perception of the operations of our own minds* within us, as it is employed about the ideas [of sensation] it has got; which operations, when the soul comes to reflect on, and consider, do furnish the understanding with another set of ideas, which could not be had from things without; and such are, *perception, thinking, doubting, believing, reasoning, knowing, willing*, and all the different actings of our own minds; which we being conscious of, and observing in ourselves, do from these receive into our understandings, as distinct ideas, as we do from bodies affecting our senses.²²

Thus, according to Locke's scheme, whatever one comes to be aware of through any kind of "introspection" shall be called an "idea of reflection." Hence, one's awareness of the content of one's own thoughts, including any awareness of one's own modifications or regulations of volition, shall be classified as "ideas of reflection." So, variations of light and color, sounds, smells, tastes, etc., shall be called "ideas of sensation," while memories, daydreams, imaginations, thoughts, concepts, and any awareness of one's own volition (or know-how), shall be classified as "ideas of reflection."

From Locke's very general use of "idea" this all seems to follow as a matter of course. If "idea" refers to *whatever* I may think on or be aware of at any given moment, then certainly my own actions, my own thoughts, etc. count as "ideas" just as much as any ache, pain, color, or sound. For, I am certainly aware of myself doing things, whether I am moving some part of my body, or recalling the events of last week, or imagining something, or trying to solve a math problem. And, my awareness of actually *doing* these things, and/or my awareness of *how* to do these things, is at least as clear and distinct as my awareness of whatever is thereby done. For example, if I move a finger, I am distinctly aware of some active power or *effort* on my part; what I would call my "willing" or my "volition." I am also aware that this active power/effort on my part bears a special relation to the pattern of visual and kinesthetic sensations that I perceive and describe as "my finger moving", and I would describe this special relation by saying that I "willed" my finger to move.

²² Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter I, §4.

According to Locke's classification scheme, the actual look and feel of my moving finger would be classified as "ideas of sensation" since I become aware of these experiences through my visual, kinesthetic and tactile senses. However, my awareness that I am *doing* something, my awareness of my own volition, of myself as *active*, is not acquired through any of my various senses. Instead, I am simply aware, "immediately aware," we might say, that I am *doing* (something).

Since, however, there are many occasions when I act without engaging in any introspective reflection at all, we might prefer to say that I am "reflectively" (rather than "immediately") aware of my own volition. Indeed, with regard to ideas of reflection generally, Locke wrote that people only come to be "furnished with" ideas of reflection "according as they more or less *reflect* on them."²³ That is, "unless he turn his thoughts that way, and consider them *attentively*, he will no more have clear and distinct ideas of all the *operations of his mind*, and all that may be observed therein, than he will have all the particular ideas of any landscape, or of the parts and motions of a clock, who will not turn his eyes to it, and with attention heed all the parts of it." (emphasis in original). Now, we have already seen, from B2, C1, S4 (quoted above), that Locke included one's awareness of "willing" under the general sub-category of "Ideas of Reflection." Thus, we become aware of our own active volition by attentively reflecting upon particular acts of volition, thereby perceiving that "operation of mind" we generally call "willing." As a result of such reflective attention, we acquire ideas of reflection of our own active volition.²⁴

According to Berkeley's revision of Locke's scheme, the proper distinction to be drawn is not between Ideas of Sensation and Ideas of Reflection, with any awareness of one's own active volition falling under the latter category; but, instead, between (1) an awareness of one's own

²³ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II, Chapter I, §7.

²⁴ Two problems immediately stand out from this account. First, to say we acquire "ideas" of our own active volition by "perceiving" it (through an act of reflection) would seem to require that the thing we perceive (our active volition) actually *be there* to be perceived. This would mean, however, that we can only have ideas of our own *active* volitions if we reflect upon our volition *while* we actually do (something). That is, you could not reflect upon what you did yesterday and, thereby, acquire an idea of your own *active* volition (since all you would have to reflect upon would be relatively passive and inert "ideas of memory" of what you did yesterday). Second, if we must engage in an *act* of reflection in order to acquire any idea (of reflection) of the operations of our own minds, it follows that we cannot have any "idea" of the act of reflection itself, unless we reflect upon that act of reflection by engaging in a second act of reflection so as to acquire an idea of that operation of mind we are calling "reflection." But, then, of course, this second act of reflection would require another act of reflection, and so on, *ad infinitum*. Accordingly, to acquire an idea of myself *doing* X, I must: (1) actually be *doing* X; and, (2) if X is that operation of mind we call "reflecting" then I must engage in an infinite series of reflections - or, rather, I simply *cannot* have any "idea" of that operation of mind we call "reflecting."

active volition or "active being," and (2) an awareness of *anything and everything else*. For Berkeley, then, the proper distinction is not between Ideas of Reflection and Ideas of Sensation, but between Active Volition and Passive Ideas.

Therefore, Berkeley used "idea" to refer to immediately experienced sense data (which he calls "Ideas of Sense" generally, or more specifically, "visual ideas", "tactile ideas", "auditory ideas", etc.), and whatever one may become aware of through imagination and memory ("Ideas of imagination and memory"). This latter category can include ideas of reflection since Berkeley was not completely opposed to that class of ideas; his complaint was only that active volition is not to be included in that class of ideas, since, according to Berkeley, we can have no ideas whatsoever of active volition.

For the remainder of this dissertation, then, please be wary of confusing Berkeley's very technical use of "idea" with the many ways in which this word is used in common speech today, e.g., "I have an idea of what you mean" or "I have no idea where my keys are" or "I have an idea for how we might sell this house" or "do you have any idea how much that cost?" or just simply, "I just had an idea!" None of these expressions accords with Berkeley's use of "idea." For Berkeley, "ideas of sense" are mere fleeting sensations; a pattern of light, a noise, a feeling of cold wind on your face, the smell of coffee, etc. As Berkeley wrote, at §26 of Part I of the *Principles*: "We perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear." Moreover, "[w]hen in broad day-light I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or no, or to determine what particular objects shall present themselves to my view." (§29, Part I). Thus, ideas of sense are continuously experienced (as long as one is conscious or aware), and are independent of our own volition, i.e., we have no direct control over the stream of sense-data that assaults us whenever we are conscious.

Now, the reason Berkeley refused to allow that we know of our own active volition, or willing, as ideas of reflection was his insistence that our awareness of our own active volition is, as Berkeley said, "*toto coelo* different" from our awareness of anything else. As Berkeley wrote, at entry 643 of his Notebooks:

The grand Cause of perplexity & darkness in treating of the Will, is that we Imagine it to be an object of thought (to speak with the vulgar), we think we may perceive, contemplate & view it like any of our Ideas whereas in truth 'tis no idea. Nor is there any

Idea of it. *tis toto coelo* different from the Understanding i.e. from all our Ideas. If you say the will or rather a Volition is something I answer there is an Homonymy in the word thing when apply'd to Ideas & volitions & understanding & will. all ideas are passive, volitions active.

To clarify this "*toto coelo* difference," we could start by distinguishing any sensory "feedback" that might attend an act of volition from the exercise of volition itself. For example, imagine that your hand is temporarily paralyzed; you try to move a finger, and nothing happens. Suppose now that a person, observing you sitting motionless, asks, "what are you doing?" And, you reply, "I'm trying to move my finger." Now, compare this to a case where your hand is not paralyzed: you try to move a finger, and it moves just as you expected it to move. An observer asks, "What are you doing?" You reply, "I'm moving my finger..." You then direct the observer's attention to your moving finger, saying, "look here! *This* is what I'm doing."

In both cases, you would be clearly and distinctly aware of your own active "trying." In fact, the difference between these two cases lies entirely in the presence or absence of sensory feedback that can be correlated with your efforts. For, if you did not know that your hand was paralyzed, you would set out to move your finger (i.e., regulate your volition) according to the expectation that your finger would move as a result. Only upon becoming aware of a lack of movement in your finger(s) would you modify the description of what you were doing from "moving a finger" to merely "trying" to move a finger.²⁵ Thus, even when your hand is paralyzed, as far as your volition is concerned (so to speak), you would still be "moving your finger." That is, you would be exercising your volition in the same 'way', whether your finger moved or not.

At a more general level, consider what it takes to become aware of your own active volition, as compared to becoming aware of any "ideas." To become aware of some idea of sense, it need only happen that you become aware of it. In other words, it is out of our control; we are assaulted with a constant barrage of ideas of sense, as long as we are conscious. For, even sitting still in a dark and silent room, one still breathes, one's heart still beats, one still receives kinesthetic sensations from the position of one's body, etc., and normally, of course, we do not sit in silent, dark rooms. By comparison, to become immediately aware of your own

²⁵ Berkeley expressed this as a difference between "power" and "volition" rather than between "doing" and "trying." In Notebook entry 699, for example, Berkeley wrote: "There is a difference betwixt Power & Volition. There may be volition without Power. But there can be no Power without Volition. Power implyeth volition & at the same time a Connnotation of the Effect's following the Volition."

active volition, you must *actively* modify or regulate or exercise your volition.²⁶ Hence, we become aware of our own volition or "active being" only by *being active*, and for Berkeley, as long as we are conscious, we are active. For, even when we might describe ourselves as "doing nothing" we are still active, i.e., *remaining* still is a form of action. As Berkeley stated in Notebook entry 791: "my acquiescing in the present State is willing." So, for Berkeley, a living, conscious human being is continually active (in some way or another), and also continually assaulted (so to speak) with ideas of sense (again, in some form or another). As Berkeley recorded in Notebook entry 673: "The Existence of active things is to act; of inactive to be perceiv'd."²⁷

The general term Berkeley employed to describe one's volition or "active being" was "spirit," and he described this most directly in the following Notebook entries:

- 828 The Will is *purus actus* or rather pure Spirit not imaginable, not sensible, not intelligible, in no wise the object of the Understanding, no wise perceivable.
- 829 Substance of a Spirit is that it 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 it's [sic] substance is not knowable not being an Idea.

Note the care that Berkeley took in entry 829; he was uncomfortable with even using the word "it" to refer to "spirit." The fear here is that we will slide into the mistake of treating volition as some sort of passive 'object' or inert 'thing' to be viewed or examined "at arm's length," i.e., as an *idea*. In fact, however, volition is what does any viewing or examining, or rather it is whatever we mean by "viewing" or "examining." It is "*purus actus*," as Berkeley says, and as such, you cannot "view" it, you can only *do* it, or rather, *be* it.²⁸

When Berkeley describes "spirit" as being "not knowable," we must not read this as implying that volition is in any way occult, mysterious, or ineffable. Instead, the point is simply that one's awareness of one's own active volition is a fundamentally different *kind* of awareness

²⁶ The terminology here is difficult. See *infra*. n. 28.

²⁷ The latter part of this statement is synonymous with Berkeley's (in)famous *esse est percipi* principle, which I shall discuss in Chapter II.

²⁸ Note that saying you could "become" your own active volition is itself a misleading expression. For, to say you could "become" your own active volition implies a possible state wherein you are *not* your own active volition. According to Berkeley's approach, volition, being "*purus actus*," is never dormant; the existence of volition is synonymous with its activity. See e.g., Notebook entry 673: "The Existence of active things is to act, of inactive to be perceiv'd." Moreover, according to Berkeley, the 'self' just *is* this active volition; thus, you cannot, strictly speaking, "become" your own active volition; instead, you simply *are* your own active volition. As Berkeley recorded in Notebook entry 499a: "it should be said nothing but a Will, a being wch wills being unintelligible."

than that of ideas. For Berkeley, "language & knowledge are all about ideas"²⁹ so it would constitute an abuse of language to say that we could "know" that which is *toto coelo* different from any idea. In fact, so adamant was Berkeley about the *toto coelo* difference between our awareness of our own volition and our awareness of any ideas that he wrote, in §142 of Part I of the *Principles*, "[s]pirits and ideas are things so wholly different, that when we say 'they exist,' 'they are known,' or the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures." Thus, Berkeley wrote, at §139 of Part I of the *Principles*, "[I]t is therefore necessary, in order to prevent equivocation and confounding natures perfectly disagreeing and unlike, that we distinguish between *spirit* and *idea*."

In fact, spirit and idea are so "perfectly disagreeing and unlike" one another that it may be misleading to say even that one is "aware of" one's own volition. For, this way of speaking might imply that spirit, which is *purus actus*, could be, if only grammatically and entirely for the sake of discussion, a relatively inert and static object of awareness, i.e., that spirit could be (like) an idea. Therefore, instead of saying that one is "aware of" one's own volition, or that one "perceives" or even "knows" one's own volition, Berkeley chose to say that one just "is" one's own active volition. As Berkeley explained in §2 of the *Principles*:

But, beside 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 *myself*. By which words I do not denote any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them.³⁰

"What I am myself – that which I denote by the term *I*," he later explained, in §139 of the *Principles*, "is the same with what is meant by *soul* or *spiritual substance*." He went on to explain that "[i]n a large sense indeed, we may be said to have an idea [or rather a notion] of *spirit*; that is, we understand the meaning of the word, otherwise we could not affirm or deny anything of it." (§140, *Principles*, emphasis and brackets in original). The bracketed text in this passage, in which Berkeley referred to having a "notion" of spirit, was added in the second

²⁹ Notebook entry 312.

³⁰ See also Notebook entry 362a: "Qu: whether I had not better allow Colours to exist without the Mind taking the Mind for the Active thing which I call I, my self." See also Alciphron VII, §8: "I understand what is signified by the term *I*, or *myself*, or know what it means, although it be no idea, or like an idea, but that which thinks, and wills, and apprehends ideas, and operates about them." (stated by Euphranor).

edition of the *Principles*. The following was also added in the second edition, by way of further explanation, at §142:

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 these words. What I know, that I have some notion of. [emphasis in original]

Here we see Berkeley wrestling with language; on the one hand, it would be an abuse of language to say we "know" our own active volition (since "knowledge is all about ideas"), but on the other hand, it would be foolish to deny that we know nothing of our own actions, our own active selves. To cut through this, Berkeley suggested using the word "notion" instead of "idea" when referring to our awareness of our own active selves.³¹ It should be clear, however, that Berkeley was *not* attempting to introduce "notion" as denoting some discrete object of awareness, i.e., as being some newly identified category of "idea." It would defy all that has been advanced thus far to say that one perceives "notions" of one's own active self, just as one perceives "ideas" of sense, or even that one is "aware of" volition as one might be aware of ideas of memory and imagination. Instead, as Berkeley indicated in the above-cited passages, we simply *are* our active selves, and as such, while it would be absurd to say we are entirely oblivious of ourselves as active beings, Berkeley felt that it was dangerously misleading to say that we are "aware of" or that we "perceive" ourselves as active beings, inasmuch as this would imply a Subject-Object relationship and, thus, would threaten to convert spirit into a passive object of awareness and, thus, into an "idea." Consequently, when Berkeley wrote that "we may be said to have a notion" of our active selves, he could not have been attempting to name some reflective item, or object, of experience; for, that would be tantamount to saying we have "ideas" of our own active selves.³²

³¹ See Margaret Atherton, "The Coherence of Berkeley's Theory of Mind", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* Vol. 43, No. 3 (March 1983), 389-399, p. 396: "'Notion' is not a word invented to get him out of difficulties in talking about minds. He suggests the use of the term, 'notion' because he thinks people have been misled by the word 'idea' into drawing some unacceptable conclusions."

³² But see, Daniel E. Flage, "Berkeley's Notions", *Philosophical and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (Mar. 1985), pp. 407-425. Flage attempts to use Thomas Reid's use of "direct" and "relative" conception to give content to what he calls Berkeley's "doctrine of notions." He interprets Berkeley as having held that we only know our own mind by a relative notion (similar to Reid's relative conception), as 'that which thinks, wills, and perceives.' While Flage makes an interesting case and is aware of Berkeley's insistence that we know of our active selves immediately and without the need for any "ideas" of our active selves, he reads too much into Berkeley's suggested use of "notion." The passages I have cited represent all that Berkeley had to say regarding this particular use of

Finally, we may address "perceive" and "mind." In his Notebooks, Berkeley wrote: "Whatsoever has any of our ideas in it must perceive, it being that very having, that passive reception of ideas that denominates the mind perceiving. that being the very essence of perception, or that wherein perception consists." We may also consider Notebook entry 582: "The having Ideas is not the same thing with Perception. a Man may have Ideas when he only Imagines. But – then this Imagination presupposeth Perception." These entries tell us that Berkeley uses "perceive" synonymously with the passive reception or 'having' of ideas (of sense). Entry 582 makes it clear that "perceive" does not apply to ideas of imagination (presumably, the better term here would be "imagine" rather than "perceive"), and the reference to "passive reception" in entry 301 reinforces this, since we do seem to have some control over what we imagine, whereas we have no control over what ideas of sense we may experience at any time.³³ While Berkeley may at times use "perceive" in a wider sense, to refer to one's awareness of ideas of imagination and memory, the key point is that "perceive" is used to indicate our awareness of "ideas."

Finally, there is "mind." Berkeley tends to use this term a bit haphazardly, but it is generally synonymous with "spirit" or "self." Recall Notebook entry 362a: "Qu: whether I had not better allow Colours to exist without the Mind taking the Mind for the Active thing which I call I, my self." Recall also §2 of Part I of the *Principles*: "[t]his perceiving, active being is what I call *mind, spirit, soul, or myself*." However, there does seem to be a subtle distinction in how Berkeley uses "mind" and "spirit." Berkeley tends to use "mind" when discussing the passive 'having' or perception of ideas; and, he tends to use "spirit" when discussing active volition.

There is one final point about "mind" that we must appreciate, and this point is made by Philonous in the Third Dialogue: "when I speak of objects as existing in the mind, or imprinted on the senses, I would not be understood in the gross literal sense – as when bodies are said to exist in a place, or a seal to make an impression upon wax. My meaning is only that the mind comprehends or perceives them." (Fraser, V. I., p. 346). Thus, "mind" is not some metaphysical

"notion." Thus, it seems very unlikely that Berkeley was proposing anything like a "doctrine of notions." In fact, pluralizing this term, speaking of "notions", seems to unavoidably convert 'them' back into "ideas." Thus, Flage's argument threatens to contradict Berkeley's insistence on the *toto coelo* difference between our awareness of active volition and passive idea.

³³ See also Notebook entry 286: "Thoughts do most properly signify or are mostly taken for the interior operations of the mind, wherein the mind is active, those [that] obey not the acts of Volition, & in [which] the mind is passive are more properly call'd sensations or perceptions."

'space' for Berkeley, nor is it a 'container' of ideas, etc. It is merely a word, and it is used to indicate the having of (or perception/awareness of) ideas. Moreover, when Berkeley speaks of things "existing in the mind" or "existing without the mind" he is merely referring to the perception or awareness of things, in the former case, and things existing unperceived (or "in and of themselves" we might say) in the latter case.

CHAPTER 2

ABSTRACT IDEAS AND MATERIAL SUBSTANCE

While there are many arguments on various topics to be found in Berkeley's published works, the two issues which have received the most attention from philosophers are: (1) Berkeley's rejection of Abstract Ideas; and, (2) Berkeley's rejection of Material Substance, which is commonly referred to as Berkeley's "immaterialism."

These two issues were first addressed by Berkeley in the Introduction and Part I of his 1710 *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. However, as also stated above, this was not Berkeley's first major publication. In fact, his 1709 *Essay* on vision was his first major work, and the precise relation between these two publications has been a subject of some debate amongst Berkeley scholars.³⁴

This debate revolves around the questions of which work had greater influence on the other (since it is an open question which publication was drafted before the other), and whether or not Berkeley, when drafting the 1709 *Essay* on vision, had fully embraced the immaterialism that he would argue for in Part I of the *Principles*. The main reason for this debate is that Berkeley treated tangible bodies as existing independent of perception in the 1709 *Essay* on vision, but then treated all sensations (whether visual or tactile) as existing "only in the mind" in the 1710 Part I of the *Principles*. So, the issue that has been debated is whether Berkeley was only a partial idealist when he drafted the 1709 *Essay* on vision. While there are legitimate historical reasons for engaging in this debate, Berkeley explained why he treated tangible bodies as existing independent of perception in his earlier work, in §44 of Part I of the *Principles*:

That the proper objects of sight neither exist without the mind, nor are the images of external things, was shewn even in that treatise [i.e., in the 1709 *Essay* on vision]. Though throughout the same, the contrary be supposed true of tangible objects: not that to suppose that vulgar error, was necessary for establishing the notion therein laid down; but because it was beside my purpose to examine and refute it in a discourse concerning *vision*. [Berkeley's emphasis].³⁵

³⁴ See e.g., Thomas M. Lennon, "The Historical Consistency of Berkeley's Idealism", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 16(1), 2008, pp. 101-124. See also C.M. Turbayne, "The Influence of Berkeley's Science on His Metaphysics", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V.16, No. 4 (June 1956), pp. 476-487.

³⁵ Since the debate concerning the precise relationship between the 1709 *Essay* and the 1710 Introduction & Part I of the *Principles* is not terribly relevant to this dissertation, Berkeley's stated explanation will have to suffice.

In Chapter III, I will explore in detail the New Theory of Vision put forward in Berkeley's 1709 *Essay*, but in this chapter, I wish to focus only on Berkeley's arguments against Abstract Ideas, and also to introduce two of the more notorious arguments Berkeley made relative to Material Substance. I shall also examine some common criticisms that have been made regarding each of these arguments.

2.1 ABSTRACT IDEAS

The Introduction to the *Principles* is a relatively short tract, and it is devoted almost entirely to denouncing "the opinion that the mind hath a power of framing *abstract ideas*." (§6, Introduction, emphasis in original). Berkeley attacked this opinion because he believed it to be false, but more importantly because, as he observed, abstract ideas were "thought to be the object of those sciences which go by the name of Logic and Metaphysics, and of all that which passes under the notion of the most abstract and sublime learning, in all which one shall scarce find any question handled in such a manner, as does not suppose their existence in the mind, and that it is well acquainted with them." (§6). Thus, if there are no such things as abstract ideas, these sciences may be in desperate need of re-examination. As Berkeley wrote, in an unpublished first Draft of the Introduction, "those parts of learning must of necessity be overrun with very much useless wrangling & jargon, innumerable absurdities & contradictions, if so be that abstract general ideas are perfectly inconceivable."³⁶

Berkeley presented two primary arguments against this "opinion." As a prefatory matter, however, it must be understood that there existed no 'official' doctrine of abstract ideas; indeed, a great many philosophers before Berkeley had written of "abstract ideas." As Berkeley was an ardent fan of John Locke, he chose Locke's descriptions of abstract ideas as his target, since he held Locke to be the "ablest patron" of that doctrine.³⁷

³⁶ Luce & Jessop, *Works*, V. 2, p. 123. In the Draft Introduction, Berkeley also wrote that the doctrine of abstract ideas was not "confined to" the sciences of logic and metaphysics, but that "[t]he contagion thereof has spread throughout all the parts of philosophy. It has invaded and overrun those useful studies of physic and divinity, and even the mathematicians themselves have had their full share of it." (ibid, p. 133).

³⁷ Though Berkeley frequently used Locke as a target for various arguments, Berkeley seemed to idolize Locke. For the truth of this, one need only consult Berkeley's notebooks, which are replete with glowing praise for Locke's writings, even when claiming that Locke had made mistakes. Consider, for example, Notebook entry 567: "Wonderful in Locke that he could when advanc'd in years see at all thro a mist that had been so long a gathering & was consequently thick. This more to be admir'd than that he didn't see farther." We may also consider Notebook entry 688, regarding those philosophers who had come before Berkeley: "They give good rules tho perhaps they themselves do not always observe them. they speak much of clear & distinct Ideas. tho at the same they talk of

Before examining Berkeley's arguments, we must acquaint ourselves with the doctrine Berkeley was attacking. To understand the doctrine of Abstract Ideas, we may start with any day-to-day object, e.g., an eight-ball (billiard ball) rolling across the green felt of a pool table. Now, there are many properties or qualities that can be predicated of this billiard ball. For example, it is in motion, it is spherical, it is black, it is extended (i.e., takes up space), etc. According to Berkeley's understanding of the doctrine of abstract ideas, there are three types of so-called "abstract idea." Note that apart from citing Locke's description of an abstract idea, which I shall discuss in a moment, Berkeley merely prefaces his discussion of these putative types of abstract idea with "[i]t is agreed on all hands..." Thus, one could argue that even if Berkeley was successful against his described target, there may be legitimate theories of abstract ideas that Berkeley missed.

In any case, in §7 of the Introduction, Berkeley explained the first type of supposed abstraction: "...we are told, the mind being able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united, does by that means frame to it self abstract ideas." So, for example, one could form an idea of the blackness of the billiard ball, or of its motion, or its shape, or its extension, etc. The key point is that this type of abstract idea would be an idea of a single quality of some particular object, and *nothing else*. So, it may be an idea of the blackness of the eight-ball, but *not* of its motion or its extension or its shape, etc. Or, it may be an idea of the motion of the eight-ball, but would not include its shape, extension, or color. Remember that "idea" (as used by Berkeley and Locke and which was, according to Berkeley, the prevailing use³⁸) refers to whatever one is immediately and actually aware of, so this doctrine entails that one can become aware of the color of some object, but that this awareness will be of a color with no shape and that occupies no space (no extension). So, it would not be an awareness of a "patch" or even a "blob" of black, but just an immediate awareness (i.e., an "idea") of the specific blackness of the target object, the eight-ball in this case, and nothing else.

In §8, Berkeley described the second type of abstract idea: "...the mind by leaving out of the particular colours perceived by sense, and retaining that only which is common to all, makes

General, abstract ideas etc I'll instance in Lockes opinion of abstraction he being as clear a writer as I have met with. Such was the Candour of this great Man that I perswade [sic] my Self were he alive. he would not be offended that I differ from him seeing that even in so doing. I follow his advice viz. to use my own Judgment, see with my own eyes & not with anothers."

³⁸ See e.g., *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision* §45: "I take the word idea for any the immediate object of sense, or understanding - in which large signification it is commonly used by the moderns."

an idea of colour in abstract which is neither red, nor blue, nor white, nor any other determinate colour." So, where the first type of abstract idea isolates some quality of an object, the second type generalizes that quality. Accordingly, we should be able to frame an idea of color that is not the specific blackness of the eight-ball, but just an awareness of color, in general. Note that this would not be awareness of any particular color, but just an awareness (i.e., an "idea") of color. Or, again, one could – according to this type of abstraction – form an awareness of just generic motion without any determinate shape or extension, or generic extension without any determinate shape or color, or generic shape without any determinate color or extension, etc.

In §9, Berkeley described the third type of abstract idea: "...as the mind frames to it self abstract ideas of qualities or modes [i.e., the second type of abstract idea], so does it, by the same precision or mental separation, attain abstract ideas of the more compounded beings, which include several coexistent qualities." In this case, then, we would frame an idea of a rolling eight-ball, but it would not be an idea of the particular eight-ball that we started with, but an idea of any eight-ball, or just an idea of rolling billiard balls in general.

As stated above, any object will do. So, for example, we could start with an actual human male. According to the doctrine of abstract ideas, as Berkeley understood it, we could frame an idea that is only of that man's height, or stature, or hair-color, etc. This would be an abstract idea of the first type. From there, we can frame an idea of height in general, or stature in general, or hair-color in general, which would be abstract ideas of the second type. Finally, we can frame an idea of just man, or humanity, in general. I say "in general" because, according to the doctrine of abstract ideas, the idea framed cannot be identical with any particular object, else it would no longer be an "abstract" idea. I shall return to this point later on. For now, consider Berkeley's account of this third type of abstract idea, specifically of man or humanity: "...after this manner it is said we come by the abstract idea of *man* or, if you please, humanity or human nature; wherein it is true, there is included colour, because there is no man but has some colour, but then it can be neither white, nor black, nor any particular colour; because there is no one particular colour wherein all men partake. So likewise there is included stature, but then it is neither tall stature nor low stature, nor yet middle stature, but something abstracted from all these." (§8). According to the doctrine of abstract ideas, we need not stop with the abstract idea of man, but can abstract even further, e.g., to the abstract idea of animal "which abstracts not only from all particular men, but also all birds, beasts, fishes, and insects." Eventually, I

suppose, we would hit some most general limit, perhaps with the abstract idea of *thing*, or just *existence* in general, which would presumably be an awareness of anything and everything, but not of any particular thing.

Now, the first point that Berkeley makes against this doctrine is exceedingly simple, and it follows directly after Berkeley's description of the abstract idea of man. Berkeley states, in §10: "[w]hether 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. . . [but] I cannot by any effort of thought conceive the abstract idea [of man] above described." Berkeley admitted in §10 that he could "abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others, with which though they are united in some object, yet, it is possible they may really exist without them." I take Berkeley to be saying, here, that he can imagine or conceive of, e.g., the roof of a house and only the roof, or only a person's arm, or just the trunk of an elephant, or a patch or blob of red or some other color, because these things could actually be experienced, by themselves; so, it should be a relatively simple task to imagine or frame ideas such things.

However, we must recognize that Berkeley was not, in §10, making a logical argument from premises to conclusion. He was simply reporting what he found himself capable of doing, and he found that he was incapable of forming any ideas of the three types described in §§7-9 of the Introduction to the *Principles*. Curiously, after making this report, he immediately moved on to "examine what can be alleged in defence [sic] of the doctrine of abstraction, and try if I can discover what it is that inclines the men of speculation to embrace an opinion, so far remote from common sense as that seems to be." (§11). So, after reporting his own inability to frame any such ideas, Berkeley seemed to be finished; it would seem that he felt he had demonstrated the impossibility of abstract ideas. Of course, the term "impossibility" is vague here, since one could interpret this to mean either "psychological impossibility" or "logical impossibility." Berkeley's own inability to frame any such ideas would be relevant to the question of the psychological possibility of framing such ideas, but it would be irrelevant to the question of the logical possibility of such ideas. I shall return to this point in a moment.

Meanwhile, it should be noted that toward the close of Berkeley's 1709 *Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley did present an actual *argument* against abstract ideas, but that

argument was directed specifically at Locke's own descriptions of abstract ideas. So, in §125 of the 1709 *Essay*, Berkeley explained that if anyone could make clear the nature of abstract ideas it would be John Locke, the “deservedly admired author of the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.” Berkeley then cited Locke’s description of the abstract idea of a triangle which, according to Locke, “must be. . . neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenum; but all and none of these at once.” “In effect,” Locke explained, “it is somewhat imperfect that cannot exist; an idea, wherein some parts of several different and *inconsistent ideas are put together*.”³⁹ After citing these passages, Berkeley then referenced another passage from Locke’s *Essay*: “ideas of mixed modes wherein *any inconsistent ideas are put together*, cannot so much as exist in the mind, i.e., be conceived.”⁴⁰ Had Locke considered these passages together, Berkeley argued, “he would have owned it above all the pains and skill he was master of, to form the above-mentioned idea of a triangle, which is made up of manifest staring contradictions.” Based on Berkeley's Notebook entry 687, it seems that Berkeley placed a great deal of stock in this argument: "Mem: to bring the killing blow at the last v.g. in the matter of Abstraction to bring Lockes general triangle at the last."

In §13 of the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley cited the same tract from Locke's *Essay*, and then asked: "What more easy that for any one to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is here given of the general idea of a triangle, which is, *neither oblique, nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once?*" (emphasis in original). Many philosophers (especially Locke scholars) have argued that Berkeley misunderstood Locke's overall position regarding abstract ideas and abstraction.⁴¹ Therefore, if the only argument Berkeley could bring to the table was essentially an *ad hominum* directed at

³⁹ *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book IV, Ch. 7, §9, cited by Berkeley in §125 of the 1709 *Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision*, my emphasis.

⁴⁰ *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book III, Ch. 10, §33, cited in §125 of the *Essay* on vision, my emphasis.

⁴¹ See e.g., George Pitcher, *Berkeley* (Routledge & Kegan Paul, Boston: 1977), p. 66-67; Kenneth Winkler, *Berkeley, an Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1989), pp. 37-43; Ian Tipton, *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, pp. 138-9; G.J. Warnock, *Berkeley* (Basil Blackwell, Oxford: 1982), p. 63: "it has often been objected that the view which Berkeley attributes to Locke and demolishes is not, in fact, a view which Locke ever held."; Margaret Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision* (Cornell University Press: 1990), p. 182: "Berkeley's alleged argument against Locke has been treated with varying degrees of respect and is often said to misrepresent Locke's views."

Locke's perhaps unfortunate choice of words in that particular passage, then the accuracy of Berkeley's overall interpretation of Locke would be relevant.

However, Berkeley's attack on Locke's choice of words is not the only reason Berkeley offered for rejecting the doctrine of abstract ideas. In fact, we should notice a shift in emphasis from §125 of the *Essay* on vision to §13 of the Introduction. In §125 of the 1709 *Essay*, Berkeley points to an apparent contradiction in Locke's description, but in the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley uses the same text from Locke to ask his readers to see for themselves whether or not they can conceive of the triangle so described. So, the former is an argument based on the law of non-contradiction, while the latter is an appeal to what David Berman refers to as Berkeley's "subjective empiricism,"⁴² i.e., an appeal to the *psychological* possibility of framing the proposed idea. Granted, the §13 appeal to subjective empiricism is still couched in Locke's choice of words, and so, in deference to Locke and Locke scholars, we can simply ignore that particular passage; for, Berkeley had still described the general process of abstraction by listing off the three supposed types of abstract idea, so he can still call for introspection on the part of his readers with regard to any of those putative ideas, without incurring any legitimate wrath of Locke scholars.

So, the issue becomes whether or not Berkeley must show the psychological impossibility of abstract ideas or whether he must establish the logical impossibility of such ideas; and, in either case, has Berkeley succeeded? There are several philosophers who hold Berkeley to the higher standard of proving the logical impossibility of abstract ideas. For example, Martha Brandt Bolton has argued:

Clearly, the fact that Berkeley, you or I try to frame an idea and fail does not prove the point, because future attempts may succeed and other minds may be better at forming ideas than we are. Berkeley needs something better than the 'try and fail' test to establish the impossibility of an idea.⁴³

Tipton has also expressed some dismay over the fact that "though Berkeley *asserts* that it is 'impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it', there is really nothing said to convince the doubter that this is true.

⁴² See Berman, *Berkeley* (Routledge, New York: 1999), at p.10.

⁴³ Martha Brandt Bolton, "Berkeley's Objection to Abstract Ideas", in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, E. Sosa ed., (D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1987), p. 72.

Here again we feel the need for some argument.”⁴⁴ We may also consider George Pappas’ summary dismissal of Berkeley’s appeal to subjective empiricism: “The fact that Berkeley cannot acquire these abstract ideas, however, would hardly be a decisive or even especially forceful objection to them.” Pappas goes on to claim that “it is no part of Berkeley’s case against abstract ideas to decry them based just on his own inability to frame them.”⁴⁵ Similarly, E.J. Craig has observed and argued:

It should also be noted that his objections are put in empirical psychological terms, sometimes tinged with irony, as in: 'Whether others have this wonderful faculty of *abstracting their ideas*, they best can tell: for my self I find I have indeed a faculty of imagining, or representing to my self ...' [§ 10; original italics]. But they are always capable of translation into the logical mode as points about the a priori impossibility of there being images of certain kinds, and it will be more profitable for us to take them in this way.⁴⁶

Echoing this sentiment that Berkeley was being "ironic" when he referred to his own inability to frame abstract ideas, C.C.W Taylor has stated:

Berkeley does not of course distinguish between psychological and conceptual impossibility, but we are justified in interpreting him in terms of the latter, since despite the ironic opening of 10, "Whether others have this wonderful faculty of *abstracting their ideas*, they best can tell", Berkeley is clearly not prepared to accept that someone might, as a matter of empirical fact, turn out to be able to conceive abstract ideas of the objectionable sort.⁴⁷

George Pitcher took Taylor's suggestion – that Berkeley would not accept the empirical possibility that someone may be able to conceive of an abstract idea – a step further when he argued:

One can take a first-hand survey of one's own mind, and then ask a few friends what sorts of ideas they find in theirs – but even if we obtained in this way a completely Berkleyan result, this would provide no answer at all to the abstract idea theorist when he confronts

⁴⁴ Tipton, *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 157. Tipton is speaking here of conceiving of an object existing without perception, and thus this statement was made in the context of analyzing Berkeley's arguments against Material Substance; nevertheless, the particular claim being analyzed is directly relevant to Berkeley's arguments against abstract ideas, since Tipton is discussing the possibility of framing an idea of something's existence, while leaving out of that idea the 'quality' of the object's being perceived.

⁴⁵ George Pappas, *Berkeley's Thought* (Cornell University Press, 2000), p.49.

⁴⁶ E.J. Craig, "Berkeley's Attack on Abstract Ideas", *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Oct., 1968), pp. 425-437, at p. 431.

⁴⁷ C.C.W. Taylor, "Berkeley's Theory of Abstract Ideas", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 111 (Apr., 1978), pp. 97-115, at p. 108.

us with the remark, 'Ah, but you see I *do* find abstract ideas in my mind.' So more substantial backing is needed.⁴⁸

I find Pitcher's reason for rejecting Berkeley's subjective empiricism a bit strange; for, if we are to simply claim something for the sake of claiming it, with no sincerity or seriousness, then Berkeley could have replied to such a remark by simply calling the abstract idea theorist a "liar", or perhaps more in keeping with Berkeley's approach, "deluded." Moreover, one must wonder why Pitcher himself did not make such a claim, since that would have apparently represented such an easy 'killing blow' against Berkeley's position. More to the point, though, Berkeley stated, in §13 of the Introduction: "[i]f any man has the faculty of framing in his mind such an idea of a triangle as is here described, *it is in 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." (my emphasis). So, Berkeley was expressly relying on his readers performing a *candid* survey of their own minds/ideas to see whether or not "the mind hath a power of framing *abstract ideas*." (§6).⁴⁹ As Robert McKim has argued, since Berkeley's target was only to disabuse people of the "opinion that the mind hath a power of framing *abstract ideas*" (§6) Berkeley needed only to establish the psychological impossibility of any such ideas.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, Monroe Beardsley took the rejection of Berkeley's subjective empiricism even further, when he argued:

But even if we were to grant that he is right in holding that there are some ideas which are not abstractable, we would still have to enquire how we may know which ones are not abstractable. The obvious reply to this is an appeal (which Berkeley often makes) to immediate experience; but since his whole purpose (that of removing ancient prejudices

⁴⁸ Pitcher, *Berkeley*, p. 73.

⁴⁹ Recall Berkeley's admonitions, discussed above in Chapter I, that we readers of Berkeley need to do some work on our own to understand his position(s). For example, Notebook entry 696: "I desire & warn [my reader] not to expect to find truth in my Book or any where but in his own Mind. whatever I see my self tis impossible I can paint it out in words." Recall also §134 of the 1709 *Essay* on vision: "as for those that will not be at the pains of a little thought, no multiplication of words will ever suffice to make them understand the truth, or rightly conceive my meaning."

⁵⁰ See Robert McKim, "Wenz on Abstract Ideas and Christian Neo-Platonism in Berkeley", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1982), pp. 665-671, at p. 666. To understand this we need only recognize that the opinion Berkeley was attacking was not that the mind *could* frame abstract ideas, but that it *does* frame abstract ideas.

about abstract ideas) presupposes that the common run of philosophers have misinterpreted their own experience, this appeal does not suffice.⁵¹

In a footnote appended to this text, Beardsley went on to state that "Berkeley tacitly admits this, for example, when in writing to Samuel Johnson about the abstract idea of existence, he remarks, " I cannot find I have any such idea, and this is my reason against it."⁵² So, Beardsley is effectively arguing that *because* Berkeley claims to not be able to frame or find any abstract ideas in his own mind, but others seem to think they can (though, curiously, I have not read any scholar who addresses this, actually claim that to be the case), Berkeley's call to his readers to simply consult what passes in their own minds is somehow rendered inadmissible. What is truly dangerous about Beardsley's approach is that it would also render inadmissible any claim Berkeley might have wanted to make to the effect that proponents of the doctrine of abstract ideas are actually suffering from some form of "delusion" in this regard. I shall return to this question in Chapter III.

There are, of course, philosophers who have supported Berkeley's appeal to subjective empiricism. For example, A. A. Luce summarized Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas as follows: "I have tried to frame an abstract idea after the Lockian pattern, and I cannot do so. Can you?"⁵³ A little further on, Luce states: "Try it for yourself, he says. Try to frame this abstract idea of a triangle with all of these contradictory attributes and none of them. It cannot be done. That is his refutation of abstract ideas"⁵⁴ and Luce held that such a refutation was a success.

Similarly, David Berman has argued that "Berkeley believes that language is so flawed that it cannot be relied upon, not even when it appears to be revealing a contradiction. What can be trusted is experience, whether inner or outer. So the only reliable test for determining whether an abstract idea of triangle, or any abstract idea, exists is to try to experience it by introspection."⁵⁵

I must agree with Berman, McKim, and Luce on this issue, for the simple reason that the topic of debate concerns the existence or non-existence of a class of putative *idea*, and as has already been made plain, that term was used by Berkeley and his contemporaries to refer to

⁵¹ Monroe C. Beardsley, "Berkeley on 'Abstract Ideas', *Mind*, New Series, Vol. 52, No. 206 (Apr., 1943), pp. 157-170, at p. 163.

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ Luce, *Berkeley's Immaterialism*, p. 32.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 33.

⁵⁵ Berman, *Berkeley*, (Routledge, 1999), p. 7.

something of which a person is immediately and *actually aware*. Whatever else "idea" may mean, e.g., whether we can have ideas of active volition, etc., it most certainly was used by Berkeley and his contemporaries to refer to whatever is *actually experienced*, or whatever someone is *actually aware of*, at any given time. Therefore, to ignore Berkeley's call to simple introspection with regard to this particular debate is truly bizarre. As Berkeley asks his reader, in §13 of the Introduction, "[w]hat more easy that for any one to look a little into his own thoughts...?"

Those authors who reject this approach are highly intelligent philosophers, and I do not mean to imply otherwise. Indeed, since they reject this appeal to subjective empiricism, they each go on to set forth lengthy and complex arguments regarding the various putative types of abstract idea set forth in §§7-9 of Berkeley's Introduction to the *Principles*, in an effort to determine whether or not they are logically or conceptually inconsistent, and Berkeley does not fare very well in this regard.

As I shall argue in more detail in Chapter III, however, the source of the tension here may be due to an unnoticed category-mistake, what Berkeley called, the "grand mistake." Consider, for example, Notebook entry 176a: "[t]he grand Mistake is that we think we have Ideas of the Operations of our Minds." Recall Berkeley's insistence, discussed in Chapter I, that our awareness of our own active selves is *toto coelo* different from our awareness of any idea. Recall also that Berkeley refused to hold that we know of the "Operations of our Minds" through ideas of reflection, or any ideas at all, for that matter. Now, consider Notebook entry 660: "[t]he referring Ideas to things which are not Ideas, the using the Term, Idea of, is one great cause of mistake, as in other matters so also in this." The phrase "so also in this" refers to the issue of whether or not we have ideas of our own active volition or active selves, as the immediately preceding entries make clear:

657 To ask have we an idea of the Will or volition is nonsense. an idea can resemble nothing but an idea.

658 If you ask what thing it is that wills. I answer if you mean Idea by the Word thing or any thing like any Idea, then I say tis no thing at all that wills'. This how extravagant soever it may seem yet is a certain truth. we are cheated by these general terms, thing, is etc.

Notebook entry 176a was not the only place Berkeley referred to this "grand mistake." We may also consider Notebook entry 806, in which Berkeley identified Hobbes as making this

same grand mistake: "The not distinguishing twixt Will & ideas is a Grand Mistake with Hobbs [sic]. He takes those things for nothing which are not Ideas." We may also consider entry 847: "But the Grand Mistake is that we know not what we mean by we our selves, our mind etc. this most sure & certain that our Ideas are distinct from the Mind i.e. the Will, the Spirit." Finally, we may consider the following from the Draft Introduction:

But there are some parts of learning which contain the knowledge of things the most noble and important of any within the reach of human reason, that have been so signally perplex'd and darken'd, by the abuse of words and general ways of speech, wherein they are deliver'd; that in the study thereof a man cannot be too much upon his guard, either in his private meditations, or in reading the writings, or hearing the discourses, of other men, to prevent his being cheated by the glibness and familiarity of speech into a belief that those words stand for ideas, which, in truth, stand for none at all. Which *grand mistake*, it is almost incredible, what a mist and a darkness it has cast over the understandings of men, otherwise the most rational and clear-sighted.⁵⁶

The problem with this intriguing line of reasoning is that Berkeley failed to develop it. As stated at the outset of this dissertation, I shall attempt my own development of this line of reasoning in Chapter III and, once that is complete, I shall re-address this debate regarding Berkeley's appeal to introspection to show the impossibility of abstract ideas. For now, it is enough to be acquainted with the central issues in this debate over abstract ideas.

Another issue that must be addressed in relation to abstract ideas is Pitcher's argument regarding what he calls "purely intellectual, non-sensuous ideas."⁵⁷ Pitcher argues that Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas suffers from Berkeley's over-reliance on treating ideas as "mental images." Pitcher claims that "Berkeley's argument [against abstract ideas] does, after all, rest on the assumption that all ideas are images"⁵⁸ and because of this, Berkeley misses the point about abstract ideas, which are actually, according to Pitcher, "non-imagistic" or "purely intellectual, non-sensuous ideas." Pitcher does not go on to explain what he means exactly, by "purely intellectual, non-sensuous idea", but it is curious Pitcher would take this position since

⁵⁶ Luce & Jessop, *Works*, pp. 141-142. My emphasis. Recall also Berkeley's own confessions, cited above in Chapter I, to once having adhered to the doctrine of abstract ideas and, thus, presumed that he himself had the power of framing abstract ideas: "For there was a time when, being banter'd and abus'd by words, I did not in the least doubt my having it" (Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p.412); and, "Tho' being accustom'd to those forms of speech, I once thought there was no difficulty in them." (Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p.422). Recall also Berkeley's response to a critic, in §48 of *A Defense of Free-Thinking in Mathematics* (1735): "I entreat my reader to think. For, if he doth not, he may be under some influence from your confident and positive way of talking. But any one who thinks may, if I mistake not, plainly perceive that you are deluded, as it often happens, by mistaking the terms for ideas."

⁵⁷ Pitcher, *Berkeley*, p. 67.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, p. 70.

Berkeley himself addressed this issue, at least in passing, in the *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), and again in *Alciphron* (1732), and a comparison of the differing treatment given to this issue in either dialogue will shed some light on Berkeley's position regarding the proper test for the existence of abstract ideas. First, in the *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, we find the following exchange:

Hylas: But what say you to *pure intellect*? May not abstracted ideas be framed by that faculty?

Philonous: Since I cannot frame abstract ideas at all, it is plain I cannot frame them by the help of *pure intellect*; whatsoever faculty you understand by those words.

Notice that Philonous rejects Hylas' suggestion regarding a supposed 'faculty of pure intellect' only because Philonous finds that he "cannot frame abstract ideas at all"; thus, inventing a name for a new 'faculty' of mind will not change this brute, empirical fact. So, in 1713, Berkeley was still firmly committed to his own subjective empiricism.

By comparison, in §6 of the Seventh Dialogue of *Alciphron* (1732), the character of Alciphron argues that "[a]bstract general ideas I take to be the object of pure intellect, which may conceive them, although they cannot perhaps be imagined." Euphranor (the character who puts forward and defends Berkeley's own views) responds by saying: "I do not perceive that I can by any faculty, whether of intellect or imagination, conceive or frame an idea of that which is impossible or includes a contradiction."⁵⁹ So, one could argue that by 1732, Berkeley had changed his stance from reliance on subjective empiricism to reliance on the law of non-contradiction, i.e., he has moved from psychological impossibility to logical impossibility.

Such a reading would be a mistake. To understand this, we need only consult the exchange that immediately precedes this portion of the dialogue. For, Alciphron had stated, in §5: "as these [abstract ideas] are not so obvious and familiar to vulgar minds, it happens that some men may think they have no idea at all, when they have not a particular idea; but the truth is, you had the abstract general idea of man, in the instance assigned, wherein you thought you had none." Similarly, in §6, when Euphranor says: "Though I shut mine eyes, and use mine utmost efforts, and reflect on all that passeth in my own mind, I find it utterly impossible to form such ideas," Alciphron responds by saying: "To reflect with due attention and turn the mind

⁵⁹ Fraser, *Works*, V. II, p. 299.

inward upon itself is a difficult task, and not every one's talent." So, in 1732, Berkeley *portrayed his opponent* as not only ignoring Berkeley's (or Euphranor's) own introspective claims, but as responding to those claims by saying something to the effect of: "no, no, they're there... trust me, you're conceiving of abstract ideas, whether you're actually aware of them or not."

In this particular instance, then, Berkeley (through Euphranor) appealed to an argument based on non-contradiction because he was apparently confident that any appeal to subjective empiricism would simply be ignored by his opponents. This does not mean, however, that Berkeley had in any way abandoned his commitment to subjective empiricism as the ultimate test for whether or not abstract ideas actually exist. Indeed, it is not until Alciphron *himself* is depicted as actually stopping the conversation to consult his own mind that Alciphron begins to agree with Euphranor's arguments. For example, in §8 of that dialogue, we find two instances of this:

Alciphron: Can it be so hard a matter to form a simple idea of number, the object of a most evident demonstrable science? Hold, let me see if I cannot abstract the idea of number from the numerical names and characters, and all particular numerical things. –Upon which Alciphron paused a while, and then said, To confess the truth I do not find that I can.⁶⁰

And, a few lines later...

Euphranor: Let me entreat you, Alciphron, be not amused by terms: lay aside the *word* force, and exclude every other thing from your thoughts, and then see what precise idea you have of force... Take your own advice, and shut your eyes to assist your meditation. – Upon this, Alciphron, having closed his eyes and mused a few minutes, declared he could make nothing of it.⁶¹

We also find this same occurrence in the Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous:

Philonous: ...but, for your farther satisfaction, try if you can frame the idea of any figure, abstracted from all particularities of size, or even from other sensible qualities.

Hylas: Let me think a little -- I do not find that I can.

Thus, not only was Berkeley committed to his own subjective empiricism as the ultimate (if not only) test for whether or not an abstract idea (or any idea for that matter) actually exists throughout his published career, but he made it clear, through the characters of both dialogues,

⁶⁰ Fraser, *Works*, V.II, p. 302.

⁶¹ Fraser, *Works*, V.II, p. 303.

that until his opponents stop arguing long enough to actually consult their own ideas and mental abilities, they will never come to see what Berkeley held to be a plain and simple, brute fact. And, of course, this is directed at *us*, Berkeley's readers.

In fact, in nearly every instance where Berkeley addresses the topic of abstract ideas, he makes the same emphatic plea to introspection. For example, in §13 of Part I of the *Principles*, Berkeley states, with regard to the putative abstract idea of Unity: “That I have any such idea answering the word *unity* I do not find; and if I had, methinks I could not miss finding it.” Similarly, in a letter to Johnson dated March 24, 1730, Berkeley wrote:

Abstract general ideas was a notion that Mr. Locke held in common with the Schoolmen, and I think all other philosophers; it runs through his whole book of Human Understanding. He holds an abstract idea of existence; exclusive of perceiving and being perceived. I cannot find I have any such idea, and this is my reason against it.

We may also consider the following, from §43 of Berkeley's 1721 publication, *De Motu*:

There are indeed those who desire to contemplate motion as a certain simple and abstract idea, and separated from all other things. But that very fine-drawn and subtle idea eludes the keen edge of intellect, *as anyone can find for himself by meditation*. [emphasis added].

Now, as a final matter regarding Berkeley's published arguments against abstract ideas, I would like to return to Locke's description of an abstract idea as containing "all and none" of the determinate features of the individuals that would populate the class of objects that are meant to be represented or signified by any abstract idea. There was a reason, after all, for Locke's unfortunate description of the abstract idea of a triangle as being “neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenum; but all and none of these at once.” To fully understand this, we must acquaint ourselves with a theory of meaning that Berkeley ascribed to Locke, but which was also treated by Berkeley as being a prevailing view regarding language and meaning. Berkeley summarized this theory of language through the character of Alciphron, in §2 of the Seventh Dialogue:

[§2] Words are signs: they do or should stand for ideas; which so far as they suggest they are significant. But words that suggest no ideas are insignificant. He who annexeth a clear idea to every word he makes use of speaks sense; but where such ideas are wanting, the speaker utters nonsense. . . Men, not being able immediately to communicate their ideas one to another, are obliged to make use of sensible signs or words; the use of which

is to raise those ideas in the hearer which are in the mind of the speaker; and if they fail of this end they serve to no purpose. He who really thinks hath a train of ideas succeeding each other and connected in his mind; and when he expresseth himself by discourse each word suggests a distinct idea to the hearer or reader; who by that means hath the same train of ideas in his which was in the mind of the speaker or writer. As far as this effect is produced, so far the discourse is intelligible, hath sense and meaning. . . .
[§3] Though it is evident that, as knowledge is the perception of the connexion or disagreement between ideas, he who doth not distinctly perceive the ideas marked by the terms, so as to form a mental proposition answering to the verbal, cannot possibly have knowledge. . . . I say, all degrees of assent, whether founded on reason or authority, more or less cogent, are internal acts of mind, which alike *terminate in ideas as their proper object* – without which there can be really no such thing as knowledge, faith, or opinion.⁶²

According to this theory of meaning, any word or term acquires meaning only in virtue of some underlying idea that is "annexed" to the word or term in question.⁶³ At the outset of this section regarding abstract ideas, I stated that the Introduction to the *Principles* was devoted "almost entirely" to denouncing the opinion that we can frame abstract ideas. The reason for that qualification was that Berkeley seems to have had another agenda in the Introduction, one that he unfortunately failed to fully develop. Namely, he seemed intent on denying or rejecting some, or all, of this prevailing theory of language and meaning.

In §4 of the Introduction, Berkeley announced that the purpose of that *Treatise* would be "to try if I can discover what those Principles are which have introduced all that doubtfulness and uncertainty, those absurdities and contradictions, into the several sects of philosophy. . . . since there may be some grounds to suspect that those lets and difficulties, which stay and embarrass the mind in its search after truth, do not spring from any darkness and intricacy in the objects, or natural defect in the understanding, so much as from false Principles which have been insisted on, and might have been avoided." Clearly, one of these principles was the "opinion that the mind hath a power of framing abstract ideas." However, in §19, Berkeley also referred to the "received opinion that language has no other end but the communicating our ideas, and that every significant name stands for an idea." In §20, he announced at least a partial rejection of that prevailing view of language: "the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief

⁶² Fraser, *Works*, V.II, p. 292-3. My emphasis.

⁶³ Kenneth Pearce refers to this prevailing theory of meaning as "semantic atomism" and he confirms that it "was popular in Berkeley's day." Kenneth Pearce, "The semantics of sense perception in Berkeley", *Religious Studies* Vol. 44, Issue 03, Sept. 2008, pp. 249-268, at p. 249. I shall simply refer to it as the "prevailing" – in Berkeley's time - theory of meaning.

and only end of language, as is commonly supposed.” He went on to explain that “[t]here are other ends, as the raising of some passion, the exciting to or deterring from an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition – to which the former [imparting ideas] is in many cases barely subservient, and sometimes entirely omitted, when these can be obtained without it, as I think does not unfrequently happen in the familiar use of language.”

I call this a "partial" rejection of the prevailing theory of meaning only because Berkeley claimed that "communicating ideas marked by words is not the *chief and only* end of language," thus implying that annexing ideas to words may still be in play, in some cases. We should compare §20 from the published Introduction with the following from the Draft Introduction, where Berkeley addressed a "notion current among those that pass for the deepest thinkers, that every significant name stands for an idea":

In answer to this I say, that names, significant names, do not always stand for ideas, but that they may be and are often used to good purpose [tho' they are] without being suppos'd to stand for or represent any idea at all. And as to what we are told of understanding propositions by [perceiving] the agreement or disagreement of the ideas marked by their terms, this to me in many cases seems absolutely false.⁶⁴

Again, Berkeley qualified his rejection of that theory by writing, "this to me *in many cases* seems absolutely false." Nevertheless, he clearly felt that the prevailing theory of meaning was deficient, and he suggested an alternative – what has come to be known as Berkeley's "emotive theory" of meaning.⁶⁵ David Berman refers to this as Berkeley's "semantic revolution" and he claims that "Berkeley was the first modern philosopher to formulate and support the theory that words have legitimate uses which do not involve informing or standing for ideas."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Fraser's *Works*, Vol. I, p. 426. Emphasis added.

⁶⁵ See Berman, *Berkeley, Idealism and the Man* (Clarendon Press, Oxford: 1994). See also Colin Murray Turbayne, *The Myth of Metaphor* (University of South Carolina Press, 1970); Kenneth Williford and Roomet Jakapi, "Berkeley's Theory of Meaning in *Alciphron VII*", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 17(1) 2009: 99-118; Robert J. Baum, "The Instrumentalist and Formalist Elements of Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics", *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 3 (1972), no. 2, pp. 119-134; Colin Murray Turbayne, "Berkeley's Two Concepts of Mind", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Sept. 1959), pp. 85-92; P.J.E. Kail, "Berkeley, the Ends of Language, and the *Principles of Human Knowledge*", *Meeting of the Aristotelian Society held at Senate House, University of London, on 14 May 2007 at 4:15 pm*; Bertil Belfrage, "Development of Berkeley's Early Theory of Meaning", *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger*, T. 176, No. 3 (July-Sept. 1986), pp. 319-330; E.J. Furlong, "Berkeley's Theory of Meaning", *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 73, No. 291 (July, 1964), pp. 437-438.

⁶⁶ Berman, *Berkeley, Idealism and the Man*, p. 144. Bertil Belfrage also refers to Berkeley's 'emotive theory' of meaning as having been "revolutionary" at p. 324 of his 1986 article, "Development of Berkeley's Early Theory of Meaning."

In Chapter III, I shall present further evidence to support the conclusion that Berkeley had rejected this prevailing theory of meaning, holding instead to the view that no idea at all *need be* annexed to any word in order for that word to acquire meaning. For present purposes, we need only understand and appreciate that the doctrines Berkeley attacked in the Introduction were *both* the doctrine of abstract ideas, *and* the doctrine that every significant word acquired meaning only in virtue of some underlying idea that is "annexed" to the word.

For, with that in mind, we can now understand the diagnosis Berkeley recorded in the Draft Introduction of why otherwise astute and clear-thinking philosophers could be beguiled - just as the young Berkeley had been⁶⁷ - into adhering to the doctrine of abstract ideas. According to Berkeley's Draft Introduction, "abstract ideas" were invented to solve various problems in the prevailing account of meaning described above, and Locke's bizarre description of an abstract idea as being "all and none of these at once" was an inevitable result of the impossible role that abstract ideas were required to play in order to maintain that theory of meaning, in the face of problems internal to that account of meaning, as well as contrary evidence from direct, immediate (introspective) experience.

Recall that, according to the prevailing account of meaning, some idea *must* be apprehended by any who would understand the meaning of a given word; and, accordingly, each word calls up some idea in the mind of the listener. Moreover, statements are determined to be true or false by comparing the ideas annexed to the words involved; and, thereby, one may perceive some "agreement or disagreement" between those underlying ideas.

Now, consider the statement, "Lassie is an animal", and note that I am referring to the sable and white Collie of television fame. According to the prevailing account of meaning, one comprehends the truth of this statement by comparing the idea signified by "Lassie" with the idea signified by "animal" and, thereby, perceiving some "agreement or disagreement" between those ideas. In other words, one forms an idea⁶⁸ of a sable and white Collie ("Lassie") and compares this with whatever idea is annexed to "animal", thus recognizing that Lassie is, in fact, an animal. According to the Doctrine of Abstract Ideas, the idea that corresponds to "animal"

⁶⁷ See supra p.9; and, surpa n. 56.

⁶⁸ I realize that this use of "idea" does not accord with Berkeley's, as we are speaking of "ideas" of complex everyday objects, rather than mere fleeting sensations. We could read this, perhaps, as being a compound or complex idea of imagination/memory. In any case, we are not currently addressing Berkeley's own philosophy, but the prevailing view of meaning during Berkeley's time, so we must allow some latitude here in the use of "idea" if only to fully comprehend the view of meaning Berkeley was attacking.

would be the abstract idea of animal. On Berkeley's account, this was necessary, at least in part, because of the following problem: "in the proposition we have instanc'd, it is plain the word animal is not suppos'd to stand for the idea of any one particular animal. For if it be made stand for another different from that is marked by the name [Lassie], the proposition is false and includes a contradiction; and if it be made signify the very same individual that [Lassie] doth, it is a tautology."⁶⁹

In other words, according to the prevailing account of meaning, the statement, "Lassie is an animal" should involve two important ideas: one corresponding to "Lassie" and the other corresponding to "animal" and some kind of actual mental comparison of these two ideas allows one to judge the truth or falsity of the statement. The idea that corresponds to "Lassie" is an idea of a particular sable and white Collie named "Lassie." However, if the idea that corresponds to "animal" is an idea of some *particular* animal, then it will either be the exact same idea/animal that corresponds to "Lassie" (in which case the statement amounts to the tautology, "Lassie = Lassie"), or it will be an idea of an animal that is not-Lassie (in which case the statement amounts to a contradiction, "Lassie = not-Lassie"). Thus, if the idea annexed to "animal" is an idea of some *particular* animal, the statement is either a tautology or a contradiction.

To make matters worse, consider the following statement: "Lassie and Shamu are animals," and note that "Shamu" is the name of the *Orca*, or 'killer whale,' beloved for many years by audiences at SeaWorld. If the prevailing account of meaning is correct, there should be at least three operative ideas involved in anyone being able to understand and judge this statement to be true or false: (1) an idea of a sable and white Collie ("Lassie"); (2) an idea of a black and white Orca ("Shamu")' and, (3) an idea that corresponds to "animal" and that somehow "agrees" with each of the first two ideas while also being *not identical* with either one (for, in that case, the statement would amount to, e.g., "Lassie and Shamu are Shamu" or "Lassie and Shamu are Lassie"). Thus, according to the prevailing account of meaning, there must be some idea that corresponds to "animal" and that shares some feature(s) with Lassie and Shamu, while also being an idea of something that is not any *particular* animal (or, a particular thing of

⁶⁹ Fraser, *Works*, V.I, p. 428. Of course, Berkeley did not refer to "Lassie" anywhere in his writings. Instead, he used the mythological dog, Melampus, in the statement, "Melampus is an animal." I prefer to use the more familiar "Lassie" as I imagine most readers would form no idea whatsoever that would correspond to "Melampus." While this would make the ultimate point – that no ideas at all need be called to mind to comprehend any given statement – it would detract from the more immediate point regarding the role that abstract ideas were meant to play in the prevailing account of meaning.

any kind). Notice also that I could make this conjunction as long as I pleased (e.g., Shamu and Lassie and Benji and Elsa and Mr. Ed and George Berkeley are animals...), including in the subject clause as many particular and diverse “animals” as I please, and the idea ‘annexed to’ “animal” would have to share some feature(s) with each and every particular thing named in the subject clause, while also being not identical with any one of them, i.e., it must be “all and none of them at once.”⁷⁰

According to Berkeley's analysis in the Draft Introduction, “[i]t remains therefore that the word animal stands for the general abstract idea of animal” and, “[i]n like manner we may be able with a little attention to discover how other general [i.e., abstract] ideas of all sorts might at first have stolen into the thoughts of man.”⁷¹ According to Berkeley's diagnosis, then, “abstract ideas” were invented to solve this ‘a=b’ problem. The cost, however, is that these newly minted “abstract ideas” must now do a tremendous amount of work to keep the prevailing account of meaning intact. For, any general term will now be said to correspond to some underlying abstract idea, and every such “abstract idea” must share (or, at least, be consistently/coherently *said* to share) features with any particular thing of which the corresponding general term can be predicated, while also being not identical with any such particular thing. For, while we may forego any consideration of whether or not such ideas actually exist (i.e., whether anyone ever actually becomes aware of such ideas), if we are going to maintain this prevailing account of meaning, then we must find some way to describe the situation wherein the “abstract idea” of “animal” can be compared with other ideas, e.g., the ideas of “Lassie” and “Shamu” etc. Hence, it becomes necessary to describe abstract ideas as having “all and none” of the features exhibited by the unlimited set of particulars that can be predicated by a general term.

Not surprisingly, Berkeley argued, in the Draft Introduction, that one need only make the following “easy tryal” to see for one's self the vacuity of this prevailing theory of meaning: “Let him but cast out of his thoughts the words of the expression, and then see whether two clear and determinate ideas remain whereof he finds one to be conformable to the other.”⁷² As I have stated above, I shall re-examine this in more detail in Chapter III, but we can at least admit that Berkeley did seem to be in the stages of developing an alternative account of meaning, one that

⁷⁰ The operative type of abstract idea, here, would be the third type, described by Berkeley in §9 of the Introduction to the *Principles*, e.g., the idea of a billiard ball in general, or of a man in general, etc.

⁷¹ Fraser, *Works*, V. I, p. 428.

⁷² Fraser, *Works*, V. I, p. 427.

would allow for an "emotive" or "non-cognitive" use of words, i.e., a use of words designed not to communicate ideas but to influence the action or behavior of one's audience.

2.2 MATERIAL SUBSTANCE

Berkeley opens Part I of the *Principles* by setting out his basic ontology, whereby the world can be divided into two categories: Passive Idea or Active Volition/Spirit. He begins, in the very first line of §1 by conducting a survey of the various different kinds of ideas: "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 the help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways."

Now, an attentive reader will notice the line, "such as are perceived by... attending to the operations of the mind." Thus, my claims above, in Chapter I, that Berkeley rejected any suggestion that we could form ideas of reflection of the operations of the mind, seem to be directly contradicted by this opening sentence. However, this opening line is the only instance where Berkeley even hinted that there could be ideas of the operations of one's mind; every other instance where this issue arises, Berkeley maintains his position - that there can be no ideas of active spirit, or volition. In fact, Luce & Jessop have explained this line in their edition of the *Principles*, by pointing out that "such as" is to be read, in this context, not as "such ideas" but as "such objects."⁷³ Moreover, Berman has argued that both A. A. Luce and M. R. Ayers were correct to argue that Berkeley's ambiguous wording of the opening line of §1 of Part I was a tactical decision to "appear at the outset to accept Locke's ideas of reflection" when, in fact, he accepted no such thing.⁷⁴ Moving on, then, we find Berkeley describing the other category of his ontology in §2:

⁷³ See Luce & Jessop, *Works*, V. 2, p. 41, fn. 1.

⁷⁴ Berman, *George Berkeley, Idealism and the Man*, p. 23, citing Luce, "Is there a Berkeleian Philosophy?", *Hermathena* 25 (1936), 200-1. See also J.L. Stocks, "What Did Berkeley Mean by *Esse* is *Percipi*?" *Mind, New Series*, Vol. 45, No. 179 (Jul., 1936), pp. 310-323, p. 315: Stocks argues that Berkeley's inclusion of "operations of the mind" was a mere oversight on Berkeley's part, since Berkeley had clearly rejected Locke's "ideas of reflection." Stocks notes that Dawes Hicks was in agreement with him on this point. But see E.J. Furlong, "An Ambiguity in Berkeley's *Principles*" *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 57 (Oct., 1964), pp. 334-344. Furlong argues that while Berkeley's philosophy precludes our reading in "such ideas" rather than "such objects," he claims that the syntax of the sentence demands that we read this as "such ideas." The former point is all that I require, so Furlong can have his syntactic point.

But, beside 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 *myself*. By which words I do not denote any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them.⁷⁵

With his ontology announced, Berkeley then proceeded to make his strikingly brief argument that the existence of anything that is not active volition, i.e., anything that we are aware of *via* ideas, lies entirely in its being perceived, or being an object of perception. Thus, "the various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever objects they compose) cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them." (§3). Berkeley claims that any opposing view, i.e., "what is said of the absolute existence of unthinking things without any relation to their being perceived," is "perfectly unintelligible." (§3).

Accordingly, to predicate "exists" of anything *other than spirit/volition*⁷⁶ is synonymous with predicating "is perceived." Hence, with regard to all things that are not active spirit, which in Berkeley's ontology includes only the various types of ideas: "[t]heir *esse* is *percipi*, nor is it possible they should have any existence, out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them." Hereinafter, I shall refer to this as Berkeley's "EEP thesis." In §6, Berkeley goes on to draw a very curious conclusion from this thesis:

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, 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.

The "eternal spirit" referenced here is, of course, "God." Melissa Frankel has summarized this argument – which is known as the "continuity argument" – as follows:

In the continuity argument, we begin with the idealist claim that physical objects are just sets of ideas, which exist only when perceived by some mind; on the assumption that these physical objects exist continuously, and do not wink in and out of existence in

⁷⁵ See also Notebook entry 362a: "Qu: whether I had not better allow Colours to exist without the Mind taking the Mind for the Active thing which I call I, my self." See also Alciphron VII, §8: "I understand what is signified by the term *I*, or *myself*, or know what it means, although it be no idea, or like an idea, but that which thinks, and wills, and apprehends ideas, and operates about them." (stated by Euphranor).

⁷⁶ Recall Berkeley's statement in §142 of Part I of the *Principles*: "*spirits* and *ideas* are things so wholly different, that when we say 'they exist,' 'they are known,' or the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures."

accordance with whether some finite mind is perceiving them, it arguably follows that the ideas that constitute them also exist continuously. But then they must not be perceived by finite minds: so they are perceived by the Divine Mind. The claim that objects persist over time is thus supposed to entail God's existence.⁷⁷

Advancing this argument for God as the eternal spirit who maintains the continued existence of objects when not perceived by a finite mind was a tragic mistake on Berkeley's part. I shall discuss why this argument cripples Berkeley's philosophy, in Chapter III, after I have set forth and expanded upon Berkeley's New Theory of Vision.

For now, we may shift our focus to passages where Berkeley wrote of "exists" as being synonymous with "perceivable" rather than "perceived." For example, in §3 of Part I of the *Principles*, Berkeley wrote:

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, *meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it*, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.⁷⁸

Presently, we are only concerned with the emphasized portion of that text, which we may compare with §58 of Part I of the *Principles*, wherein Berkeley addressed a possible-counter argument to his EEP thesis: "the motion of the earth is now universally admitted among astronomers, as a truth grounded on the clearest and most convincing reasons; but on the foregoing principles, there can be no such thing. For motion being only an idea, it follows that if it be not perceived, it exists not; but the motion of the earth is not perceived by sense."⁷⁹ Berkeley's responded as follows: "whether the earth moves or no, amounts in reality to no more than this, to wit, whether we have reason to conclude from what hath been observed by astronomers, that if we were placed in such and such circumstances, and such or such a position and distance, both from the earth and sun, we should perceive the former to move among the choir of the planets, and appearing in all respects like one of them."⁸⁰ We may also consider Notebook entry 98: "The Trees are in the Park, that is, whether I will or no whether I imagine

⁷⁷ Melissa Frankel, "Berkeley and God on the Quad", *Philosophy Compass* 7/6 (2012), 388-396, p.390

⁷⁸ Luce & Jessop, *Works*, V. 2, p. 42, my emphasis.

⁷⁹ *ibid*, p. 65. Note that the last line – "the motion of the earth is not perceived by sense" should be read as meaning only that we who are actually standing on the surface of the earth cannot perceive the earth as an object moving through space.

⁸⁰ *ibid*, pp. 65-66.

any thing about them or no, let me but go thither & open my Eyes by day & I shall not avoid seeing them."

It should be acknowledged that Berkeley's EEP principle is not equivalent to his rejection of material substance; for, a materialist could accept Berkeley's EEP principle with regard to *ideas* while still claiming that Material Substance exists. Berkeley brings several arguments to bear against Material Substance and I have no wish to catalog them all here. Instead, I shall address only two points. The first is a common misconception of Berkeley's EEP principle; namely, that it entails that objects cease to exist or 'wink out of existence' when I turn my back on them, i.e., when I no longer perceive them. The second is the common claim that Berkeley's "Master Argument" commits him to solipsism. We have already seen the first point illustrated by the "continuity argument" described above. Therefore, I shall pass over this argument for now, as I will address it in the closing section of Chapter III.

The "Master Argument" can be found in §§22-23 of Part I of the *Principles*. In §22, Berkeley stated that he was "content to put the whole upon this issue; if you can but conceive it possible for one extended moveable substance, or in general, for any one idea or any thing like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause." This is certainly a stunning challenge on Berkeley's part, and as one commentator has observed, "[i]t is hard to see it as anything but sheer hubris when, after outlining his considerations in favour of the stunning doctrine that nothing exists outside the mind, Berkeley announces that he is willing to set these aside and rest his case entirely on a single argument."⁸¹ The argument in question is presented in §23:

But say you, surely 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. I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it: but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call *books* and *trees*, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you your self perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it doth not shew that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy.⁸²

⁸¹ Zoltán Gendler Szabó, "Sententialism and Berkeley's Master Argument" *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 220 (Jul., 2005), pp. 462-474, at pp. 464-5.

⁸² Luce & Jessop, *Works*, p. 50. A version of this same argument is also presented in the First Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous, but the version presented in Part I of the *Principles* will suffice for my purposes.

There have been many arguments leveled against this bit of text.⁸³ To narrow our focus here, I only wish to address the claim that this argument commits Berkeley to solipsism.⁸⁴ Specifically, I shall focus on the arguments advanced by George Pitcher. Pitcher's complaint was that the argument is "unacceptable" because it is "far too strong."⁸⁵ He explained that "several commentators have remarked, Berkeley's argument, if valid, would also prove that one cannot conceive of anything that does not exist in one's *own* mind – i.e., that is not an idea of one's own. Indeed, it would prove the even stronger proposition that one cannot conceive of anything that does not exist in one's own mind *now*. These consequences would be as unacceptable to Berkeley as they are to the rest of us. So something is wrong with the argument."⁸⁶

As Pitcher argued, Berkeley confused "an idea and what an idea is of."⁸⁷ Pitcher claimed that Berkeley's argument is analogous to saying that a public performance of a play about a man alone on an island is not possible because if the members of the audience are present, then it is not a play about a man who is all alone. Similarly, Berkeley is attacking, not what a person can form an idea *of* (an object existing unperceived), but the idea itself.

In response to this line of attack, I contend first that Berkeley was well aware of the difference between "idea" and "idea of." Recall, for example, Notebook entry 660: "[t]he referring Ideas to things which are not Ideas, the using the Term, *Idea of*, is one great cause of mistake, as in other matters so also in this." (my emphasis). In order to fully explain this, however, we must first examine and extend Berkeley's New Theory of Vision, which is the subject of Chapter III. Meanwhile, it must be admitted that Pitcher has a good point regarding solipsism; for, it does seem that if this master argument is successful, then I can only conceive of anything insofar as I have perceived it, or can recollect and recombine it in imagination. Thus, it sets a limit on what I can know or meaningfully talk or think about. If so, then I can only know

⁸³ As Janice Thomas wrote: "What is the so-called Master Argument and does it result in Berkeley's springing the solipsism trap on himself? Like so much in Berkeley's philosophy this is a topic about which there are almost as many opinions as there are authors." Janice Thomas, "The Solipsism Trap, the So-Called Master Argument, and the Pleasant Mistake" *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (Oct., 2006), pp. 339-355, p. 339.

⁸⁴ See e.g., Dancy: "Whatever one's interpretation of the... [Master Argument] about conceiving an unconceived tree, one is likely to end up saying that it commits Berkeley to solipsism." Dancy, *Berkeley, an Introduction* (Basil Blackwell, 1987), p. 154.

⁸⁵ Pitcher, p. 112.

⁸⁶ *ibid*, pp. 112-113.

⁸⁷ *ibid*, p. 113.

or understand or think about whatever passes in my own mind. Indeed, if the only ideas I can ever entertain or be privy to are my own (which seems beyond argument), and *if ideas* constitute the sum total of my possible knowledge, then solipsism seems unavoidable. Surely, then, there must be something wrong with this argument.

As I shall argue at the close of Chapter III, ideas are not the only thing I can have knowledge or awareness of; or, rather, ideas are not all there is. For, Berkeley's ontology also includes Spirit, or active volition; unfortunately, Berkeley failed to fully develop any coherent doctrine of spirit/volition. However, he did lay the groundwork for such a doctrine, and it can be found in his 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, to which I shall now turn my attention.

CHAPTER 3

VISION, LANGUAGE, AND ACTIVE AWARENESS

3.1 BERKELEY'S NEW THEORY OF VISION

To understand Berkeley's New Theory of Vision, we need to understand a supposed perceptual-volitional phenomenon, or "prejudice" as Berkeley simply called it. I say "supposed" because Berkeley did not prove that such a "prejudice" is operative in normal perception, but he did offer a theory, and good reasons, for accepting that it is. Berkeley's 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* was devoted to explaining "the manner wherein we perceive by sight the distance, magnitude, and situation of objects" (§1); I shall attempt to show, in this section, how the "prejudice" in question plays a central role in that explanation.

Before I explain the nature of this "prejudice", recall that Berkeley treated physical objects as existing independent of perception in the 1709 *Essay* on vision, and he explained this in §44 of Part I of the *Principles* by stating that it was "beside my purpose to examine and refute it in a discourse concerning *vision*."⁸⁸ It is important that we recognize this because it may go some way to explaining why Berkeley did not capitalize on some of the more powerful implications of his New Theory of Vision. I am not suggesting that Berkeley had or had not fully embraced the immaterialism he argued for in the *Principles* when he drafted and published his 1709 *Essay*; I am merely acknowledging that the 1709 *Essay* was written against the background assumption that physical objects exist independent of perception, and this seriously limited the extent to which Berkeley could develop the implications of his New Theory in that 1709 publication. Thus, in what follows, I will attempt to explain Berkeley's basic theory of vision, as he presented it; and then, I shall see how it may be further developed or extended, while remaining consistent with what Berkeley presented.

Now, to introduce this "prejudice," albeit in a non-visual context, conduct the following simple experiment: say the word "apple" out loud, and then keep saying it, over and over again until it loses its meaning and you hear it as mere noise(s). It should only take about ten to twenty repetitions before this perceptual shift, this apparent loss of meaning, takes place. According to the approach Berkeley put forward in his 1709 *Essay*, we could describe this transition from

⁸⁸ See *supra* p. 23.

meaningful term to meaningless noise as the temporary disablement or removal of the prejudice in question. In other words, the fact that one may come to perceive a mere noise as something *else* - as a meaningful word - was treated by Berkeley as a "prejudice."

He treated the perception of a noise *qua* word as a kind of prejudice because while it may be a natural, unavoidable, and even greatly advantageous psychological phenomenon, it nevertheless represents a transformation or distortion of immediate perception.⁸⁹ It may seem that the apparent loss of meaning that occurs when a word is continually repeated represents an aberration or distortion of perception because it deviates from what has grown all-too-familiar. The truth is, however, that when, after repeated utterances, you begin to hear "apple" as a meaningless pair of noises (e.g., "ahp-ull" or "ah-pull"), you are actually hearing that noise/word for what it is, with no "prejudice" influencing your perception. For, any word is, in and of itself, just a noise (or sequence of noises), and nothing more.

According to the arguments Berkeley put forward in his 1709 *Essay*, this perceptual "prejudice" occurs when one comes to habitually treat some element of sensory experience as a *sign*. I shall discuss this in detail in a moment; at the outset, however, it is important to acknowledge that we are concerned with something that affects us at a very basic level of perception: once a noise is established in one's mind as a sign/word, it is simply *heard as such*.⁹⁰

According to this approach, no conscious judgment is required to determine whether one is hearing a familiar word or a meaningless noise. Instead, we simply perceive sounds as meaningless noises, or alternately, as meaningful words. Moreover, once a noise comes to be habitually perceived as a word, it is very difficult to hear it any other way. While there must have been a time during early infancy when the words of one's native tongue were perceived as the mere noises they are, I would wager that no adult can actually recall such early experiences.

⁸⁹ When I say that the prejudice "transforms" or "distorts" perception, I do not mean to suggest that new ideas of sense are somehow injected into one's stream of experience by this prejudice. The stream of sense-data remains unchanged, much in the same way that a person can look at a Necker Cube and observe perspective shifts, such that the cube seems to be oriented in space one way or the other. Alternatively, the famous "duck-rabbit" picture illustrates the same principle; namely, that we can experience the same quanta of sensory data in different ways.

⁹⁰ David Berman has described this aspect of Berkeley's New Theory as "a powerful synesthesia." Berman, *Berkeley* (Routledge 1999) at p. 34. "Synesthesia" is a term used to describe a condition where sensory stimulation in one sense modality produces or evokes sensory awareness in a different sense modality, e.g., a certain audible note evokes a certain color, or a certain flavor evokes ideas of shape. A good account of the history of our knowledge of this condition is presented in Dr. Richard Cytowic's *The Man Who Tasted Shapes* (MIT Press: 2003). In the Foreword to that book, Dr. Johnathon Cole suggests that synesthesia "may be a normal process but one hidden below consciousness in all but a few of us." (p. xiii). If Berkeley's New Theory of Vision is correct, then Cole's (and Cytowic's) suggestion that synesthesia may be a normal process in all of us must also be correct. This will become clear by the end of this section.

The constant repetition of a word will offer us a brief glimpse into this alternate perception, and one cannot help but perceive the words of a foreign language as mere noises; however, the fact that we cannot simply will ourselves to hear the sounds that make up our own native tongue as anything other than meaningful words illustrates just how powerful this synesthetic “prejudice” can be. As Berkeley observed, in §159 of his 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*:

...consider how hard it is for any one to hear the words of his native language, which is familiar to him, pronounced in his ears without understanding them. Though he endeavour to disunite the meaning from the sound, it will nevertheless intrude into his thoughts, and he shall find it extreme[ly] difficult, if not impossible, to put himself exactly in the posture of a foreigner that never learnt the language, so as to be affected barely with the sounds themselves, and not perceive the signification annexed to them.

As its title indicates, however, the 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* was not *directly* concerned with spoken words and their meaning. Instead, that work was devoted to answering the following question: given that "what we immediately and properly see are only lights and colors in sundry situations and shades and degrees of faintness and clearness, confusion and distinctness" (§73), how is it that we come to see relatively distant objects of varying shape and size? Berkeley answered this by arguing that visual data (i.e., "lights and colors in sundry situations...") are employed by humans, and presumably all sighted creatures, as a system of signs for the purpose of regulating behavior in the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain; and, a byproduct of such use is that the same "prejudice" that turns mere noises into meaningful words also operates in visual experience to transform mere patterns of light and into relatively distant objects of varying shape and size, i.e., tables, chairs, trees, mountains, etc. Seeing a staircase, for example, rather than a haphazard patchwork of light and color⁹¹ is on a par with hearing meaningful words rather than mere noises. In both cases, the sensory data does not change, but the *use* of that data *qua sign(s)* transforms one's immediate perception of the data. Hence, sounds are heard differently and light and color is seen differently, once a certain use of these sensations becomes habitual and familiar (or, “second nature”).

Now, with regard to distance, Berkeley began by acknowledging that "[i]t is. . . agreed by all that distance of itself, and immediately, cannot be seen." (§1). The reason for this is that

⁹¹ I realize that "color" is just another "variation of light"; I employ the redundant expression "light and color" to refer to visual data, i.e., to what we immediately perceive by sight alone, only to remain consistent with Berkeley's mode of expression, as he commonly referred to what we immediately or literally see as "variations of light and color."

"distance being a line directed endwise to the eye, it projects only one point in the fund of the eye - which point remains invariably the same, whether the distance be longer or shorter." (§1). Accepting *arguendo* that distance cannot be immediately perceived by sight, if it can be visually perceived at all, it must be a "mediate" visual perception, i.e., if we can become aware of distance through vision, it must be because it is suggested to us by something that is, in fact, visually perceived. To put this more generally, "when the mind perceives an idea, not immediately and of itself, it must be by the means of some other idea." (§9). From here, Berkeley's method was fairly straight-forward: "it being already shewn that distance is suggested to the mind, by the mediation of some other idea which is itself perceived in the act of seeing, it remains that we inquire what ideas or sensations there be that attend vision, unto which we may suppose the ideas of distance are connected, and by which they are introduced into the mind." (§16).

The experiences "that attend vision" and "unto which we may suppose the ideas of distance are connected" that Berkeley listed included, *inter alia*, the kinesthetic feelings of eye-strain that accompany changes of focus, the relative blurriness or clarity of visual images, whether some portions of one's visual field seem to occlude others, and the relative sizes and positions of the various visual shapes or patterns that make up one's visual field. Consequently, in §45, Berkeley explained:

Having of a long time experienced certain ideas perceivable by touch - as distance, tangible figure, and solidity - to have been connected with certain ideas of sight, I do, upon perceiving these ideas of sight, forthwith conclude what tangible ideas are, by the wonted ordinary course of nature, like to follow. Looking at an object, I perceive a certain visible figure and colour, with some degree of faintness and other circumstances, which, from what I have formerly observed, determine me to think that if I advance forward so many paces, miles, &c., I shall be affected with such and such ideas of touch.

It may seem strange that Berkeley identified distance as an idea "perceivable by touch." The reason for this is that distance, for Berkeley, reduces to motion, or rather, to locomotion. Margaret Atherton has provided a good account of what Berkeley had in mind here:

His claim is we are able to apprehend distance kinesthetically. I have an idea of the distance something is from me when I perceive how long and at what speed it takes me to get to it, or how long and with what effort I reach for it and what it will feel like when I

have touched it. . . That it will take a great deal of time for me at one location to get to an object in another location is what being very distant means.⁹²

While this may sound relatively simple, acquiring a sense of distance by sight alone is a very complex skill that takes a great deal of time and practice to master. Berkeley's presumption, here, is that those people who are sighted from birth learn this skill in infancy. Thus, after some time spent engaged in interactive experimentation with these various visual and kinesthetic cues, one can become so adept at making distance judgments by sight alone that, upon perceiving any given visual patterns, one will immediately acquire an expectation of the relative time and effort required to experience whatever tactile sensations have come to be associated with those visual patterns.

Thus, according to Berkeley's theory of vision, we use visual data as signs, or as behavioral cues, and we continue practicing and refining this skill every moment of our sighted lives. To return to Berkeley's analogy with spoken language, people "who from their birth have grown up in a continued habit of seeing" (§43, *Essay*) are unable to visually perceive variations of light and color as anything other than relatively distant objects of varying shape and size because this visual system of signs is universal, i.e., there is no visual analog of a "foreign language."⁹³ Thus, the system of visual signs is every sighted person's native visual tongue (so to speak). According to Berkeley, it is because this visual system of signs is universal, learned from birth, and continually reinforced every moment of one's (visual) life that we are so prone to claim/believe that our visual sense lets in more than mere variations of light and color. By the same token, "if there was one only invariable and universal language in the world, and that men were born with the faculty of speaking it, it would be the opinion of some, that the ideas in other men's minds were properly perceived by the ear, or had at least a necessary and inseparable tie with the sounds that were affixed to them." (§66, *Essay*).

Before exploring this in more detail, we should consider a serious methodological difficulty attendant with Berkeley's claims here. For, even if Berkeley was correct to claim that a "prejudice" distorts our visual perception so that sighted adults no longer perceive visual sensations for the mere variations of light and color that they are, how could he have hoped to

⁹² Margaret Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision* (Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 100.

⁹³ To find a visual analog of a foreign language, one would have to travel to a region of the universe where light 'behaved' in fundamentally different ways than it does on Earth, e.g., in the vicinity of a black-hole (though, I would not recommend this).

empirically vindicate such a claim? For, according to Berkeley's own arguments, we are all held in the grip of this perceptual distortion, with no "foreign" visual language to consider by way of comparison, and with no ability to break the spell we are all supposedly under, as it has been inculcated in us since birth and is reinforced each and every time we use what we see to regulate our actions, i.e., when we use what we see as *signs*.

It would seem that the only way of empirically vindicating these claims would be to interview a sighted infant, in an attempt to discover whether the child was immediately aware of a mere patchwork of light/color or, alternately, distant objects of varying size and shape. Of course, interviewing an infant would be futile; and, as we have already seen, people "who from their birth have grown up in a continued habit of seeing" (§43, *Essay*) will be of equally little use, since the prejudice in question would be intractably riveted into their perceptual experience.

Despite these inherent difficulties, twenty-four years after his original 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley published a follow-up piece entitled *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained* (1733). The obvious question is: what happened between 1709 and 1733 that led Berkeley to feel that his earliest arguments, concerning the presence of this prejudice in the visual realm, had been "vindicated"?

The answer can be found in 1728, when Dr. William Cheseldon performed one of the earliest recorded cataract removal operations, successfully restoring sight to a thirteen year old boy who had been virtually blind since birth. Cheseldon compared the boy's vision before the procedure to seeing through "a glass of broken jelly."⁹⁴ Thanks to the procedure, the boy was allowed to see the world clearly for the first time. While the experiences reported by the boy may seem surprising to most people, they were not surprising to Berkeley; in fact, they were as he had predicted, back in 1709.

"When [the boy] first saw," reported Cheseldon, "he was so far from making any judgment about distances, that he thought all objects whatever touched his eyes (as he express'd it) as what he felt did his skin." Cheseldon also reported that the boy, using his newly restored vision, "knew not the shape of anything, nor any one thing from another, however different in shape or magnitude." As might have been expected, the boy also had difficulty learning to apply names that he had previously learned in a purely tactile context to this new flood of visual

⁹⁴ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, Appendix C, p. 444; from *An Account of some observations made by a young gentleman, who was born blind, or who lost his sight so early, that he had no remembrance of ever having seen, and was couched between 13 and 14 years of age*, by Dr. William Chesseldon.

sensations. For example, Cheseldon related the following story: "having forgot which was the cat and which the dog, he was asham'd to ask; but catching the cat (which he knew by feeling) he was observ'd to look at her steadfastly, and then setting her down, said, 'So, Puss! I shall know you another time.'" Moreover, it took several months of using his newly restored vision before the boy understood that pictures were representations of other things, rather than being mere "party-colour'd planes or surfaces diversified with variety of paint." Even after grasping the concept of a representative picture, "he was no less surpris'd, expecting the pictures would feel like the things they represented, and was amaz'd when he found those parts, which by their light and shadow appear'd now round and uneven, felt only flat like the rest; and ask'd which was the lying sense, - feeling or seeing?"⁹⁵

In the final section of *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained* (1733), Berkeley cited lengthy passages from the Cheseldon case and then concluded: "Thus, by fact and experiment, those points of the [1709] theory which seem the most remote from common apprehension were not a little confirmed, many years after I had been led into the discovery of them by reasoning." To understand how Berkeley could have specifically anticipated such strange results of a novel medical procedure years in advance, we need to go further back, to 1688, when Dr. William Molyneux posed what was then a purely hypothetical question to his friend, John Locke. In a letter from Molyneux to Locke, dated July 7, 1688, Molyneux asked Locke whether a man born blind but later made to see would be able to identify and distinguish, by sight alone, a cube from a sphere. So, when Berkeley wrote his 1709 *Essay*, he was well-aware of this question, which in 1709 had been a mere thought-experiment, and which had come to be known as "The Molyneux Problem."

Berkeley addressed The Molyneux Problem several times in his 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, and he made it clear that if his theories were correct, the answer to Molyneux's question would have to be negative. According to Berkeley's arguments, a person born blind and then made to see (or, a "Molyneux Man") would not, at the outset, be able to identify the shape, magnitude, or distance of anything by sight alone. For example, concerning distance, Berkeley wrote the following in §41 of his 1709 *Essay*:

From what hath been premised, it is a manifest consequence, that a man born blind, being made to see, would at first have no idea of distance by sight: the sun and stars, the

⁹⁵ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p. 445.

remotest objects as well as the nearer, would all seem to be in his eye, or rather in his mind. The objects intromitted by sight would seem to him (as in truth they are) no other than a new set of thoughts or sensations, each whereof is as near to him as the perceptions of pain or pleasure, or the most inward passions of his soul. For, our judging objects perceived by sight to be at any distance, or without the mind, is entirely the effect of experience, which one in those circumstances could not yet have attained to.

Similarly, in §95 of the *Essay*, Berkeley explained why a person with newly restored sight would not immediately know how to apply terms learned in a purely tactile context to the new stream of visual data:

The objects to which he had hitherto been used to apply the terms up and down, high and low, were such only as affected, or were some way perceived by his touch. But, the proper objects of vision make a new set of ideas, perfectly distinct and different from the former, and which can in no sort make themselves perceived by touch. There is, therefore, nothing at all that could induce him to think those terms applicable to them. Nor would he ever think it, till such time as he had observed their connexion [sic] with tangible objects, and *the same prejudice began to insinuate itself into his understanding, which, from their infancy, had grown up in the understandings of other men.*⁹⁶

This passage from §95 is important for many reasons, not the least of which is Berkeley's reference to the "prejudice" that must "insinuate itself into the understanding" before a newly sighted person can begin to perceive visual data in the same manner as those "who from their birth have grown up in a continued habit of seeing" (§43).

According to Berkeley's new theory of vision, there are two fundamental reasons for this prejudice in the visual realm. These are: (1) we become aware of tactile possibilities or expectations that have become habitually associated with any given visual cues in the same instant as the visual cues themselves; and, (2) our volitional regulation is informed, *not* by the visual cues themselves, but by whatever tactile expectations may have become (synesthetically) fused with those visual cues.

First, then, is the claim that we become aware of any behaviorally relevant sensory-motor expectations that we have come to habitually associate with some pattern of visual sensations *in the same instant* that we perceive the visual sensations themselves. When Berkeley explained how we come to associate the kinesthetic sensations that are felt whenever we strain our eyes so

⁹⁶ My emphasis. Recall that when Berkeley speaks of the "set of ideas" that constitute objects of vision or touch, he is speaking of day-to-day visual and tactile sensations. So, for example, Berkeley would refer to what an apple looks like as a "set of visual ideas," while referring to what an apple feels like in one's hand as a "set of tactile ideas."

as to change our point of focus with various degrees of distance (from ourselves), he summarized this as follows:

...because the mind has by constant experience found the different sensations corresponding to the different dispositions of the eyes to be attended each with a different degree of distance in the object, there has grown an habitual or customary connexion between those two sorts of ideas, so that the mind *no sooner* perceives the sensation arising from the different turn it gives the eyes, in order to bring the pupils nearer or farther asunder, but it *withal* perceives the different idea of distance which was wont to be connected with that sensation; just as upon hearing a certain sound, the idea is *immediately suggested* to the understanding which custom had *united* with it. [§17, 1709 *Essay*, My emphasis]

He went on to argue, in §20, that "[i]f we had not constantly found certain sensations arising from the various disposition of the eyes, attended with certain degrees of distance, we should never make those *sudden judgments* from them concerning the distance of objects" (my emphasis).

Notice that Berkeley did not refer to the perceptual transformation from mere variations of light and color to relatively distant objects as a form of perceptual "distortion." Instead, he referred to it as a "suggestion of sense" and, in other places, as a "sudden judgment" or an "immediate suggestion."⁹⁷ As Berkeley explained in §42 of his 1733 *Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained*:

To perceive is one thing; to judge is another. So likewise, to be suggested is one thing, and to be inferred another. Things are suggested and perceived by sense. We make judgments and inferences by the understanding. What we immediately and properly perceive by sight is its primary object - light and colours. What is suggested, or perceived by mediation thereof, are tangible ideas - which may be considered as secondary and improper objects of sight.

In this same passage from his 1733 work, Berkeley identified the primary aim of his whole Theory of Vision: "But, how comes it to pass that we apprehend by the ideas of sight certain other ideas, which neither resemble them, nor cause them, nor are caused by them, nor have any necessary connexion with them? - the solution of this problem, in its full extent, doth comprehend the whole Theory of Vision." The answer to this question rested on exposing the

⁹⁷ See e.g., §17 ("immediately suggested"); §24 ("...the sudden judgments men make of distance"); §45 ("suggestions of sense"); and, §53 (various patterns of light and color "do not first suggest distance, and then leave it to the judgment to use that as a medium whereby to collect the magnitude; [instead] they have as close and immediate a connexion with the magnitude as with the distance").

“prejudice” in question; for, as we have seen, this prejudice accounts for the apparent fusion of immediately *perceived* (visual) sensation and mediately *suggested* tactile expectation.

As stated above, Berkeley treated visual perception as a system of Signs, and he meant this quite literally. This will be of paramount importance in the analysis to follow. Perhaps the most direct expression of this comparison between visual data and spoken language can be found at §73 of the 1709 *Essay*, where Berkeley wrote: "Faintness, as well as all other ideas or perceptions which suggest magnitude or distance, does it in the same way that words suggest the notions to which they are annexed." A more detailed account can be found at §51:

No sooner do we hear the words of a familiar language pronounced in our ears, but the ideas corresponding thereto present themselves to our minds: in the very same instant the sound and the meaning enter the understanding: so closely are they united that it is not in our power to keep out the one, except we exclude the other also. . . So likewise the secondary objects, or those which are only suggested by sight, do often more strongly affect us, and are more regarded the proper objects of that sense; along with which they enter into the mind, and with which they have a far more strict connexion, than ideas have with words.⁹⁸

In §40 of Berkeley’s 1733 publication, *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*, Berkeley made it clear that he treated vision as a literal language:

A great number of arbitrary signs, various and opposite, do constitute a Language. If such arbitrary connexion be instituted by men, it is an artificial Language; if by the Author of Nature, it is a Natural Language. Infinitely various are the modifications of light and sound, whence they are each capable of supplying an endless variety of signs, and, accordingly, have been each employed to form languages; the one by the arbitrary appointment of mankind, the other by that of God Himself. A connexion established by the Author of Nature, in the ordinary course of things, may surely be called natural, as that made by men will be named artificial. And yet this doth not hinder but the one may be as arbitrary as the other. And, in fact, there is no more likeness to exhibit, or necessity

⁹⁸ We may also consider the following, from §11 of the Fourth Dialogue of Berkeley’s 1732 *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, concerning the visual experiences of a Molyneux Man:

...such a one would never think of men, trees, or any other objects that he had been accustomed to perceive by touch, upon having his mind filled with new sensations of light and colours, whose various combinations he doth not yet understand, or know the meaning of; no more that a Chinese, upon hearing the words *man* and *tree* would think of the things signified by them. In both cases, there must be time and experience, by repeated acts, to acquire a habit of knowing the connection between the sign and things signified; that is to say, of understanding the language, whether of the eyes or of the ears.

It is also worth noting that Mike May, a contemporary “Molyneux Man,” described his own difficulties in learning to use and understand his newly acquired stream of visual sensations by saying that “trying to see feels like trying to speak a foreign language.” Robert Kurson, *Crashing Through* (Random House, N.Y.: 2007), p. 183.

to infer, things tangible from the modifications of light, than there is in language to collect the meaning from the sound. But, such as the connexion is of the various tones and articulations of voice with their several meanings, the same is it between the various modes of light and their respective correlates, or, in other words, between the ideas of sight and touch.

I shall return to this point in the following section; for now, let us return to the first factor that gives rise to this "prejudice" - that tactile expectations that have become habitually associated with visual ideas *qua* signs will "enter the understanding... in the very same instant" as the visual ideas/signs themselves. It is because of this, Berkeley argued, that "we find it so difficult to discriminate between the immediate [visual] and mediate [tactile expectations] objects of sight, and are so prone to attribute to the former what belongs only to the latter." (§51, *Essay*). "They are," he went on to explain. "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." (§51).

Now, the second factor that contributes to this "prejudice" is the fact that, for the most part, we are not concerned with perceiving visual patterns for their own sake. On a purely aesthetic level, one may seek out certain visual experiences for the sheer pleasure of the experience (although, even this is debatable); nevertheless, when using one's visual sense to regulate, say, one's locomotive volition, a chief concern will be avoiding pain and/or injury. Thus, any tactile expectations that are 'suddenly suggested' upon perceiving any given variation(s) of light and color will command one's attention, leaving the perceiver relatively indifferent to the specific 'content' of the visual patterns themselves. After all, it is the tactile sense, and not the visual, that is immediately associated with pain and injury. As Berkeley explained at §59 of his 1709 *Essay*:

We regard the objects that environ us in proportion as they are adapted to benefit or injure our own bodies, and thereby produce in our minds the sensations of pleasure and pain. Now, bodies operating on our organs by an immediate application, and the hurt and advantage arising therefrom depending altogether on the tangible, and not at all on the visible, qualities of any object - this is a plain reason why those should be regarded by us much more than these.

According to Berkeley's 1709 *Essay*, as one grows accustomed to using visual sensations as behavioral cues, one's attention is proportionally drawn *away* from the visual patterns themselves and comes to focus, instead, on whatever tactile expectations may have become

associated with those visual sensations.⁹⁹ This occurs because tactile expectations, rather than the visual cues themselves, will inform one's volitional regulation, as behavior will be altered so that one may either experience or avoid those tactile possibilities, in the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain.¹⁰⁰ Thus, not only do we become suddenly aware of various tactile expectations upon perceiving familiar visual patterns, but we also become proportionally indifferent to the visual patterns themselves, since these are only relevant to our behavior *insofar* as they reliably indicate those tactile possibilities with which we are so intensely, if not desperately, concerned. This fact, coupled with the immediacy with which any sensory-motor expectations enter our awareness, leads us to eventually "see" these various tactile possibilities.

A helpful analogy may be to consider the chess-player whose attention is always focused a few moves ahead of the present board positions. For any chess-player, the present positions of the pieces are only valuable or significant insofar as they indicate possible future moves, and these future possibilities will command the attention of the experienced chess-player, since possible future moves are everything to the experienced player, and any currently executed move will be made according to the player's knowledge of those future possibilities. Thus, a move in chess is as much a manifestation of a player's "expectations" as is a runner's dodge or jump to avoid an obstacle. Indeed, just as future possible moves are *everything* to the experienced chess-player, so are future possible moves *everything* to the experienced sighted human, who seeks above all else to avoid pain and injury. Moreover, presently experienced visual patterns are as significant to the experienced sighted human as are the present positions of chess pieces to the experienced chess-player: if there are no moves to be made, the present positions mean nothing; in fact, without a game in progress (i.e., no future moves), there would be no board "positions" at all, but only pieces meaninglessly scattered around the board. Likewise, if the value of visual information is entirely, or at least predominantly, behavioral, then visual data is only meaningful or significant insofar as it can actually be *used* to regulate one's actions in anticipation of future (tactile) possibilities. As Berkeley explained, at §59 of the Essay:

⁹⁹ See also §12 of the Fourth Dialogue of Alciphron: "...signs, being little considered in themselves, or for their own sake, but only in their relative capacity, and for the sake of those things whereof they are signs, it comes to pass that the mind overlooks them, so as to carry its attention immediately on to the things signified."

¹⁰⁰ With regard to the role played by pain and pleasure in this system, See Katherine Dunlop, "The Role of Visual Language in Berkeley's Account of Generality" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 83, No. 3, Nov. 2011, pp. 525-559.

And for this end chiefly¹⁰¹ the visive sense seems to have been bestowed on animals, to wit, that, by the perception of visible ideas (which in themselves are not capable of affecting or anywise altering the frame of their bodies), they may be able to foresee (from the experience they have had what tangible ideas are connected with such and such visible ideas) the damage or benefit which is like to ensue upon the application of their own bodies to this or that body which is at a distance. . . Hence it is that, when we look at an object, the tangible figure and extension thereof are principally attended to, *whilst there is small heed taken of the visible figure and magnitude*, which, though more immediately perceived, do less sensibly affect us, and are not fitted to produce any alteration in our bodies.¹⁰²

What has been presented up to this point represents Berkeley's basic theory of vision, as set forth in his 1709 *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*. At this point, then, I wish to explore some of the implications of this basic theory, implications Berkeley did not explore but which are consistent with what has just been put forward. Most importantly, I wish to highlight the important role played by active volition in this theory.

To begin, we must first acknowledge that sensations experienced in one sense modality are distinct and independent from sensations experienced in any other sense modality. In other words, "[t]hat which is seen is one thing, and that which is felt is another." (*Essay*, §49). This claim (often called Berkeley's "heterogeneity thesis") amounts only to this: we cannot, strictly speaking, see sounds or hear colors or taste shapes, etc.¹⁰³ Instead, what we see (light) is distinct from what we hear (sound) and feel (tactile sensations), etc. As Warnock has argued, this is practically a tautology, and "in his own terms Berkeley's contention is certainly, even necessarily, correct."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰¹ Note that "chiefly" was omitted from the last edition of the *Essay*.

¹⁰² My emphasis. We may also consider Berkeley's critique of the claim that a microscope gives us a clearer or more accurate view of the world we live in. According to Berkeley, a microscope "brings us, as it were, into a new world." (§85, 1709 *Essay*). The difference between seeing the world through a microscope and seeing the world with the naked eye is that "whereas the objects perceived by the eye alone have a certain connexion with tangible objects, whereby we are taught to foresee what will ensue upon the approach or application of distance objects to the parts of our own body - which much conduceth to its preservation - there is not the like connection between things tangible and those visible objects that are perceived by the help of a fine microscope." (§85). Thus, were we to be granted microscopic vision with the naked eye, "[w]e should be deprived of the aforementioned advantage we at present receive by the visive faculty, and have left us only the empty amusement of seeing, without any other benefit arising from it." (§86).

¹⁰³ Even in cases of synesthesia, we would not say of a person who experiences a certain color accompanying each noise that such a person "heard a color." Instead, we would say that a person heard a sound and also experienced a (visual) color. Indeed, that's the whole *point* of synesthesia: that sensations from *different* sensory modalities are evoked by stimulation from one sensory mode.

¹⁰⁴ Warnock, *Berkeley*, p. 39.

A point of confusion may arise over this claim, given that Berkeley announces it in the context of discussing a person who hears a coach approaching outside his/her window, in §§46-49 of his 1709 *Essay* on vision. Thus, one may be tempted to interpret Berkeley's claim that 'we see one thing but feel another' to mean that we see one coach, but feel another coach (and, by the same argument, hear yet a third coach). However, as Margaret Atherton has made clear, this was not Berkeley's intended meaning. "The one and the same object," Atherton explains, "we never both see and feel is not a physical object, a coach, but an object of sense or way of perceiving."¹⁰⁵

Now, to draw out some more important implications of Berkeley's basic theory, let us assume that each stream of sense-data (e.g., vision, touch, hearing, etc.) constitutes a completely independent stream of data, with no inherent or necessary relation to any other stream of sense-data. Let us also assume the position of a staunch empiricist. Given these starting points, the question to consider is this: how could a correlation be established between elements from two or more distinct and independent streams of sense-data? Moreover, how could sense-data from one modality be correlated with sense-data from other modalities in such a way that would result in the apparent perception and/or cognition of a medium-sized object that we would describe as 'having' various sensory 'properties' or 'qualities'?

One answer, of course, is that independent streams of sense-data are representative of the same external (material) object. Thus, I see that a plate is round and feel that it is round and even though these are independent sense modalities, data from each reflects, references, represents, or are generated by, the same round object. The particular nature of the relationship is not relevant here, hence my long list of possibilities in the preceding sentence. What is important is only that one may claim that it is the external object itself that is responsible for correlating ideas from one sense modality with those of another. This answer, however, would seem to fly in the face of our strict empiricism, so we shall reject this answer, unless no viable alternative can be found. Another answer, of course, would be to say that it is due to the Divine Wisdom and Benevolence of God that sense-data from one sense modality can correlate or 'agree' with data from other modalities. This would certainly appeal to Berkeley, since he treated visual ideas as elements of a language that is authored by God. However, this would, once again, seem to fly in the face of our strict empiricism.

¹⁰⁵ Atherton, *Berkeley's Revolution in Vision*, p.101.

There is an alternative, and it can be derived from Berkeley's theory of vision, with special attention paid to the "prejudice" discussed above: it is the active volitional regulation of the perceiver that allows for, or makes possible, the correlation of ideas from one sense modality with ideas from another sense modality. For, while two streams of sense data may hold no inherent relation to one another, as long as each stream of sense-data changes (in some noticeable way) in direct correlation with the manner in which I modify or regulate my own active volition, then I will be able to correlate the changes in one stream of data with the changes in the other, according to how each stream changes in relation to changes in my own active volition. So, there are actually two factors involved here: (1) changes in the active volition of the perceiver; and, (2) reliably recurring changes in streams of sense-data that correlate with changes in the perceiver's active volition.

Before proceeding, it must be acknowledged that Berkeley's overall philosophy does seem to drastically limit the impact that one's volition can have on the world. Berkeley asserted, in §147 of Part I of the *Principles*, "the will of man hath no other object, than barely the motion of the limbs of the body." Similarly, in Notebook entry 548, Berkeley wrote: "We move our Legs our selves. 'tis we that will their movement." However, there is good reason to argue that even this is not, strictly speaking, true, according to Berkeley's overall philosophy, since Berkeley insists (and rightly, I think) that we are not the cause of any ideas of sense we may experience at any given time. Berkeley argues that it is some other volition that is responsible for any ideas of sense we may experience, and he calls this other volition "God." Whether or not we attempt to identify any cause of our sensations, the fact is that we ourselves cannot simply will ideas of sense into our awareness.¹⁰⁶

According to Berkeley's division of the world in Active Volition and Passive Idea, the experience of "moving a limb" consists of some relatively specific active regulation or modification of volition (what I must do in order to, e.g., expect my toe to move rather than, say, a finger), and any sensory 'feedback' (ideas of sense) that may be experienced in conjunction with that relatively specific active regulation or modification of volition, but the specific content of this sensory feedback is not something I can directly cause or influence. So, I regulate my volition in some relatively specific way and my arm moves, but I do not have any way of

¹⁰⁶ Only in a "lucid dream" can we even come close to this, but this is, of course, not a case of willing ideas of sense into existence, into awareness, since such control only occurs in a dream.

determining exactly what that event will look like or feel like – that is beyond my control. My extension of Berkeley's New Theory of Vision may nevertheless proceed without any difficulty from this fact, because it only requires: (1) that there is some meaning to "active regulation or modification of volition"¹⁰⁷; and, (2) that streams of sense-data do, in fact, change in direct correlation with such active changes or regulations of volition.

First, we can easily give meaning to "active regulation or modification of volition" because I am clearly aware that there is something *different* that I *do* in order to, say, expect my arm to move rather than expecting my foot to move, etc. I may not be able to explain this any further; in fact, I cannot. This is an area where language fails us. However, I know it to be the case, and I can only presume that this is also true of anyone reading this, i.e., you know how to read, and you know how to move parts of your body, etc. So, whatever the ultimate explanation for this fact, it is a fact; namely, that I am volitionally, or actively, aware of the difference between moving my arm and walking, between talking and jumping, etc. Indeed, if I was not in some way aware of such differences, I could not reliably perform these actions.

So, if I modify or regulate my volition in a particular way, I experience changes in visual data that I may describe (as a sighted adult) as "I see my right arm extending." Attendant upon that same modification of volition, I also experience changes in kinesthetic and tactile sensations that likewise correlate with the manner in which I modify or regulate my volition, and I may describe these sensations as "I feel my right arm extending." The important point is this: two utterly distinct streams or sets of sense data may be correlated to one another, insofar as they each change, in their own way, in direct correlation with the rate and manner in which I regulate my own volition. For, there is a relatively unique and discrete regulation of volition that must be executed in order to extend my right arm, as opposed to, say, extending my left arm, or lifting a leg, or speaking, or closing my eyes, etc. That same regulation of volition (what I do in order to extend my right arm) directly correlates with changes in visual sensations, and also with changes in tactile/kinesthetic sensations; thus, these independent streams of sense-data can acquire a relation to one another (for me), *but only relative to my own changing volition*.

By contrast, if I were a mere perceiver, fixed in place and with no ability to do anything but perceive, i.e., endowed only with a natural receptivity for ideas of sense, then the "prejudice"

¹⁰⁷ I use the terms "modify" and "regulate" with regard to active volition because: (1) volition is continuous as long as one is conscious; and, (2) it makes no sense, according to Berkeley, to say one "executes" or "exercises" one's volition since one simply "is" one's volition.

would never be able to "insinuate itself into my understanding." For, as Berkeley observed, a man born blind and suddenly made to see would not be able to judge a person that he saw before him as being erect or inverted until "turning his head or eyes up and down to the right and left, he shall observe the visible objects to change... and those that he perceives by turning up his eyes he will call upper, and those that he perceives by turning down his eyes he will call lower." (*Essay*, §97). Thus, a perceiver must *act* in order to even *allow* for the possibility of noticing changes in streams of sense-data that correlate with (or 'respond to') *changes* in the perceiver's own volition. One must be able to notice changes in sense-data that "track" or "map onto" changes in one's own volition, and thus, one must be able to actually change, or modify, or regulate one's volition. Indeed, not only must one be *able* to regulate volition, one must actually regulate or modify one's volition in some way in order to make possible, or allow for, the 'prejudice' to 'insinuate itself' in one's understanding. Moreover, since patterns of sensation from multiple, independent modalities (e.g., kinesthetic, tactile, visual, auditory, etc.) *simultaneously* track one's changing volition, a perceiver will be able to anticipate a complex multitude of possible sensory experiences based on sensations from a single sense modality, and there is no reason to limit this to vision; data from any sense modality can be used as a sign for expected data from any other modality, provided a correlation between the two modes and the perceiver's active volition has been established (through experience).¹⁰⁸

Returning to vision for the moment, evidence for the claim that active volitional regulation is essential to mastering the use of one's visual sense can be found in the results of a 1968 experiment, conducted by Richard Held and Alan Hein, at MIT. The experiment and its results have been summarized by Robert Kurson, as follows:

[Held and Hein] raised two kittens in total darkness. For a short period during each day the kittens were placed in baskets that hung just above the ground from opposite ends of a pole. Holes were cut in one basket to allow one kitten's paws to reach the ground, but not in the other. The apparatus was constructed such that when one basket moved, the other moved identically. When the lights were turned on, the kitten in the basket with holes was allowed to run along the ground, causing its basket and its mate's basket to move identically, and giving each of them an identical visual experience.

¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Berkeley did not limit his theory to vision. Consider, for example, §46 of his 1709 *Essay*: "Sitting in my study I hear a coach drive along the street. . . By the variation of the noise, I perceive the different distances of the coach, and know that it approaches before I look out. Thus, by the ear I perceive distance just after the same manner as I do by the eye."

At the end of the experiment, only the kitten that had been allowed to actively move the basket could move around the world using vision. The passive kitten - thought it had exactly the same visual experience - was functionally blind. Seeing the world passively was not enough; interaction with the world was essential for vision to be useful.¹⁰⁹

We may also consider the recent work of J. Kevin O'Regan and Alva Noë, regarding the role of what they call "sensorimotor contingencies" in visual perception.¹¹⁰ According to O'Regan and Noë, the "rules governing the sensory changes produced by various motor actions" are termed "sensorimotor contingencies."¹¹¹ To put this in Berkeley's terms, a "sensorimotor contingency" would be an expectation of certain tactile possibilities contingent upon some active regulation of volition. O'Regan and Noë have also argued that each sensory modality has its own unique set of sensorimotor contingencies, because each sensory modality changes in its own way relative to the changing behavior/volition of the perceiver. So, for example, while we can expect certain changes in our visual experience if we open or close our eyes or change the focus of our eyes or turn our head in various directions, the changes we come to expect in, say, auditory experience take on a different "structure," e.g., there is no auditory equivalent to closing or blinking one's eyes, and head rotation changes the nature of auditory experience in a way that is quite different from how the motion of one's head changes visual experience.¹¹²

O'Regan and Noë have also argued that "[f]or a creature (or a machine for that matter) to possess visual awareness, what is required is that, in addition to exercising the mastery of the relevant sensorimotor contingencies, it must make use of this exercise for the purposes of thought and planning."¹¹³ Translated into my extension of Berkeley's theory of vision: to visually perceive, or become aware, of an object of varying size, shape, and/or distance, we must *actually use* what we see as *signs* to regulate our behavior. O'Regan and Noë also argue that: "among all previously memorized action recipes that allow you to make lawful changes in sensory stimulation, only some are applicable at the present moment. The sets that are applicable *now* are characteristic of the visual attributes of the object you are looking at, and their being *currently exercised* constitutes the fact of your visually perceiving that object."¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Robert Kurson, *Crashing Through* (Random House, N.Y.: 2007), pp. 238-239.

¹¹⁰ See e.g., "A Sensorimotor Account of Vision and Visual Consciousness", *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, (2001), V.24, pp. 939-1031.

¹¹¹ *ibid*, p. 941.

¹¹² *ibid*, pp. 940-941.

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 944.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, p. 945, emphasis in original.

According to O'Regan and Noë, visual awareness of an object cannot reasonably be characterized as an internal or mental "representation" or "reproduction" of the external world; instead, it reduces to a form of *know-how*. That is, our visual awareness of objects existing around us in three-dimensional space reduces to our ability to predict or expect what we will experience in either visual or tactile/kinesthetic experience, should we act in one way or the other, and these predictions are based on whatever is currently being seen¹¹⁵, coupled, of course, with an available repertoire of sensory-motor contingencies, which are forms volitional regulation, or just, know-how. O'Regan and Noë have described this as follows:

Under the present theory, visual experience does not arise because an internal representation of the world is activated in some brain area. On the contrary, visual experience is a mode of activity involving practical knowledge about currently possible behaviors and associated sensory consequences. Visual experience rests on know-how, the possession of skills.¹¹⁶

Thus, just as a chess-player knows how to play chess if and only if the player knows, based on the present positions of the pieces on the board, what moves he/she can expect to make and the results of those possibilities, so do I know of my surroundings, while I sit here typing, if and only if I know what to expect, should I regulate my volition in some way or another. In Berkeley's terms, the chess-player treats the present positions of the pieces as *signs* of what to expect, in terms of possible future moves and the results of those moves; and, likewise, one treats whatever one sees as *signs* of what to expect, in terms of possible modifications of volition and the expected sensory results of those possible 'moves.'

Borrowing, then, the terminology of O'Regan and Noë, I shall refer to changes in sense-data that correlate with changes in active volition as "sensory-motor contingencies" or "sensory-motor expectations." Such an expectation could be described in the form of "In the presence of sensation(s)-X, I expect to experience sensation(s)-Y, if I *do* Z." So, for example, I am currently seated in my apartment, and based on what I see as I look straight ahead, I expect to see other familiar sights if I turn my head to the left or right, etc. Moreover, because patterns of experience from each sense simultaneously track my changing volition, I also expect to experience various tactile sensations, should I exercise my will in certain ways, based only on

¹¹⁵ Note that O'Regan and Noë's account theory is limited to vision. According to my extension of Berkeley's theory of vision, however, data from any sensory modality can serve as volitional cues, provided the requisite correlations have been established, so we can extend O'Regan and Noë's account to apply to any and all sensory modalities.

¹¹⁶ *ibid*, p. 946.

what I currently perceive through my visual sense alone. For example, based on what I am presently seeing, I expect to experience relatively specific tactile sensations, should I extend my right arm in a particular manner, and I could describe this sensory-motor expectation by saying, "if I extend my right arm, I expect to feel my coffee cup (with/on my fingers)," or simply: "I see *that* my coffee cup is within reach of my hand."

Likewise, the kinesthetic feelings that attend a certain movement of my eyes and/or a change in the shape of the ocular lens, coupled with the variations of light and color that I perceive as this happens, might collectively lead me to expect a certain tactile experience should I exercise my will in some way and for some relatively specific *duration*. I could express this by saying, "I see that a smooth solid object [my coffee cup] is within reach of my right hand," or in another situation, "I see a sharp object a few paces away from me," or perhaps, "Seeing what I take to be a sliver of ocean on the horizon leads me to expect that it will take hours of walking before I will arrive at the beach." Notice that, according to this approach, any sense of distance that I acquire upon perceiving some visual pattern(s) will be reducible to the amount and degree of volition/effort that I expect to endure in order to experience whatever tactile sensations may have been signified or suggested by those visual pattern(s). This is, of course, consistent with Berkeley's arguments from his 1709 *Essay*.

It is also worth considering that using visual data as volitional cues in this way is what allows us to use our visual sense to quickly navigate through experience in the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain. Recall that Berkeley's "prejudice" is akin to a form of synesthesia; once an association has become familiar and habitual the "sudden suggestions" of sense 'transform' our perception so that we "see" various non-visual sensory-motor contingencies, e.g., tactile contingencies. This enables an acting perceiver to make rapid changes in volition because no conscious judgment or inference would be required to become aware of the relevant expectations and, thus, to regulate volition according to those expectations.

To better understand this, consider what it takes to run anywhere without injuring one's self. To do this, one must quickly negotiate obstacles, and the visual sense is uniquely useful in this regard. It allows us to forecast tactile possibilities and, thereby, modify our behavior so as to avoid them. To do this quickly, however, we cannot afford to pause and deliberate over what to expect from a given visual pattern; instead, we simply *see* tactile (or "physical") objects of a various sizes, shapes, and at varying distances from ourselves. Of course, we do not literally

"see" any of this, since all we ever see is a changing patchwork of light and color. However, we do *expect* various tactile possibilities *based on what we see*, and we come to expect these possibilities with such an immediacy and level of certainty that we can unhesitatingly act upon them.

Thus, if I am running and I notice an obstacle in my path, I modify my behavior so as to avoid tactile/tangible collision, and this alteration can take place so quickly as to preclude the possibility of serious thought, or inferential deliberation. At the same time, though, it need not be a mindless reflex: I can consciously notice an obstacle and deliberately (albeit, very quickly) decide *how* to modify my behavior so as to avoid it, e.g., I am being pursued and I am running at top speed, I notice an obstacle and quickly decide whether to dodge around it or jump over it, taking into consideration whatever I may expect regarding which action might best distance me from my pursuer, etc., and all of this deliberation can happen in an instant. To make such an instant but deliberate decision, and then successfully execute either action (dodging or jumping), I must have *immediately at hand* some sense of the relative size and shape of the obstacle (to execute the proper motions that would get me around or over the obstacle) and I must have some sense of the relative distance of the obstacle (to execute the dodge/jump at the proper time).

Accordingly, seeing *how* to avoid an obstacle just *is* seeing the size, shape, and relative distance of the obstacle. Thus, as soon as I perceive various visual patterns, I am also made immediately aware of various behavioral options and how to carry them out (or, at least, how to try), and this incredibly advantageous ability is made possible because I have learned how to see, or rather, I have become fluent in using visual sensations as Signs of various sensory-motor expectations. Accordingly, the "prejudice" has insinuated itself into my understanding and I no longer perceive a meaningless patchwork of light and color; instead, I perceive objects of varying distance, size and shape, as various tactile-volitional expectations have become synesthetically fused with the relevant host of operative visual cues.

Moreover, because Berkeley treated visual data as elements of a language, we can also conclude that a visual idea or pattern of ideas will only acquire *meaning* if it is *actually used* as a sign. Thus, as soon as I recognize a correlation between certain visual patterns¹¹⁷ and my

¹¹⁷ For this to work, we must assume that we have an ability to recognize sensory patterns at one time as being "the same as" sensory patterns (from the same sensory modality) perceived in the past. This need not be an objective 'sameness', however; we only need to have the ability to make that 'recognition' – we can assume that if making that recognition turns out to be beneficial to the actor/perceiver, then it will become reinforced; if not, it will be ignored.

behavior, and a correlation between, say, certain tactile sensations and that *same* behavior on my part, then I can correlate the visual with the tactile, i.e., I can now use those visual patterns as signs to expect those tactile patterns, should I regulate my volition in a certain way. Hence, the signs of Berkeley's Natural Language only acquire their meaning by serving as cues for the regulation of volition/behavior. I shall return to this very important point in the next section.

To return to our runner who jumps over or runs around obstacles - the particular 'look' of an obstacle is only relevant to the runner insofar as it informs the runner of how to modify his/her volition so as to avoid tactile expectations/possibilities, and according to the synesthetic "prejudice," this know-how should manifest itself in the runner's visual experience as the apparent size, shape and distance of an obstacle. Thus, the runner does not, strictly speaking, "see" the size, shape and distance "of" some thing, X, where X can be called "the obstacle" and where X has, in and of itself, various 'properties' of size, shape, and distance, etc. Instead, the runner simply sees a changing patchwork of light and color, but the runner's visual perception is distorted by the prejudice born of a long tract of interactive experience and resultant know-how. That is, the runner makes "sudden judgments" or receives "immediate suggestions of sense" concerning tactile-motor possibilities, based on what is presently seen. As a result, the visual patterns that the runner sees and the various sensory-motor possibilities the runner becomes immediately aware of "are so blended and confounded together as to be mistaken for one and the same thing - out of which prejudice we cannot easily extricate ourselves." (1709 *Essay* §79).

We should keep in mind that when Berkeley speaks of extricating ourselves from this prejudice, he does not mean that we could, or even should, actually do this. For, doing so would render a person functionally blind; without the "prejudice" in place, we would be in the position of a Molyneux Man, and while this would certainly be a revelatory experience for the truly strict empiricist, it would also make life exceedingly difficult. Consider, for example, the following account of "Virgil," a 50 year old man whose sight was restored through a pair of cataract removal operations:

...he said that in general he found walking "scary" and "confusing" without touch, without his cane, with his uncertain, unstable judgment of space and distance. Sometimes surfaces or objects would seem to loom, to be on top of him, when they were still quite a distance away; sometimes he would get confused by his own shadow (the whole concept of shadows, of objects blocking light, was puzzling to him) and would come to a stop, or trip, or try to step over it. Steps, in particular, posed a special hazard,

because all he could see was a confusion, a flat surface, of parallel and crisscrossing lines; he could not see them (although he knew them) as solid objects going up or coming down in three-dimensional space. Now, five weeks after surgery, he often felt more disabled than he had felt when he was blind, and he had lost the confidence, the ease of moving, that he had possessed then.¹¹⁸

Berkeley's point was not that we should rid ourselves of this incalculably valuable "prejudice," but only that *philosophers must take this phenomenon into account* when inquiring into the nature of the world around us and the apparent multitude of "physical objects" we (seem to) see around us; otherwise, we are bound to draw the wrong speculative conclusions. For, while this prejudice may be wonderfully advantageous on a purely practical level, it is just as pernicious at a purely speculative or philosophical level, insofar as it represents a distortion of visual perception. As Berkeley explained, in §35 of his 1733 *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*:

There hath been a long and close connexion in our minds between the ideas of sight and touch. Hence they are considered as one thing – which prejudice suiteth well enough with the purpose of life; and language is suited to this prejudice. The work of science and speculation is to unravel our prejudices and mistakes, untwisting the closest connexions, distinguishing things that are different; instead of confused or perplexed, giving us distinct views; gradually correcting our judgment, and reducing it to philosophical exactness. And, as this work is the work of time, and done by degrees, it is extremely difficult, if at all possible, to escape the snares of popular language, and the being betrayed thereby to say things strictly speaking neither true nor consistent. This makes thought and candour more especially necessary in the reader. For, language being accommodated to the praenotions of men and use of life, it is difficult to express therein the precise truth of things, which is so distant from their use, and so contrary to our praenotions.

Now, any modification in my behavior (e.g., deciding whether to jump or dodge an obstacle) will be based only what I see, and I cannot collide with any *visual* sensation(s). Thus, I alter my behavior to avoid painful tactile sensations that I will not actually experience/perceive if my avoidance behavior is successful. That is, I *act as if* certain relevant tactile-motor possibilities were, in fact, present and actual. Thus, to say one regulates one's volition "according to" various sensory-motor expectations is just to say that one *acts as if* those sensory-motor possibilities were actually existent/present. Indeed, with the "prejudice" fully in place, I will "see" those possibilities as present actualities, insofar as I will see more than a mere

¹¹⁸ Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars* (Vintage Books, New York: 1995), pp. 120-121.

patchwork of light and color, i.e., I will perceive my visual field as a world of three-dimensional objects of varying size and shape and at various distances from me.

If my avoidance behavior is successful, one could reasonably say that there really were no tactile sensations to avoid, since no such sensations were ever actually experienced, and an unexperienced sensation is no sensation at all. We might avoid this apparent paradox by saying that the anticipated tactile sensations existed *in potentia*. However, it would be more accurate to say that there never were any painful tactile sensations, since my avoidance behavior was successful, but that there were certain expectations of tactile possibilities, and the modifications of volition that constitute my successful "avoidance behavior" just *are* those "expectations." In any case, we should be able to see that, however useful this "prejudice" may be to practical existence and our continued survival, it also leads us to associate two quite different elements so closely with one another that they become fused, as it were, in our thoughts and perceptions. If this is true, then philosophers *must* take this into account before setting out to say anything about perception, reality, the ontological status of "objects" etc., since what we think we immediately see (e.g., tables, chairs, etc.) is not, strictly speaking, what we immediately see (e.g., light and color). As Berkeley explained, in §36 of his 1733 *Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*:

In the contrivance of Vision, as that of other things, the wisdom of Providence seemeth to have consulted the operation rather than the theory of man; to the former things are admirably fitted, but, by that very means, the latter is often perplexed. For, as useful as these immediate suggestions and constant connexions are to direct our actions; so is our distinguishing between things confounded, and as it were blended together, no less necessary to the speculation and knowledge of truth.

Evidence for this synesthetic 'prejudice' can also be found in the way we casually describe certain objects. For example, if I see a certain visual pattern that has habitually led me to expect that, were I to reach out my hand, I would feel a smooth surface, I do not consciously infer this; instead, I (seem to) *see* a smooth surface, and accordingly, I might say, "I see that it is smooth" or that "it looks smooth." Strictly speaking, however, either description would be absurd, since "smooth" describes a purely tactile experience, and not a visual one. How could something literally *look* smooth? We might as well say that a certain sound looks sour. And, yet, we commonly report our visual experiences by saying that what we see with our eyes "looks

like" whatever tactile experiences we *expect* to encounter, should we exercise our will in one way or the other, e.g., "that knife looks sharp" or "that stove looks hot" etc.

According to Berkeley, the fact that we talk this way merely reflects and reinforces the underlying prejudice in question. As he explained, at §35 of his 1733 *Theory of Vision or Visual Language Vindicated and Explained*, "[t]here hath been a long and close connexion in our minds between the ideas of sight and touch. Hence they are considered as one thing – which prejudice suiteth well enough with the purpose of life; and language is suited to this prejudice." Thus, we do not simply speak this way while nevertheless perceiving a mere patchwork of light and color; instead, we literally seem to *see* qualities like sharpness or heat, despite the undeniable fact that, literally or strictly speaking, these are not visual qualities at all.

According to my extension of Berkeley's Theory of Vision, when visual sensations are perceived as 'having' tactile properties, the "prejudice" has fully "insinuated itself into our understanding." In other terms, the "prejudice" occurs when we perceive a fusion or union of the "mediate object" of perception (e.g., a tactile-motor expectation) with the "immediate object" of perception (e.g., a pattern of light and color). Berkeley summarized this at §66 of his 1709 *Essay*:

We are nevertheless exceedingly prone to imagine those things which are perceived only by the mediation of others to be themselves the immediate objects of sight, or at least to have in their own nature a fitness to be suggested by them before ever they have been experienced to coexist with them. From which prejudice every one perhaps will not find it easy to emancipate himself, by any the clearest convictions of reason.

This passage identifies the essential nature of this "prejudice." We strictly or literally perceive, by sight, only various patterns of light and color, and these are the "immediate objects of sight." For, "what we immediately and properly see are only lights and colors in sundry situations and shades and degrees of faintness and clearness, confusion and distinctness" (*Essay*, §73). We could also say that we see visual "shapes" and/or visual "patterns" but we must keep in mind that these shapes or patterns are entirely and absolutely *visual*, i.e., they are shapes or patterns of light and color in our visual field, and nothing else. We must be vigilant in this regard because it is the very nature of this prejudice that we form the contrary belief: that we immediately see something that is not visual (or, that we see more than we can see).

Since those of us sighted since birth have lived with and operated according to this prejudice for longer than we can remember, its operation in the visual realm will doubtless be difficult to appreciate.¹¹⁹ However, people who have been sighted since birth can still be made aware of this, as Berkeley pointed out in §43 of the *Essay*: "And, perhaps, upon a strict inquiry, we shall not find that even those who from their birth have grown up in a continued habit of seeing are irrevocably prejudiced on the other side, to wit, in thinking what they see to be at a distance from them."¹²⁰ In this regard, Berkeley was adamant that the key to appreciating the active presence of this prejudice in the visual realm was to carefully consider the situation of a "Molyneux Man":

In order to disentangle our minds from whatever prejudices we may entertain with relation to the subject in hand, nothing seems more apposite than the taking into our thoughts the case of one born blind, and afterwards, when grown up, made to see. And - though perhaps it may not be a task altogether easy and familiar to us, to divest ourselves

¹¹⁹ It may be helpful here to recall the analogy to the noises/words of a spoken language. Since I am writing in English, imagine English was the only language you had ever heard, and that no amount of repeating a familiar word would ever make it sound any different. In that case, you would never have reason to think that, say, "apple" could ever be heard as anything other than the meaningful word that you hear it to be. Thus, you would not even be able to imagine what the "mere noise of 'ahp-pull'" referred to, since you could never repeat the word enough times to experience that perceptual transformation. Its status as a *meaningful word* would be riveted into your thoughts and perceptions. However, the fact would remain that mere noise is all the audible sense ever hears. Nevertheless, whenever we hear "apple" as a *word* rather than a mere noise, we do seem to be hearing something *more* than a mere noise. In just the same fashion, when we seem to *see* non-visual properties, and/or when we claim to see non-visual "objects" that only 'have' visual qualities, e.g., a desk, a chair, a tree, etc., we certainly seem to be seeing *more* than what our visual sense can actually provide. To fully accept this, it is imperative that one take into account and carefully consider the reports of any 'Molyneux Men.'

¹²⁰ Note that when Berkeley claims that it is a prejudice to believe that what we see is at a distance from us, we must, once again, keep in mind that what we see is just visual data. That is, we see patterns or shapes of color in our visual field, and as actually experienced immediate sensations it would not make sense to say they existed at some 'distance' from the perceiver. Of course, as *signs*, the sensations are perceived right along with a host of sensory-motor expectations, including those kinesthetic-motor expectations that are, or can be, described in terms of "distance." By the same token, if I hear a distant train whistle, the noise that I actually hear is not any "distance" from me. However, the quality and context of the noise leads me to expect, based on past experience with such noises and with hearing in general, that I could find various sensations that I call "train" if I exercise my will so as to move myself in the appropriate direction for an appropriate amount of time. One could attempt to refute this by, e.g., shining a beam of light onto a far wall to prove that we *can*, in fact, see a mere patch of light/color as being at a distance from us. The problem with such a demonstration is that it would take place under the influence of the very prejudice in question. So, the response to such a 'demonstration' should be: *of course* you see the light on that far wall as being at a distance, but that's only because you've grown up in the "continued habit of seeing." That is, you've become fluent in using visual signs; so, you cannot see things any other way (just as you cannot hear the words of your native tongue as anything but meaningful words). But, a "Molyneux Man" would *not* see the splotch of light on the far wall as being at any distance, much less as "a beam of light projected onto a far wall." Instead, a Molyneux Man would simply see a splotch of color in his visual field, and one that is not distinguishable from any other in any distance-relative way; only after a great deal of interactive practice with his new visual sense would he perceive this as a beam of light projected onto a far wall, as it is perceived by those who have been sighted since birth.

entirely of the experiences received from sight, so as to be able to put our thoughts exactly in the posture of such a one's - we must, nevertheless, as far as possible, endeavour to frame true conceptions of what might reasonably be supposed to pass in his mind.¹²¹

So, to return to the Molyneux Problem, we may consider the case of a nine year old boy whose sight was restored, several years after the Cheseldon case. Upon being presented with a cube and a sphere, the boy could immediately perceive a difference in their visual shape, but could not say what that difference was. "It was not until they had many times been placed in his hands that he learnt to distinguish by the eye the one which he had just had in his hands, from the other placed beside it. He gradually became more correct in his perception, but it was only after several days that he could or would tell by the eyes alone, which was the sphere and which the cube; when asked, he always, before answering, wished to take both into his hands; even when this was allowed, when immediately afterwards the objects were placed before the eyes, he was not certain of the figure."¹²² This account went on to say of the boy that, "[o]f distance he had not the least conception," and that "[h]e said everything touched his eyes, and walked about most carefully, with his hands held out in before him, to prevent things hurting his eyes by touching them."¹²³

Since 1728, there have been several other cases like this, wherein a person born blind is made to see, and the results are invariably the same: the person seeing the world for the first time does not understand much, if any, of what he/she sees (or, certainly not in any way comparable to a normally sighted adult); and, a great deal of interactive practice is required if the person is to make sense and/or use of this new flood of visual information as would an adult who had been sighted since birth. Moreover, as Berkeley had predicted in 1709, the most profound difficulties seem to arise when making judgments of distance and magnitude by vision alone. For example, recall "Virgil," the man who had been "virtually blind since childhood" but who, at the age of 50, had his sight restored through a pair of cataract removal operations. Dr. Sacks recounted that, following the restoration of his sight, Virgil would jump if he perceived birds coming too close. The birds did not actually come close to Virgil but, as Dr. Sacks reported,

¹²¹ 1709 *Essay*, §92.

¹²² Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p. 447-448, citing from Nunnely's *The Organs of Vision: their Anatomy and Physiology* (1858).

¹²³ Fraser, *Works*, Vol. 1, p. 447-448, citing from Nunnely's *The Organs of Vision: their Anatomy and Physiology* (1858).

“Virgil simply had no idea of distance.” (p. 119). Sacks also tells us that while Virgil enjoyed the “uncluttered views” of rolling hills of green grass, “it was difficult for him. . . to connect the visual shapes of hills with the tangible hills he had walked up, and he had no idea of size or perspective.” (p.119).

We might also consider the case of patient "H.S." whose vision had been completely lost at the age of fifteen, and then restored twenty-two years later through a corneal transplant. H.S. described his experiences after the surgery: "During these first weeks [after surgery] I had no appreciation of depth or distance; street lights were luminous stains stuck to the window panes, and the corridors of the hospital were black holes." (p. 121).¹²⁴ In fact, according to Dr. Sacks, drastic misapprehensions of distance are not limited to those who have had their sight restored:

Sensation itself has no “markers” for size and distance; these have to be learned on the basis of experience. Thus it has been reported that if people who have lived their entire lives in dense rain forest, with a far point no more than a few feet away, are brought into a wide, empty landscape, they may reach out and try to touch the mountaintops with their hands; they have no concept of how far the mountains are.¹²⁵

The 1728 Cheseldon case represented the first empirical evidence that could be brought to bear on the "Molyneux Problem," and the results Cheseldon reported were just as Berkeley had predicted in 1709; hence, Berkeley's "vindication." Moreover, if anyone doubted the initial assumption of Berkeley's argument described above - that distance is not directly or immediately perceived by vision alone - the consistent results of these cases should remove any such doubt. For, if distance were immediately perceived by vision alone, we should expect a person who has just been bestowed with a fully functional visual sense to acquire a sense of distance right along with their newly restored vision. Even if such a person was unsure how to describe their newly acquired visual sense of distance, they should nevertheless have it, i.e., they should be able to use their new visual sense to avoid bumping into things while they walk or run. In fact, as we have already seen, people with newly restored sight have extreme difficulty using their newly acquired visual sense to navigate through the world and a great deal of interactive practice is required before the "prejudice" will "insinuate itself" into their understanding, such that they come to see the world as most sighted adults, i.e., a world of tables and chairs, etc.

¹²⁴ Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, pp. 108-152.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, p. 119, fn. 6.

The world presents us with multiple and independent streams of sense-data (vision, hearing, touch, etc.) and the only fact of final importance, for Berkeley, is that these streams of data remain to some degree consistent and reliable. As he explained in §160 of *Siris*, “[W]ithout a regular course, nature could never be understood; mankind must always be at a loss, not knowing what to expect, or how to govern themselves, or direct their actions for the obtaining of any end.” That nature remains “on a regular course” or “consistent and reliable” only means that it will be possible to form sensory-motor expectations that will continue to 'hold true', or just work (relative to any subject’s particular goals/plans) over time. Thus, so long as these multiple streams of sense-data reliably change in some way that is in direct correlation to changes in a perceiver's volition, the formation of sensory-motor expectations will be possible, and the particular 'content' of these data streams becomes an arbitrary matter. For, any bit of sense-data is just a point of behavioral reference that allows for the formation of general rules of behavior, and the only requirement for such a perceptual-volitional system is that changes in sense-data correlate with changes in the perceiver's volition. Exactly *what* those changes are is not finally important. Thus, just as the particular noises that make up a given human language can be perfectly arbitrary, provided they are spoken or written with some requisite degree of consistency, so to is the particular 'content' of sensory experience equally arbitrary.

This means that what an object looks like is not, *by itself*, what allows us to visually recognize and identify the object. Recall, for example, the conclusion drawn by O'Regan and Noë: "among all previously memorized action recipes that allow you to make lawful changes in sensory stimulation, only some are applicable at the present moment. The sets that are applicable *now* are characteristic of the visual attributes of the object you are looking at, and their being *currently exercised* constitutes the fact of your visually perceiving that object." (p. 945, emphasis in original). Accordingly, being able to visually identify something as, say, a "staircase" rather than, say, "a confusion, a flat surface, of parallel and crisscrossing lines"¹²⁶ requires that the "prejudice" be "insinuated" into one's understanding, and that requires some inter-active practice with one's visual sense. Moreover, since the particular visual patterns are an arbitrary matter, provided they change with the requisite level of consistency to allow for the formation of sensory-motor contingencies, I need only expect that a certain form of volitional regulation (what we might call stair-relative behavior) is currently applicable. So, I know that I

¹²⁶ See supra n. 119 and accompanying text (the case of "Virgil").

am in the presence of stairs when I am prepared to unhesitatingly act in a stair-relative way. That is, my (volitional) certainty in this regard is what passes for my knowledge, or belief, that I am in the presence of stairs.¹²⁷ The visual patterns I see may 'suddenly suggest' this to me, but the point is that these patterns could have been anything; the specific 'content' of the visual patterns is not what drives this process forward.

Before applying this extension of Berkeley's theory of vision to understanding Berkeley's partially developed approach to human language, I shall briefly re-examine Berkeley's tragic argument for God as the "eternal spirit" that maintains the continuity of objects when not perceived by finite minds. For, we should now be in a position to see the fatal flaw in that argument. In fact, John Stuart Mill's criticism of this argument perfectly identified this fatal flaw.

Mill argued that Berkeley "did not see clearly that the sensations I have to-day are not the same as those I had yesterday, which are gone, never to return; but are only exactly similar; and that what has been kept in continuous existence is but a potentiality of having such sensations, or, to express it in other words, a law of uniformity in nature, by virtue of which similar sensations might and would have recurred, at any intermediate time, under similar conditions."¹²⁸ He went on to argue that "[t]hese sensations, which I did not have, but which experience teaches me that I might have had at any time during the intermission of my actual sensations, are not a positive entity subsisting through that time: they did not exist as sensations, but as a guaranteed belief; implying constancy in the order of phenomena, but not a spiritual substance for the phenomena to dwell in when not present to my own mind."¹²⁹

Mill was correct. For, according to what has been advanced above, there is nothing that God needs to *perceive* in order to maintain the uniformity and reliability of our experiences. We may illustrate this by considering any modern "first-person" computer game, or computer generated virtual reality. In the course of playing a game, a player sees on-screen, e.g., an enemy

¹²⁷ Curiously, there is some slight indication that Berkeley may have been developing something along these lines. See e.g., Notebook entry 776: "Agreeable to my Doctrine of Certainty. He that acts not in order to the obtaining of eternal Happyness must be an infidel at least he is not certain of a future judgment." Thus, one may proclaim his/her fervent belief in the tenets of, say, Christianity, but if this person does not actually modify his/her volition according to those beliefs (i.e., does not act "in order for the obtaining of eternal Happyness"), Berkeley would say that this person is still not "certain" of those beliefs and, thus, "must be an infidel." Unfortunately, a few notebook entries are all we have regarding Berkeley's nascent "doctrine of certainty."

¹²⁸ J.S. Mill, "Berkeley's Life and Writings" *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. vii, p. 451.

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

soldier crouching behind cover. The player moves the mouse, or presses a button on a game-controller, and the view on the screen shifts, i.e., the player's 'avatar' "turns around" (within the game-world, that is; not the actual human player). When the player "turns back around" (within the game-world), the enemy soldier is still seen to be crouching in the same place. Berkeley's argument regarding God's continued perception of objects amounts to saying that the enemy soldier the player sees at one moment (which is nothing more than changing pixels of light and color on the computer screen) must somehow persist *in that same form* even when the player looks away (within the game-world). Berkeley's argument here would be tantamount to arguing that the computer's hardware and software must continue to 'perceive' the enemy soldier whenever a player turns away (in the game-world). In fact, however, the computer hardware and software need only be able to regenerate the appropriate patterns of light/color at the appropriate times, in relation to the actions of the player, in order to produce a seamless 'virtual reality' such that a player may turn back around and see the "same" enemy soldier.¹³⁰

This argument was a tragic mistake on Berkeley's part because it is inconsistent with the powerful implications of his New Theory of Vision, implications that Berkeley himself may or may not have fully appreciated. Moreover, as Mill pointed out, "[t]his illogical side of Berkeley's theory was the part of it to which he himself attached the greatest value; and he would have been much grieved if he had foreseen the utter neglect of his favourite argument for Theism."¹³¹

3.2 BERKELEY AND LANGUAGE

In Chapter II, Berkeley's "emotive" theory of meaning was introduced, in the context of discussing Berkeley's rejection of abstract ideas in Introduction to the *Principles*. In this section, I shall examine Berkeley's partial development of that theory of meaning, in light of what has been advanced thus far.

Recall that Berkeley treated visual perception as the comprehension of a Natural Language. That sensory experience could be treated literally as a form of language was important to Berkeley because, *inter alia*, it enabled him to advance an argument for the

¹³⁰ David Berman has suggested that modern readers of Berkeley can greatly benefit by considering such 'virtual reality' scenarios. See Berman, *Berkeley* (Routledge 1999), pp. 25, 35. In fact, I am currently drafting an article wherein I consider various arguments advanced by Berkeley in the context of such virtual realities.

¹³¹ J.S. Mill, "Berkeley's Life and Writings" *The Collected Works of John Stuart Mill*, Vol. vii, p. 451.

existence of God, as the Author of this Natural Language.¹³² The argument, in very brief summary, was this: if being in the presence of language is a sure sign that one is in the presence of another “spirit” (i.e., volition/mind); and, if sensory experience is literally a kind of Natural Language; then, sensory experience provides as much (if not more) evidence for “God” (an arbitrary name for the author of this natural language) as spoken language provides for the existence of other (finite) minds.¹³³ As intriguing as this argument may be, it will not be explored any further in this dissertation.

What should concern us, however, is the other direction of this comparison; for, just as Berkeley was able to borrow a feature of artificial (human) language and apply it to the “Natural Language” that is sensory experience in order to advance his theological argument; he was likewise able to borrow features of his theory of vision and apply them to his understanding of artificial (human) languages, and based on Berkeley's partial development of his theory of language and meaning, it would appear that Berkeley did just that. For, as we have seen, Berkeley's theory of vision entails that sensory ideas become meaningful Signs only by an acting perceiver making use of them as cues for volitional regulation according to various sensory-motor expectations. Thus, based on that theory, Berkeley should have been able to extend that to artificial language in order to realize, e.g., that words may be meaningful without calling to mind, or being ‘annexed to’ any underlying ideas whatsoever, *provided* those artificial signs are used as signs for the regulation of volition.

In fact, this is precisely what we find Berkeley arguing in various places in his published works. The most direct instance of this can be found in the Seventh Dialogue of *Alciphron*, §11, where Euphranor states: “signs may be significant, though they should not suggest ideas represented by them – provided they serve to regulate and influence our wills, passions, and conduct.” Likewise, in a letter to Johnson dated March 24, 1730, he wrote: “words... as often terminate in the will as in the understanding, being employed rather to excite, influence, and direct action, than to produce clear and distinct ideas.” And, again, in §17 of the Seventh Dialogue of *Alciphron*: “the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different

¹³² See e.g., Robert J. Baum, “The Instrumentalist and Formalist Elements of Berkeley's Philosophy of Mathematics” *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, 3 (1972) no. 2, 119-134, p. 121: “One of the conclusions of the *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision* was that the visible world is not only a system of signs which man can use for anticipating tactile sensations, but that it is in fact the language of God, the Author of Nature.”

¹³³ This argument is advanced by Euphranor in the Fourth Dialogue of *Alciphron*.

degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always, the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather something of an active operative nature.”¹³⁴

That Berkeley could have arrived at this conclusion – that the true end of artificial signs is "something of an active operative nature" - should come as no surprise, given his Theory of Vision, and his claim that visual ideas constitute a Natural Language. More importantly, we know from the Theory of Vision that any (patterns of) idea of sense will only acquire meaning in virtue of the "prejudice" which can only become operative relative to active volitional regulation (of the perceiver). That is, only when we perceive ideas of sense *as signs* will the prejudice insinuate itself into our understanding, thus giving meaning to those ideas of sense; and, to say we perceive ideas of sense as signs is simply to say that we use them as cues for the active regulation of volition/behavior.

Thus, with regard to mathematics, Berkeley wrote, in §122 of Part I of the *Principles*: “In Arithmetic, therefore, we regard not the *things* but the *signs*, which nevertheless are not regarded for their own sake, but because they direct us how to act with relation to things, and dispose rightly of them.” And again, in §8 of the Seventh Dialogue of *Alciphron*: “though it seems neither you nor I can form distinct simple *ideas* of number, we can nevertheless make a very proper and significant use of numeral *names*. They direct us in the disposition and management of our affairs, and are of such necessary use, that we should not know how to do without them.”

We have already seen Berkeley's claim, in §20 of the Introduction to the *Principles*, that “the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only end of language, as is commonly supposed.” Recall also that Berkeley went on to explain that “[t]here are other ends, as the raising of some passion, the exciting to or deterring from an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition – to which the former [imparting ideas] is in many cases barely

¹³⁴ §17, *Alciphron* VII. For a look at Berkeley's developing thoughts in this regard, we may consult the following three Notebook entries. First, entry 661: "Some words there are which do not stand for Ideas v.g. particles Will etc." Note that a 'particle' is a word like 'but' or 'and' or 'not'. Now, entry 661a: "particles stand for volitions & their concomitant Ideas." And, finally, entry 667: "Tis allow'd that Particles stand not for Ideas & yet they are not said to be empty useless sounds. The truth on't is they stand for the operations of the mind, i.e., volitions." Tipton has noted that this accords with Locke's treatment of particles: "In a chapter which is for some unaccountable reason usually cut from abridged editions of the *Essay* Locke had conceded that particles (words such as 'if', 'but and 'not') do not stand for ideas, and Berkeley seizes on this in PC 661 and 667... Berkeley follows Locke in supposing that if such words do not stand for ideas then they must stand for *something*, and he agrees with Locke that they stand for operations of the mind." Tipton, *Berkeley, The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, p. 153.

subservient, and sometimes entirely omitted, when these can be obtained without it, as I think does not unfrequently happen in the familiar use of language.” We also saw that, in the Draft Introduction, Berkeley was willing to claim that "names, significant names, do not always stand for ideas, but that they may be and are often used to good purpose [tho' they are] without being supposed to stand for or represent any idea at all."

We may also consider a pair of letters that Berkeley wrote to Samuel Molyneux in 1709. In a letter dated Dec. 8, 1709, in response to a question from Molyneux as to whether we can “reason without ideas,” Berkeley wrote: “We may very well, and in my Opinion often do, reason without Ideas but only the Words us’d, being usd [sic] for the most parts as Letters in Algebra, which tho they denote particular Quantities, Yet every step do not suggest them to our Thoughts, and for all that We may reason or perform Operations *intirly* [sic] *about them*” (my emphasis). Eleven days later (Dec. 19, 1709), Berkeley wrote another letter to Molyneux:

You tell Me that if, as I think, Words do not at every Turn suggest the respective Ideas they are supposed to stand for it is purely by Chance Our Discourse hangs together, and is found after 2 or 3 hours jingling & permutation of Sounds to agree with our Thoughts. As for what I said of Algebra, You are of Opinion the Illustration will not hold good because there are no Set rules except those of the Syllogisms whereby to range & permute [our] Words like to the Algebraic Process. In Answer to all which I observe first, That if We put Our Words together any how and at Random then indeed there may be some Grounds for what You say, but if people lay their Words together with Design and according to Rule then there can be no Pretence so far as I can see for your Inference. Secondly. I cannot but dissent from what You say, of there being no Set Rules for the Ranging and Disposition of Words but only the Syllogistic, for to Me it appears That all Grammar & every part Logic contains little else than Rules for Discourse & Ratiocination by Words. And those who do not expressly set themselves to study those Arts do nevertheless learn them insensibly by Custom.

Notice that, by rejecting the view that words are merely vehicles for underlying ideas, Berkeley arrived at the only conclusion possible: that we reason and ratiocinate not about any non-existent underlying ideas, but about the words *themselves*, i.e., we “reason or perform Operations [entirely] about them.” Again, this would not have been a terribly difficult leap for Berkeley to make, since words are just patterns of visual or audible ideas, and Berkeley had already accepted that such (patterns of) ideas function as signs in a Natural Language.

To illustrate the point that we use the words themselves as signs (rather than any underlying ideas), Berkeley pointed, in these 1709 letters to Molyneux and in the 1710

Introduction to the *Principles*, to Algebra as an example. In §19 of the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley wrote: “And a little attention will discover that it is not necessary (even in the strictest reasonings) significant names which stand for ideas should, every time they are used, excite in the understanding the ideas they are meant to stand for – in reading and discoursing, names being for the most part used as letters are in Algebra, in which, though a particular quantity be marked by each letter, yet to proceed right it is not requisite that in every step each letter suggest to your thoughts that particular quantity it was appointed to stand for.”

To better understand this, consider the manner in which Algebra is actually learned: most people learn Algebra in a classroom and, in that context, students are only expected to provide appropriate spoken and/or written responses when called upon to do so. In fact, for those students who do not pursue careers that require the use of Algebra, providing answers on tests and quizzes will likely be the *only* use to which they will ever put their algebraic skills. Thus, these students need never associate the signs of algebra with anything other than the signs of algebra. For, what a student learns in an Algebra classroom is only how to regulate his or her volition so as to write down (or speak) the appropriate symbols and characters at the appropriate time. For example, a student may learn how to “solve for x , if $3x + 6 = 15$ ” by carrying out a series of steps (or, by carrying out various algebraic ‘action recipes’) and eventually arriving at the expected solution. Thus, in the statement $3x + 6 = 15$, ‘ x ’ denotes “3”, but this will not be known unless and until the requisite steps are carried out; therefore, one *must* be able to execute those steps *without* associating ‘ x ’ with anything other than itself. Thus, “though a particular quantity be marked by each letter, yet to proceed right it is not requisite that in every step each letter suggest to your thoughts that particular quantity it was appointed to stand for.” (Intro, §19).

This does not mean that the activities we collectively call “algebra” serve no purpose beyond burdening high-school students with skills that most of them will never expressly use outside the classroom. It does mean, however, that the only *immediate* purpose of algebra is simply more algebra. That is, regardless of how one may apply the results of algebraic behavior to regulate non-algebraic behavior and, thereby, perform some non-algebraic task(s), one need never do this in order to successfully perform algebra. To illustrate this, consider the following. A lawyer is tasked with dividing the assets of a trust according to the last wishes of a recently deceased head of household. In the decedent’s will it was decreed that the assets of the trust

shall be divided equally among the decedent's surviving children, but that the youngest child shall only receive half of what the other children receive. Assume the assets of the trust total \$78,500.00, and that there are four surviving children: Roger, Alison, Mary, and Mark (in order from oldest to youngest). Now, in the course of performing his duties as an attorney, the lawyer may call upon previously learned algebraic skills to arrive at an answer with relative ease. If 'x' is the amount that the oldest three will receive, then $x/2$ will be the amount given to the youngest (Mark), and $3x + x/2 = 78,500$. By "solving for x" the lawyer determines that $x = 22,428.57$ and $x/2 = 11,214.29$.

The point of this example is that in order to arrive at these answers, one need not think of money or trusts or people at all. One need only have the relevant algebraic know-how that allows one to "solve for x" in any given statement(s). Indeed, students in a classroom may have been called upon to "solve for x" in that very same equation ($3x + x/2 = 78,500$) by sheer coincidence, and those students may think of whatever they please, provided they arrive at the expected answer(s). The undeniable fact is that we do not require that students have specific *ideas* when writing out the answers to algebra problems; we only require that they write the correct answers, i.e., that they consistently *behave* according to our (algebraic) expectations.

Even the lawyer in our scenario need not think of 78,500 as representing or signifying the assets of a trust in order to "solve for x." Of course, if this algebraic behavior is to be of any further *use* to the lawyer, the lawyer must call upon other non-algebraic skills to get the appropriate amounts of money to the right people, e.g., the lawyer must contact the administrators of the trust and inform them that checks for \$22,428.57 must be drawn and made payable to Roger, Alison and Mary, and that a check for \$11,214.29 is to be paid to Mark. Thus, the lawyer *applies* the results of his algebraic calculations to regulate further (non-algebraic) behavior and it is in doing so that his algebraic behavior becomes something more than the mere game, if you will, that was learned in the classroom.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ In 1707, Berkeley invented "the algebraic game" which was just what its name implies: a game to be played by moving pegs around a board and, thereby, constructing arbitrary algebraic equations to be solved by the player(s), with the option of betting along the way. Having observed friends engrossed in playing chess for the better part of a day, the young Berkeley set out to create a game that would afford as much mental exercise as chess but that would also leave the players with skills that could be applied beyond the gaming board; hence, the algebraic game. After describing the rules to his game, Berkeley entreated his fellow students: "You see what a mere game is algebra, and that both chance and science find place in it. Why should you not, then, come to this gaming table?" (*Mathematical Miscellanies, On the Algebraic Game*, p. 56).

Notice also that our lawyer may successfully carry out these further non-algebraic tasks without having ever met any of the people involved. In that regard, as far as the lawyer is concerned, the names “Mary” or “Mark” function in much the same way as “x” in his algebraic calculations. That is, to properly employ these words and thereby regulate his own linguistic behavior and, thereby, the behavior of the trust administrators, and, consequently, fulfill his lawyerly duties relative to a particular client, the lawyer need never think of any particular people with regard to “Mary” and “Mark” – he need only supply these names at the right point(s) in his conversation with the trust administrators and/or at the appropriate places on various forms, documents, etc. Thus, “though a particular [person] be marked by each [name], yet to proceed right it is not requisite that in every step each [name] suggest to [our lawyer’s] thoughts that particular [person] it was appointed to stand for.”

In §8 of the Seventh Dialogue of *Alciphron*, Berkeley illustrated this general point about language – that we can and often do ‘perform operations entirely about words’ – by comparing words to “counters” at a card table (i.e., poker chips):

Euphranor: Say now, Alciphron, is it necessary every time these counters are used throughout the progress of a game, to frame an idea of the distinct sum or value that each represents?

Alciphron: By no means; it is sufficient the players first agree on their respective values, and at last substitute those values in their stead.

Euphranor: And in casting up a sum, where the figures stand for pounds, shillings, and pence, do you think it necessary, throughout the whole progress of the operation, in each step to form ideas of pounds, shillings, and pence?

Alciphron: I do not; it will suffice if in the conclusion those figures direct our actions with respect to things.

Euphranor: From hence it seems to follow, that words may not be insignificant, although they should not, every time they are used, excite the ideas they signify in our minds; it being sufficient that we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for their signs when there is occasion. It seems also to follow, that there may be another use of words besides that of marking and suggesting distinct ideas, to wit, the influencing our conduct and actions; which may be done either by forming rules for us to act by, or by raising certain passions, dispositions, and emotions in our minds. *A discourse, therefore, that directs how to act or excite to the doing or forbearance of an action may, it seems, by useful and significant, although*

*the words whereof it is composed should not bring each a distinct idea into our minds.*¹³⁶

The point of these analogies – between words and algebraic variables and between words and poker chips – is simply this: we use artificial signs in the same way that we use natural signs; namely, to *regulate volition* according to various complex sensory-motor expectations. When a poker player surveys her remaining chips, she is attempting to decide how to go about playing (and presumably winning) a hand of poker, i.e., she is using visual cues to regulate her poker-playing behavior, and the game of poker will proceed according the same rules of success or failure regardless of whether the chips are ever exchanged for money, and regardless of whether they are even thought of as representing specific amounts of money. For, the successful poker-player need only know how the chips *themselves* are used in the course of that particular game. That is, she need only know that, say, one blue chip can be exchanged for ten red chips, or that one white chip must be thrown into the pot before each hand, and that running out of chips means she is out of the game, etc. Treating the chips as representing specific monetary amounts is an arbitrary addition to the game; it is not required to successfully play the game of poker.

Algebraic equations will likewise be solved according to the same rules regardless of how (or even whether) one goes on to apply the results of those calculations to regulate his/her non-algebraic behavior. Thus, to solve an algebraic equation, one need not think of anything other than the symbols and rules of algebra itself. In like manner, *any* linguistic behavior will proceed according to the same local rules of grammar and syntax regardless of how – or even whether – one goes on to apply the results of that linguistic behavior to regulate one’s non-linguistic behavior. For, as Berkeley observed, in §17 of *Alciphron* VII, “what is true of algebraic signs is also true of words or language – modern algebra being in fact a more short, apposite, and artificial sort of language.”

We must not read too much into Berkeley here, because he did write, in §20 of the Introduction to the *Principles*, that “[a]t first, indeed, the words might have occasioned ideas that were fit to produce those emotions; but, if I mistake not, it will be found that when language is once grown familiar, the hearing of the sounds or sight of the characters is oft immediately attended with those passions, which at first were wont to be produced by the intervention of

¹³⁶ My emphasis.

ideas, that are now quite omitted." In the context of mathematical language, Robert Baum has explained this as follows:

In so far as mathematics as a language deals with propositions which are denotatively meaningful, i.e., in so far as it functions as a system of signs, once certain signs have been assigned and rules for their manipulation have been established on the basis of empirical observation of the relations of their significates, it is possible (as with any system of signs) to manipulate the signs without taking their significates into consideration at all.¹³⁷

If we combine these various statements with Berkeley's Theory of Vision, we may conclude that it becomes clear that Berkeley was committed to the position that ideas are never ends in themselves, but only available means, *qua* signs, to some volitional end. Consider, for example, the opening line of the Preface to his 1713 *Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*: "it seems the general opinion of the world, no less than the design of nature and providence, that the end of speculation be Practice, or the improvement and regulation of our lives."¹³⁸ More to the point, Berkeley wrote that "the human mind" is "designed, not for the bare intuition of ideas, but for action and operation about them,"¹³⁹ and, just as ideas are merely available signs for the regulation of volition, so are words "instruments to direct our practice"¹⁴⁰

By comparison, if our philosophical methodology is built upon the "grand mistake" of treating all operations of mind and/or regulations of active volition as being, in the final analysis, some kind of idea(s), then we will naturally assume that the point of any communicative behavior is only to impart ideas to one's audience, with the behavior of one's audience being treated as an incidental byproduct of those ideas. Consequently, by committing the "grand mistake" we shall treat "means and instruments as ultimate ends, and [labour] to attain precise ideas which [we] suppose indiscriminately annexed to all terms."¹⁴¹

As Baum recognized, regarding Berkeley's treatment of formal mathematical systems in *The Ananlyst*, "[Berkeley] warned that pure mathematics is a waste of time and effort if it does not keep some ultimate application in mind while developing a system."¹⁴² Thus, once a convention has been established, we may 'perform operations entirely about words and

¹³⁷ Baum, p. 127.

¹³⁸ Fraser, *Works*, V.I, p. 258.

¹³⁹ Seventh Dialogue, §14.

¹⁴⁰ Seventh Dialogue, §17.

¹⁴¹ Seventh Dialogue, §18.

¹⁴² Baum, p. 129.

symbols,' which is just to say that artificial words and symbols serve as signs for various grammatical/linguistic expectations according to which we regulate our linguistic behavior (i.e., how we converse with others).¹⁴³ Likewise, philosophical discourse may also proceed based entirely on the customary conventions of discourse without any possible application to non-linguistic behavior. In fact, talk of "material substance" necessitates just that, since "material substance" is defined as being *not* part of the phenomenal world. Therefore, there is no way anyone can possibly *act relative to* material substance, since we can only regulate our behavior relative to whatever we currently and actually perceive (i.e., ideas). Since it is only the manner in which we go on to *apply* linguistic behavior, i.e., to use the results of our 'operations entirely about words' to regulate further *non-linguistic* behavior, that allows this purely linguistic behavior to become something more than a mere game and acquire a "reference" to anything outside itself, the term "material substance" must be deemed meaningless in this regard. As Berkeley announced, in §15 of Alciphron VII, "all sciences, so far as they are universal and demonstrable by human reason, will be found conversant about *signs as their immediate object* – though these in the application are referred to things."¹⁴⁴ Hence, "material substance" cannot possibly 'refer' to anything.

As David Berman has argued, "the actual meaning of the word 'matter' is emotive: it makes certain men act as if the cause of their sensations were material rather than spiritual."¹⁴⁵ For, as Berkeley argued in §54 of the *Principles*: "Strictly speaking, to believe that which involves a contradiction, or has no meaning in it, is impossible... In one sense indeed, men may be said to believe that matter exists, that is, they *act as if* the immediate cause of their sensations, which affect them every moment and is so nearly present to them, were some senseless unthinking being." (my emphasis). Unfortunately, the only way to "act as if" matter exists is to speak about it, to assert its existence and to incorporate such assertions into the conventions of philosophical discourse, and the only thing this has produced, according to Berkeley, is "a forlorn skepticism" (§1, Introduction to the *Principles*), and atheism.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ See e.g., §49 of Part I of the *Principles*: "to say a die is hard, extended, and square is not to attribute those qualities to a subject distinct from and supporting them, but only an explication of the meaning of the word *die*."

¹⁴⁴ Recall Alciphron's acknowledgment, with regard to symbols for pounds, shillings, pence, etc., that "it will suffice if in the conclusion those figures direct our actions with respect to things."

¹⁴⁵ Berman, *Berkeley, Idealism and the Man*, p. 150.

¹⁴⁶ Why Berkeley thought that talk of 'matter' and 'material substance' encouraged or at least supported atheism is not important to the present analysis. Berkeley's claim that talk of 'matter' leads to a "forlorn skepticism" should be obvious to any philosopher – incorporating 'matter' into philosophical discourse requires that we also talk of the

3.3 ACTIVE AWARENESS

Recall, from Chapter I, Berkeley's insistence on the *toto coelo* difference between our awareness of our own active selves, as opposed to our awareness of any idea(s). Recall also Berkeley's admonition in §142 of Part I of the *Principles* that, "[s]pirits and ideas are things so wholly different, that when we say 'they exist,' 'they are known,' or the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures." Thus, our knowledge of our own active selves, of how to do anything, e.g., how to move a toe rather than a finger, or how and when to say "house" rather than "apple" etc., is a *toto coelo* different *kind* of awareness than our awareness of, say, a pattern of light, or a sound, etc.

Since Berkeley did not develop this line of thought, concerning the different kind of awareness we have of our own active selves, I suggest that our awareness of how to do something, of how to regulate our own volition, is an *active awareness*; and, by this, I should not be taken to mean anything in common with, say, one's "awareness" of a patch of color or a sound.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, expressing this is extremely difficult, but this should not come as a surprise to the Berkeleyan since, as Berkeley stated, "language & knowledge are all about ideas."¹⁴⁸ In fact, I can think of no way to express any specific know-how, without reference to the expectations according to which such volitional regulation occurs, e.g., what I do in order to expect my leg to move, or what I do in order to expect to start walking forward, etc. Indeed, volitional regulation becomes differentiated into relative specific 'action-recipes' or sub-routines as new sensory-motor contingencies are developed; thus, know-how is sculpted (as it were) around these sensory-motor contingencies. Hence, I can only describe various action recipes or protocols, etc., with reference to the patterns of ideas around which regulations of volition have been formed, e.g., what I do to move a toe, or drive a car, or eat a sandwich, etc.

The salient point, however, is just that my knowledge or awareness of how to regulate my volition in some relatively specific way is an *active awareness*, which is *toto coelo* different from my awareness of any ideas. Thus, my awareness that I am in the presence of, say, a staircase, is

world as being divided into two metaphysical realms, the realm of matter and the realm of experience/phenomena/ideas, with human knowledge being limited to the latter while ultimate reality/truth resides in the former.

¹⁴⁷ J.L. Stocks has observed that Berkeley's doctrine of Spirit "was in fact never fully developed" but Stocks opined that "Part II of the *Principles*, in which he says he had made 'considerable progress' before he lost the manuscript during his travels in Italy, would have developed this side of his thought." (p.319).

¹⁴⁸ Notebook entry 312.

only partly ideational (I must, at some point, experience some sensory cues if a specific form of volitional regulation is to be formed), but also partly volitional, and my awareness that I *can* regulate my volition in a certain way in a given situation with the expectation that certain results will follow is an *active awareness*. Alternatively, we may say that my awareness that I am in the presence of a staircase is based on sensory cues, and also my *certainty* that some form of volitional regulation is applicable to my present situation. We may consider in this regard Berkeley's Notebook entry 777: "To be sure or certain of what we do not actually perceive (I say perceive not imagine) We must not be altogether Passive, there must be a disposition to act, there must be assent, which is active, nay what do I talk There must be Actual Volition."

Based on all that has been advanced thus far, the common misconception regarding Berkeley's immaterialism that was introduced in the last section of Chapter II can now be conclusively dispelled; namely, the claim that Berkeley's philosophy commits him to the position that objects cease to exist when we turn our backs on them, i.e., when we no longer perceive them. As Berkeley recorded in Notebook entry 777 (cited just above), our certainty regarding the existence of the world around us, whether we immediately perceive that world or not, is based not on perception *alone*, but as much, if not more so, on Active Volition and the 'insinuation' of the "prejudice" in our understanding. Thus, my knowledge of the vast world of possibilities that I inhabit extends far beyond the world of my immediate sensory environment at any given moment. Indeed, my immediate sensory environment is merely a host of signs that indicate to me, through a vast repertoire of sensory-motor expectations, the presence of this larger world. Therefore, my awareness of this larger world is, at least in part, an *active awareness* of *how* to regulate my volition according to a host of presently applicable sensory-motor expectations.

Moreover, the sensory-motor expectations or contingencies according to which I am currently regulating my volition, at any given time, need not be correlated with *presently perceived* sensory signs; in fact, this is often not the case. Consider, for example, that you find yourself in a room with a gaping hole in the floor, and you can see, through this hole, that a fatal fall awaits you if you step or fall into the hole. Imagine wind whistling up through the hole and that you see the tops of trees far below. Once you see that yawning abyss, you will continue to take it into account in the manner in which you move (tentatively, no doubt) about the room, even if you are not looking directly at the hole (or hearing the wind whistling beyond the hole).

You will adopt a posture, a way of behaving, that is triggered, if you will, by the various sensory signs that indicated to you the presence of this fatal fall. This behavior posture, then, just *is* your *active awareness* of the existence of that hole, whether you continue to perceive it or not, as you move cautiously about the room.

A table is less dramatic than a fatal fall, but the principle is still the same; for, both descriptions (“a table” and/or “a gaping hole”) are merely shorthand names for a host of sensory-motor possibilities (in a given, specific context). Standing in a room and seeing what you take to be a table and then turning off the lights will simply remove the operative visual signs from existence, but you have learned, over the course of your life, that turning off the lights does not negate the import or relevance of those visual signs, i.e., you have learned to continue to regulate your behavior according to the same expectations that were suddenly suggested by the visual signs when the lights were on, just as when they are turned off. Thus, it is the manner in which one regulates one’s volition that constitutes one’s certainty of the continued existence of any given “object” regardless of whatever sensory signs are being experienced at any given moment.

Of course, our expectations and attendant volitional regulation must actually *work* for the “object” to be said to “actually continue to exist,” regardless of anyone’s apparent certainty or knowledge of such continued existence. For example, if I see what I take to be a table before me and then turn around and walk quickly backwards, I would expect to experience tactile sensations that I would refer back to the table, e.g., “what it feels like when I back into the table.” However, if I do not encounter such tactile sensations, if I walk backwards unhindered (despite my expectations to the contrary), then I would say/think, e.g., “I only *thought* there was a table there, but apparently, I was mistaken” or, e.g., “somehow that table went away when by back was turned” etc.

That expectations hold good, or just work over time, is dependent on the ultimate cause of our sensations and I will not presume to answer such a question. In any case, we can know that our expectations will hold good, or just work, over time, because we do not acquire fully formed expectations to the point where they are “suddenly suggested” (thus insinuating the prejudice into our understanding), and then go on to find out whether they work or not; instead, we form expectations *as they work*, or *insofar as they work*. That is, the more frequently and regularly certain sensory-expectations hold good, the more firmly they will become ingrained into our actions and thinking, such that they will eventually reach the point of ‘certainty’ where

they become “suddenly suggested” and thus the operative prejudice “insinuates itself into our understanding.” Thus, when we act with certainty of our surroundings (which equates to a certainty regarding the “continued existence” of various “objects” in one’s environment), we are acting according to expectations that have achieved the status of “sudden suggestions” only because they have worked so well (relative to whatever goals we may have, but most generally, we can just say, relative to the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain).

We may also apply this notion of an *active awareness* to a (brief) re-examination of Berkeley's arguments against abstract ideas. Recall that Berkeley relied upon the psychological impossibility of framing such ideas, and he also relied upon his readers to perform a candid introspective examination of what passes in our minds to determine the truth of his claim that no such ideas can possibly exist because we simply cannot become aware of them. Recall also that this argument was not very well received, in part because of the criticism that Berkeley was being too imagistic in his thinking. Recall, for example, Pitcher's insistence on "purely intellectual non-sensuous ideas."

Had Berkeley developed this notion of an *active awareness* that is *toto coelo* different from our awareness of ideas, he could have responded to Pitcher's criticism, and others like it, by arguing that what Pitcher is calling for in the form of a "purely intellectual non-sensuous idea" is, in actuality, an *active awareness* of *how* to speak, or *how* to use and comprehend an artificial sign in a 'general' way.¹⁴⁹ Recall that Berkeley claimed that "language and knowledge are all about ideas."¹⁵⁰ If this is true, then it should be no wonder why so many philosophers are so deeply unsatisfied with Berkeley's call to introspection to deny abstract ideas. For, a philosopher may reasonably argue that *something* must be going on when we comprehend the meaning of a term, so even if we cannot frame a specific abstract idea, they must be there, or something like them must be at work here. However, if what is really driving our ability to comprehend and use terms in a general way (or, in any way, for that matter) is our *active awareness* of how to regulate our volition so as to converse meaningfully with others (i.e., to produce noises in such an order so as to achieve whatever short-term or long-term goals prompted us to converse in the

¹⁴⁹ In the Introduction to the *Principles*, Berkeley offered a brief account of how words become general in their use without the intervention of abstract ideas, but exploring the details of this account is beyond the scope of the present argument.

¹⁵⁰ Notebook entry 312.

first place, in some particular situation), then it will be something that cannot be readily discussed and analyzed through philosophical discourse.

Moreover, if we are operating according to the "grand mistake" of ignoring this active awareness and the role played by active volition in cognition and meaning, then we will insist upon the presence of some kind of idea(s) where, in truth, it is our active awareness that is operative, and this is a *toto coelo* different kind of awareness than that of any idea.

The same argument can be brought to defend the "Master Argument." For, again, one who is skeptical of the merits of this argument could argue, "look, I know that things exist when I don't perceive them – I *know* that, and I fully understand what is meant by that, so your argument, Berkeley, cannot possibly be correct." Once again, Berkeley could have employed this notion of an active awareness that is *toto coelo* different from our awareness of ideas to respond, "of course you know that; but it's a different *kind* of knowledge (or awareness). You can imagine anything you like, but that's nothing to the purpose; for, that is not what constitutes your knowledge of unperceived objects. In fact, it cannot be, since whatever you can imagine will be based on what you have actually perceived, at some point, and so, it will not be an idea (of imagination/memory) of something existing unperceived." Berkeley could have responded in this way and still won his point, since the operative *active awareness* (of, say, books in the closet or trees in the park) is clearly something that cannot exist independent of *spirit*, since it simply *is* spirit/volition.

Moreover, this appeal to active awareness would have explained why Berkeley was committed to being so "imagistic" in these two thought experiments (abstract ideas and the Master Argument). The reason is simple: if you are not becoming aware of some concrete and particular 'image'¹⁵¹ through your efforts at recollection/imagination, but you are certain that you are, nevertheless, aware of *something*, then according to Berkeley's ontology (Passive Idea vs. Active Volition), that something can only be some form of active awareness (e.g., of how to converse with others using terms in a general way, or how to find, say, books in the closet, or trees in the park, etc.). It is that active awareness, then, that is being mistaken for some kind of idea; thus, we could say that it was Berkeley's fervent desire to avoid the "grand mistake" of replacing active know-how with passive ideas that forced him to adopt an "imagistic" approach

¹⁵¹ And note that I use 'image' here loosely; for, obviously, our powers of imagination and recollection are not limited to visual recall and imagination.

to these thought experiments. Again, had Berkeley developed his doctrine of Spirit as I have attempted, he would have had these arguments at his disposal.

Berkeley could have also used this notion of an active awareness to respond to any charges of solipsism. For, just as we know that we are in the presence of any object according to *both* sensory signs *and* our active awareness of how to regulate our volition accordingly, so we are aware of the presence of other minds/spirits in the same way, i.e., when acting in an 'other-mind-relative-way' *works*, and an apt example of such behavior is, of course, conversing or speaking, i.e., if I can converse with it, then it deserves the appellation, "other mind."¹⁵² Once again, then, our knowledge of other minds is an active awareness, and so will defy careful linguistic analysis and, thus, the attention of the philosopher, especially if the "grand mistake" is firmly entrenched in the conventions of philosophical discourse.

Finally, Berkeley could have capitalized on this line of reasoning regarding our active awareness of volitional regulation according to sensory-motor expectations in order to better explain those instances wherein Berkeley equated "exists" with "is perceivable" rather than "is perceived." For present purposes, we may focus on Berkeley's statements in §3 of Part I of the *Principles*: "The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it." Based on all that has been advanced thus far, we can now re-interpret this claim. First, we should acknowledge that no one, outside of philosophical discourse, really ever says simply that something "exists." If a person walked into a room full of people, pointed at a table and said "that table exists!" that person would be met only with a sincere concern for his/her mental health. However, we do use the verb "is" quite frequently, so this will suffice for present purposes. So, for example, I may say to someone who is looking for their car keys that "they are in the next room" or I may inform someone that "there is a fountain in the park" etc.

Now, according to Berkeley's undeveloped view of the "active operative" nature of language, wherein meaning "as often terminate in the will as in the understanding, being employed rather to excite, influence, and direct action, than to produce clear and distinct ideas,"¹⁵³ we can interpret any statement to the effect that some object, X, "exists" (or just "is")

¹⁵² I list linguistic behavior as other-mind-relative-behavior because Alciphron makes the argument, in the Fourth Dialogue of *Alciphron*, that the surest sign of being in the presence of another intelligence is that other's ability to converse, i.e., use language.

¹⁵³ letter to Johnson dated March 24, 1730.

beyond the scope of whatever is presently perceived as a series of (emotive) signs being offered up (by the speaker) to be used as signs for the regulation of (the listener's) volition. Hence, existential statements such as "your keys are in the next room" or "the books are in the closet" can be restated in the form of: "should you regulate your volition in some particular way, you should expect to find/perceive X" where "X" is the subject of the statement in question.

It is truly unfortunate that Berkeley abandoned his originally planned *Treatise*, as it would have been quite interesting to have seen what he might have had in mind with regard to any 'doctrine of spirit/volition.' I have attempted to extend Berkeley's incomplete writings on the subject in the hope of shedding new light on Berkeley's revolutionary views. Whether Berkeley himself ever entertained any of the thoughts I have presented in this attempted extension, we shall probably never know, but we can at least re-examine what he did complete and publish, and we can begin to take seriously his warning that "[u]nless we take care to clear the first principles of knowledge, from the embarrass [sic] and delusion of words, we may make infinite reasonings upon them to no purpose; we may draw consequences from consequences, and be never the wiser."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Introduction to the *Principles*, §25.

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