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Berkeley's Christian Enlightenment

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Berkeley's thought has often been considered not related to, or even directly opposite to the general atmosphere of the Enlightenment, though it pervaded Berkeley's times and his literary and philosophical circle. In particular, Berkeley's so-called "second" philosophy, expressed in *De motu*, *Alciphron*, *Theory of Vision Vindicated* and, above all, in *Siris* – neoplatonic from its very title¹ – has often been judged post-immaterialist and definitely not "enlightened".² I will show that:

- a) the concept of "Christian Enlightenment" is historically legitimate and theoretically useful: it may cast some light on Berkeley's figure and on the development of his philosophy, giving it unity and coherence;
- b) the concept of "Christian Enlightenment" may be defined in comparison with the general aspects of French Enlightenment; apologetics, rooted in seventeenth century as well as in ancient philosophy, is its main content.

¹ Cf. S. Parigi, "Siris and the Renaissance: Some Overlooked Berkeleian Sources," *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 2010, 151–162.

² For example, by C. Renouvier, H. Bergson, M. M. Rossi, P. Casini, A. C. Fraser, J. W. Davis, J. Wild, G. A. Johnston, M. Gueroult, L. Neri, G. Brykman, M. T. Monti.

1. Christian Enlightenment and Berkeley's Philosophy

The historiographical category of Christian Enlightenment has been used by the Italian spiritualist philosopher Augusto Guzzo, in the early sixties of last century, in order to define Berkeley's thought.³ It may appear a contradiction in terms, because the term "Enlightenment" – of quite a difficult application beyond the English Channel⁴ – is often referred to free-thinking, and Berkeley presents himself as an adversary of free-thinkers.

In order to give a sound answer, it is necessary to start from a preliminary definition of Enlightenment focusing on its main characteristics, from Voltaire's *Lettres philosophiques* (1734) to D'Holbach's *Système de la nature* (1770). A firm and constant will to disseminate and divulge truth, which is always useful for everybody; a deep conviction that from the spread of truth the good of mankind will result because of the public usefulness of the sciences and techniques; a trustworthy and optimistic conception of human nature, in whose development education can do anything; freedom of thought, speech, press, trade, cult; criticism of metaphysical systems; birth of a scientifically oriented public opinion; a desirable change in mentality as to science and technique, without any radical political change; political and religious toleration. In all its main aspects, French Enlightenment has its sources in English politics, society, science and philosophy: Locke and Newton are Voltaire's mentors. His *Lettres philosophiques* are indeed *Lettres Anglaises* – that is to say, conceived and written during his stay in England (1726–1729).

However, the *philosophe*, in that he is a "man of reason", is supposed to be anti-Christian, because the content of any revealed religion may appear as a prejudice to dismiss: the "man of reason" is not supposed to have faith in dogmas. On the contrary, the alleged reasonableness of Christianity is not only an attempt to make revealed religion more palatable to human understanding (Locke), or an express rejection of revelation (Toland, Collins, Tindal and free thinkers); it is also an assumption of some Latitudinarian churchmen, such as William Chillingworth, and Cambridge Platonists, e.g. Benjamin Whichcote.⁵ In the seventeenth

³ "Introduzione", in G. Berkeley, *Alcifrone*, edited and translated by A. and C. Guzzo, Bologna: Zanichelli, 1963, 3–67. Guzzo incidentally speaks of the possibility of a "Christian Enlightenment" (p. 410, note 4). An interesting, similar interpretation has been offered by M. Bonifacio, *George Berkeley e la cittadella della Cristianità. Apologetica e filosofia nel Settecento britannico*, Ph. D. Thesis, University of Turin, 2018.

⁴ See, for example, F. Venturi, *Utopia e riforma nell'Illuminismo*, Torino: Einaudi, 1970.

⁵ See M. Sina, *Studi su John Locke. E su altri pensatori cristiani agli albori del secolo dei Lumi*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2015, 317–329.

century, dominated by theological controversies, the thesis of a deep consonance between reason and religion, between the Scriptural Truth and rational truths, is quite common: "And then all necessary truth being as I have prov'd, plainly set down in Scripture, I am certain by believing Scripture, to believe all necessary truth".⁶

Reason is "the very Voice of God", or the "Candle of the Lord", according to the Cambridge Platonist Benjamin Whichcote:

Religion exercises, teaches, satisfies that which is the height and excellency of human nature. Our reason is not laid aside nor discharged, much less is it confounded by any of the materials of religion; but awakened, excited, employed, directed, and improved by it: for the mind and understanding of man, is that faculty, whereby man is made capable of God. [...] The effects and products of his reason and religion are the same, in a person that is truly religious; his reason is sanctified by his religion, and his religion helps and make use of his reason: so that in the subject it is but one thing; you may call it, if you will, religious reason, and reason made religious.⁷

Therefore, Christian Enlightenment may be considered as a sort of cultural heritage of English Latitudinarianism and Cambridge Platonism, within Locke's thought, later divulged in France by Voltaire. But why and in which sense may Berkeley's philosophy be interpreted as Christian Enlightenment? I will argue that the main contents and characteristics of Berkeley's thought fit the main features of Enlightenment, as listed before.

First of all, let us examine his conception of progress in the arts and sciences, as well as in religion and politics.

That innovations in government and religion, are dangerous, and ought to be discountenanced, I freely own. But is there the like reason why they should be discouraged in philosophy? The making any thing known which was unknown before, is an innovation in knowledge: and if all

⁶ W. Chillingworth, *Religion of Protestants*, Oxford: L. Lichfield, 1638, chap. VI, 376.

⁷ B. Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, in *The Works*, Aberdeen, J. Chalmers, 1751, vol. IV, *Discourse LXXIX*, 139–140, 147. On the relevance of Cambridge Platonists for seventeenth century philosophy and early Enlightenment, see S. Hutton, "The Cambridge Platonists: some new studies", *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 25 (May 2017), 851–857. She writes: "As religious philosophers, they appear out of tune with the perceived secular drift of modern philosophy. Yet their concern with the compatibility of philosophy and religion, and their anti-atheistical stance, is of a piece with the natural philosophers of the time, like Boyle and Newton, who sought to affirm the compatibility of their scientific pursuits with religious belief" (852).

such innovations had been forbidden, men would [not] have made a notable progress in the arts and sciences.⁸

Here we have the first pragmatic definition: Christian Enlightenment is a conservative attitude in religion and politics – incidentally, no Enlightenment thinker was a revolutionary in politics – and, at the same time, presented an innovative attitude in philosophy. Berkeley was indeed the author of various, different, real or alleged discoveries: in metaphysics (*esse est percipi*), in medicine (tar-water, a novel panacea), in mathematics (“a new method of indivisibles”⁹ and a new, sense-grounded geometry – that fortunately was to remain just a claim) and in the theory of vision. It is a historiographical commonplace that George Berkeley was the founder of the empiristic theory of vision based on psychological foundations.

The motto of Christian Enlightenment drawn from a letter written by Misatheus – Berkeley’s pseudonym in all probability– and published in the “Guardian” on 21 March, 1713 could be: “reason abandons men that would employ it against religion”.¹⁰ That is to say, Christian Enlightenment conciliates reason and religion, making them compatible and complementary; it is a sort of “rational belief”, a compromise between reason and religion, rationality and Christian faith. As Benjamin Whichcote once wrote, when a man “speaks religiously, he speaks reasonably”.¹¹ This is also Berkeley’s deep conviction: religion does not limit freedom of thinking, or is the opposite of reason; on the contrary, there can never be incompatibility between reason and religion, because God is the Father of lights, both natural and revealed.¹² Therefore, Berkeley plans to fight against free-thinkers by using their own tools: dissimulation and Socratic irony which enable him to overturn the traditional charges of narrow-mindedness, slavery to prejudice and intolerance brought by free-thinkers against religious men.

A limited understanding applies itself to limited objects like a fly on a pillar in St. Paul’s Cathedral, “whose prospect was confined to a little part of one of the stones of a single pillar”: from its point of view “the joint beauty of the whole or the distinct use of its parts were inconspicuous, and nothing could appear but small inequalities in the surface of the hewn stone”.¹³ In Berkeley’s opinion, free-thinkers are *minute*

⁸ G. Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, in *The Works*, edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–1957, vol. II, 243–244.

⁹ G. Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, entry 346.

¹⁰ A. A. Luce, “Editor’s Introduction to the *Essays in the Guardian*”, in *The Works*, vol. VII, 173–178 (176).

¹¹ B. Whichcote, *Moral and Religious Aphorisms*, 144.

¹² As Berkeley says in the *Alciphron*, dialogue VII, § 28.

¹³ G. Berkeley, *Minute philosophers*, in *The Works*, vol. VII, 206.

philosophers; on the contrary, Christians, capable of thinking God, virtue, soul, eternity are the most wide-minded creatures in the world, the noblest, most rational and tolerant beings, without any prejudice at all: Christians are the real enlightened men and thinkers. In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley mentions a "light of Nature", showing the existence of a deity: faith must be grounded on a "rational belief", very different from Catholic "enthusiasm" implicit, for example, in Malebranche's thought, which violates, at the same time, "the laws of reason and religion".¹⁴ These laws are the same; and they have been the same from the ancient times.

In 1735, Berkeley actually presents himself as a champion of free-thinking in mathematics: as "the causes of fluxions cannot be defended by reason", the analysts have "defended their doctrine, in the same manner as any declaiming bigot would defend transubstantiation".

I observe upon the inconsistency of certain infidel analysts. I remark some defects in the principles of the modern analysis. I take the liberty decently to dissent from Sir Isaac Newton. What is there in all this [...] that should move you to cry out "Spain, inquisition, *odium theologicum*?" [...] As I heartily abhor an inquisition in faith, so I think you have no right to erect one in science.¹⁵

Infidelity goes hand in hand with inconsistency and intolerance, as many blind followers of the Newtonian doctrine of fluxions show; as well as Galileo had done in his dispute with the Aristotelians in his *Dialogo sopra i due massimi sistemi del mondo* (1632), Berkeley adopts the Horatian motto of the Royal Society: "nullius addictus iurare in verba magistri". "This same adoration that you pay to him [i.e. Newton] I will pay only to truth"; an authentically enlightened thinker must never say: "*Vestigia pronus adoro*".

In the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron*, Berkeley writes: "thinking is the greatest *desideratum* of the present age"; it is true that "we speak more about thinking", but "we think less than in the ancient times".¹⁶ Freedom of thought and rationality are not prerogatives of the moderns, as it might appear; moreover, devotion to reason, or absolute and blind trust in it – as the main Enlightenment philosophers know very well – is not a rational, but an enthusiastic attitude.¹⁷ In *Siris*, Berkeley mentions "the successful curiosity of the present age, in arts and experiments and

¹⁴ G. Berkeley, *Three dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, in *The Works*, vol. II, 214, 237, and 254.

¹⁵ G. Berkeley, *A defence of free-thinking in mathematics*, in *The works*, vol. IV, §§ IX–XIII.

¹⁶ G. Berkeley, *Alciphron*, dialogue VII, §§ 26–31.

¹⁷ An examination of the different attitudes of eighteenth-century philosophers (Berkeley included) towards enthusiasm may be found in S. Parigi, "La crit-

new systems". While he acknowledges the successes of the "moderns", he admonishes men of science against "enthusiasm" for their achievements: they do not have to forget that "the ancients too were not ignorant of many things, as well in physics as metaphysics".¹⁸

In particular, Berkeley warns his contemporary thinkers against any anti-religious use of the new dogmas in mechanical and natural philosophy. Such a use would be beyond their range and compass, as Robert Boyle and Isaac Newton significantly show. In particular, Boyle would have shared the motto of Christian Enlightenment; from his youth, he is convinced that God wrote three books – the Bible, conscience and Nature – which, therefore, can never contradict one another.¹⁹ It has been said that experimental science was a "religious experience",²⁰ "the best route to a properly theistic view of the world"²¹ – capable, in Boyle's opinion, of defeating an excessive, potentially atheistic rationalism, such as that of the Socinians or free-thinkers, Berkeley's narrow-minded enemies.

In an Age, where so many doe take upon them to deride all that is supernaturall; & whilst they loudly cry up to Reason, make no better use of it, then to employ it, first to Depose Faith, and then to serve their Passions & Interests,²²

Boyle "had a profound sense of God's presence and power, and this constant awareness of God's immediacy was the psychological and intellectual basis both for his outlook in natural philosophy and his general attitude to life". Such a description could have perfectly defined Berkeley's personality as well.²³ In Berkeley's opinion, an authentic empiricist attitude cannot exclude supernatural events occurring in men's experi-

ica all'entusiasmo nel Settecento," in A. Bettini, S. Parigi (eds.), *Studi sull'entusiasmo*, Milano: Angeli, 2001, 137–151.

¹⁸ G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 265.

¹⁹ In a manuscript of the years 1649–1650, entitled *Of the Study of the Book of Nature*: see M. Hunter, "How Boyle Became a Scientist," *History of Science* 33 (1995), 59–103.

²⁰ Ph. Hamou, "Boyle et la valeur de la science," in M. Dennehy, C. Ramond (eds.), *La philosophie naturelle de Robert Boyle*, Paris: Vrin, 2009, 175–193 (185).

²¹ "General Introduction", in *The Works of Robert Boyle*, edited by M. Hunter and E. B. Davis, London: Pickering & Chatto, 1999, vol. I, XXIII.

²² M. Hunter, "Boyle et le surnaturel," in *La philosophie naturelle de Robert Boyle*, 213–236 (223).

²³ "General Introduction", in *The Works of Robert Boyle*, p. XXII. The same thesis is argued by M. J. Osler, "From Immanent Natures to Nature as Artifice: The Reinterpretation of Final Causes in Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosophy," *The Monist* 79 (1996), 388–407 and S. Ducheyne, "The General Scholium: Some Notes on Newton's Published and Unpublished Endeavours," *Lias-Sources and Documents relating to the Early Modern History of Ideas* 33 (2006), 223–274.

ence; an authentically unprejudiced reason must be able to think God, virtue, soul, eternity.

Moreover, Berkeley always shows an "intellectual passion for the clarification of ideas and the simplification of theory" (as Thomas Jesop said)²⁴ exemplified by the critical analysis of some familiar concepts in philosophy and science: the "lines" and "angles" of the "optic writers",²⁵ the "occult qualities" of mechanical philosophy such as "force" and "gravity",²⁶ the empty notions of infinitesimals, absolute space and motion.²⁷ We may add the concept of "cause", criticized in some important, though often neglected, "humian" passages.²⁸ Berkeley shares this conception of philosophy as an epistemological, critical enterprise, opposed to the construction of metaphysical systems, with those presented by main French Enlightenment thinkers.

Both in his life and works, Berkeley always manifests a constant, Baconian and enlightened concern for public, moral or material welfare: in his opinion, general good and happiness should be the purpose of any philosophy – and this is both a Christian principle and a major aspect of the Enlightenment ideology. Indeed, he was a very active man, one of the most progressive land-owners in Southern Ireland, a zealous bishop always residing in his diocese, promoting agriculture, spinning and weaving; he boldly planned the foundation of St. Paul's College in the Bermuda to religiously and philosophically educate the natives; he pretended to discover a panacea, i.e. tar-water, in order to heal his unlucky parishioners; he also projected the national Irish Bank in the *Querist*. He was, moreover, an amateur of the mechanical arts and techniques, spending many hours in the foundries to watch the workers, like Galileo in the Venetian Arsenal, or Diderot and d'Alembert in Paris.²⁹

As David Berman maintained, in his philosophy, Berkeley joined the liberal, rationalist, tolerant and anti-dogmatic tradition – represented in his times by the Irish philosopher John Toland – and the fideistic, but at the same time strongly empiristic tradition – represented by the Provost of Trinity College, Peter Browne, and by the Archbishop of Dublin,

²⁴ In the "Editor's Introduction" to the *Treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, in *The Works*, vol. II, 7 (note 1).

²⁵ G. Berkeley, *An essay towards a new theory of vision*, §§ 12–15, 33, 38, 77–78.

²⁶ G. Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, § 102; *De motu*, §§ 4–6; *Alciphron*, dialogue VII, §§ 6–7; *Siris*, § 293.

²⁷ G. Berkeley, *A treatise*, §§ 110–117 and 130–132; *De motu*, §§ 52–65; *Siris*, §§ 249–250 and 270–271.

²⁸ See, for example, *A treatise*, §§ 31, 65 and 108.

²⁹ See S. R. L. Clark, "God-appointed Berkeley and general good," in J. Foster, H. Robinson (eds.), *Essays on Berkeley. A tercentennial celebration*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985, 233–253.

William King: the result is a peculiar “mysticism grounded on reason”³⁰ that can also be considered a sort of synthesis of “Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment in Irish philosophy”.³¹ But, in my opinion, the paradigm of Christian Enlightenment fits better to Berkeleian theories and attitudes.

As well as other Enlightenment authors, Berkeley is not a systematic thinker; as he writes to his American correspondent Samuel Johnson: “I have no inclination to trouble the world with large volumes”.³² Moreover, he attends London literary circles, and even the clubs of free-thinkers; among his friends, there are Richard Steele and Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift and Alexander Pope. As well as other Enlightenment authors, his style is plain and, at the same time, brilliant, both in the genres of the treatise, the dialogue and the essay; he repeatedly affirms that he wants to write for everybody.

From the beginning to the end, Berkeley’s thought is dominated by an inexhausted strain towards the truth *and* (not *or*) the Truth, against any prejudice and intolerance. Here is an early declaration of intents:

I am young, I am an upstart, I am a pretender, I am vain, very well. [...] But one thing, I know, I am not guilty of. I do not pin my faith on the sleeve of any great man. I act not out of prejudice & prepossession. I do not adhere to any opinion because it is an old one, a receiv’d one, a fashionable one, or one that I have spent much time in the study and cultivation of. [...] If in some things I differ from a Philosopher I profess to admire, ‘tis for that very thing on account whereof I admire him namely the love of truth.³³

In his first letter to Johnson, Berkeley states: “I do not pretend that my books can teach truth. All I hope for is, that they may be an occasion to inquisitive men of discovering truth, by consulting their own minds, and looking into their own thoughts”.³⁴ This is an authentically enlightened attitude: everyone must be free of searching for truth, without any received authority to follow blindly. In the *Theory of Vision Vindicated* we may read:

³⁰ D. Berman, *George Berkeley. Idealism and the man*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1994, ch. I, § 2; see also p. 53.

³¹ D. Berman, *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy*, London–New York: Continuum, 2005, ch. 3.

³² G. Berkeley, *Philosophical Correspondence between Berkeley and Samuel Johnson*, 281.

³³ G. Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, entries 465 and 467.

³⁴ G. Berkeley, *Philosophical Correspondence between Berkeley and Samuel Johnson*, 282.

In an age wherein we hear so much of thinking and reasoning, it may seem needless to observe, how useful and necessary it is to think, in order to obtain just and accurate notions, to distinguish things that are different, to speak consistently, to know even our own meaning. And yet for want of this, we may see many, even in these days, run into perpetual blunders and paralogisms. No friend, therefore, to truth and knowledge would lay any restraint or discouragement on thinking.³⁵

Christian faith, in Berkeley's opinion, does not imply any restraint or discourage anybody from thinking; on the contrary, it allows us to widen our understanding. It may be objected that Berkeley is the protagonist of some fights which often appeared anti-enlightened *ex post*: for example, against Newtonian mathematicians. But, as we have already said, they are considered as followers of authority, rather than of truth:³⁶ therefore, they – not the bishop – are the real intolerant, not enlightened thinkers.

Even in *Siris*, Berkeley's last work, which Luce considers an example of anti-Enlightenment and pre-Romantic thought,³⁷ Berkeley fights against "infidel" physicians: as well as free-thinkers and Newtonian mathematicians, some physicians, often bound to the Low Church and the whig party, were reputed to be atheists.³⁸ Against them, Berkeley introduces the active principle of tar-water, which is made to coincide with Newton and Stephen Hales' aether, or Hermann Boerhaave's fire; nevertheless, Berkeley refuses to consider it a real and universal cause. He opposes the materialistic and immanentistic paradigm, of Newtonian origin, which dominates medicine in his times. The invisible aethereal spirit (which is fire, the substance of light and *anima mundi*) is spread everywhere; it contains the seeds of everything; it is the means by which the unique incorporeal Agent rules and governs "the whole mass of corporeal beings".³⁹ In Berkeley's thought, the chemical philosophy of the beginning of the eighteenth century is deeply linked with biblical, Egyptian, Persian and hermetic *prisca sapientia*.⁴⁰ Just like infidel mathematicians are often wrong about their principles, materialistic physicians are

³⁵ G. Berkeley, *Theory of vision vindicated and explained*, §§ 70 and 35.

³⁶ G. Berkeley, *A defence of free-thinking in mathematics*, §§ 2, 9, 11, 13, 21, 50.

³⁷ A. A. Luce, "Editor's Introduction to the *Siris*", in *The works*, vol. V, 7.

³⁸ Among the others, William Porterfield, Robert Whytt, William Cullen, Alexander Monro; see, for example, M. Benjamin, "Medicine, morality, and the politics of Berkeley's tar-water," in A. Cunningham, R. French (eds.), *The medical Enlightenment of the eighteenth century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, 165–193.

³⁹ G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 266.

⁴⁰ See G. N. Cantor, "The theological significance of ether", in G. N. Cantor, M. S. Hodge (eds.), *Conceptions of ether. Studies in the history of ether theories 1740–1900*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1981, 135–155.

less effective at doing their job: on the contrary, tar-water may work as a panacea, in that it is a sort of “potable God”.

In *Siris*, there is a vehement plea for truth:

But charity obligeth me to say what I know, and what I think, howsoever it may be taken. Men may censure and object as they please, but I appeal to time and experiment. Effects misimputed, cases wrong told, circumstances overlooked, perhaps, too, prejudices and partialities against truth, may for a time prevail, and keep her at the bottom of her well, from whence nevertheless she emergeth sooner or later, and strikes the eyes of all who do not keep them shut.⁴¹

Siris' last paragraph is a sort of spiritual testament which deeply and definitely links natural truth to supernatural Truth:

Truth is the cry of all, but the game of a few. Certainly, where it is the chief passion, it doth not give way to vulgar cares and views; nor is it contented with a little ardour in the early time of life, active perhaps to pursue, but not so fit to weigh and revise. He that would make a real progress in knowledge must dedicate his age as well as youth, the later growth as well as first fruits, at the altar of Truth.⁴²

2. The Rational Core of Berkeley's Apologetics

Two theories lie at the core of Berkeley's philosophy: immaterialism – a metaphysical doctrine born in the field of gnoseology – and the conception of the world as a divine language – “the voice of the Author of nature, which speaks to our eyes”⁴³ – grounded on the theory of vision. These two theories, deeply interwoven, allow him to conciliate philosophical enquiry and apologetics, truth (in small letters) and the Truth (with a capital “T”). As it rests on epistemology and scientific theories, Berkeley's apologetics intrigued men of science, like Boerhaave, Haller, Nieuwentijdt: this link between contemporary science and apologetics may be considered an aspect of Christian Enlightenment.

Berkeley's philosophy has always had apologetic aims, since his youth; therefore, he never denied or gave up the double rational core of his apologetics; if he sometimes puts those theories in brackets (especially in *De motu* and *Siris*), this happens because they are inessential to his aims, so that he may take them for granted. If apologetics is to be considered as a sort of silver thread in Berkeley's philosophical and scien-

⁴¹ G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 82.

⁴² G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 368.

⁴³ G. Berkeley, *An Essay towards a new theory of vision*, § 152.

tific thought, there cannot be a “second”, post-immaterialist philosophy, which Berkeley would have developed after *Three Dialogues*, as some scholars, from Mario Manlio Rossi to Geneviève Brykman,⁴⁴ maintained.

Indeed, immaterialism is an assumption in *Theory of Vision Vindicated*:

The objects of sense, being things immediately perceived, are otherwise called ideas. The cause of these ideas, or the power producing them, is not the object of sense, not being it self perceived, but only inferred by reason from its effects, to wit, those objects or ideas which are perceived by sense. From our ideas of sense the inference of reason is good to a Power, Cause, Agent. But we may not therefore infer that our ideas are like unto this Power, Cause, or active Being. On the contrary, it seems evident that an idea can be only like another idea, and that in our ideas or immediate objects of sense, there is nothing of power, causality, or agency included.⁴⁵

In *De motu*, Berkeley admits the existence of second causes, but he deprives them of any real power and affirms that the investigation of the actual, incorporeal causes (i. e. the universal Mind) is the field of metaphysics. As he had already stated in *Treatise*, he reaffirms that the task of the scientist is not to search for causes, or to explain phenomena, but to refer them to certain rules, finding the “grammar” of nature.⁴⁶ When he refers to a *res extensa*, in the form of things, bodies or qualities,⁴⁷ he accepts to “speak with the vulgar”, without ceasing to “think with the learned”;⁴⁸ in the same way, Berkeley considered the existence of tangible objects in his theory of vision.

Also in his last work, Berkeley confirms his two core theories in their apologetic extent. What is really new in *Siris* is the Neoplatonic image of the world as a chain of intermediate entities between God and tar-water, the occasional cause of that work: tar-water is a sort of “potable God”, in that it derives its powers from God, by means of the aethereal chain. What is really new in *Siris* is the search for the noble and ancient origins of iatrochemical theories of tar-water and, at the same time, of immaterialism: Berkeley exposes a syncretistic project in the authentic

⁴⁴ M. M. Rossi, *Saggio su Berkeley*, Bari: Laterza, 1955; *Introduzione a Berkeley*, Bari: Laterza, 1970; G. Brykman, *Berkeley. Philosophie et apologetique*, Lille, Atelier nationale de reproduction des thèses, Paris: Vrin, 1984, vol. I.

⁴⁵ G. Berkeley, *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, § 11.

⁴⁶ G. Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, §§ 65, 108–109; *Siris*, §§ 252–254. On Berkeley's adoption of the ancient paradigm of “scire per signa”, as opposed to the likewise ancient paradigm of science as “scire per causas”, see S. Parigi, “‘Scire per causas’ vs. ‘scire per signa’: George Berkeley and scientific explanation in *Siris*”, in S. Parigi (ed.), *George Berkeley. Religion and Science in the Age of Enlightenment*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2010, 107–119.

⁴⁷ See, for example, *De motu*, §§ 21 and 30; *Siris*, §§ 162 and 290.

⁴⁸ G. Berkeley, *A treatise*, § 51.

spirit of Renaissance. Immaterialism goes back to Aristotle and Plato, Plotinus and Jamblicus; its traces may be found in Hermes Trismegistus and Francesco Patrizi, Ralph Cudworth and Bernard Nieuwentijdt.

Berkeley wants to include his thought in a long philosophical tradition; without substantially modifying his concepts, he makes use of an inspired language to explicitly state immaterialism once again: "As to an absolute actual existence of sensible or corporeal things, it doth not seem to have been admitted either by Plato or Aristotle"⁴⁹ and "natural phenomena are only natural appearances. They are, therefore, such as we see and perceive them".⁵⁰

The Pythagoreans and Platonists had a notion of the true system of the world. They allowed of mechanical principles, but actuated by soul or mind: they distinguished the primary qualities in bodies from the secondary, making the former to be physical causes, and they understood physical causes in a right sense:⁵¹ they saw that a mind infinite in power, unextended, invisible, immortal, governed, connected, and contained all things.⁵²

Physical causes understood "in a right sense" are "natural appearances", that is to say, ideas in man and God's minds, deprived of any power and physical agency. Moreover, in *Siris*, there is the last and most complete account of the metaphor of sensible world as a divine language, first advanced in *An essay towards a new theory of vision*. This image was born on the field of biblical hermeneutics: its author was Philo Alexandrinus (20 b. C.–45 a. C.) who commented on some passages in *Deuteronomy* (IV, 12) and *Exodus* (XX, 18 and 22): there is an analogy among the "voice" of God, "seen by the eyes of the soul", light and thought; the word is invisible, like the spirit.⁵³ The divine language argument is deeply connected with immaterialism, and in that it helps in establishing the following theses: 1) visible objects do not exist without the mind, as "a new set of thoughts or sensations";⁵⁴ 2) visible ideas are not caused by tangible objects 3) nor are like them; visible ideas may only indicate tangible objects as their signs. It is superfluous to remind that, starting from *Treatise*, tangible objects become in turn another kind of ideas.

⁴⁹ G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 311.

⁵⁰ G. Berkeley, *Siris*, § 292.

⁵¹ That is to say, they knew that "physical causes were only instruments, or rather marks and signs", as Berkeley says in the conclusion of section 266.

⁵² G. Berkeley, *Siris*, §§ 266 and 294.

⁵³ Philo Alexandrinus, *De migratione Abrahami*, in *Oeuvres* (eds. R. Arnaldez, C. Mondésert and J. Pouilloux), Paris: CERF, 1965, vol. XIV, §§ 47–52.

⁵⁴ G. Berkeley, *An essay towards a new theory of vision*, § 41.

Therefore, the two central doctrines of Berkeley's apologetics – immaterialism and the divine language argument – are present in Berkeley's philosophy from the very beginning to the end: they are the core of a rational apologetics, particularly attractive to scientific minds, both enlightened and Christian, without any perceived contradiction. Indeed Berkeley, a bishop in the Age of Enlightenment, was not an isolated figure: other eighteenth century authors were, at the same time, philosophers, apologists, men of science, combining in their works erudition, a deep knowledge of ancient and modern philosophies, authentic scientific discoveries and religious concerns. The concept of Christian Enlightenment may be applied, for example, to the learned *savant* Albrecht von Haller, a Swiss physician and physiologist, professor of anatomy, surgery and botany at the University of Göttingen, or to the Dutch mathematician Bernard Nieuwentijdt, well known to Berkeley.

Both of them, following in Berkeley's footsteps, made an apologetic use of the theory of vision. The first one expressly adopted the Berkeleyian metaphor of the visible world as a divine language, and extended it to every kind of objects, making that theory the core of a gnoseological theory of signs. In *Elementa physiologiae* (1768–1771), Haller affirms:

Therefore George Berkley (*sic!*) was not excessive in considering the entire process of vision as an arbitrary dialogue between God and the creature. This does not feel or perceive anything of the objects, but what God wants it to feel and perceive, in order that by means of those signs man preserves himself, as if he was led by God's hand.⁵⁵

According to Haller, the whole knowledge is the knowledge of signs: this is what distinguishes the man from the brute. However, God might have changed the impressions made by external objects in our sense organs, the convexity of the cornea, or the laws of refraction, and we would have got different ideas of, for example, colours: in this case, we would see "another world".⁵⁶ Haller attributes the same opinion to Hermann Boerhaave, in his commented edition of *Praelectiones academicae in proprias Institutiones rei medicae* (1740–1744). The Dutch physician, too, had stated a theory of objects as *notae characteristicae*, mere signs of the language spoken by God to our sense organs, whose meaning are concepts

⁵⁵ A. von Haller, *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani*, Venetiis, apud Aloysium Milocco, 1768–1771, vol. V, 360. The Latin text is as follows: "Ut omnino non penitus nimius fuerit Georgius Berkley, quando totum visionis negotium pro dialogo arbitrario Deum inter et creaturam habet; quae nihil de rebus ipsis sentiat, et percipiat, nisi quae Deus ipsam sentire, et percipere vult, ut per ea signa homo ad sui conservationem quasi manu divina ducatur". Translation is mine. See also, of the same author, *Prinae lineae physiologiae* (first ed. Göttingen 1747), Hildesheim: Olms, 1974, 291.

⁵⁶ A. von Haller, *Elementa physiologiae*, vol. V, book XVII, sect. I, §§ 4, 7, 11, and 14.

of the mind:⁵⁷ “the whole process of sensation is due to God, who has arranged the human mind in this way”.⁵⁸ These assertions may be read in scientific, academic works on medicine.

In conclusion, Bishop Berkeley does not stay at the sidelines of the age of Enlightenment, both because he shares many essential points of French Enlightenment and because of the firm apologetic aims of his unchanged philosophical doctrines. Christian Enlightenment is a useful category to understand the deep connections among the apparently unrelated central doctrines of Berkeley’s philosophy: immaterialism, the conception of the visible world as a divine language, the chain connecting God and tar – because of which tar-water has a universal healing power. Such doctrines were, at the same time, current in Berkeley’s time and deeply grounded in classical antiquity. Therefore, the apparent extravagance of Berkeley’s thought is deeply rooted in the age that – though bold of its lights and projected towards the future – has many shadowy links with the past.

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⁵⁷ H. Boerhaave, *Praelectiones academicae in proprias Institutiones rei medicae* (edidit, et notas addidit Albertus Haller), Gottingae, apud Abram Vandenhoeck, 1740–1744, vol. IV, p. 284.

⁵⁸ H. Boerhaave, *Praelectiones academicae*, vol. IV, 441. The Latin text says: “Totumque Deo debetur opus sensationum, qui mentem humanam ita instruxit”. Translation is mine.

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Summary

Berkeley's thought has often been considered not related to, or even directly opposite to the general atmosphere of the Enlightenment, though it pervaded Berkeley's times and his literary and philosophical circle. In particular, Berke-

ley's so-called "second" philosophy expressed in *De motu*, *Alciphron*, *Theory of Vision Vindicated* and, above all, in *Siris* – neoplatonic from its very title – has often been judged post-immaterialist and definitely not "enlightened". I will show that:

- c) the concept of "Christian Enlightenment" is historically legitimate and theoretically useful: it may cast some light on Berkeley's figure and on the development of his philosophy, giving it unity and coherence;
- d) the concept of "Christian Enlightenment" may be defined in comparison with the general aspects of French Enlightenment; apologetics, rooted in seventeenth century as well as in ancient philosophy, is its main content.

Keywords: Enlightenment, Platonism, reason vs. religion, free-thinking, apologetics

Streszczenie

Berkeley i chrześcijańskie Oświecenie

Często uważano, że myśl Berkeleya nie ma związku z ogólnym duchem Oświecenia, a nawet jest mu przeciwna, choć duch ten przenikał zarówno jego czasy, jak i środowisko literatów oraz filozofów, pośród których się obracał. Zwłaszcza tak zwaną „drugą” filozofię Berkeleya, zawartą w *De motu*, *Alkifronie*, *Obronie i wyjaśnieniu teorii widzenia* i przede wszystkim w *Siris* – dziele, którego sam tytuł wskazuje na tradycję neoplatońską – określano często jako postimmaterialistyczną i całkowicie „nieoświeceniową”. W artykule wykazuję, że:

- a) pojęcie „chrześcijańskiego Oświecenia” jest historycznie uzasadnione i użyteczne od strony teoretycznej, może bowiem rzucić nieco światła na postać Berkeleya i rozwój jego filozofii, nadając jej jedność oraz spójność;
- b) pojęcie „chrześcijańskiego Oświecenia” można zdefiniować poprzez odniesienie do ogólnych cech Oświecenia francuskiego, przy czym jego zasadniczą treścią jest sięgająca korzeniami zarówno wieku siedemnastego, jak i filozofii starożytnej apologetyka.

Słowa kluczowe: Oświecenie, platonizm, rozum a religia, wolnomyślicielstwo, apologetyka