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## George Berkeley's Conception of Accountability\*

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In this article, George Berkeley's theory of moral responsibility is examined. The term *moral responsibility* is not used by Berkeley. He prefers a different name for this concept — *accountability*. *Alciphron* is the only Berkeley's work where this term is used systematically. And the only place where Berkeley discusses the question of moral responsibility at length is the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron*, sections 16–20. In the present work, I am going to use terms *moral responsibility* and *accountability* interchangeably.

The aim of this article is to reconstruct Berkeley's views on accountability expressed in the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron*. In the first section, I formulate the question of moral responsibility. In the second section, I analyze the place the concept of moral responsibility occupies in Alciphron's argument against religion (A 7.16),<sup>1</sup> trace the argument

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I am going to use the abbreviations used in *Berkeley Revisited: Moral, Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Sébastien Charles (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2015), ix–xi. All Berkeley's works are cited according to George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop, 9 vols. (Edinburgh and London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–57). This collection is abbreviated as W and cited by volume and page. *Passive Obedience* (W 6.1–46) is abbreviated as PO and cited by section number. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (W 2.147–263) are abbreviated as DHP and cited by page. *Alciphron, or the Minute*

back to Clarke–Collins correspondence and show what type of the notion of moral responsibility, given his answer to the argument, Berkeley is committed to. In the last two sections, I explicate the concept of accountability, examine the conditions of accountability and, with the help of some additional material from the sermons and *Siris*, show that, in his later works, Berkeley develops an *internal deviation account* of moral responsibility first sketched in *Three Dialogues*.

The paragraphs 16–20 of the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron* have been analyzed by some of Berkeley scholars: Paul Olscamp,<sup>2</sup> James Harris,<sup>3</sup> Geneviève Brykman,<sup>4</sup> Marc Hight<sup>5</sup> examine Berkeley's views on free will; Melissa Frankel<sup>6</sup> and Hugh Hunter<sup>7</sup> reconstruct Berkeley's account of moral responsibility relying on *Three Dialogues* and *Passive Obedience*. Finally, Timo Airaksinen gives an original interpretation<sup>8</sup> of Berkeley's approach to free will together with moral responsibility using *Alciphron* VII.

## The Question of Moral Responsibility

To justify writing on matter that has already been covered in the literature, I need to make the subject of this article more specific. The question of moral responsibility to be discussed here is following: what does it take for a person, according to Berkeley, to be morally responsible for her actions? But we should distinguish this question from a more basic one — the question of attributability, which is to ask, why certain event is considered to be some person's action? The distinction is borrowed

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*Philosopher* (W 3.1–329) is cited by dialogue and section number. *Siris* (W 5.1–163) is abbreviated as S and cited by section number.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 85–103.

<sup>3</sup> James A. Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity. The Free Will Debate in Eighteenth-Century British Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 134–135.

<sup>4</sup> Geneviève Brykman, "On Human Liberty in Berkeley's *Alciphron* VII," in *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2008), 231–246.

<sup>5</sup> Marc Hight, "Berkeley on the Difference between Brutes and Men," in *Berkeley's Lasting Legacy: 300 Years Later*, ed. Timo Airaksinen and Bertil Belfrage (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 211–216.

<sup>6</sup> Melissa Frankel, "Actions, Behaviours and Volitions in Berkeley's Moral Philosophy," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited*, 99–113.

<sup>7</sup> Hugh Hunter, "Berkeley on Doing Good and Meaning Well," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited*, 131–146.

<sup>8</sup> Timo Airaksinen, "Vulgar Thoughts: Berkeley on Responsibility and Freedom," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited* 115–130.

from Maria Schechtman who states it shortly and clearly.<sup>9</sup> Schechtman insists that the questions, although they are different, are tightly related: "Basic, literal attribution is not necessarily irrelevant to these practical judgments because it is an answer to the basic question of attribution that tells us where we can look to start asking questions about the more full-blown sense, the answers to which constitute these judgments [of moral responsibility]".<sup>10</sup> In Berkeley scholarship, the two questions are often conflated and considered in the course of discussing free will and causation. In this article, I am concerned with the question of moral responsibility. Then, my query regarding Berkeley's philosophy is this: given that a certain action is rightly attributed to some person, what does it mean that she is accountable for it?

It may be asked, whether Berkeley himself distinguishes these two questions. There is evidence that he does. In *A* 7.17, Berkeley's spokesman Euphranor explicitly utters them:

*Euphranor.* Tell me, Alciphron, do you think it implies a contradiction that God should make a creature free?

*Alciphron.* I do not.

*E.* It is then possible there may be such a thing?

*A.* This I do not deny.

*E.* You can therefore conceive and suppose such a free agent?

*A.* Admitting that I can; what then?

*E.* Would not such a one think that he acted? [1]

*A.* He would.

*E.* And condemn himself for some actions, and approve himself for others? [2]

*A.* This too I grant.

*E.* Would he not think he deserved reward or punishment? [3]

*A.* He would (*A* 7.17).

Euphranor's question [1] is a paraphrase of the attributability question: in *Alciphron* VII.19, Berkeley claims that the experience of activity is sufficient to attribute an action to a person while questions [2] and [3] are related to moral responsibility.

According to Airaksinen, the answers to the questions of attributability and moral responsibility coincide. His view is that attributing an action to an agent is both a necessary and sufficient condition for her to be responsible for the action:

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<sup>9</sup> Maria Schechtman, *Staying Alive: Personal Identity, Practical Concerns, and the Unity of Life*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 14–20.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

The thesis is that I am accountable if and only if I acted, in the sense that I was the agent and the action was mine. This is the ownership theory of accountability. Its great merit is that it bypasses the problem of free will. It does not say that I am responsible for my free actions; it says I am responsible for those actions that are mine, or of which I am the agent.<sup>11</sup>

Although Airaksinen's interpretation is literally correct, his *ownership theory* fails to recognize the difference between the questions. Two questions may be different but have one answer, and it seems to be Berkeley's case.

Due to the confluences of the questions, the ownership theory faces a problem, recognized by Frankel and Hunter: according to Berkeley, all physical events, including human behavior, can be rightly attributed to God; if attribution is sufficient for accountability then God is morally responsible for human behavior, including sins. Berkeley addresses this problem in the *Three Dialogues*:

Sin or moral turpitude doth not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion. This is plain, in that the killing an enemy in a battle, or putting a criminal legally to death, is not thought sinful, though the outward act be the very same with that in the case of murder. Since therefore sin doth not consist in the physical action, the making God an immediate cause of all such actions, is not making him the author of sin (*DHP* 236–237).

It is possible to try to defend the *ownership theory* by denying that human actions can be rightly attributed to God, but the cited fragment eliminates this option: Berkeley believes that God is not the author of sin, even though he can be an immediate cause of an action. Additionally, Melissa Frankel correctly suggests that there are only two possible interpretations of God's relation to human actions available for Berkeley, namely concurrentism and occasionalism.<sup>12</sup> Both of them entail that human actions can be attributed to God. Then, it seems that moral responsibility requires something more than simple attribution of an action to an agent. This criticism of the *ownership theory* does not imply that God is not a morally responsible being; rather, it shows that this theory addresses mainly the question of attribution and does not give an answer to the question of moral responsibility.

The problem of consistency between human and divine responsibility is the main motivation for development of the *internal deviation account* (IDA). The term is suggested by Hugh Hunter who gives a short sum-

<sup>11</sup> Airaksinen, "Vulgar Thoughts," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited*, 128.

<sup>12</sup> Frankel, "Actions, Behaviours and Volitions," 105n.

mary of this view: "So: one means well when one's acts of will track the laws of reason and religion, and one means badly otherwise. I will call this 'internal deviation account' of moral responsibility".<sup>13</sup> And later: "Every attribution of praise and blame can be accounted for by pointing to some morally relevant volition or volitions".<sup>14</sup> It seems that Frankel is also committed to IDA, although she disagrees with Hunter on the question of attribution: "The account is thus as follows: a physical event (bodily motion), in order to count as moral, must be connected to the proper volition to act in accordance with the moral rule. The very same physical motion might be immoral if connected with a different volition — if the will 'deviat[es] from the laws of reason'".<sup>15</sup> I understand IDA, in its basic sense, as a theory that says that what makes an agent responsible for his action is the quality of will resulting in the action. The presence of certain quality of will makes the agent an appropriate target for application of moral responsibility.

I believe that IDA is basically correct, but it needs further development. Frankel and Hunter state it very briefly and ground it mainly in the *Three Dialogues* and the *Passive Obedience*. I am going to elaborate this account using Berkeley's later works.

## Alciphron's Argument and Clarke-Collins Correspondence

Some commentators mention that, according to Berkeley, freedom is a necessary condition of responsibility. Hight recognizes the importance of this connection for Berkeley's moral philosophy: "The foundation of morality (and religion) for Berkeley is the ability of rational agents to freely will in a manner that makes them responsible agents".<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the necessity of freedom for morality and religion is stressed by Berkeley himself. The discussion of free will in *Alciphron* VII begins with Alciphron's argument against religion:

Religion, it is evident, implies the worship of a God, which worship supposeth rewards and punishments, which suppose merits and demerits, actions good and evil, and these suppose human liberty, a thing impossible and, consequently, religion, a thing built thereon, must be an unreasonable absurd thing" (A 7.16).

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<sup>13</sup> Hunter, "Berkeley on Doing Good and Meaning Well," 134.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Frankel, "Actions, Behaviours and Volitions," 110.

<sup>16</sup> Hight, "Berkeley on the Difference between Brutes and Men," 215.

This argument and Berkeley's reply to it suggest that freedom is not an immediate condition of religion but is required for moral responsibility that is a necessary condition of posthumous retribution and religion itself.

It is generally accepted that some characters of the dialogues of *Alciphron* express the views of Berkeley's real opponents — the freethinkers. Commentators agree<sup>17</sup> that Berkeley's primary target in the discussed part of the seventh dialogue is Anthony Collins, whose position is represented by Alciphron. Collins is the best candidate for the object of Berkeley's criticism for the following reason: Berkeley was concerned with disputing the views of his contemporaries. Brykman rightly suggests that, beneath the freethinking philosophers, "lurk more impious figures"<sup>18</sup> of Hobbes and Spinoza, but it seems that these seventeenth century philosophers are of interest to Berkeley as far as their views coincide with the views of the freethinkers. And, among Berkeley's contemporaries, Collins is that freethinking philosopher who has actively developed a theory of free will and moral responsibility. These topics were raised in his correspondence with Samuel Clarke (1707–1708);<sup>19</sup> later Collins treated free will and moral responsibility in his *Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (1717).<sup>20</sup>

Given that Collins is the best candidate for the real figure criticized by Berkeley in *A* 7.16–20, we can expect to find in his work an argument presented in *A* 7.16 (i.e. the argument from impossibility of free will to impossibility of religion). And a reasoning of this kind can be found in Clarke–Collins correspondence:

[I]f the mind of man were nothing but a certain system of matter, and thinking nothing but a certain mode of motion in that system, it would follow that, since every determination of motion depends necessarily upon the impulse that causes it, therefore every thought in a man's mind must likewise be necessary and depending wholly upon external causes, and there could be no such thing in us as liberty or a power of self-de-

<sup>17</sup> Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley*, 91; David Berman, "Introduction," in George Berkeley, *Alciphron or the minute philosopher in focus*, ed. David Berman (London: Routledge, 1993), 11; Brykman, "On Human Liberty," 236–237.

<sup>18</sup> Brykman, "On Human Liberty," 236.

<sup>19</sup> William Uzgalis, ed., *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707–08* (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2011).

<sup>20</sup> Anthony Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty*, ed. J. O'Higgins (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1976). Explication of Collins' conception of free will and moral responsibility is not the goal of this article; for a brief summary of Collins' view see William Uzgalis, "Anthony Collins", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/collins/>>.

termination. Now what ends and purposes of religion mere clocks and watches are capable of serving needs no long and nice consideration.<sup>21</sup>

We could immediately conclude that this argument is the one Berkeley means in *Alciphron VII*, but there are at least two problems. The first problem is that this passage appears in Clarke's *Third Defence*, not in a Collins' letter. Clarke introduces this fragment to demonstrate that "the notion [he is] arguing against is utterly destructive of religion".<sup>22</sup> Collins' reaction is not to accept the argument:

Men and clocks agree in being necessarily determined in all their actions — therefore, says he, they are alike incapable of religion? ... [W]hat is it makes a man a proper subject of religion but his understanding? And what excludes a clock from being a proper subject of religion but the want of a human understanding? Both are necessarily determined in their actions. The one by the appearances of good and evil, and the other by a weight or a spring. But how does this agreement destroy man's capacity for religion?<sup>23</sup>

So, the argument is not authorized by Collins. However, both Clarke and Berkeley had reasons to believe that the conclusion of the argument naturally follows from Collins' principles. Moreover, Berkeley had an additional motive to suspect Collins' insincerity. In 1713, Berkeley secretly visited some meetings of freethinkers in London, and he heard how Collins declared "that he had found a demonstration against the being of God".<sup>24</sup> In the light of this fact, Collins' own assertion that his position is harmless for religion could be ignored by Berkeley.

The second problem is that Collins does not deny that humans are responsible beings. He has a consequentialist theory of responsibility that claims that the practice of distribution of rewards and punishments is compatible with determinism. This is explained in the fifth and sixth parts of his *Inquiry*. According to Collins,

The sole end of punishment in society is to prevent, as far as may be, the commission of certain crimes... [I]t will be manifest, that no regard is had to any free-agency in man, in order to render those punishments just; but that on the contrary punishments may be justly inflicted on man tho' a necessary agent.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Uzgalis, *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins*, 192.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 192

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>24</sup> Cited as in David Berman, *George Berkeley. Idealism and the Man*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 78; see also Berman, "Introduction," 11.

<sup>25</sup> Collins, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, 100.



Does Berkeley misinterpret the view of his opponent and fight with a strawman? James Harris believes that he does:

We see in both Butler's *Analogy* and *Alciphron* a tendency to equate the affirmation of necessity with a denial of human accountability. In both works, the necessitarian is depicted as accepting, what most actual necessitarians were at pains to deny, that his scheme is impossible to reconcile with punishment and reward.<sup>26</sup>

But it seems that Harris' conclusion misses the point. We do not have any reasons to believe that Butler and Berkeley have not read the works of their opponents carefully. Rather, they are not satisfied with the type of responsibility proposed by necessitarians, and they defend a different kind of it. The difference between the two types of responsibility is stressed by Berkeley's elder contemporary, Gottfried Leibniz. The paragraphs 72 and 73 of the *Theodicy* say:

I had observed at the outset that he [Hobbes] had not at all proved the absolute necessity of all things, but had shown sufficiently that necessity would not overthrow all the rules of divine or human justice, and would not prevent altogether the exercise of this virtue. There is, however, a kind of justice and a certain sort of rewards and of punishments which appear not so applicable to those who should act by an absolute necessity, supposing such necessity existed. It is that kind of justice which has for its goal neither improvement nor example, nor even redress of the evil. This justice has its foundation only in the fitness of things, which demands a certain satisfaction for the expiation of an evil action. The Socinians, Hobbes and some others do not admit this punitive justice, which properly speaking is avenging justice.<sup>27</sup>

While the kind of responsibility allowed by Collins is consequential, the other kind can be characterized as retributive. Derk Pereboom — a 21<sup>st</sup> century philosopher — has labeled this type of moral responsibility as *basic desert*:

For an agent to be morally responsible for an action is for it to belong to her in such a way that she would deserve blame if she understood that it was morally wrong, and she would deserve credit or perhaps praise if she understood that it was morally exemplary. The desert at issue here is basic in the sense that the agent, to be morally responsible, would de-

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<sup>26</sup> Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 135.

<sup>27</sup> Gottfried W. Leibniz, *Theodicy* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 164–165. I do not claim that Berkeley was influenced by Leibniz in this respect; my aim is to show that the difference between these two kinds of responsibility was recognized by Berkeley's contemporaries.



serve the blame or credit just because she has performed the action, given sensitivity to its moral status, and not by virtue of consequentialist or contractualist considerations.<sup>28</sup>

The hypothesis that Berkeley is defending the basic desert concept of moral responsibility is confirmed by the fragment of the dialogue between Euphranor and Alciphron cited above (A 7.17). Agent's [1] belief that he is acting is sufficient for him to [2] "condemn himself for some actions and approve himself for the other", what is [3] enough for him to deserve reward or punishment. Presumably, moral responsibility in the basic desert sense is not compatible with determinism, while the consequentialist responsibility is. The structure of Alciphron's argument (*Alciphron* VII.16) suggests that the basic desert sense is meant, not the consequentialist one; otherwise the argument misses the point: for nobody (neither Collins, nor Berkeley) argues that responsibility in the consequentialist sense is incompatible with determinism.

## The Concept of Accountability

In this section, I am going to explicate some basic features of Berkeley's concept of accountability and link it to IDA. I would like to start with a rather general point: Berkeley's theory is monistic. The difference between monistic and pluralistic approaches to moral responsibility is stressed by David Shoemaker who himself defends a theory of the second type.<sup>29</sup> Roughly, a monistic theory says that there is only one sense of moral responsibility. Berkeley's accountability monism plays an important role in his response to Alciphron's argument. This is evident in A 7.19:

If we consider the notions that obtain in the world of guilt and merit, praise and blame, accountable and unaccountable, we shall find the common question, in order to applaud or censure, acquit or condemn a man, is, whether he did such an action, and whether he was himself when he did it? ... I know I act, and what I act I am accountable for. And, if this be true, the foundation of religion and morality remains unshaken. Religion, I say, is concerned no farther than that man should be accountable: and this he is according to my sense, and the common sense of the world, if he acts; and that he doth act is self-evident (A 7.19).

This passage shows that a person's moral responsibility to other humans and her responsibility to God are of one and the same type. Ad-

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<sup>28</sup> Derk Pereboom, "Optimistic Skepticism about Free Will," in *The Philosophy of Free Will: Essential Readings from the Contemporary Debates*, ed. Paul Russell and Oisín Deery (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 421.

<sup>29</sup> David Shoemaker, *Responsibility from the Margins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 17.

ditionally, Berkeley specifies only one set of conditions of accountability which entails that there is only one type of it.

An attempt to reconstruct Berkeley's theory of accountability implies that this concept is not a primitive one, i.e. it can be explained with more basic concepts. It seems that, for Berkeley, these basic concepts can be found in the ordinary notions of the world, and the fact that he mentions accountability among them may posit a problem for my project: is accountability not a basic unanalyzable concept? This objection may find some support in the words of Crito:

There is not need of much inquiry to be convinced of two points, than which none are more evident, more obvious, and more universally admitted by men of all sorts, learned or unlearned, in all times and places, to wit, that man acts, and is accountable for his actions (A 7.20).

But being a commonsensical notion does not necessarily presuppose being basic and unanalyzable. Furthermore, Berkeley clearly indicates what concepts are basic for accountability:

The notions of guilt and merit, justice and reward, are in the minds of men antecedent to all metaphysical disquisitions; and, according to those received natural notions, it is not doubted that man is accountable, that he acts, and is self-determined (A 7.19).

The notions of guilt and merit, justice and reward are basic in two senses: first, they are evident and do not need any philosophical analysis at all; second, accountability is rooted in these notions. I take the notions of praise and blame to be primitive as well, but distinct from guilt and merit: while guilt and merit are the features of the agent, praise and blame seem to be appropriate reactions to those features. My interpretational hypothesis is that the notions of guilt, merit, praise, blame, approval, condemnation, applauding, censuring, constitute a family of concepts: they cannot be defined with more basic terms, but they are tightly connected to each other and can be explained through each other. I will call this group of concepts the *accountability family* (AF).

The suggestion that the notions of AF are primitive does not mean that relations between them and other concepts cannot be established. Berkeley makes clear what at least one of these relations is; namely, he answers the question, what it takes for an action to be praiseworthy. The answer is presented in the sermon *On the Mystery of Godliness* (the sixth sermon in Luce–Jessop edition):<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> This is the first of two sermons carrying this name. According to Luce, it belongs to Berkeley's American period; at the same time, *Alciphron* was written (W 7.85).

It is evident there are two parts in the composition of man: The mind which is pure and spiritual, which is made in the image of God, and which we have in common with angels: and the corporeal part containing the senses and passions which we have in common with brute beasts. The former tends to the knowledge and love of God as its true center, to virtue piety and holiness, to all things excellent and praise-worthy; the later inclines to the world, to sensible objects, to carnal things such as may gratify our grosser affections and appetites (*W* 7.88).

According to Berkeley, all praiseworthy actions have their origin in the rational part of man, i.e. praiseworthy actions are rational. The cited fragment does not make clear whether some blameworthy actions can be rational and whether our carnal part can give rise to some praiseworthy actions; but, in this place, we need to recall IDA.

I believe that the passage cited above supports IDA. *Internal deviation account* of responsibility has got its name from and is based on the following fragment of the *Three Dialogues*: "Sin or moral turpitude doth not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the internal deviation of the will from the laws of reason and religion" (*DHP* 236–37). The fragment ends with the conclusion that human beings can be entitled to all the guilt of their actions (*DHP* 237). Thus, *sin* can be characterized as a *guilty action*, and *guilt* is a notion of AF opposed to merit. A natural outcome of this is that a necessary condition of a meritorious action is that it is performed according to the laws of reason and religion. And this conclusion is confirmed by the quotation from the sixth sermon. This interpretation leaves the question, whether there can be rational actions that are neither praiseworthy, nor blameworthy, but it seems that there is no textual evidence to answer it.<sup>31</sup>

Now, it is possible to describe Berkeley's concept of accountability using the notions of AF: a person is accountable for her action if the actions origins from volitions of certain quality — rational or irrational; these volitions are the proper objects of moral estimation; according to the quality of her will, a person is the locus of merit or guilt; to be ac-

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<sup>31</sup> The anonymous reviewer has attracted my attention to the notion of indifferent actions Berkeley discusses in the sermon *On Religious Zeal*. I am grateful to the reviewer for this comment, but I do not agree that the relevant passages from the sermon demonstrate that, according to Berkeley, there are actions that are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy. Indifferent things discussed by Berkeley are those "the practice or belief whereof is not necessary for Salvation". Then Berkeley says, "And for a man to employ his most serious thoughts and endeavors to be active and earnest and solicitous about these things is surely a misapplication of zeal" (*W* 7.19). It seems that things indifferent for salvation are not morally neutral for Berkeley: concentration of one's efforts on these things can be blameworthy (although Berkeley does not say this directly).

countable for an action is to deserve praise or blame for it, applauding or condemnation, reward or punishment.

In the end of this section, I would like to discuss the relation between the notions of AF and the concepts of good and bad. It is important to note that *good* and *bad* are not members of AF: in the seventh dialogue of *Alciphron*, Berkeley does not link accountability to good and bad actions. It seems trivial to say that good actions are praiseworthy, meritorious and applaudable, while bad actions are blameworthy, guilty and condemnable. But, nevertheless, I feel obliged to give at least some support to this thesis. Berkeley's views on the basic moral concepts are formulated in the *Passive Obedience*. In that work, the notion of *good* is tied to the laws of reason and to the general wellbeing of mankind.<sup>32</sup> The fragment from the sixth sermon makes clear that praiseworthy actions, as well as good ones, take their origin from reason. The connection between praiseworthy actions and the general wellbeing of mankind is established in the *On Religious Zeal* sermon (the second sermon in Luce–Jessop edition):<sup>33</sup>

Benevolence to mankind is a noble source, a divine principle of true Christian zeal. ... [I mean] a rational benevolence, a Christian Charity which arises from a sense that it is acceptable to God, that it is agreeable to reason, and what the well being of the world requires. Such a benevolence as this will branch forth into all the social virtues, all the kind good natured offices of life, it will inspire us with an aversion for whatsoever is cruel or unjust, mean or selfish, and give birth to a zeal for everything that is truly generous and praiseworthy (*W* 7.22).

Benevolence to other people is necessary for wellbeing of humankind, that is a characteristic of good, and is the source of everything that is praiseworthy. The conditions for being good and being praiseworthy are the same, and it follows that an action is praiseworthy only if it is good, and, *vice versa*, if an action is praiseworthy it is good; the same logic is applicable to actions bad and blameworthy. It seems that the sets of good actions and praiseworthy actions coincide, but it does not mean that the concepts of *good* and *praise* are one concept.

Although trivial, this conclusion is important for the interpretation of Berkeley's moral philosophy. Many Berkeley scholars have defended a utilitarian reading of his moral philosophy.<sup>34</sup> Utilitarianism is a species of consequentialism, and it has been shown that Berkeley's theory

<sup>32</sup> See, e.g., *PO* 10, *PO* 31.

<sup>33</sup> According to Luce, the sermon belongs to the period of 1709–1712.

<sup>34</sup> For a recent review of the literature on the subject, see Sam Rickless "The Nature, Grounds, and Limits of Berkeley's Argument for Passive Obedience," *Berkeley Studies* 26 (2015–2016): 3–4.

of moral responsibility is of the basic desert type, i.e. not a consequentialist one. If Berkeley were a consequentialist, particular evaluation of the consequences would be necessary for deciding whether an action is good or bad; being good is both necessary and sufficient for being praiseworthy; but evaluation of the consequences is not necessary for ascribing accountability, deciding whether a person deserves praise or blame. Therefore, the concepts of good and bad are not consequentialist, and Berkeley is not a utilitarian.<sup>35</sup>

## The Conditions of Accountability

When I listed the notions of AF, I skipped two important concepts mentioned in *Alciphron* VII.19, namely, of unaccountable and acquittal. These notions lead us to the question of the conditions of responsibility: presumably, if these conditions are not satisfied, a person is unaccountable for her action and is acquitted. In our day discussions, two conditions of moral responsibility are usually discriminated: the control condition

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<sup>35</sup> I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for an objection to this part of argumentation. With the permission of the reviewer, I quote a part of his or her response: "If utilitarianism is the view that moral laws, rules, or principles are justified by their consequences for our happiness or well-being, there's a good deal of evidence that Berkeley is indeed a utilitarian. ... Berkeley can be a consequentialist when it comes to the justification of rules or laws without being a consequentialist with respect to accountability. This is true even if the relevant rules or laws tell us what it is that we should choose or will. If consequentialist reasoning shows that it is good to perform benevolent outward acts, it will thereby show that it is good to will benevolent acts, because willing benevolent outward acts is a reliable way of bringing them about". To answer this, I need to clarify what I understand by utilitarianism here. An important feature of (classical) utilitarianism (and consequentialism in general) is the claim that "whether an act is morally right depends only on consequences" (Walter Sinnott-Armstrong, "Consequentialism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2015/entries/consequentialism/>>). In other words, an action is morally right *if and only if* it leads to certain consequences (or, in the rule utilitarianism case, an action of a particular type usually leads to certain consequences). If we accept the view on Berkeley as a utilitarian, we should deny that there is something else, except of the consequences, what make an action good. The reviewer suggests to regard Berkeley as a utilitarian about the laws and rules, i.e. the ways of obtaining good. But this is still compatible with the position that Berkeley does not define moral good in terms of consequences. And, if it is true, than Berkeley is not a utilitarian. But suppose that Berkeley believes that good is defined in terms of consequences. Then an action is good *if and only if* it leads to certain consequences (again, a rule utilitarian would make this statement more complex). I tried to show that, for Berkeley, an action is praiseworthy *if and only if* it is good. It follows that an action is praiseworthy *if and only if* it leads to certain consequences that is untrue for Berkeley.

and the epistemic condition.<sup>36</sup> The control condition says, roughly, that an agent is morally responsible only for those actions that he controls. The epistemic condition says that the agent is morally responsible for an action only if he has some relevant knowledge.

I am not going to discuss the control condition at any length, because it is connected, first of all, to the attributability question: an action is rightly attributed to an agent if the control condition is satisfied. I will underline some features of the control condition important for accountability. Berkeley recognizes this condition when he says that an agent is accountable if he did an action, and he was himself when he did it (A 7.19).

One important question is, whether freedom is necessary for an agent to be accountable. Airaksinen's position is that the answer to this question is negative: the ownership theory "does not say that I am responsible for my free actions; it says I am responsible for those actions that are mine, or of which I am the agent".<sup>37</sup> The text of *Alciphron* is quite contradictory on this issue. On the one hand, Euphranor argues that,

question being not, whether he did it with a free will, or what determined his will ..., but only, whether he did it wilfully, as what must entitle him to the guilt or merit of it (A 7.19).<sup>38</sup>

The passage quoted above allegedly suggests that freedom is not a necessary condition of accountability. But, on the other hand, in the same section he claims that "a man is said to be free, so far forth as he can do what he will". A possible solution is to ascribe to Berkeley Locke's opinion that freedom cannot be a property of will, because there is no such an entity as will, but it is a property of agents.<sup>39</sup> This suggestion seems attractive in the light of Euphranor's critique of *Alciphron* in A 7.18 for making illegitimate abstractions. So, the cited fragments may be reconciled. Thus, if an action is performed according to a person's will, she is accountable for it (must be entitled to the guilt or merit of it) and is free in respect of this action: accountability presupposes freedom.

In A 7.19, Berkeley says that, to be accountable, agent not only needs to do the action, but also to be himself while performing it. This addition is especially intriguing in the light of what Berkeley says in the next sentence:

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<sup>36</sup> John M. Fischer and Mark Ravizza, *Responsibility and Control: A Theory of Moral Responsibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>37</sup> Airaksinen, "Vulgar Thoughts," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited*, 128.

<sup>38</sup> This quotation, again, supports IDA: this account says that the presence of a will of a certain quality, connected to the action, makes the agent an appropriate target for praise or blame, reward or punishment etc.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Harris, *Of Liberty and Necessity*, 23–24.

[The question is,] whether he did such an action, and whether he was himself when he did it? which comes to the same thing. It should seem, therefore, that, in the ordinary commerce of mankind, any person is esteemed accountable simply as he is an agent (*Alciphron* VII.19).

The claim that a person is accountable simply as she is an agent is the main motivation for the ownership theory. But, again, this theory fails to recognize that there are two questions here. The question whether an agent was himself when he performed an action is related to the epistemic condition of responsibility. This query presupposes the situations when an agent is not himself. In *Alciphron*, Berkeley does not explain what these situations are. But the answer can be found in *Siris*:

It must be owned, we are not conscious of the systole and diastole of the heart, or the motion of the diaphragm. It may not nevertheless be thence inferred that unknowing nature can act regularly, as well as ourselves. The true inference is that the self-thinking individual, or human person, is not the real author of those natural motions. And, in fact, no man blames himself if they are wrong, or values himself if they are right. The same may be said of the fingers of a musician, which some object to be moved by habit which understands not; it being evident that what is done by rule must proceed from something that understands the rule; therefore, if not from the musician himself, from some other active intelligence, the same perhaps which governs bees and spiders, and moves the limbs of those who walk in their sleep (S 257).<sup>40</sup>

This fragment demonstrates that, according to Berkeley, if an agent is unconscious of his action, he is not accountable for it; the action should be attributed to another agent. It seems to be a situation when the agent is not himself.

Berkeley's appeal to consciousness makes it clear that the epistemic condition is discussed. The epistemic condition can require awareness

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<sup>40</sup> An important methodological reservation is to be made here. In this article, I use the material from Berkeley's early and later works. A critic may say that this is methodologically incorrect, because there was some development between these works. Indeed, such a development, or, at least, a change of opinion is evident from the quoted paragraph: Berkeley uses the term *consciousness* and characterizes person as a self-thinking individual, and this looks like Locke's view on person, that was criticized by Berkeley in *A* 7.8. Another example of the development of Berkeley's view can be found in Airaksinen's article: Airaksinen insists that there is a shift in Berkeley's understanding of good between early *Passive Obedience* and later *Alciphron* and *Siris* (Airaksinen, "Vulgar Thoughts," in Charles, *Berkeley Revisited*, 117–118). But the particular change described by Airaksinen does not undermine my reasoning. My answer to a possible critic is that the burden of proof lies on him or her: if there is some change in Berkeley's views that posit a threat to my argumentation, it should be indicated.



of several types; one of them is awareness of action. It is evident from *S* 257 that the awareness of action is a necessary condition of accountability: if person is not conscious of an action, she is not accountable for it. But the awareness of action is also a necessary condition of attributing an action to a person. This is clear from Euphranor's words:

It is no less evident that man is a free agent: and though, by abstracted reasonings, you should puzzle me, and seem to prove the contrary, yet, so long as I am conscious of my own actions, this inward evidence of plain fact will bear me up against all your reasonings, however subtle and refined (*A* 7.18).

That is why the questions whether a person did something, and whether she was herself when she did it come to the same answer: if a person is conscious of her action, then both the control and the epistemic conditions are satisfied. Most certainly, the awareness of the volition is a necessary part of the awareness of action for Berkeley. The epistemic condition for accountability, in Berkeley's theory, is abundant: if the epistemic condition is satisfied, all other conditions of accountability are also satisfied.<sup>41</sup> It can explain why an agent is responsible for his action "simply as he is an agent".

## Conclusion

I have analyzed Berkeley's views on accountability in *Alciphron* using some additional material from *Siris* and the sermons. This analysis shows that Berkeley distinguishes the questions of attributability and moral responsibility (accountability). His conception of accountability is developed as a response to an argument ascribed by Samuel Clarke to Anthony Collins. Berkeley defends a basic desert theory of accountability opposed to Collins' consequentialist approach. His conception of accountability is monistic. The concept of accountability is grounded in the group of ordinary notions that I call the *accountability family*. The representatives of this family are notions of guilt and merit, praise and blame, applauding and condemnation. This analysis supports the *internal deviation account* based on the *Three Dialogues*. Generally, this account claims that the presence of certain quality of will makes the agent an appropriate target for application of moral responsibility. If united with the

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<sup>41</sup> Here I mean only logical sufficiency and not explanatory primacy. As the anonymous reviewer suggests, the satisfaction of the epistemic condition presupposes existence of an agent and his or her acting. I agree with it, but what I want to say is that satisfaction of the epistemic condition is a sufficient mark for the agent and, presumably, for other people that all other conditions of accountability are also satisfied.

analysis of *Alciphron*, this theory leads us to the following understanding of accountability in Berkeley: a person is accountable for her action if the actions origins from volitions of certain quality – rational or irrational; these volitions are the proper objects of moral estimation; according to the quality of her will, a person is the locus of merit or guilt; to be accountable for an action is to deserve praise or blame for it, applauding or condemnation, reward or punishment.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> The early versions of this article were presented at the conferences *Berkeley's Philosophy after the Principles and the Three Dialogues* (October 23–26, 2017, Nicolaus Copernicus University, Torun, Poland) and *Nordic Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy 9* (May 26–27, 2016, University of Tampere, Yampere, Finland). I am grateful to Adam Grzeliński for his help and attentiveness during the Torun conference and my work on this paper, and I express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewer for his or her helpful critique.

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## Summary

In the article, Berkeley's views on accountability in *Alciphron*, dialogue seven, are analyzed. It is shown that Berkeley's conception of accountability is developed as a response to an argument ascribed by Samuel Clarke to Anthony Collins. The features of Berkeley's conception of accountability are examined. The author argues that this is a basic desert monistic theory. The concept of accountability is grounded in the group of ordinary notions: guilt and merit, praise and blame, applauding and condemnation. The *internal deviation account* of moral responsibility based on the *Three Dialogues* is developed and applied to *Alciphron*. Generally, this account claims that the presence of certain quality of will makes the agent an appropriate target for application of moral responsibility. Berkeley's treatment of the control and epistemic conditions of moral responsibility is clarified.

**Keywords:** George Berkeley, moral responsibility, moral philosophy, utilitarianism, basic desert

## Streszczenie

### Pojęcie odpowiedzialności u George'a Berkeleya

Analizy przeprowadzone w niniejszym artykule dotyczą zawartych w siódmym dialogu *Alkifrona* poglądów Berkeleya na odpowiedzialność. Wskazano w nim, że Berkeleyowskie pojęcie odpowiedzialności stanowi odpowiedź na argumentację Samuela Clarke'a i Anthony'ego Collinsa. Zdaniem autora artykułu pojęcie to należy wpisać w monistyczną koncepcję, którą Derk Pereboom określił mianem koncepcji *podstawowego zasługiwania* (*basic desert*). Pojęcie odpowiedzialności opiera się na zbiorze zwykłych pojęć: winy i zasługi, pochwały i nagany. Oparty na *Trzech dialogach* opis „wewnętrznego odchylenia” moralnej odpowiedzialności zostaje tu rozwinięty i odniesiony do *Alkifrona*. Ogólnie rzecz biorąc, wedle tego opisu obecność pewnego przymiotu woli sprawia, że można komuś w uzasadniony sposób przypisać moralną odpowiedzialność. W dalszej części artykułu zostaje objaśniony sposób, w jaki Berkeley ujmuje ograniczenia i epistemiczne warunki odpowiedzialności moralnej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** George Berkeley, moralna odpowiedzialność, filozofia moralna, utylitaryzm, *basic desert*