NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE: EXPLORING THE IMMEDIACY OF GOD IN GEORGE BERKELEY'S PHILOSOPHY

By

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(Under the Direction of ELIZABETH BRIENT)

ABSTRACT

As an impassioned theist, modern philosopher George Berkeley constantly contemplates our fundamentally spiritual condition, as created souls who stand in relationship with the Divine Spirit. Berkeley's unique metaphysics, which effectively re-conceptualize – and arguably collapse – traditional boundaries separating ontology from epistemology, seemingly deny even the possibility of formulating an ontological argument for God's existence, while simultaneously making possible novel and refreshing ways of deploying both the cosmological argument and teleological considerations.

Berkeley's novel variation upon the cosmological argument demonstrates the epistemic immediacy of our experience of God, as the necessary condition for sense perception. Berkeley's explication of an essentially "flat" ontology secures the second, metaphysical instance of immediacy, the metaphysical claim of an unmediated relationship between God's ideas and our own sense perceptions. Finally, Berkeley employs the language of teleology to establish the essential

character of God – the metaphorical Divine Artisan – as something both benevolent and intensely personal.

INDEX WORDS: George Berkeley, Modern Philosophy, British Empiricism, Subjective Idealism, Theism, Existence of God, Ontological Argument, Cosmological Argument, Teleological Argument, Immediacy of God, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Experience, Sense Perception

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For Grandma Joyce – Blessed Be.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: THREE ARGUMENTS

Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,

Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;

Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee.

--Sarah Flower Adams

George Berkeley: Bishop of Cloyne and British Empiricist

In the development of modern philosophy during the 17th and 18th Centuries, the unique thought of George Berkeley represents the philosophical crossroads of theism, empiricism, and idealism. As the Anglican Bishop of Cloyne, Ireland, George Berkeley represents an impassioned defender of Christianity against skepticism, atheism, and rival theological positions – especially Spinoza's deterministic pantheism, as well as the theological claims of Deism. Berkeley derives his strongest and most impassioned arguments for God's existence and God's character from explorations of the implications of empiricism and idealism.

Historically, Berkeley stands in the broader tradition of British Empiricism. Writing during the early decades of the 18th Century, Berkeley critiques, and

further develops the empiricism of John Locke, likewise emphasizing – against continental rationalism – the value of sense experience as the dominant or even exclusive source of knowledge. Where John Locke follows the rationalist philosopher Rene Descartes and argues for "common sense" dualism between mind and matter, however, George Berkeley makes the case for one especially strong species of subjective idealism, which denies outright the existence of matter.

Beginning from the metaphysical premise that being and being perceived are one and the same, George Berkeley collapses traditional boundaries between ontology and epistemology. Nevertheless, Berkeley himself perceives these novel metaphysical moves as fundamentally rooted in common sense. He constantly stresses that his denial of matter – as the supposed substrate or cause of sense perception – emphatically does not entail the denial of the sensible world. Indeed, argues Berkeley, by removing matter from our metaphysical conception of the world, we affirm the identification of the world which we perceive with the world which we actually inhabit. Under Berkeley's formulation, our ontologically ideal perception of some sensible object constitutes the actual, existent object. Berkeley argues that appeals for some material substrate or ground for existence – completely heterogeneous with our perceptions – represent not common sense, but rather the pernicious influence of ultimately inconsistent, abstract notions, often advanced under impious motives.

An impassioned theist in the Anglican tradition, Berkeley constantly contemplates our fundamentally spiritual condition, as created souls who stand in relationship with the Divine Spirit. From his reflections upon metaphysics and epistemology, Berkeley develops arguments for God's existence and character which stress the immediacy of our experience of the Divine Nature. Before exploring how George Berkeley specifically develops these arguments, however, we must first consider how advocates for theism generally understand and deploy the various arguments for God's existence.

Understanding Three Arguments for God's Existence

In *Philosophy and Religious Belief*, George Thomas identifies four primary arguments for the existence of God. While none of these arguments constitutes an absolutely unassailable proof for the actual existence of God, taken either singly or else together, these four arguments potentially provide rational evidence which supports God's existence, above and beyond those arguments which religious authority and religious experience might furnish (Thomas 138-141). Setting aside the late "moral argument" – developed by Immanuel Kant, although referenced as early as Thomas Aquinas – the three remaining arguments for God's existence with which Berkeley proves familiar are the ontological argument, the cosmological argument, and the teleological argument.

The ontological argument for God's existence attempts to deduce conclusions about God's epistemic and ontological necessity, from the definition of the

monotheistic God as the greatest possible being which is conceivable (Thomas 141-144). The cosmological argument begins by rejecting the possibility of an infinite regress, and from this assumption concludes that there must be some self-caused cause of everything else, which the proponent of the cosmological argument then presumably identifies with the monotheistic God (Thomas 145-152). The teleological argument – the argument from apparent design – proposes that the structure and beauty found throughout the universe could not result from sheer chance. Rather, this structure and beauty must represent the work of an exceptionally intelligent and benevolent designer, which the proponent of theism identifies with the monotheistic God (Thomas 152-163).

We might conceptualize the relationship among these arguments in different ways. One way of conceptualizing these arguments approaches the ontological, cosmological, and teleological arguments as three distinct pillars supporting one single conclusion, the actual existence of the monotheistic God. This notion of distinct pillars admits at least two possible readings. Under one reading, the proponent of monotheism formulates these three individual arguments independently from one another, but the arguments serve as cumulative evidence for one single conclusion reached by inductive reasoning, such that the weakening – or even the outright loss – of any one pillar may very well doom the overall conclusion which all three pillars support. Alternately, we might conceive of three functionally separate pillars which support three separate – although analogous – conclusions about God's actual existence. Under this paradigm, the

weakening or loss of one pillar – or even the outright loss of two – does not preclude or otherwise affect the capacity of the remaining argument or arguments to support God's actual existence.

Another paradigm for characterizing the relationship which holds among the three arguments for God's existence proposes that these defenses rest upon one another in sequential fashion, such that one argument serves as foundation for the others, while every subsequent argument somehow builds upon the preceding arguments.

The paradigm which holds the arguments are sequential, however – much like the conception of the arguments as distinct pillars upholding one inductive conclusion – leaves the case for God's actual existence with an inherent structural weakness, because the failure of the argument which serves as the foundation, or even the failure of an intermediate argument, may very well preclude even the consideration of subsequent arguments, as Immanuel Kant famously demonstrates with his characterization of the ontological argument (or at least Descartes' formulation thereof) both as foundational for the cosmological and the teleological arguments, and as itself mortally flawed. For this reason, the proponent of monotheism who wishes to propose reasoned arguments for God's actual existence might better serve their cause by treating the arguments as distinct pillars which yield analogous conclusions.

Beyond considering the overall superstructure formed by these three arguments as some sort of strategy for disputation, however, we must likewise

consider the very real possibility that not every metaphysical system permits formulations of all three arguments for God's existence, even among those metaphysical systems which argue – and indeed argue passionately – in favor of the actual existence of the monotheistic God. The frequently counter-intuitive metaphysics of modern philosopher and empiricist George Berkeley represent one such example. Berkeley's unique metaphysics, which re-conceptualize – and arguably collapse – those traditional philosophical boundaries which separate ontology from epistemology, seemingly deny even the possibility of formulating some variation upon the ontological argument, while simultaneously making possible both novel and refreshing ways of deploying both the cosmological argument and teleological considerations.

Berkeley's treatment of our epistemic notions, his novel cosmological argument, and his explication of teleology – These three threads of argumentation collectively establish and reinforce Berkeley's common theme of immediacy in our apprehension of the Divine Spirit. Although Berkeley's epistemic and ontological commitments prevent an immediate perception of God, as we might immediately perceive – say – an apple tree, George Berkeley argues that the *immediately apprehensible* fact that we experience sense perception generally discloses the existence of an omniscient Divine Spirit, as the necessary and *a priori* condition for such sense perception. Conversely, although our observations both of structure and of beauty disclosed by natural phenomena throughout the cosmos remain inescapably *a posteriori* in character, the

subsequent notion of God as a metaphorical Divine Artisan, which conceptualizes God as an intensely *personal* Spirit, likewise enables our reflection upon the *immediately apprehensible* powers of our own souls, which – Berkeley argues – are qualitatively similar with those possessed by God, such that from those reflections, we may formulate coherent and meaningful notions both about God's existence and – crucially for Berkeley – about God's just, benevolent, wise, and especially *personal* character.

CHAPTER 2

THE "MISSING" ONTOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Descartes' *Meditations* and Berkeley: The Mediated Character of Spirits

In the Fifth of his *Meditations*, Descartes explicates his celebrated variation upon the ontological argument for God's existence. Descartes states, "When I think of it more attentively, it appears that the existence can no more be separated from the essence of God, than the idea of a mountain from that of a valley, or the equality of its three angles to two right angles, from the essence of a triangle; so that it is not less impossible to conceive a God, that is, a being supremely perfect, to whom existence is wanting, or who is devoid of a certain perfection, than to conceive a mountain without a valley (Descartes 155)." According to Descartes' argument here, God constitutes the unique entity whom we must credit with existence. Descartes argues that while we cannot separate the idea of the mountain from the corresponding idea of the valley, we might well deny that such geographic features actually exist. God's existence, upon the other hand, constitutes one among several divine perfections, and as such proves inseparable from any coherent account of the Divine Nature.

Descartes believes this epistemic necessity follows from the ontological necessity of God's actual existence: "Because I cannot conceive God unless as

existing, it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and therefore that he really exists. Not that this is brought about by my thought, or that it imposes any necessity on things, but on the contrary, the necessity which lies in the thing itself, that is, the necessity of the existence of God, determines me to think in this way (Descartes 156)." For Descartes, the epistemic necessity involved, when we reflect upon coherent conceptions of the Divine Nature, both discloses and follows from the ontological necessity of God's actual existence.

From these arguments, Descartes draws the happy conclusion which enables an overcoming of the skepticism brought about by Descartes' signature program of radical doubt. Descartes concludes, "After I have discovered that God exists, seeing that I also at the same time observed that all things depend on him, and that he is no deceiver, and thence inferred that all which I clearly and distinctly perceive is of necessity true: Although I no longer attend to the grounds of a judgment, no opposite reason can be alleged sufficient to lead me to doubt of its truth, provided only I remember that I once possessed a clear and distinct comprehension of it (Descartes 158)." From this ontological argument, Descartes hopes to eventually recover the possibility of recognizing and affirming clear and distinct truths.

George Berkeley does argue against Descartes' argument for God's existence, itself a variation of Anselm's second ontological argument, but Berkeley seems to take issue less with the actual substance of the argument, and more with the skepticism presumably motivating Descartes' philosophical moves: "What a jest

for a philosopher to question the existence of sensible things, till he hath it proved to him from the veracity of God, or to pretend our knowledge in this point falls short of intuition or demonstration." Interestingly, here Berkeley does not reference Descartes by name, although almost certainly Berkeley intends the following jab as thinly veiled retort against Descartes' methodical doubt, culminating in the classic philosophical assertion *cogito ergo sum*: "I might as well doubt of my own being, as of the being of those things I actually see and feel (*Dialogues* 274)." Berkeley plainly regards Descartes' methodical doubt as symptomatic of an unhealthy and unhelpful skepticism, although here Berkeley does not challenge the actual substance of the ontological argument. Whether Berkeley's empiricist-oriented metaphysics actually preclude even the bare possibility of advancing an ontological argument proves somewhat less clear.

Much of the difficulty turns upon Berkeley's distinction between our perception of ideas and our inference-based apprehension of spirits. For Berkeley, passive ideas and active spirits are wholly distinct from one another: "All the unthinking objects of the mind [ideas] agree in that they are entirely passive, and their existence consists only in being perceived, whereas a soul or spirit is an active being, whose existence consists, not in being perceived, but in perceiving ideas and thinking (*Principles* 208)." Because of this crucial distinction, the epistemic operations by which we perceive ideas differ in kind from those by which we apprehend spirits. Berkeley states that we cannot perceive or otherwise generate *ideas* of spirits or souls. Berkeley states, "Hence there can be

no *idea* formed of a soul or spirit, for all ideas whatever, being passive and inert… they cannot represent unto us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts (*Principles* 161)." Nevertheless, according to Berkeley, we do remain capable of formulating notions about other souls: "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 (*Principles* 209)."

For Berkeley, we formulate these notions about other agents and spirits by way of inference. In the *Principles* Berkeley states that we perceive other spirits by reflecting upon, and extrapolating from, the effects which those spirits produce. Berkeley observes, "Such is the nature of *spirit*, or that which acts, that it cannot be of itself perceived, but only by the effects which it produceth (*Principles* 161)." Berkeley once again makes this assertion in the *Principles* when he states, "From what hath been said, it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us (*Principles* 210)." Here Berkeley observes that, by formulating inferences about such operations and ideas, we thereby formulate notions about other agents like ourselves. Berkeley explains, "I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas, that inform me there are particular agents, like myself, which accompany them and occur in their production (*Principles* 210)." Notably, Berkeley makes explicit the essentially *mediated* character of our knowledge about other spirits, which he contrasts with the essentially immediate character of our perception of ideas.

God constitutes a spirit for Berkeley, and therefore – properly speaking – we cannot actually formulate an idea of God, although we may possess notions about God. By investigating what notions about spirits in general – and God in particular – disclose for our understanding, we might better understand whether an ontological argument for God's existence proves even barely possible for George Berkeley, given Berkeley's other epistemic and ontological commitments.

According to Berkeley, our knowledge of other spirits consists of those notions which we formulate based upon tokens or signs which those spirits generate. Furthermore, the mediated character of our knowledge of other spirits qualitatively differs from that associated with the immediate knowledge of our own ideas. However, Berkeley *does* allow for certain analogous elements between mediated notions and immediate ideas. Here Berkeley observes, "As we conceive the ideas that are in the minds of other spirits by means of our own, which we suppose to be resemblances of them, so we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is the image or idea of them (*Principles* 208)." In *Three Dialogues*, George Berkeley makes this very point explicit with regards to our notions about God, "I do not therefore say my soul is an idea, or like an idea. However, taking the word *idea* in a large sense, my soul may be said to furnish me with an idea, that is, an image, or likeness of God, although indeed extremely inadequate (*Dialogues* 275)."

George Berkeley's collapse of ontology into epistemology nevertheless raises deeper questions about whether – upon Berkeley's terms – we can meaningfully

conceptualize the real notion of an ultimately non-existent God. With regard to those ideas which we immediately perceive, Berkeley remains emphatic that although we can imagine things, we cannot imagine unperceived things. If we imagine an apple tree, for example, then we ourselves perceive the apple tree, and because Berkeley equates being with being perceived, then that apple tree must – in some sense – exist. Berkeley argues, "But, say you, surely there is nothing easier than for me to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer, you may so. There is no difficulty in it." Berkeley, however, then reveals the hidden observer who perceives those objects, which an exercise of imagination *cannot* erase, "What is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and the same time omitting to frame the idea of any one that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? (*Principles* 159)." Berkeley makes the same point in *Three Dialogues*, where the character of Hylas – upon close reflection – observes, "As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place, where no one was present to see it, methought that was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, not considering that I myself conceived it all the while (*Dialogues* 245)."

Because being and being perceived prove one and the same for Berkeley, we must regard those things which we perceive by way of our imagination as possessing actual existence. Berkeley does allow for dreams, hallucinations, and other "chimeras" of perception, but those distinctions depend upon elements

such as persistence and coherence. Berkeley observes, "The ideas of sense are more strong, lively, and distinct than those of the imagination. They have likewise a steadiness, order, and coherence (*Principles* 162)." Those ideas which exist in the imagination nevertheless exist, because we perceive them, and perceive them immediately.

The existence of an apple tree, however, proves trivially true of every apple tree which we might perceive. The apple tree in the orchard which we perceive with our eyes – as something which we perceive – must exist. For precisely the same reason, the apple tree about which we imagine must exist. Berkeley distinguishes between the persistent, coherent ideas disclosed by sense perception, and the comparatively unsteady ideas disclosed by our imagination, but both sets of ideas – because they are the objects of perception – must exist.

According to Berkeley, when we reflect upon the motions of – and those relations among – immediately perceived ideas, we formulate notions of other spirits like ourselves. Like the apple tree about which we imagine, the sheer existence of those mediated but nevertheless perceived notions seems unimpeachable, but likewise trivial. When we reflect upon our notion about some particular spirit, we cannot doubt the existence of the notion upon which we reflect. However, upon Berkeley's own terms, we should remain able to question whether that notion might prove confused, or even false. Indeed, Berkeley himself repeatedly denies the existence of material substance, without concurrently denying that people possess notions about material substance.

Seemingly every notion we have about God must trivially exist, as must every notion we harbor about any spirit whatsoever. Unlike our immediately perceived ideas, however, our inescapably mediated notion about some spirit *does not* guarantee the actual existence of the spirit in question, because notions may prove confused or false. Notions – much like ideas – prove utterly passive for Berkeley. Thus, we might well possess notions about God, but we emphatically *cannot equate* such notions with an active, thinking God.

Although elsewhere Berkeley maintains that our notions remain utterly passive in character, in one intriguing instance he appears more ambivalent upon this point. In *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley describes his formulation of his notions about God thusly: "For all the notion I have of God is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections. I have therefore, though not an inactive idea, yet in myself some sort of an active, thinking image of the Deity (*Dialogues* 275)." Here he seems to describe the notion itself both as active and as thinking, counter to numerous instances elsewhere where he indicates that notions are essentially passive. The distinguishing feature of Berkeley's notion of God, however, and the element which accounts for the uniquely active character of this notion, turns upon the fact that he formulates this notion by way of reflection upon his own active, thinking soul – something to which Berkeley enjoys immediate access. This process of formulating notions about God might impact what sort of notions we can formulate about spirits generally and about God particularly. We cannot, for

example, formulate the clear notion of some spirit which could self-consistently doubt or even deny its own existence. Knowledge of other souls and other agents, however, remains essentially *mediated*. Berkeley continues, "My own mind and my own ideas I have an immediate knowledge of, and by the help of these, I do *mediately* apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas (*Dialogues* 275, emphasis mine)." Because our knowledge of other spirits like ourselves remains mediated, the fundamental possibility of confused or false inferences looms large.

For Berkeley, we are capable of formulating *notions about* God within the mind, and we ground these notions by way of self-reflection upon our own active, thinking faculties. However, our knowledge of God consists of notions which we derive through inferential reasoning, and remains a mediated knowledge. As mediated knowledge, such notions themselves must exist, but may in principle prove confused or even false. Thus, we might well possess *notions* about God which themselves must exist, but the mere existence of those *notions* does not guarantee the existence of an otherwise invisible God.

In short, Berkeley – who desperately wishes to demonstrate the existence of an omnipotent and benevolent Deity – does not advance an ontological argument for such purpose. Berkeley's novel approach to empiricism simply precludes an immediate knowledge of spirits which would prove adequate for some natural formulation of the ontological argument for God's existence. We cannot, however, say the same either for the cosmological argument or for the

teleological argument. Indeed, we find robust formulations of both defenses, frequently intertwined with one another, throughout both the *Principles* and the *Dialogues*.

CHAPTER 3

BERKELEY'S COSMOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

Weaving Together Two Arguments: Cosmology and Teleology

Throughout both *Principles of Human Understanding* and *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley alternates rapidly and almost imperceptibly between cosmological arguments and teleological arguments, demanding an attentive reading to distinguish between two otherwise distinct threads of reasoning. Berkeley's skillful weaving together of these arguments for God's existence (and likewise God's character) becomes apparent in the second chapter of *Three Dialogues*, where the character of Philonous – Berkeley's mouthpiece – observes, "Though, it must be confessed, these creatures of the fancy [imagined ideas] are not altogether so distinct, so strong, vivid, and permanent, as those perceived by my senses – which latter are called *real things*. From all which I conclude, *there is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive*." Berkeley then has Philonous continue, "And from the variety, order, and manner of these, I conclude the author of them to be *wise, powerful, and good, beyond comprehension* (*Dialogues* 259)." Although the first statement reflects Berkeley's novel approach towards the cosmological argument, the second statement endeavors to characterize the ultimate Origin of our sense impressions as wise,

powerful, and good, based upon the character of the content of those sense impressions. The order and goodness apparent throughout the universe we experience disclose the wisdom and benevolence of the Creator God who creates and sustains that universe.

Berkeley touches upon the order, goodness, and beauty on display throughout the cosmos several times throughout both *Principles* and *Three Dialogues*. In *Three Dialogues*, however, Berkeley asserts the cosmological argument as the philosophic position which *uniquely* furnishes "a direct and immediate demonstration, from a most evident principle," for God's existence. Berkeley does compliment those who follow out the *a posteriori* reasoning which characterizes the teleological argument, when he observes, "Divines and philosophers had proved beyond all controversy, from the beauty and usefulness of the several parts of the creation, that it was the workmanship of God (*Dialogues* 257)." Nevertheless, Berkeley himself regards the cosmological argument as the definitive argument for demonstrating God's existence.

Aquinas' Third Way and Berkeley: God as Ontological Ground

In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas presents five distinct arguments for God's existence. The first three of Aquinas' arguments are all variations upon the cosmological argument, which attempts to establish God as the ultimate Source of the observed world. Following Aristotle's reasoning about the metaphysical necessity of some "Prime Mover" – which proves both eternal and unmoved –

Thomas Aquinas predicates his arguments on the presumed impossibility of an infinite regress. Aquinas identifies God as "some first cause of change not itself changed by anything," and as "some first cause" which begins every other causal chain. Both these characterizations of God – potentially, although perhaps unintentionally – enable and even encourage readings which situate God within temporal existence, as the beginning of some causal chain, which then raises further problems identifying God as transcendent over and against the temporal order (*Sacred Texts*).

Alternate readings of Aristotle's Prime Mover – rendered by Thomas Aquinas within the *Summa Theologica* as God – remain possible. Rather than reading Aquinas' God as the beginning of some temporal chain, we might instead read Aquinas as addressing an ultimate Source of being. Under this reading, Aquinas means to characterize God as an ontological ground, rather than as some merely temporal beginning. Aquinas' Third Argument renders possible precisely this reading: "One is forced therefore to suppose something which must be, and owes this to no other thing than itself; indeed [that thing] itself is the cause that other things must be (*Sacred Texts*)." Thomas Aquinas' argument makes explicit the characterization of God as ontological ground and the ultimate cause of being for everything else, and not merely as the self-caused efficient cause, beginning some chain of temporally situated, efficient causes.

George Berkeley famously equates being with the condition of being perceived, and furthermore denies the very existence of any material substrate

which might cause or occasion our ideas and perceptions. Indeed, one of Berkeley's key arguments against the ontological possibility of some material substrate echoes Aquinas' rejection of infinite regress: "Consequently every corporeal substance being the *substratum* of extension, must have in itself another extension by which it is qualified to be a *substratum*; and so on to infinity. And I ask whether this be not absurd in itself (*Dialogues* 243)." Unlike Aquinas, however, Berkeley does not allow for some Divine terminus which begins the causal chain, and instead argues that the infinite regress implied by the concept of matter as substrate demonstrates the impossibility of matter.

Consequently – if unfairly – Berkeley finds himself compelled to account for the apparent persistence of the world, and especially why sensible objects which we perceive do not effectively "wink out of existence" when we cease to observe them. George Berkeley does not abandon the apparent persistence of the sensible world, and instead employs his affirmation of that persistence as an occasion to defend God's actual existence, formulating his surprising variation of the cosmological argument which nevertheless meshes well with his radical idealism. Berkeley maintains that sensible objects persist even when unobserved by contingent or human minds, not because they possess some "absolute existence" outside of being perceived, but rather because another mind always perceives otherwise unattended objects: "Seeing they [sensible objects which Berkeley does not himself observe] depend not on my thought, and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me, *there must be some other mind*

wherein they exist (*Dialogues* 256)." Berkeley then makes explicit the identification of this mind with God: "As sure therefore as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite, omnipresent Spirit who contains and supports it (*Dialogues* 256)."

Berkeley characterizes the monotheistic tradition as beginning from some argument or belief for God's existence, and then deriving God's omniscience from that argument or belief. Because Berkeley's metaphysics effectively collapse those traditional distinctions between ontology and epistemology, Berkeley then leverages our immediate and obvious apprehension of the sensible world into an argument for the necessity of an omniscient Spirit, from which he may then "work backwards" and derive God's implicit existence.

Two points of especial interest emerge. First, although George Berkeley elsewhere draws upon basically teleological considerations – reminiscent of Aquinas' Fifth Argument – along with variations of the aesthetic theodicy found both in Augustine and in Leibniz, Berkeley's cosmological argument for the necessity of an omniscient Spirit emphatically *does not* depend upon the specific content of our sense impressions. Berkeley renders clear the specifically cosmological character of his argument within Three Dialogues: "But that setting aside all help of astronomy and natural philosophy, all contemplation of the natural contrivance, order, and adjustment of things, an infinite mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare existence of the sensible world, is an advantage peculiar for them only who have made this easy reflection (*Dialogues*

257)." Berkeley believes that we may infer the actual existence – and perhaps more crucially, the character – of God from the ordered and benevolent character of the sensible world, but Berkeley's argument here turns – not upon those specifics of *what* we perceive – but rather upon the bare and presumably self-evident fact that we perceive sensible things at all. As that which makes possible our epistemic experience of the sensible world, God constitutes the ontological ground of existence.

Second, Berkeley's cosmological argument more closely parallels Aquinas' third argument for God's existence (God as Ontological Ground), rather than Aquinas' first and second arguments (God as Unchanged Changer and God as Uncaused Cause), insofar as Berkeley's version of the cosmological argument plainly does not envision temporally situated changes or causes, and plainly does not invite readings oriented with respect towards the temporal order. Instead Berkeley emphasizes the perpetual and sustaining influence of the Divine Spirit. Berkeley observes, "Though it must be confessed, these creatures of my fancy are not altogether so distinct – so strong, vivid, and permanent – as those perceived by my senses, which latter are called *real things*. From which I conclude, *there is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions which I perceive* (*Dialogues* 259)." For Berkeley, the Divine Spirit's influence proves constant and immediate.

The Immediacy of God: Berkeley's Essentially "Flat" Ontology

Keeping with his fundamentally Empiricist orientation, Berkeley cannot and does not deny the complex phenomena which simple observation and natural science reveal. Moreover, George Berkeley absolutely must acknowledge those complex phenomena and the overall coherence of the natural world, if he hopes to advance any sort of effective variation upon the teleological argument – the argument from apparent design. Nevertheless, Berkeley's metaphysics likewise demands the identification of complex natural phenomena – indeed, any sensible phenomena – with ideas which remain wholly passive, and which cannot influence one another. He acknowledges the tension between these two metaphysical commitments within the Principles: "There are… several combinations of [ideas] made in a very regular and artificial manner, which seem like so many instruments in the hand of nature that, being hid as it were behind the scenes, have a secret operation in producing those appearances which are seen on the theater of the world… (*Principles* 176-177)." The growth of plants and the movement of animals, observed with the help of microscopes and other instruments, seemingly displays hidden causal mechanisms, much like the mechanical pocket watch seemingly reveals hidden causal mechanisms when we remove the backing (*Principles* 174-175). When we take up Berkeley's approach towards teleology, we will revisit Berkeley's treatment of natural phenomena as complex.)

Monotheists as diverse as Thomas Aquinas and the Deists might regard as perfectly acceptable the discovery of such hidden operations across the natural world, as long as those hidden mechanisms form a causal chain whose ontological – and incidentally temporal – beginning we identify with some Divine First Cause. The seemingly complex structure which the contents of sense perception disclose – identified and developed through basic observation and through scientific inquiry – underwrites the teleological argument.

Berkeley, however, does not countenance even the possibility of these complex causal chains, with one or more intermediate causal agents standing between God's ideas and our sense impressions. Berkeley does acknowledge the pervasive regularities of nature and the associations which consistently obtain among sense perceptions. Furthermore, Berkeley grants the possibility of natural laws which describe such regular associations of ideas, but he characterizes such associations as connections between signs and what those signs signify, and emphatically not as representing some causal relationship. Berkeley carefully establishes the absolutely passive character of our ideas. Berkeley states, "All our ideas, sensations, notions, or the things which we perceive, by whatsoever names they may be distinguished, are visibly inactive. There is nothing of power or agency included in them. So one idea or object of thought cannot produce or make any alteration in another (*Principles* 160)."

From this observation, Berkeley draws the conclusion that ideas cannot function as causal agents for one another. Berkeley observes, "The connection of

ideas does not imply the relation of *cause and effect*, but only of a mark or *sign* with the thing *signified* (*Principles* 177)." Berkeley makes clear that even without matter, we must be careful to distinguish between active spirits and passive perceptions, the latter of which cannot actually cause anything. Berkeley continues, "The fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it. In like manner the noise that I hear is not the effect of this or that motion or collision of the ambient bodies, but the sign thereof (*Principles* 177)."

George Berkeley further removes the possibility of intermediate causal agents when he dismisses as incoherent the concept of an active impulse within Nature. Berkeley observes, "But you will say, Hath Nature no share in the production of natural things, and must they all be ascribed to the immediate and sole operation of God? I answer, if by 'Nature' is meant only the visible *series* of effects or sensations imprinted on our minds, according to certain fixed and general laws, then it is plain that Nature, taken in this sense, cannot produce anything at all (*Principles 212*)."

Hence, although material existence – as something separate and distinct from the condition of being perceived – constitutes perhaps the best known of those possible causal agents which Berkeley removes from our metaphysical consideration, Berkeley's tenacious pursuit of epistemic immediacy in our apprehension of God's hand motivates Berkeley to reject *every* possible intermediate causal agent which could intervene between our sense perceptions

and the ultimate Origin and Author of those perceptions. Berkeley rejects material existence as one possible causal agent, because the concept of matter itself proves incoherent. Berkeley likewise rejects our perceptions and ideas as other possible intermediate causal agents, because perceptions and ideas prove wholly passive. Our passive perceptions and ideas, Berkeley observes, emphatically *cannot* cause or influence other ideas. Moreover, Berkeley argues, the concept of an active impulse within Nature, which could intervene between God's ideas and our own sense perceptions, ultimately proves incoherent.

Berkeley's metaphysics, and especially his characterization of ideas as wholly passive, leave absolutely no room for intermediate links in the causal chain; God might directly impress upon the contingent being some sensible impression, but God *does not* begin a causal chain of ideas, wherein one idea causes another idea, which causes another, and so forth, until the chain terminates with some particular sensible impression. George Berkeley's metaphysics allow neither matter – which Berkeley denies outright – nor ideas – which are wholly passive – to make up the intermediate causal links of the sort envisioned by Aquinas and others. Berkeley's metaphysics allow neither "chained" changes nor "chained" causes, and the ontological connection between some necessary Spirit and the contingent creature emphatically *does not* leave room for intermediate causal agents of any sort.

The question then emerges: *Why* does Berkeley eschew any sort of intermediate causal or ontological links? We might read Berkeley as making

certain metaphysical commitments – the characterization of ideas as things which are wholly passive, for example – and then following those arguments towards their logical conclusions, as students of philosophy often read Berkeley's Empiricist successor, David Hume. We might also read Berkeley with one eye towards which metaphysical commitments become primary for Berkeley, understanding that not every metaphysical position occupies equal importance in Berkeley's thought.

The pernicious tendency here might be to read Berkeley's radical commitment to idealism as his primary metaphysical commitment. By sheer volume, this argument occupies much of the *Principles*, and almost the entirety of *Three Dialogues*. George Berkeley's strident anti-materialism constitutes the most obviously unique among his metaphysical commitments, and Berkeley's opposition towards causal associations – partially grounded in this immaterialism – becomes the virtual centerpiece for David Hume's subsequent attacks upon traditional understandings of causality.

Nevertheless, there remains good evidence for believing that Berkeley's version of idealism – which eschews all intermediate causal and ontological elements – actually emerges from another, deeper metaphysical commitment – Throughout Berkeley's philosophical writings, Berkeley defends the *immediacy* of the relationship between God and contingent beings. When Berkeley defends his characterization of natural science as the uncovering of signs rather than causes,

he does so within the context of an *immediate* relationship between God and contingent beings.

Berkeley argues that the natural philosopher's goal should not be "the pretending to explain things by corporeal causes, which doctrine seems to have estranged the minds of men from that active principle, that supreme and wise Spirit 'in whom we live, move, and have our being (*Principles* 177-178).'" The doctrine of material substance represents an intellectual obstacle preventing the immediate apprehension of the Divine Presence, an intellectual obstacle maintained by widespread prejudice and reinforced by impious philosophies: "It is… much to be lamented, that the mind of man retains so great a fondness, against all the evidence of reason, for a stupid, thoughtless *somewhat*, by the interposition whereof it would as it were screen itself from the providence of God, and remove it farther off from the affairs of the world (*Principles* 181)."

Berkeley's philosophic focus here remains much less upon immaterialism for the sake of immaterialism, and much more upon the conceptual – and even theological – issue of whether the doctrine of material substance ultimately alienates contingent beings like ourselves from God.

Both individually and collectively, these philosophic positions reinforce Berkeley's claim about the epistemic immediacy of our experience of God's influence through our sense impressions generally. The crucial epistemic immediacy of God as the necessary condition for sense perception, which Berkeley captures through the metaphysically "flat" cosmological argument,

likewise removes those intermediate causal agents or influences, onto which we might offload responsibility for natural evil and suffering throughout the universe. Prior theological commitments push Berkeley to affirm God's character both as absolutely powerful and as absolutely benevolent. The epistemic immediacy of our experience of God's influence, which the cosmological argument affirms, highlights the urgency for Berkeley of developing some robust and powerful theodicy. Having established the epistemic immediacy of our experience of God as the Spirit who creates and sustains our perceptions of the cosmos, that is, as the necessary condition for sense perception of every sort, Berkeley must subsequently defend the actual contents of sense perception as phenomena befitting the *unmediated* influence of an absolutely powerful, absolutely benevolent Creator God.

CHAPTER 4

BERKELEY'S TELEOLOCAL ARGUMENT

Mirror Images: Distinguishing Teleology and Theodicy

By comparison, Berkeley's explication of the teleological argument seems basically conventional, although detailed analysis reveals that Berkeley deploys the teleological argument less for establishing God's bare existence, and more for qualifying God's essential character. Moreover, the character of God which Berkeley explicates likewise confirms the immediacy of our experience of God, although where Berkeley's novel variation upon the cosmological argument demonstrates an epistemic immediacy, Berkeley's account of the teleological argument proves more descriptive in character, suggesting a wise and loving Creator – A Creator God with whom created spirits may readily and intuitively empathize. Furthermore, Berkeley employs with great effect the metaphor of God as the Divine Artisan, establishing an account of God as essentially personal, with personal understanding and personal will which prove comprehensible by created spirits. Berkeley's development of the teleological argument aims much less for demonstrating God's existence, and much more for establishing the psychological immediacy of our experience of God.

Before proceeding further, we must carefully observe that the teleological argument and the claims associated with theodicy sometimes manifest as "mirror images" of each other, insofar as the teleological argument begins from the assumption that the cosmos discloses order, goodness, and beauty, which support the claim of an absolutely powerful, absolutely benevolent Creator God, whereas theodicy begins from the assumption of an absolutely powerful and absolutely benevolent Creator God, and then endeavors to explain apparent shortcomings – of order, of goodness, and of beauty – on display throughout the universe.

We should observe that teleological argumentation may be distinguished from the claims of theodicy, by examining whether an argument incorporates some sort of variation upon Ockham's Razor. When the advocate for theism begins an argument from the assumption that the universe discloses structure and beauty – following the teleological argument – then an invocation of Ockham's Razor follows naturally, as the theist proposes the influence of the Divine Spirit as the simplest viable explanation for the structure and beauty on display. Conversely, when the theist confronts the skeptical claim, that the universe admits of natural evils which are inconsistent with the theist's claims about God's power or God's wisdom, then Ockham's Razor becomes the atheist's boon, because the simple denial of God's existence, God's absolute power, or God's absolute benevolence, furnish comparatively simple and apparently viable solutions for the paradox which theodicy addresses.

In short, the claims of teleology reflect the theist on the offensive, operating from the presumably secure position that the universe discloses both structure and beauty, whereas the claims of theodicy represent the defensive posture, where the theist must address the implications of skeptical doubts about the presumption of structure and beauty throughout the cosmos.

The Character of Berkeley's Cosmos: Structure and Beauty

For Berkeley, teleological considerations crucially supplement the cosmological argument, by furnishing valuable insights regarding the character of the Creator God whose existence Berkeley establishes through his variation upon the cosmological argument. Indeed, Berkeley reaches some of his most poetic observations when he meditates upon the order and goodness of the cosmos which we experience.

In *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley has the character of Philonous declare, "Look. Are not the fields covered with a delightful verdure? Is there not something in the woods and groves, in the rivers and clear springs, that soothes, that delights, that transports the soul?" Through Philonous' rhapsody, Berkeley extends this seemingly instinctual sentiment of wonder to include those environs which human beings typically regard as desolate and forbidding. Berkeley continues, "At the prospect of the wide and deep ocean, or of some huge mountain whose top is lost in the clouds, or of an old gloomy forest, are not our minds filled with a pleasing horror? Even in rocks and deserts, is there not an agreeable wildness

(*Dialogues* 254)?" Berkeley even finds order, goodness, and beauty within those phenomena which do not immediately fascinate human sensibilities, especially when Berkeley reflects upon the integral role which such phenomena play within the broader context of an organism or even of an ecosystem. Berkeley has Philonous with wonder exclaim, "What variety and use in the meanest production of nature. What delicacy, what beauty, and what contrivance in animal and vegetable bodies. How exquisitely are all things suited, as well, to their particular ends, as to constitute opposite parts of the whole. And while they mutually aid and support, do they not also set off and illustrate each other (*Dialogues* 255)?" This emphasis on the grandeur of complex, mutually supporting systems surfaces through the whole of Berkeley's account of the Divine Nature, even – and sometimes especially – when he endeavors to square the apparent complexity of the natural world with his account of natural philosophy as the identification of signs furnished by God for our edification.

Berkeley then shifts his attention beyond the terrestrial firmament, contemplating the planets and the stars above. He begins by reflecting upon the orderly revolutions of the planets across the heavens and through space. Berkeley marvels, "Raise now your thoughts from this ball of earth, towards all those glorious luminaries that adorn the high arch of heaven. The motion and situation of the planets – Are they not admirable for use and order?" Berkeley makes especial note of the essential structure which marks the movement of the planets: "So fixed, so immutable are the laws by which the unseen Author of

nature actuates the universe (*Dialogues* 255)." Drawing together these observations, Berkeley marvels, "Is not the whole system immense, beautiful, glorious beyond expression and beyond thought (*Dialogues* 255)?." Here Berkeley celebrates an immense and awesome cosmos.

Berkeley makes this poetic digression from *Three Dialogues* with two purposes in mind. First, Berkeley wishes to impress upon his audience an appreciation for the intricate structure and breathtaking beauty on display throughout the universe, with the ultimate objective of establishing the benevolent and wise character of the Creator God who creates and sustains the universe. Strictly speaking, Berkeley's observations *do not* comprise an argument for God's *bare existence*. When Berkeley reflects upon the order, goodness, and beauty on display throughout the universe, both in *Principles of Human Knowledge* and in *Three Dialogues*, those meditations conspicuously lack any recognizable variation upon Ockham's Razor. That is, Berkeley never argues that God's bare existence provides the simplest viable explanation for the order, goodness, and beauty on display throughout the universe. (By contrast, Berkeley makes thorough use of something like Ockham's Razor when defending his unique variation upon the cosmological argument for God's existence.) Thus, we might best understand Berkeley's effusive praise for the structure and beauty of the universe, not as an argument for God's bare existence upon teleological grounds, but rather as the effort to qualify George Berkeley's God – ostensibly demonstrated upon purely cosmological grounds – as essentially benevolent and wise.

The second purpose which Berkeley hopes to accomplish through this meditation from *Three Dialogues* turns upon Berkeley's capacity to make assertions about God's character based upon the observed character of the universe. In particular, Berkeley desperately wants to demonstrate that the natural sentiment of wonder – an instinctive appreciation for the essential structure and beauty disclosed by the cosmos – remains possible under the assumption of metaphysical idealism which underwrites Berkeley's cosmological argument for God's existence. That is, Berkeley explicitly recognizes that he must forcefully refute the pernicious suggestion that an ideal world proves somehow "unreal" and thus undeserving of the praise which Berkeley extends. Berkeley not only refutes this argument, but actually turns the accusation upon its head, countering that radical idealism uniquely enables an authentic appreciation for the natural world.

By removing the screening influence of matter – together with every other possible intermediate influence – from the causal chain between God's ideas and our own sense perceptions, we thereby affirm an immediately present cosmos, and thus the cosmos which may disclose structure and beauty. Against those who would argue that idealism somehow impeaches the authentic character of our perceptions, Berkeley throws down the gauntlet: "Assert the evidence of sense as high as you please. We are willing to do the same. That what I see, hear, and feel doth exist, that is to say, is perceived by me, I no more doubt than I do of

my own being (*Principles* 166)." Here Berkeley acknowledges that our perceptions disclose their own existence as something authentic.

Berkeley makes explicit this fortunate outcome of his metaphysical idealism in *Three Dialogues*, where following his account of the structure and beauty found throughout both the terrestrial and the celestial realms, he observes, "What treatment then do those philosophers deserve, who would deprive these noble and delightful scenes of all reality? How should those principles be entertained which lead us to think all the visible beauty of the creation a false imaginary glare (*Dialogues* 255)?" Beyond inoculating himself against charges of skepticism, here Berkeley contends that idealism uniquely affirms the authenticity of our perceptions – which presumably disclose the structure and beauty of the cosmos – as fundamentally genuine and real.

The Claims of Theodicy: Defending the Character of the Cosmos

To affirm the benevolence of God, as something disclosed by the actual contents of sense perception, Berkeley advances four predominant arguments, calculated to defend from skeptical challenges the order, goodness, and beauty of the cosmos, and by extension, the benevolence and the wisdom of the Divine Being who creates and perpetually sustains the cosmos. Of these four broad arguments, fully three correspond less with the comparatively aggressive claims of teleology, and more with the defensive posture associated with theodicy. Nevertheless, close examination of these three reveal threads of reasoning which

Berkeley later develops into something much more like the teleological argument for God's existence. As we have previously observed, however, Berkeley's teleological claims are calculated to establish God's character as benevolent and as immediately apprehensible in psychological terms, more than the bare fact of God's existence, the latter of which Berkeley secures through the cosmological argument.

The first argument which Berkeley deploys to defend the claim that the cosmos discloses both structure and beauty, and by extension discloses the benevolence and wisdom of the Divine Spirit, echoes the aesthetic argument proposed by Leibniz in defense of his own theodicy. In short, Berkeley proposes that we should regard apparent shortcomings in natural phenomena as variations which enhance the beauty of the whole. Berkeley observes, "We should further consider that the very blemishes and defects of nature are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable sort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of the creation, as shades in a picture serve to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts (*Principles* 214)."

Berkeley alludes to the aesthetic beauty which natural variation makes possible, in *Three Dialogues* when – through the character of Philonous – he marvels about the stark beauty of certain desolate and forbidding landscapes (*Dialogues* 254). Berkeley likewise expresses wonder regarding the impressive complexity exhibited by even the most humble among natural phenomena, especially when he observes the complex interactions which frequently obtain

between the "meanest production of nature" and the broader ecosystem (*Dialogues* 255). Both forbidding terrain and "unimpressive" natural phenomena contribute towards the aesthetic beauty disclosed by the whole cosmos.

The second argument which Berkeley proposes, against skeptical doubts that the universe really does disclose structure and beauty befitting an absolutely powerful and absolutely benevolent Creator God, follows much the same thread of reasoning as the previous, aesthetic argument, although instead of some greater beauty which obtains when we regard the broader ecosystem or the whole cosmos, this argument emphasizes the greater physical or natural goodness which – accordingly to Berkeley – God secures through things which cause physical suffering. Once again following much the same reasoning as Leibniz, Berkeley argues that things which appear as natural evils, or as causes of suffering, when regarded locally actually contribute towards some greater natural goodness. Here Berkeley observes, "As for the mixture of pain or uneasiness which is in the world, pursuant to the general laws of nature, and the actions of finite, imperfect spirits, this, in the state we are in at present, is indispensably necessary to our well-being. But our prospects are too narrow (*Principles* 214)." Berkeley argument once again crucially depends upon the existence of some greater design – apprehensible upon comparatively broad scales – which discloses some natural goodness, goodness which overshadows those natural evils which appear upon local scales.

These first two arguments represent Berkeley's treatment of theodicy, much more than the framework for some sort of teleological argument for God's existence. Berkeley demonstrates God's bare existence – he believes – upon cosmological grounds (*Dialogues* 256-257). Here, however, Berkeley's chief concern turns upon establishing the character of the universe which we inhabit as one which discloses both structure and beauty. Although Berkeley obviously believes that the universe *does* exhibit structure and beauty, Berkeley does not presume such, for purposes of argumentation.

Conversely, Berkeley does not develop *sustained* argumentation for either position. Although he does not reference Voltaire by name, Berkeley remains aware that someone like Voltaire might easily skewer claims that local suffering may be justified by specious appeals towards some higher order of aesthetic beauty or moral goodness. Here Berkeley caustically cautions, "Little and unreflecting souls may indeed burlesque the works of Providence, the beauty and order whereof they have not capacity, or will not be at the pains, to comprehend (*Principles* 214-215)." Although this response might seem dismissive, we might better understand Berkeley as eschewing sustained defense of those arguments which appeal towards an often incomprehensibly broad macrocosm. Although he makes the token argument here, Berkeley's fourth argument – which does not depend upon an appeal to the macrocosm – constitutes Berkeley's dominant retort against this strain of skepticism.

The third argument by which Berkeley means to secure the structure and beauty of the cosmos turns upon the sheer immensity of the cosmic expanse. We have already examined one especially poetic speech by the character of Philonous in *Three Dialogues*, where Berkeley expresses what he regards as the intuitive sense of wonder which the immense yet structured movements of the various celestial bodies inspire within the human consciousness. Although Berkeley continually returns to the theme of cosmic order, clearly he believes the sheer scale upon which this order plays out may inspire wonder and even reverence. Berkeley observes, "But neither sense nor imagination are big enough to comprehend the boundless extent, with all its glittering furniture. Though the laboring mind exert and strain each power to its utmost reach, there still stands out ungrasped a surplusage immeasurable (*Dialogues* 255)."

Berkeley's description of the vast cosmic expanse as "surplusage" here, calculated to inspire positive wonder within his audience, finds expression elsewhere in *Principles of Human Knowledge*, although there, Berkeley means to inoculate himself against skeptical challenges which suggest that the contents of the universe reveal at best an Author who creates in capricious or wasteful ways. Berkeley observes, "We would likewise do well to examine whether our taxing the waste of seeds and embryos, and accidental destruction of plants and animals, before they come to full maturity, as imprudence in the Author of nature, be not the effect of prejudice contracted by our familiarity with impotent and saving mortals (*Principles* 214)."

On the contrary, argues Berkeley, we cannot apply the standards of efficiency and conservation so crucial for the survival and prosperity of finite spirits, where the Spirit in question possesses infinite power. Rather than evoking the deaths of living beings throughout nature, for the purpose of skeptically impugning God's benevolence and wisdom, argues Berkeley, we should instead regard such "surplusage" as evidence for God's omnipotence (*Principles* 214).

Once again, Berkeley does not develop sustained argumentation. The Divine Being's omnipotence, cast as the ability to ignore both limitation and want, distinguishes God from finite spirits. The sharp division between the boundless scope of God's power and the bounded power of created spirits potentially estranges creative spirits from the Divine Being. This estrangement undercuts Berkeley's broader emphasis upon the psychological immediacy of our experience of the Divine Being, and especially our ability to formulate notions about God based upon an immediate apprehension of our own condition and capacities.

Berkeley's Teleological Argument: Divine Artisan and Personal God

The fourth argument which Berkeley deploys to defend the claim that the cosmos discloses both structure and beauty focuses upon how the essential structure of the cosmos benefits created and rational spirits. Here Berkeley argues that the essential order of the universe enables us – as essentially *rational* spirits – to regulate our conduct, which – Berkeley argues – outweighs any

incidental inconvenience or even incidental suffering. This position arguably constitutes one variation upon Berkeley's second argument concerning the structure and beauty which the cosmos discloses, but where Berkeley's second argument envisions physical or natural goodness upon the macrocosmic level, which overshadows and outweighs those things which locally appear as natural evils, Berkeley's fourth argument focuses upon the essential structure of the universe, which brings about the greater good, insofar as the structured cosmos proves comprehensible for rational beings like ourselves. Furthermore, this argument does not depend upon issues of perspective and scale, because – *as rational beings* – we may apprehend and appreciate the rational structure of the universe upon every conceivable scale.

We have previously observed in *Three Dialogues* how George Berkeley preserves the essential value of structure and especially beauty under the metaphysical claims of radical idealism. In *Principles of Human Understanding*, Berkeley develops much the same reasoning, but with an emphasis upon cosmic structure. Berkeley presents the challenge thus: "It shall be demanded, to what purpose serves that curious organization of plants, and the animal mechanism in the parts of animals. Might not vegetables grow, and shoot forth leaves of blossoms, and animals perform all their motions, as well without as with all that variety of internal parts so elegantly contrived and put together (*Principles* 174)." This skeptical challenge becomes especially acute when we reflect upon God's omnipotence, which seems to render such complex operations superfluous.

Here Berkeley employs the language of mechanism when speaking about plants and animals, but immediately afterwards, he invokes an explicitly mechanical example: "By this doctrine, though an artist has made the spring and wheels, and every movement of a watch, and adjusted them in such a manner as he knew would produce the motions he designed, yet he must think all this done to no purpose, and that it is an Intelligence which directs the index, and points to the hour of the day (*Principles* 174)." Berkeley, however, does not rest with the condition of the human watchmaker and watch, but instead applies the "clockwork" metaphor to every phenomenon visible throughout the cosmos. Berkeley continues, "The like may be said of all the clockwork of nature, the greater part whereof proves so wonderfully fine and subtle as scarce to be discerned by the best microscope (*Principles* 174-175)."

Although Berkeley explicitly allows for the possibility of miracles, befitting God's absolute power, here Berkeley remains content to describe the various phenomena of the natural world as "clockwork" in character. Elsewhere in *Principles of Human Understanding*, Berkeley invokes much the same metaphor of mechanism, although Berkeley preserves the sustaining role which God as the Divine Artisan plays: "Such is the artificial contrivance of this mighty machine of nature that, whilst its motions and various phenomena strike on our senses, the hand which actuates the whole is itself unperceivable to men of flesh and blood (Principles 213)." Although Berkeley plainly rejects the possibility of *causal* relations among natural phenomena, nevertheless Berkeley endorses the

presence of complexity throughout the cosmos. Here Berkeley states, "But to come nigher the difficulty, it must be observed that though the fabrication of all those parts and organs be not absolutely necessary to the producing any effect, yet it is necessary to the producing of things in a constant, regular way according to the laws of nature (*Principles* 175)." Without endorsing causal relations among passive natural phenomena, Berkeley nevertheless presents metaphysical idealism with an authentic appreciation for complex phenomena.

By employing the metaphor of "clockwork" mechanisms to illustrate the structure and order which the cosmos discloses, Berkeley invites the metaphorical description of the Divine Spirit as Divine Artisan, one who fashions essentially mechanical beings – the "Clockmaker" God prevalent in Deism.

In fairness, Berkeley may respond to the skeptical challenge here – namely that idealism proves incompatible with the complexity on display throughout the natural world – without necessarily bringing theism into the argument. Beyond answering the skeptical challenge in question, however, Berkeley intends to secure not only one claim of theodicy, but also the empirical foundation for the teleology by which he establishes God as both benevolent and fundamentally personal.

Even though natural laws reflect consistent signs, rather than causal relationships, they remain helpful for regulating our daily conduct. Berkeley states, "This gives us a sort of foresight which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. And without this we should be eternally at a loss. We could

not know how to act anything that might procure us the least pleasure, or remove the least pain of sense (*Principles* 162)." Berkeley concludes that the structure of the cosmos, which enables reasonable predictions and hence reasonable conduct, outweighs any incidental inconvenience or even incidental suffering associated with such structure: "It is clear, from what we have elsewhere observed, that the operating according to general and stated laws is so necessary for our guidance in the affairs of life, and letting us into the secret of nature, that without it all reach and compass of thought, all human sagacity and design, could serve to no manner of purpose… Which one consideration abundantly outbalances whatever particular inconveniences may thence arise (Principles 213)." Thus Berkeley leverages the structure which the cosmos discloses, to demonstrate the benevolence of the Divine Spirit.

Beyond demonstrating God's absolute benevolence, however, by invoking Deism's metaphor of God as mechanical Artisan, Berkeley attempts to establish God's character as fundamentally personal. Berkeley's theological and metaphysical views differ from those which Deism generally affirms, insofar as Berkeley's novel variation upon the cosmological argument does not envision any temporal "gap" between the Creator God and the cosmos which we experience, as does Deism. Berkeley's strong contention that the Creator of the universe of sense perception perpetually sustains that universe removes any possible temporal screen between our sense perceptions and the ultimate Author of those perceptions.

Nevertheless, Deism's metaphor of the "Watchmaker God" evokes impressions of an intensely personal God, one who possesses both understanding and will, powers which are qualitatively similar with those powers which created spirits possess. By cultivating Deism's depiction of God both as benevolent and as personal, Berkeley transforms our notions about the Ultimate Origin of sense perception into the benevolent and personal Divine Artisan, whom created spirits may apprehend through intuition and appreciate through reverence.

The Immediacy of God Revisited: God's Psychological Immediacy

As much as Berkeley wishes to demonstrate the epistemic immediacy of God as the ultimate Origin and necessary condition for sense perception generally, he likewise wishes to affirm, from the actual contents of sense perception as *a posteriori* grounds, the *psychological* immediacy of an essentially personal Divine Spirit, with personal understanding and personal will which prove analogous with the powers of individual created spirits. Of course, for Berkeley, the powers of the Divine Spirit prove boundless, which perhaps ironically renders especially subtle the omnipresent and perpetual influence of God upon the cosmos (*Principles* 173). In other respects, Berkeley's Creator God demonstrates an essentially *personal* character, with understanding and will which differ from the powers of the created soul seemingly not in quality, but rather, only in quantity. In *Principles of Human Understanding*, Berkeley does describe God as "infinitely

wise, good, and powerful" (*Principles* 180). Again in *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley has Philonous employ much the same language, characterizing God as *wise, powerful, and good, beyond comprehension*" (*Dialogues* 259). Attentive examination of these and like passages, however, reveals that the accent in Berkeley's thought consistently falls upon the specific capacity or characteristic in question, and not upon the qualification of that capacity or characteristic as something which proves infinite in God. That is, Berkeley emphasizes the fact that God is powerful, *just like created spirits may be powerful*, however finite such power might prove. God is benevolent, just like created spirits may be benevolent. God is wise, just like created spirits may be wise. The absolutely infinite capacities and characteristics of Berkeley's God – who remains one Spirit among many – correspond with quantitatively finite but *qualitatively similar* parallels within created spirits.

Berkeley emphatically eschews apophatic theology, the so-called Way of Negation, which presumes the capacities and characteristics of the Divine Nature, as something infinite, must differ *qualitatively* from the finite powers of the created spirit. He plainly believes that – as created spirits – we prove wholly capable of formulating and expressing essentially positive and cataphatic statements regarding the Divine Nature, statements which are both meaningful and true. Moreover, Berkeley emphatically believes that *by reflecting upon the powers of our own souls*, we may *thereby* formulate positive, coherent, and meaningful notions about the Divine Nature. Berkeley observes, "For all the

notion I have of God is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections. I have therefore, though not an inactive idea, yet in myself some sort of an active, thinking image of the Deity (*Dialogues* 275)." Indeed, contends Berkeley, because we cannot immediately perceive spirits themselves, our reflections upon our own souls' capacities – together with our meditations upon the actual contents of sense perception – constitute perhaps the only way by which we may form positive notions about God's character and powers.

Here in Berkeley's thought, we discover an absence of *sustained* reflection upon the infinite character of the Divine attributes. This conspicuous absence enables Berkeley to refrain from depicting the infinite as something *qualitatively* different from finite things. Berkeley recognizes that such depictions may overshadow our capacity to formulate positive statements about God. By contrast, Berkeley emphatically believes that we *can* employ positive language when we speak about God, and furthermore, he believes that we *should* speak about God, *especially* when we confront essentially pernicious strains of skeptical thought.

Berkeley tenaciously contends that – *as spirits* – our meditations regarding the immediately apprehensible capacities of our own souls are sufficient for formulating coherent and meaningful notions about the *infinite but qualitatively similar* capacities of the Divine Nature. This depiction of God – as one spirit among many, whose unbounded capacities and powers prove nevertheless

qualitatively similar with our own – renders Berkeley's Creator as Someone who proves psychologically comprehensible for created spirits, insofar as such spirits possess the psychological capacity to reflect upon the capacities and powers of their own souls. To formulate coherent and meaningful notions about God's infinite power, created spirits merely require reflection upon their own finite power – itself psychologically available for immediate apprehension – envisioning the heightening of that capacity, along with removing the relevant imperfections.

By parallel thought processes, created and otherwise bounded spirits may formulate notions about God as infinitely benevolent, or as infinitely wise. The ease with which finite spirits may formulate such positive notions about God turns upon the immediate apprehension of our own capacities and characteristics. The created spirit possesses an immediate apprehension of their own capacity for benevolence, and working from this immediate apprehension, the spirit may formulate notions about an infinitely benevolent Spirit, because finite benevolence – according to George Berkeley – differs from infinite only *quantitatively*. In short, we prove capable of formulating positive, coherent, and meaningful notions about the Divine Nature because God represents one Spirit among many, whose capacities and characteristics prove *qualitatively* similar enough with those of created spirits, such that we created spirits may extrapolate from the immediate apprehension of our own capacities and characteristics.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE IMMEDIACY OF GOD

The common thread which runs through Berkeley's thought about God's existence and about God's character – through Berkeley's treatment of our notions about spirits, through the novel and refreshing variation upon the cosmological argument, and through his deployment of basically teleological narratives – remains an enduring emphasis upon the theme of immediacy. Of course, essentially every argument for God's existence strives for an appeal towards our immediate apprehensions, for the sake of communicating persuasive force, but Berkeley's signature collapse of ontology into epistemology renders especially telling this accent upon the immediate.

Berkeley actually endeavors to secure three distinguishable but really inseparable immediacies. Through the cosmological argument, Berkeley demonstrates the epistemic immediacy of our experience of God, as the Ontological Ground and as the necessary condition for sense perception. Berkeley's explication of an essentially "flat" ontology secures the second, metaphysical instance of immediacy, the metaphysical claim of an unmediated relationship between God's ideas and our own sense perceptions. Finally, Berkeley employs the language of teleology to establish the essential character of

God – the metaphorical Divine Artisan – as something both benevolent and intensely personal. Thus, Berkeley establishes the third, psychological immediacy of God, as personal Spirit plainly comprehensible for other personal spirits through simple reflections upon their own immediately apprehensible characters and capacities.

Berkeley's epistemic distinction between notions and ideas remains such that we cannot immediately perceive God – as Spirit – as we might perceive – say – an apple tree. The inescapably mediated character of our knowledge about spirits precludes Berkeley from making an ontological argument. Moreover, Berkeley's explication of teleological considerations begins with *a posteriori* reasoning about the specific contents of sense perception, as every teleological argument must.

Nevertheless, Berkeley again and again returns the focus of conversation towards those elements which prove immediately apprehensible for created spirits. Berkeley likewise affirms an essentially "flat" ontology, one which brings God's ideas and our own sense perceptions into immediate contact with each other. Berkeley continually affirms the epistemic, metaphysical, and psychological immediacy which defines our experience of the Divine Spirit, thereby revealing the profound nearness of God.

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