

# The Development of Berkeley's Philosophy

**G. A. Johnston**



# The Philosophy of George Berkeley

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**G. A. Johnston**

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THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF  
BERKELEY'S PHILOSOPHY

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## PREFACE

No apology would seem to be required for an attempt to examine the historical development of Berkeley's philosophy as a whole. In this book I have tried to throw light on the evolution of Berkeley's thought by a careful study of his works in their chronological sequence and by detailed reference to his relations with his predecessors and contemporaries. I have naturally devoted most attention to what is central in Berkeley's philosophy—his metaphysics and theory of knowledge,—but I have not neglected the other problems that were touched by his wide-roving mind.

Every student of Berkeley owes a debt of enduring gratitude to the careful and loving work of Campbell Fraser. In addition to his indispensable commentaries and memoirs, I have sought help from every source that seemed likely to afford it. In general, however, I have found Berkeley to be his own best interpreter.

This book contains the substance of the Shaw Fellowship Lectures which I had the privilege of delivering in the University of Edinburgh in 1920.

G. A. JOHNSTON.

GENEVA,  
*August, 1923.*

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY: BERKELEY'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR PHILOSOPHY

THE early eighteenth century, with all its wealth of versatility, possessed no one who touched its life at more points than Berkeley. But though he was intimately connected with almost every department of the life and thought of his time, it is for his philosophy that he is, and deserves to be, chiefly remembered. His reputation does not, however, rest equally on every part of his philosophy. The three great philosophical problems with which the eighteenth century concerned itself were those of knowledge, morality and religion. Berkeley traversed the whole of this field of contemporary speculation, and to the study of all its problems he made worthy contributions; but his philosophical significance depends almost wholly upon his treatment of the problem of knowledge.

In spite of Berkeley's originality of thought and unconventionality of life he remains the entirely typical English philosopher. English philosophers in general, and its five greatest representatives in particular, display three well-marked characteristics. A survey of the work of Bacon, Hobbes, Locke,

B. P.

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Berkeley and Hume shows that (1) their interest in philosophy is predominantly practical, (2) their inquiries are prevailingly epistemological in character, and (3) the general method they adopt is psychological and inductive. These three features are more or less characteristic of English philosophy as a whole. But they are specially prominent in Berkeley.

(1) Berkeley entirely agrees with Bacon that "knowledge is power," and that its end is "the improvement of man's estate." This does not, of course, mean that he minimises the importance of the theoretical interest. In his view, the conduct of the understanding does not yield in importance to the conduct of life ; and, indeed, he has a great deal more to say about knowledge than about practice. But the value of knowledge does not end in itself ; it is value for something, power to produce something. He never allows us to forget that all his writings are dominated by a double practical aim. "The new principle" will, in the first place, "abridge the labour of study," and render the natural sciences and mathematics more compendious and useful ; and, in the second place, by making manifest the nearness and omnipresence of God, it will exercise a profound influence for good in the world. This twofold purpose animates every page of Berkeley's work ; "the whole," he says, is "directed to practice."<sup>1</sup>

But Berkeley's practical spirit went further than this. And here also he is typical of English philosophy. For it is characteristic of the philo-

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, i. 92. (All references are to the Oxford Edition of Berkeley's works in 4 vols. 1901.)

sophy of England, more than that of any other country, that its chief representatives have been not academic savants but men of affairs. Not to mention others, all the great men already named took a prominent and honourable place in the public life of their time. Now, though for many years Berkeley was connected with Trinity College, Dublin, his life was not that of a University teacher. Associating with the wits of a brilliant London, denouncing free-thinking in the *Guardian*, acting as chaplain to an embassy, exploring Sicily to discover the cause of its volcanoes, writing an *Essay towards preventing the ruin of Great Britain*, inspiring London, in an age when an enthusiast was considered either a knave or a fool, with the romantic missionary project of a college in Bermuda, sailing to America in a "hired ship of 250 tons," farming and preaching and waiting in Rhode Island for the fulfilment of Walpole's promise of Government assistance for his college, and in the evening of his days as Bishop of Cloyne caring for his people's souls, healing their bodies with tar-water, and castigating their idleness in the *Querist*—such, in some of the aspects of his varied life, was George Berkeley. Through all the vicissitudes of this eventful life his practical interests were supreme.

(2) Berkeley also agrees with the prevailing tendency of English thought in basing his philosophy directly on experience, and in attending specially to psychological and epistemological questions of the relation between the mind and the world of nature. With regard to the problem to be solved and the point of departure he is at one with Locke.



Both start with experience, and both follow "the new way of ideas." Along that way, however, Berkeley went a step further than Locke; and it is, in one respect, his chief historical significance that he formed a link in the chain of reasoning which terminated in Hume's scepticism. Berkeley accepts Locke's doctrine that the object of thought is an idea, but, denying that this idea is a copy of an external thing, he maintains that, as we cannot know material reality either by way of ideas or by perception of its effects, so-called material substances and material causes are simply non-existent. Instead of material substance and material cause Berkeley posits spiritual substance and spiritual cause; and thus his universe consists of spirits, substantive and causal, and ideas, inert, unitary and dependent. Hume has only a single step to take to reach his sceptical conclusion. The same arguments, he insists, can be advanced against Berkeley's spiritual substance and spiritual cause as Berkeley had brought against Locke's material substance and material cause: if spiritual substance be simply an indefinable "something," we have no more ground for maintaining its existence than Locke has for his material "something."

Now, from one standpoint, this is Berkeley's place in the history of English philosophy. But it is not a complete account of his philosophical significance. It is a great mistake to say, as Green does, that Berkeley is "merely Locke purged." For the most suggestive part of Berkeley's doctrine is not his criticism of Locke, but his positive theory of spirit. And that doctrine cannot really be overthrown by

the same arguments as proved fatal to Locke's material substance, for Berkeley insists that we *can* know spirit—though we do not perceive it as an idea, we have a notion of it, and know it to be active. Now, his insistence on the reality of mind or spirit is of the first importance. Locke, indeed, had not denied the existence of mind, but he did not fully realise its indispensability for knowledge. And Berkeley was, in fact, the first modern philosopher to discover the importance of the thinking subject in knowledge. Whereas previous philosophy had, in general, been content to regard mind as dependent for its knowledge on the external world, Berkeley made a veritable Copernican change, and insisted that the so-called external world depends for its existence on the mind. Thus mind or spirit becomes the most important thing in the world. Reality is primarily spiritual, and the existence of the physical universe is mind-dependent.

But Berkeley was in advance of the process of thought, and it was left to Kant, after the depths of scepticism had been sounded by Hume, to reinstate the self in a more secure position than it occupied in Berkeley's system. For Berkeley had allowed two great lacunae to remain in his doctrine. He left side by side two kinds of knowledge, (1) knowledge of ideas, and (2) knowledge of spirits by way of notions; and until *Siris* he made no attempt to bring these two kinds of knowledge into any system. But in that work he points out the necessary interconnection of perceptions and conceptions; and, in terms that remind us of Kant, insists that as understanding alone cannot perceive, so sense alone

cannot know, for all real knowledge requires the concurrence of both ways of knowing. But this view was never worked out. The other great defect in his theory is his failure to give any account of relations. He does, indeed, once or twice mention relations as involving mental activity, but such suggestions do not amount to a serious attempt to deal with the problem. Berkeley explicitly holds that things can be known apart from their relations, and, though he insists on the uniformity of experience and the systematic and harmonious nature of the world, he maintains that no necessary connection subsists between the particulars which constitute the physical order.

To psychology Berkeley made contributions which were of the first importance for the development of that science. Mill, in a burst of generous enthusiasm, attributes to him "three first rate philosophical discoveries, each sufficient to have constituted a revolution in psychology, and which by their combination have determined the whole course of subsequent philosophical speculation; discoveries, too, which were not, like the achievements of many other distinguished thinkers, merely refutations of error, but were this and much more also; being all of them entitled to a permanent place among positive truths."<sup>1</sup> The three doctrines on which Mill bestows such praise are the theory of visual perception, the contention that we reason always on a particular, and the theory that reality consists of groups of sensations. How far these doctrines have the right to be called "positive truths" we shall see

<sup>1</sup> *Dissertations and Discussions*, iv. 155.

later; but there can at least be no doubt of the importance of their influence on the development of psychology. If we trace the growth of psychology, we shall find, as Ward has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> that it was first unduly objective and then improperly subjective. A mature psychology will hold in due balance both the objective and subjective aspects; its fundamental conception will be experience, in which subject and object are correlated. Now, while Berkeley properly belongs to the second period, he has done much to pave the way towards an adequate psychology of experience. Aristotle, whom Ward takes as the representative of the first period, developed his psychology from a standpoint resembling that of the modern biologist, and it was characteristic of his work to contemplate psychical facts from without, rather than introspectively from within. Advancing on these lines, Aristotle was unable to give any adequate account of the unity of consciousness as the central feature of all psychical acts. In Descartes and Locke psychology assumed a more subjective tinge. They did not, however, remain true to the introspective method which they professed. They introduced metaphysical distinctions, and vitiated their psychology by a dualism of mind and matter. Now, Berkeley denied the existence of that dualism, and, by his insistence on the importance of the subject within experience, anticipated the day when psychology would strike the proper balance between the subjective and objective elements within the unity of experience as a whole. To adapt a Kantian dis-

<sup>1</sup> "On the Definition of Psychology," *Br. Jl. Psych.* i. 4.

tion, while Descartes' subject in knowledge performs only regulative functions, Berkeley's subject is constitutive of experience. Berkeley's significance really lies in his suggestion that both external and internal fall within the subject's individual experience. But the importance of this suggestion (for it is nothing more than a suggestion) was overlooked by Berkeley's successors; and it has remained for Ward and others in our own day to re-learn and re-teach the lesson.

(3) Berkeley did not distinguish between philosophy and psychology. He believed that the only method of dealing with the facts of experience is what we should now call the psychological. And here also his procedure is typical of English philosophy in general. It is characteristic of English thought to assume that philosophy consists mainly in an analytical examination of mental processes.<sup>1</sup> We may say either that English philosophy confuses psychology and philosophy, or, if we prefer, that its philosophical method is exclusively psychological. English philosophy attempts to satisfy the wonder in which philosophy arises by analysing conscious experience into its constituent elements. It seeks to apply to conscious experience (what it calls "inner experience") the same methods of observation and experiment, examination and analysis, division and classification, as have proved useful in the natural sciences, the sciences of "outer experience." This treatment of experience gives us, on the one hand, the body of natural science, and on the other, mental science or philosophy. The

<sup>1</sup> This refers, of course, to the traditional English method.

psychological method in philosophy involves an examination of the contents of the mind, regarded as particular facts ; and on the results of its observation it constructs a system of generalised propositions which form the body of philosophy.

This method Berkeley inherited from Locke, and in his earlier work it and it alone is employed. In the *New Theory of Vision* and *Principles* the only method which he uses is introspection upon conscious experience. The person who introspects is regarded as somehow standing apart from his experience : his experience is for him a series of isolated presentations, presentative of nothing outside themselves, and having no essential relation to other presentations..

But Berkeley soon came to doubt the validity and universal applicability of the traditional psychological method. One or two entries in the *Commonplace Book* show that even in those early days he had a presentiment of the inadequacy of the method, and the impossibility of explaining by it the mind and its operations. The complete analysis of conscious experience which the method professes to supply leaves out of account the self for which that experience is. Introspection discovers only series of particular ideas : it reveals no permanent and identical self. Now Berkeley believed that the existence of the self is essential to the constitution of experience, and the psychological method is therefore inadequate in so far as it is unable to give any account of the self.

In his later work he gradually recognised the deficiencies of the standpoint and method with which

he started. Any knowledge we get by this method must be supplemented and corrected with reference to a new way of knowing, viz. knowledge by way of notions. We have notions of the self, of relations, and of mental operations, none of which are revealed to us by a psychological analysis, and to none of which have we any right if we proceed solely by the psychological method. In Berkeley's middle period knowledge of ideas and knowledge of notions were allowed to remain side by side as two isolated and distinct kinds of cognition, each fitted for obtaining awareness of its appropriate objects, and no attempt was made to show the relation of these kinds of knowledge. But in the latest stage of his philosophical development he realised, as we have already mentioned, that we cannot have in isolation knowledge of particulars and knowledge of universals; and that all knowledge requires the concurrence of both the universal and the particular. Sensation gives merely the raw material of knowledge, which needs to be understood and interpreted before becoming knowledge; and the understanding by itself is empty and can give no knowledge apart from the filling of sense. All this, of course, proves the inadequacy of the psychological method. But though Berkeley certainly did see that it is inadequate, he does not seem to have understood precisely why it is inadequate. It is unsatisfactory as a philosophical method because it takes very little account of a group of problems which it is one of the principal tasks of philosophy to examine, the problem of the relation of the self to its experience, the problem of the relation of inner experience to

outer experience, and the problem of the relation of the finite self to the Infinite. All these problems are touched by Berkeley, but in no case did he face thoroughly the difficulties which they involve. And his philosophical weakness may be said to be due, in a word, to his failure to work out the implications of personality. The world is, for him, dependent for its character and existence on persons; yet he deliberately avoids any fundamental discussion of the meaning of personality.



## CHAPTER II

### THE ORIGINS OF BERKELEY'S THOUGHT

#### I. PHILOSOPHICAL AND RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT

It is the merest commonplace to say that every thinker owes much to his predecessors and contemporaries. His thought is consciously influenced by philosophers, scientists and moralists; and, in addition, it bears upon it the stamp of that subtler but none the less potent force, the social environment in which he lives. Berkeley is perhaps the freshest and most original thinker in the history of British philosophy; yet, more than any other, he was influenced both by his immediate philosophical predecessors and by the social surroundings in which he was placed. He was aware of his debt, though not, perhaps, of the full extent of it. "I must acknowledge myself beholding to the philosophers who have gone before me,"<sup>1</sup> he reminds himself in the *Commonplace Book*; but at the same time he compares these predecessors to adventurers, "who, tho' they attained not the desired port, they by their wrecks have made known the rocks and sands, whereby the passage of aftercomers is made more

<sup>1</sup> *Commonplace Book*, i. 38.

secure and easy." <sup>1</sup> But Berkeley's indebtedness was not merely of this negative kind. He did not use other philosophers merely as beacons to enable him to keep clear of the errors on which their thought had been wrecked. This metaphor is entirely inadequate. In reality, other philosophers formed his spiritual meat and drink, and it was because he assimilated so well the nourishment they provided that he was able to reach the philosophical stature to which he actually grew.

In Berkeley's case it is possible, with greater certainty than is usual, to discover the material which his receptive mind acquired from his predecessors and contemporaries, and, in general, to trace the outlines of the main formative influences which played upon his mind. When his first book appeared, he was still very young. He was only twenty-four when the *New Theory of Vision* was published, and the *Principles* was given to the world in the following year. In these works he makes no effort to conceal the sources from which the New Principle was derived. One of his great aims, he tells us, is to "remove the mist or veil of words" by which philosophy is obscured, and he has no wish to hide the origins of his own thought or mask the workings of his own mind. His own consciousness of his relations of attraction and repulsion to other philosophers renders the determination by us of the extent and nature of those relations, if not an easy task, at least a practicable one. A Locke, a Kant, or a Hobbes, who does not produce his work till near the evening of his days, finds it impossible to say

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, i. 38.

which among the myriad influences to which he has been exposed have really been vital in the formation of his mind. And it is often equally impossible for the historian to disentangle the various threads which have been woven so closely into the texture of the particular philosophy. But Berkeley's enduring philosophical work was nearly all done when he was a very young man, and while the impressions of his student-days were still fresh and vivid. It is thus possible for us to trace, from his own writings, the influence of his social and philosophical environment on the development of his thought.

What we have to do, then, is to study the evolution of Berkeley's philosophy, and, as no study of evolution is complete without some investigation of environment, it is necessary to sketch in outline the nature of the environment of mental and moral forces with which Berkeley was surrounded during his student-days at Trinity College, Dublin.

In his College days or earlier Berkeley encountered the two great influences which affected the whole course of his life and work. The one aim which he kept persistently before him through all the vicissitudes of a varied life was the refutation of deists and free-thinkers. Now, in the formation of this purpose and in the preparation for carrying it out, he was affected by two main influences or sets of influences, one religious, the other philosophical. He was influenced not only by the new experimental philosophy of mind and nature introduced by Newton and Locke, but also by the great religious controversy, which lasted over half-a-century, between orthodoxy and deism.

When Berkeley went to Dublin, the great deist controversy, in which he was destined to play a not unimportant part, was just beginning. In 1696 the flame was fairly lit by John Toland with his anonymous book, *Christianity not Mysteriorious*. The publication immediately became notorious, and a second edition bearing Toland's name was issued in the same year. In the spring of 1697 Toland went to Ireland, his native country, and discovered that intense excitement had already been caused by his book. He did everything to encourage it. In tavern and coffee-house he never wearied of airing his views and repeating his main arguments. His skill in debate won many to his side, and Authority considered it necessary to institute a vigorous campaign against him.<sup>1</sup> Everything possible was done to crush his views. State, Church, and University were all arrayed against him. Dr. Peter Browne,<sup>2</sup> at that time Provost of Trinity, published a violent attack on his views,<sup>3</sup> in which he endeavoured to excite a popular outcry against him.<sup>4</sup> The Church was not behind in lending its voice to the general condemnation, and from every pulpit, by Archbishop and curate, Toland and his views were denounced.<sup>5</sup> The affair was even taken up by the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Lechler: *Geschichte des Englischen Deismus*, p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Browne, with whom Berkeley subsequently had a controversy, was the author of *The Procedure and Limits of Human Understanding*, and *The Divine Analogy*.

<sup>3</sup> *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled Christianity Not Mysteriorious*, 1697.

<sup>4</sup> Molyneux, the friend of Locke, criticised Browne on this score. (Locke's *Works*, viii. 428.)

<sup>5</sup> "A sermon against his errors was as much expected as if it had been prescribed in the rubric; and an Irish peer gave it as

Irish Parliament, a special commission was appointed to deal with it, and eventually a resolution was passed by the whole House declaring the book to be antagonistic to the Christian religion and the Established Church, and decreeing that it should be publicly burnt by the common hangman, and the author arrested by the Serjeant at Arms. Toland fled. But the controversy which he had popularised was not so easily got rid of, and when Berkeley entered Trinity College in 1700 free-thinking was still a subject of the keenest debate. From the beginning Berkeley took the greatest interest in the controversy, and definitely ranged himself on the side of the orthodox.<sup>1</sup>

Berkeley's Dublin environment was also responsible for leading him in the direction in which the work was to be done that would secure for him a permanent reputation. If his work had consisted simply in the refutation of the deists, he would now be as much ignored as they are. His reputation rests on his philosophy pure and simple, and the general character of his philosophy was determined by his early studies at Trinity College. The College in which he lived had changed greatly since Swift's student-days. Swift took his degree in 1685, after wrestling contemptuously with the "Logics" of Burgersdicius, Keekermannus and Smiglecius and the "Manuals" of Baronius and Scheiblerus. But

a reason why he had ceased to attend church that once he heard something there about his saviour Jesus Christ, but now all the discourse was about one John Toland." (Hunt, *Religious Thought in England*, ii. 244.)

<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of Berkeley's attitude to the deists *vide infra*, chapter vii.

by Berkeley's time these tomes had been discarded from the curriculum, and very little attention was paid to the subtleties of the Schools. Trinity College had given a welcome to Locke's *Essay*, published in 1690, and Newton's *Principia*, published in 1687; and all interest was now concentrated on the new philosophy initiated by them. Thus, when Berkeley became a student in 1700, Locke and Newton were the great intellectual forces in his environment. Berkeley became greatly interested in both thinkers, and in 1706 he was the leading member of a society which met weekly for the discussion of their views.

This society, which was founded on January 10, 1705/6, consisted originally of eight persons only; and there is some reason to suppose that Berkeley was president and Samuel Molyneux (son of Locke's friend) secretary.<sup>1</sup> Though the statutes of this

<sup>1</sup> The reasons for this conjecture are as follows. Berkeley, we know, was far ahead of his fellow-students (*Life and Letters of Berkeley*, p. 23), and it is therefore *a priori* natural to suppose that he was the first president of the society. Further, the statutes, which deal mainly with elaborate rules of procedure, are written out in full in his book, but not in his handwriting. They are written, no doubt by the secretary, in the president's book for his guidance in directing the discussions. Again, the date of the foundation of the society is January 10, 1705/6, and there is in existence a manuscript of Berkeley's—the *Description of the Cave of Dunmore*—bearing the same date, which was almost certainly read by Berkeley at the first meeting of the society. (See *Hermathena*, vol. xi. p. 181.) And it seems probable that the inaugural paper would be read by the president.

That Samuel Molyneux was secretary is suggested by the fact that the manuscript just referred to and the manuscript of Berkeley's essay *Of Infinities* (which was apparently read to the same society) were discovered among the Molyneux papers in the library of Trinity College, Dublin, and both bear an endorsement in the writing of Samuel Molyneux (*Hermathena*, xi. 181).

society, which are preserved in Berkeley's *Commonplace Book*, are rather elaborate, yet, oddly enough, the *object* of the society is not stated. It was clearly to be very comprehensive, members being entitled to "propose to the assembly their inventions, new thoughts, or observations in any of the sciences."<sup>1</sup> The constitution provides for a museum, with one of the members as "Keeper of the Rarities"; and it is clear from some entries which immediately follow the statutes in Berkeley's *Commonplace Book* that Locke was the subject of much discussion. Directly after these entries follows another list of statutes, a short one this time, which is dated December 7, 1706. These statutes may refer to a new society, but it is more probable that they merely correct or amplify the constitution of the original society. The object of the society is now defined. It is "to discourse on some part of the new philosophy."<sup>2</sup>

In this society, accordingly, Berkeley discussed with his friends the New Philosophy of Locke and Newton; and in connection with these discussions, he wrote his *Commonplace Book*.

## II. THE COMMONPLACE BOOK

The *Commonplace Book* is in itself of unique philosophical interest, and is, in addition, of the utmost value for the light it throws on the genesis, evolution,

Now it was one of the statutes of the society "that the secretary have the charge of all papers belonging to the society." (*Life and Letters*, p. 24.)

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Berkeley*, p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

and affiliation of Berkeley's thought. Begun early in 1706, the book contains a full and suggestive series of notes of what he was reading and thinking and planning during the earliest years of his philosophical development. In its vivid, disjointed, and staccato jottings it reveals a mind pregnant with a great discovery. More important still, it displays the sources from which that great discovery was nourished prior to being brought forth in the *New Theory of Vision* and *Principles*, and enables us to discern the emotions which, in Berkeley's mind, accompanied the birth of the New Principle. The notebook was intended for the eye of its writer alone, and it contains the freest possible expression of his attitude towards the philosophers and mathematicians from whom he was still learning. Its casual and unstudied utterances throw a brilliant light on the origin and progress of his thought.

The earliest philosophical remarks in the book are the queries interposed between the statutes of January 1705/6 and December 1706. These have reference, without exception, to particular points of Locke's doctrine. Several isolated questions refer to matters which Berkeley was later to raise, though they have little connection with the fundamentals of his own theory; but more interesting than these are the important queries which indicate that already Berkeley's mind was tending in the direction of the New Principle. Suggestive, for instance, is the very first entry, "Query. Whether number be in the objects without the mind? Locke, *b.* 2, *c.* 8, *s.* 9." <sup>1</sup> Berkeley's conviction of the mind-dependent

<sup>1</sup> *Life and Letters of Berkeley*, p. 25.



reality of the world was already dawning ; and that he was thus early inclining to the emphasis on sense which is so marked a feature of his earlier thought is evident from the tentative and awkwardly expressed statement, " Things belonging to reflection are for the most part expressed by forms borrowed from things sensible." <sup>1</sup> But such suggestions as these are merely prolegomena to the New Principle : the New Principle itself has not yet been revealed to Berkeley's ardent mind.

The revelation takes place in the most striking way in the next group of entries. As we read the phrases they contain, it needs no effort of imagination to reconstruct the stages of the development of the New Idea. No harsh Socratic maieutic was needed to bring it to the birth ; it came to light easily and almost imperceptibly, and as we scan the sentences in which Berkeley indicated the process, it is easy to sympathise with his joy and surprise as he gazes at the child of his mind—" The obvious tho' amazing truth."

The whole process of evolution takes place in a single page, and that the first page of the *Commonplace Book* proper.<sup>2</sup> Berkeley is considering the problem of time and eternity, and after one or two

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26.

<sup>2</sup> My account of the development of Berkeley's early thought as revealed in the *Commonplace Book* is based on the supposition that the order in which Berkeley actually made the entries is not that which is adopted by Campbell Fraser in the Oxford edition, but is as follows.

I. The Statutes of January 1705/6, the queries, and the Statutes of December 1706. (Though these are all in the manuscript of the " *Commonplace Book*," they are not printed by Fraser in the *Commonplace Book*, but

remarks of no particular importance, he makes the significant statement, "Time is the train of ideas succeeding each other."<sup>1</sup> Next he says, "Duration not distinguished from existence." Time, he means,

are inserted by him in his *Life and Letters of Berkeley*, pp. 23-27.)

II. *Commonplace Book*, pp. 58-89.

III. *Commonplace Book*, pp. 7-58.

IV. *Commonplace Book*, pp. 89-92. (These references are to the "Commonplace Book" as printed by Fraser in the 1901 edition of the *Works*.)

It is necessary now to give reasons for adopting this order.

The essential question relates to the order of the two sections numbered above II. and III. And it may at the outset be pointed out that section I. coheres closely with section II., and is to be regarded as prefatory to it. Section I., which was extracted from its proper place in the "Commonplace Book" by Campbell Fraser for biographical purposes when he published the 1871 edition of the *Works*, and was apparently overlooked altogether when he brought out the edition of 1901, stands written in the manuscript volume which we call the "Commonplace Book" between the quotation from Clov (?) and the sentence "One eternity greater than another of the same kind." The quotation from Clov (?) ends one page. *Then follow three blank pages.* Then we have the statutes of January 1705/6, and the other items which constitute what I have called section I. The sentence "One eternity greater than another of the same kind" runs on *immediately after* the last of the statutes of December 1706. It is clear, then, that the statutes and queries are connected with section II., and are disconnected from section III., from which they are separated by the three blank pages. That is, section I. is connected with II., but not with III. It is, as we have said, prefatory to II.

Having now made clear the close connection of I. with II. (which nobody doubts), we proceed to the crux of the question, viz. the transposition of sections II. and III.

The order in which the *Commonplace Book* is printed by Campbell Fraser is that of the manuscript volume. The only alterations which Fraser made in editing the manuscript were (a) the excision of section I. (to which we have already alluded), (b) the omission of a few repetitions, and (c) the addition on p. 92 of a few remarks taken from *another* manuscript of Berkeley. Apart from these intentional interferences with the text of the manu-

<sup>1</sup> *Commonplace Book*, i. 58.

exists only so long as it endures. The existence of time is its duration and nothing else; hence, in general (this seems to be his argument), existence is identical with duration. But the difficulty arises

script, and some errors in deciphering Berkeley's handwriting. the *Commonplace Book* printed by Campbell Fraser is identical with the manuscript volume.

Now, as Lorenz was the first to point out (*Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, xviii. 554), the manuscript volume consists of two notebooks, bound together. Evidence of the former bindings remains, and there is a slight difference in the texture and quality of the paper. One notebook comprises pp. 7-58 down to and including the quotation from Clov (?), i.e. what we have called section III. For convenience we will call this notebook A. The other contains the statutes and queries followed by pp. 58-92, i.e. what we have called sections I., II. and IV. Let us call this notebook B.

It was suggested by Lorenz that these notebooks had accidentally been bound together in the wrong order. This supposition I have adopted. To substantiate it, it is necessary to show that notebook A must be later than notebook B.

(1) A contains the date August 28th, 1708. B contains the dates January 10, 1705/6, and December 7, 1706. There is no doubt as to these dates, consequently A must be later than B. This is absolutely conclusive. (There is an entry on p. 84 which might be taken to suggest that it had been written before April 16, 1705. It refers to "Mr. Newton," and as Newton was knighted on April 16, 1705, the entry, Fraser suggests, would seem to indicate that it was written before that date. This is not, of course, conclusive. It is quite possible that Berkeley simply wrote "Mr. Newton" inadvertently. If Fraser's supposition be true, it still further confirms our contention that B is earlier than A, though it gives rise to difficulties of its own in connection with the statutes, which would then, though preceding the Newton entry in the manuscript, be subsequent to it in time. And this, I think, is a further objection to Fraser's suggestion.)

(2) That B was written as early as 1706, and therefore before A, is confirmed by the discovery made by Prof. S. P. Johnston of an essay by Berkeley entitled "Of Infinites." On external and internal evidence Prof. Johnston assigns this essay to the period 1706-7 (*Hermathena*, vol. xi. pp. 181-2), and a comparison of it with the *Commonplace Book* shows that it was certainly written at the same time as pp. 83-88.

(3) Berkeley tells us (*Works*, ii. 19) that one of his earliest

that, if this be so, we seem to be deprived of any objective measure of existence. In pain time is longer than it is in pleasure. Because its duration is longer, its existence is longer. The conclusion

enquiries was about time. Now the only group of entries in the *Commonplace Book* concerning time is that on pp. 58f. This would be "one of his earliest enquiries" only if B is prior to A.

(4) But by far the most convincing confirmatory evidence of the priority of B is that supplied by a consideration of the subjects dealt with in the two parts. There are, for instance, two or three fairly certain references from A to B. On p. 12 we have the following: "Motion on 2nd thoughts seems to be a simple idea." Now, motion has not been mentioned previous to this in A. In B, on the other hand, motion is mentioned in such a way as to imply that it is a complex idea. That is, we have Berkeley's first thought in B, and his second thought in A. Again, in B we frequently find dogmatic and unguarded statements which are carefully qualified in A. For instance, he states in B, absolutely and without qualification, that in perception the mind is essentially passive (p. 83). But in A he qualifies this by adding, "There is somewhat active in most perceptions" (p. 37). Lastly (and this seems to be an irrefragable example), in B he defines "bodies" as "combinations of powers," obviously a technical definition of his own (p. 64). But in A he reminds himself "not to mention the combinations of powers" (p. 50). Now, the phrase "combinations of powers" has not previously been mentioned in A. The reference is clearly to the passage in B.

(5) Finally, if we take the *Commonplace Book* printed in the Oxford edition, it is impossible to trace any *development* in Berkeley's thought. On the very first page of A, in the second entry, we have a reference in detail to the structure of the Introduction to the *Principles*, and Berkeley speaks in a most familiar way of the application of the Principle to various difficulties. The first few pages of A show, in fact, that he had already reached the stage of drafting the *Principles*, and was even paying attention to the phrasing of important passages. In A the references are all to the *Principles*. On the other hand, B contains almost the whole of the argument of the *New Theory of Vision*, which was certainly developed before the *Principles*. And the general style and atmosphere of A are more mature than B. Most important of all, on the supposition that B precedes A in time, it is possible to discern a real continuity of argument and progress of thought. This is shown in the brief exposition of the argument of the *Commonplace Book* which I have given in the text, and need

would seem to follow that the measure of time, and consequently the measure of existence, differs from individual to individual, and in the same individual from moment to moment. This consequence is, in part, admitted by Berkeley. "The same τὸ νῦν," he says, "not common to all intelligences." There is no objective or universal measure of time, and the conclusion must be drawn, "Time a sensation ;

not be repeated here. The reality of this continuity grows on the mind the more frequently one reads the *Commonplace Book* ; and no one who reads it over several times, first in one order and then in the other, can avoid the conclusion that Berkeley wrote B before A.

For all these reasons, then, we maintain that the order in which Berkeley actually made his jottings is that which we have adopted. The essential question, let us repeat, concerns our transposition of sections II. and III., and this we have proved to be justified.

A word or two will suffice for the unimportant question why pages 89-92 are postponed to notebook A, though they really occur at the end of B. In the manuscript there is a hiatus where on p. 89 in the Oxford edition a line is drawn. That is, the portion of p. 89 after the line does not follow on uninterruptedly the part of p. 89 before the line. We thus have this initial reason for separating p. 89 ff. from the rest of B. Now, pp. 89-92 consist of (a) nineteen carefully stated and numbered axiomatic statements of the salient points of Berkeley's *New Principle*, followed by (b) a few jottings of the usual kind. Now, it may be suggested that what Berkeley did was this. He began by writing notebook B from the beginning to p. 89. He then left a few pages blank at the end of the notebook, in order to state there the positive results of his thought. At the same time he started a new book (A) for the purpose of continuing his jottings and queries. Finally, when A was completely filled (it is filled from the first page to the last), he returned to the pages at the end of B, some of which still remained blank, and wrote the page or two of jottings which form the end of the *Commonplace Book*. But it should be remembered that this is merely conjecture. And, in any case, nothing of importance in connection with the development of Berkeley's thought depends upon it. On the other hand, what is of vital importance, i.e. the transposition of II. and III., we take to be definitely established.

therefore onely in ye mind." This conclusion is obviously of the first importance in the development of Berkeley's philosophy. Time, he has been forced to state, has no existence in itself or in an external world of things. It is simply a sensation or series of sensations, and is thus entirely dependent on the mind. But much more than this is implied. Berkeley has already declared that duration and existence are identical, and the tremendous conclusion follows that all existence is mind-dependent. Time is a sensation, or, as he elsewhere says, a perception . . . *tempus est percipi*; and existence itself is simply a perception or series of perceptions . . . *esse est percipi*. That is the first part of Berkeley's New Principle.

In the next few entries Berkeley confirms and extends "this amazing truth." Extension, he declares, is a sensation, "therefore not without the mind." And in general we may proceed to affirm, "Primary ideas proved not to exist in matter; after the same manner that secondary ones are proved not to exist therein." Primary ideas, equally with secondary ones (which Locke and others had proved to be dependent on perception), are mind-dependent. Hence the great conclusion is confirmed that the whole world depends on thought. "World without thought is *nec quid, nec quantum, nec quale*, etc." The world owes its determinate existence to the fact that it is an object of thought or perception. In being perceived it exists. Hence the source of existence must be in that on which existence depends, and that is consciousness. Consciousness, then, is the only real existence, for the things which owe their being to it have a merely derivative

existence. And the conclusion follows that "Nothing properly but Persons, *i.e.* conscious things, do exist." Existence, then, is of two kinds: in its primary sense it means "perceiving," in a secondary sense it means "being perceived." We may accordingly state the universal and comprehensive truth *esse est aut percipere aut percipi*.

This is, in essence, the kernel of Berkeley's theory of knowledge and existence. The evolution—and it is a real evolution—is complete in the first page of the *Commonplace Book*.

But no sooner had Berkeley reached this conclusion (and indeed before he reached it), than difficulties came crowding into his mind. Nothing, I think, in the whole course of Berkeley's work leaves such an impression of freshness, vitality, and vigour, as the early pages of the *Commonplace Book*. His mind was literally open to the world, problems of all kinds impinged upon it from every direction, and, now that he had discovered his New Principle, it was essential that all these problems should be considered with reference to it, and in the light which it had to give.

These problems fall naturally into three classes: they are either religious, psychological, or mathematical. As an example of the way in which problems literally overwhelm him, it may be of interest simply to enumerate some of the points which he mentions and considers in the first two pages of the *Commonplace Book*. (1) Religious. Immortality, the wisdom of God, the fall of Adam, the knowability of the soul, and the proofs of the being of God. (2) Psychological. The nature of primary and secondary qualities, the question whether a

blind man made to see would know motion at first sight, the nature of colour, the relation of visual and tactual qualities, and the query of Molyneux whether a born-blind man made to see would know a cube or sphere at first sight. (3) Mathematical. The infinite divisibility of time and space, the nature of motion, and the question whether the incommensurability of the side and diagonal of the square is compatible with the New Principle. Most of these special difficulties, many of them of the first importance in themselves and with reference to his theory, were dealt with in detail by him subsequently: the impressive thing about their appearance here is just the fact that they do appear. Berkeley's instinct for the important elements was not at fault; for as early as this he descried the obstacles and hazards in the way of the exposition of the Philosophy of the New Principle.

In the rest of the *Commonplace Book* the New Principle is turned over and over in Berkeley's mind, scrutinised from every possible point of view, examined in the light of all the reading he could bring to bear upon it, and defended against the attacks of imaginary critics. In these pages there is naturally much repetition, for the same difficulties recur again and again. But the repetition is, like Kant's, never entirely negligible. The same fundamental ideas are advanced in slightly different settings, for they have been suggested in slightly different ways.

The development of what is commonly known as the Berkeleian theory is in essentials completed, as we have seen, in the first few lines of the *Common-*



*place Book*, and it is unnecessary to trace in any great detail the progress of Berkeley's thought in the remaining pages. The precise way in which he dealt with the various difficulties which confronted the *New Principle* will be treated subsequently. In the meantime it will be sufficient to indicate, in the briefest outline, the *order* in which the various problems seem to have become prominent in his mind.

The general problem which first occupies him is the nature of extension. He has already concluded that extension is simply a collection of ideas ; but this conclusion, he soon realises, teems with important and difficult problems. What, for example, is the relation of visible extension to tangible extension ?—and the relation of either or both to reality ? Again, since the existence of extension consists in being perceived, what becomes of it when it is not being perceived ? Has extension any permanence ? And further, what is the relation of the extension that I perceive to the extension that you perceive ? Has extension any self-identity ? Lastly, if extension consists of discrete ideas, particular perceptions, what do we mean by speaking of its continuity ? (pp. 60-63).

These problems of permanence, identity and continuity are next considered in relation to persons. The existence, permanence, and the like of the external world, Berkeley believes, depend on the perception of persons ; and it is therefore obviously important to examine the grounds on which we ascribe existence to persons. If the existence of persons consists in perceiving, what becomes of them

when they are not actually perceiving? Does it follow that "men die, or are in a state of annihilation, oft in a day?" Or, if we say that identity of personality consists in the will, and that the will is continuously active, what is the relation of the finite will to the will of God? Is its existence swallowed up in God as the ultimate power of perception and action, or does it enjoy a distinct and particular permanence and reality? (pp. 64-72).

The next main group of problems is concerned with the perception of distance and magnitude. Questions relating to perception have, as we have seen, already been raised by Berkeley, but he does not become preoccupied with them till p. 72. On that page he states in successive entries the two fundamental points in his theory of vision, viz. that there is no *necessary* connection between optic angles and extension, and that distance is not *immediately* perceived by sight. The relation, he goes on to point out, between visual signs and the distance or magnitude they suggest is, though constant association leads us to imagine it to be necessary, really only an arbitrary one. We never *immediately* perceive distance or magnitude. They can only be inferred by us, for they are suggested to us by the signs which, in our experience, uniformly accompany them <sup>1</sup> (pp. 72-82).

In the next few pages Berkeley's mind is, in spite of many distractions, occupied in the main with

<sup>1</sup> It is noticeable that in dealing with these points, soon to be expounded in the *New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley is distinctly more sure of himself than when discussing the problems which we have mentioned in the previous two paragraphs. There he is, for the most part, still asking questions. Here, on the other hand, he makes assertions.