



Piotr Szałek, *Istnienie i umysł. Studium podstaw filozofii George'a Berkeleya [Existence and Mind. A Study of George Berkeley's Philosophical Fundamentals]*, Universitas, Kraków 2016, pp. 309

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What makes the subject of the book is historical and philosophical characteristics of Berkeley's "new principle", i.e. the existential statement: *esse est percipi aut percipere* – *to be is to be perceived or to perceive*, which makes the fundament of his philosophical system. In the book, Étienne Gilson and Stefan Swieżawski's method of internal analysis has been applied for the philosophical doctrines, together with the aid of the theory of ideal types by Max Weber. Contrary to the dominant epistemological interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy, it was the significance of a metaphysical dimension of Berkeley's new principle that has been stressed here and a reconstruction of its sources, assumptions, and arguments in this spirit was proposed.

The above declaration by Piotr Szałek, the author of the dissertation *Existence and Mind. A Study of George Berkeley's Philosophical Fundamentals* seems to have two origins. The first one is a tradition of philosophical research carried out at the Catholic University of Lublin, where the author of the monograph works. The two first of the aforementioned thinkers whose work has been used by Szałek are outstanding experts in Christian philosophy, chiefly that of the Middle Ages. That is particularly reasonable in the case of Berkeley's philosophy, in which bonds between a religious worldview and philosophical issues are particularly strong. However, it is only one of the tracks to follow. The second and the more important one refers to the manner of conducting historical and philosophical research. In it, philosophy is treated as a field that has its own domain and in spite of its development under various external factors (social, historical, scientific, religious, personal, and political) it cannot be boiled down to them. An example of such an approach is provided by a well-known work by Gilson, *The Unity of Philosophical Experience*, where he traces some cyclical changes in understanding of principal philosophical issues in modern philosophy; the "life of notions" that often gets

stranded in scepticism to be reborn. This way of dealing with philosophy was presented in detail by Swieżawski in his early, but vast, monograph *The Issue of the History of Philosophy*. He writes there: "When preserving a maximum fidelity to the author's concept, we may ... move with our understanding of the text that far, so that we can get from it what could not be enhanced enough by the author himself."¹ Similar procedures are visible in the book by Szalek who attempts to extract from Berkeley's works those motifs that were not often discussed sufficiently by the philosopher. It seems quite justifiable as the texts in the monograph include Berkeley's *Philosophical Commentaries* – 888 short and brief notices that require a lot of effort from their interpreter to discover their logics and to present the formation of fundamentals for Berkeley's philosophy.

The third of the applied methodologies, Weber's concept of ideal types seems to be a less convincing one. In the author's opinion, Berkeley's philosophy was to be born at the contact point of two main traditions: Cartesian rationalism and Locke's *new way of ideas*. However, a shortened definition of Cartesianism with such notions as "substantialism", "theism", "realism" (on an ontological plane) or "nativism" and "rationalism" (referring to epistemology) and defining empiricism by the respective notions of "antisubstantialism", "agnosticism" and "nominalism" together with "genetic empiricism" and "empiricism as a cognitive tool" seems a bit too vague to present the specificity of both viewpoints. Also, it turns out quite quickly for every of those "families" of concepts (to use a shapely notion by Tzvetan Todorov) that each time it is necessary to compromise every of that viewpoints, which the author of the monograph perfectly is aware of. Moreover, the statement that Berkeley's concept stems from Cartesian dualism may as well fit into the description of views held by Berkeley or Locke and, most likely, many other philosophical systems of pre-Kantian modern era. Obviously, it is not an objection but rather a notice on certain specificity of Piotr Szalek's narration.

What makes the author's main interpretational assumption is an analysis of Berkeley's principal immaterialistic thesis to the phrase: *esse est percipi aut posse percipi*. Sources of viewing Berkeley's philosophy in that way may be traced back both to already classic establishments by A. A. Luce, who seems to provide basic thoughts for a great deal of Szalek's analyses, and to such commentators as A. C. Grauling, C. J. McCracken, H. Bracken, and L. E. Loeb. Such classic reading of Berkeley's philosophy results from several assumptions accepted at the beginning.

¹ S. Swieżawski, *Zagadnienie historii filozofii* (Warszawa: PWN, 1966), 779–780 (my own translation).

Firstly, the issues of ontology come to the foreground together with a crucial problem of existence referred to two types of being indicated by Berkeley: ideas forming the natural world and spirits (finite human spirits and the infinite spirit, God). Thus, discussing the epistemological issues moves towards the background as they are secondary to the ontological assumptions in which the dependency of Berkeley's concept on Descartes's stance is stressed more strongly than by other commentators. It is noteworthy that the interpretation is not obvious at first glance for various reasons. Although Berkeley is associated most of all with his famous thesis "*esse is percipi*" as well as the immaterialist thesis, but it is abolishing the Cartesian dualism or different understanding of substance which makes that dependency not very clear.

The second assumption refers to setting Berkeley's philosophy in the context of the history of philosophy. As it is reminded by the author who quotes Harry Bracken and David Berman, the early reception of Berkeley's thought placed it in the area of Cartesian tradition rather than in the Locke's empiricism that was finalized by Hume's scepticism. That is really worth emphasizing as it was not once in history that accents were moved similarly, an example of which is for instance the fact that Locke read works by Descartes for the philosophy of nature that he created, not for metaphysics. In the case of Berkeley, we would deal with leaving the reading that stresses the role of metaphysics or ontology for stressing epistemology. Various reasons for such a change may be found – be it an erosion of modern metaphysics occurring in the British empiricism with its major category of substance or later readings of philosophical tradition by Kant and Hegel after the transcendental revolution. Independently from that, a return to making ontology the centre of Berkeley's philosophy upon which all other problems hinge seems to be justified by his combination of philosophical and religious motifs – ultimately, all the events in the world take place within the man and the God.

The third assumption, very important for Szatek's analyses, refers to the general unchangeability of Berkeley's philosophy. It indirectly results from turning the metaphysical thesis into the main subject of the work: Szatek focuses mostly on the *Philosophical Commentaries*, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and *The Three Dialogues*. The issue whether there are any significant changes in the analyses of the notion of existence is not discussed in the book. It would be interesting particularly in the case of *Siris*, which is connected with accepting the Neoplatonic metaphysics, mostly in the light of Timo Airaksinen's findings on this work. Moreover, the author does not analyse the fringes of Berkeley's philosophy (a connection between the immaterialistic thesis with the philosophy of science, philosophy of nature, or morality). Such an approach, however, may be justified by the viewpoint accepted in the book, the one which focuses on the very "ontological core" of im-

materialism, and also by the aforementioned applying the idealisation which refers not only to abstract philosophical stances but also, to some degree, to Berkeley's philosophy itself treated as a systematic whole.

The first part of the book reconstructs the shaping of Berkeley's "new principle". In his analyses, the author follows the path indicated by Luce and analyses the influences of Malebranche, Bayle, and Locke on Berkeley's formation. The specificity of the interpretation is decided to a large degree by a huge influence of Cartesianism on that philosophical tradition. Although stressing Malebranche and Bayle's role in indicating sceptical consequences of Cartesian philosophy is nothing new, what really deserves attention here is a convincingly conducted analysis of affinities between Cartesianism and Berkeley's metaphysics. The author attempts to show that the influence was stronger than it is usually assumed, and the significance of Locke was smaller and limited to scepticism referring to the cognition of the nature of bodies (probably a notion of corpuscular pessimism, not scepticism, would fit here better, which was proposed by Peter Anstey not long ago) as well as his new way of ideas, which seems obvious. What deserves a special emphasis is the accuracy and coherence of discourse, the content analysis of not only Malebranche's *The Search after Truth* or selected entries in Bayle's *Dictionary*, but also of the writings by Foucher and Fardella mentioned by Luce.

Additionally, two things are worth mentioning. Firstly, in the light of the analyses in the book, it would be good to rethink whether the Cartesian motifs are really as strong in Locke's philosophy as it usually seems. His remarks on the possibility of granting the capability of thinking to material bodies by God, his critique of Malebranche, the interpretation of salvation of bodies (not souls), and many more, indicate that Locke's thoughts belong also to a different, materialistic, current of philosophy originating from Hobbes rather than Descartes. The second thing is connected with content analyses of the *Philosophical Commentaries* and their input into shaping Berkeley's stance. For scholars focusing their research to this writing, it is obvious that Berkeley's gradual departure from Locke's views is observed in those notes – the publications by Bertil Belfrage on dating particular portions of the *Philosophical Commentaries* could support the interpretation presented in the book and make it more detailed in some places.

Szałek devoted the second part of his monograph to Berkeley's explication of the existence of the physical world. The general assumption of the interpretation presented there is as follows below. In the philosophy of idea shaped under the influence of Descartes in the second half of the 18th century, there occurs a dispute between the psychologist approach to that notion and the antipsychologist approach. At first, that dispute took place among the Cartesians: Malebranche claiming that ideas are representations of archetypes existing in the divine mind and

thus have an objective status and, to some extent, are separate from mental acts, versus Arnauld identifying ideas with perceptions. The next stage of that discussion may be found in Locke and Berkeley. Whilst Locke was a supporter of the interpretation proposed by Arnauld, Berkeley ontologizes the notion of idea, which then leads to his antirepresentationism and immaterialism. Ultimately, the author presents three possible interpretations of Berkeley's stance: the theory of the existence grades (ideas eternally perceived in God's mind or, alternatively, the existence of ideas as objects of possible perception); the theory of power (physical objects are powers in God); the theory that is a possibilistic explanation of the "new principle" in which the possibility aspect of perception of ideas is stressed. That part is summarised by a review of interpretations of the dependencies between the physical world and God's mind as well as additional quotations of the analyses by Roman Ingarden from his *Spór o istnienie świata* [*Dispute on the Existence of the World*] referring to the independency of the physical world.

The third part deals with the existence of spiritual substances. According to the author of the monograph, in Berkeley's early works, it is possible to trace three developmental phases of his views on that problem: the primal one, with visibly strong influences of Cartesianism; the medial one, in which two aspects of a spiritual substance – the will and the reason – are treated separately, the proof of which are entries, commented upon by commentators repeatedly, where the mind is brought down to a bundle of perceptions; finally, there is a mature phase, where Berkeley stresses the unity of will and reason and attempts to present the concept of the spiritual substance coherent with the "new principle".

As it may be read in the monograph: "In order to get coherence with the »new principle« that he was developing, Berkeley began characterising the mind as something active that includes the will and the reason, which are different not on the grounds of separate powers or types of activities but, as it seems, only in the power of their differences in relations between the mind in its activity and the results of its own actions. What confirms such a developmental direction of Berkeley's concept of mind is the fact that it is possible to find an outline of a view similar to the last concept in a mature work he published, namely his *Treatise*".²

As it may be read further, that new interpretation is the least developed part of Berkeley's philosophy and, finally, it is inconclusive. What makes a particularly interesting part of that chapter is the discussion on the relations between finite human spirits and the infinite spirit which is God. The discussion indicates, after Stanisław Judycki, numerous possibilities of interpretation: causal dependency on acts of the will, on epis-

² Piotr Szatek, *Istnienie i umysł. Studium podstaw filozofii George'a Berkeleya* (Kraków: Universitas, 2016), 228 (my own translation).

temic procedures, on mental states, as well as on epistemic categories of the mind.

Although detailed and interesting, the analyses in the book could be extended in two aspects: a) by indicating a difference between understanding the activity on the mind by Locke and by Berkeley; b) by supplementing references to the contents of correspondence with Samuel Johnson. The first of those extensions (totally in the spirit of the book) would indicate the diversity of Locke's psychologist approach and metaphysical character of Berkeley's concept in which activity should be identified with creativity. That leads to the second extension – indication of a relation between the time and the eternity and of religious implications of Berkeley's philosophy. The second extension, however, would go beyond the framework of the monograph. There is also a third aspect of the issue that could be discussed. An analysis of the notion of idea for the affinity of Berkeley's concept and Locke's theory, together with the content of the *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* could provide a new perspective on indicating the role of the mind in construction (organization and systematization) the experience and, in consequence, could supplement the metaphysical understanding of the activity of the mind with psychological and epistemological understanding. Limiting those perspectives is, however, understandable due to the frames set to the subject of the monograph.

As it has already been written, coherence of the discourse and analysis of 'the fundamentals of Berkeley's philosophy', not its consequences, makes it refer to ontology and metaphysics. The existence of the world is viewed as a purely philosophical question, detached, for instance, from the problem of the status of scientific knowledge, which was discussed by Berkeley, or Berkeley's approach to Newtonian physics, optics, or chemistry that was born at his times. Directing the attention to 'the fundamentals', not 'the consequences' results in not much space devoted to the issue of intersubjectivity of cognitive objects or a discussion with subjective idealism that is attributed to Berkeley. It is again, however, the issue of choices that the author has made. In numerous cases (discussion within Cartesianism, comments on Locke's viewpoint), the book presents a rich intellectual background against which Berkeley's concept was formed. The book is very carefully prepared – in various aspects. The author presents exact publications of Berkeley's works (which is of particular significance in the case of the *Philosophical Commentaries*), sets precisely his interpretation against the background of the international research, including some newest studies, and refers to both the source and subject literature.

The author's choices lead the reader and the reviewer to the question about the potential reader of the monograph. The book is published in Polish; however, it refers mostly to the foreign literature on Berkeley's

philosophy. On the one hand, the author presents a very classic interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy, shaped under the influence of Luce's works supported, however, with the newest literature; on the other hand, a huge number of references and the author's penchant for historical and philosophical details make the publication avoid a popularization market and the interpretational intention of the book is completed at a very high level. Owing to an analytical character of the discourse and devoting the monograph to the main Berkeley's thesis on the characteristics of the existence makes Piotr Szalek's book come closer to the work by Bartosz Żukowski mentioned above rather than to *Człowiek i duch nieskończony. Immaterializm George'a Berkeleya* [*The Man and the Infinite Spirit. The Immaterialism of George Berkeley*] by Adam Grzeliński, which is of more popularizing nature though its subject is wider, or the contextual dissertation by Marta Szymańska-Lewoszewska *W służbie Bogu i człowiekowi. Zarys problem patriotyzmu w myśli George'a Berkeleya* [*In God's and Man's Service. An Outline of the Issue of Patriotism in George Berkeley's Thought*] on Berkeley's patriotism which is just being published. On the other hand, which should be seen as the advantage of the book, the author refers also to works by Polish philosophers – Kazimierz Twardowski, Jan Czerkowski, Roman Ingarden, Władysław Tatarkiewicz, and Stanisław Judycki – finding in them some valuable interpretational hints to the discussed issues. Although originating from quite traditional readings, the interpretation presented in the book has been significantly developed and presented in detail. This makes it possible to say that Piotr Szalek's monograph makes a successful attempt to bring the worldwide research to Poland. Accepting the researcher's perspective, exceptional coherence and readability of the discourse together with the author's expertise in historical and philosophical details and his sense of analytical thinking decide upon a high value of that book.

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