RUCH FILOZOFICZNY
LXXIV 2018 4

Stephen H. Daniel
Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas, USA
ORCID: 0000-0002-6811-2573
e-mail: sdaniel@tamu.edu

Substance and Person: Berkeley on Descartes and Locke

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2018.046

Because most of Berkeley's remarks about Descartes and Locke appear in his *Notebooks* (1707–1708), *New Theory of Vision* (1709), *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), and *Dialogues* (1713), his subsequent comments on them are generally overlooked. But in his *De Motu* (1721), correspondence with Samuel Johnson (1730), *Defense of Free Thinking in Mathematics* (1735), and *Siris* (1744), he focuses on how their ideas draw his philosophic, scientific, and religious critiques together around two topics that are of interest to his contemporaries: mechanism (for Descartes) and general abstract ideas (for Locke). These two topics unite the epistemological issues central to the first half of Berkeley's life to practical issues central to the second half of his life.

Specifically, in his correspondence with Johnson, he dismisses Locke's theory of abstract general ideas—particularly, the abstract idea of existence considered apart from perceiving and being perceived (PW 354).[1]

[1] Berkeley citations: NB=*Notebooks*; PHK=*Principles of Human Knowledge*; DM=*De Motu*; DHP=*Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, all in *George Berkeley: Philosophical Works* (PW), ed. Michael Ayers (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992). *Alciphron* (Alc) and *Siris* references are to the Luce–Jessop edition of the *Works*, vols. 3 and 5. Descartes citations: Rep=*Meditations* Replies, PP=*Principles of Philosophy*, in CSM=*Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. I–II, ed. Cottingham et al. (New York: Cambridge UP, 1984–1985). Locke citations: E=*Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975); W=*Works*, new ed. (10 vols.; London: Thomas Tegg et al., 1823).

He challenges Descartes' claim that some things 'exist more' than others, but he admits that such disagreements might only be 'verbal disputes' based on abstractions. The same worry affects his notion of time, in that (for him) the actual *succession* of ideas constitutes time, not (as with Locke) the *sensible measure* of the succession of those ideas.

In *De Motu* (sec. 30) Berkeley agrees with Descartes about the 'great difference' between thinking things and extended things, but he warns against thinking that the motion of bodies can be explained by metaphysical principles (e.g. force, action) rather than observed regularities in natural science.[2] Even then, those regularities must be understood as mechanical laws of attraction and repulsion rather than principles of size, figure, or motion (*Siris* secs. 232, 243).

In his *Defence of Free Thinking in Mathematics*, Berkeley contrasts his view of general ideas as stand-ins for other individuals to Locke's theory of abstraction, and he points out how Locke admits that since such abstractions cannot exist, they require 'pains and skill' to form (sec. 45). He adds that because the idea of such non–existent things is impossible, it must be what James Jurin (author of *Geometry no Friend to Infidelity*, 1734) hints is really a trap Locke sets up 'to catch fools' (sec. 46).[3] Nonetheless, for Berkeley, Locke's 'capital error' lies in confusing *terms* with ideas in the purported attempt to frame abstract general ideas (sec. 48).

These references to Descartes and Locke in the second half of Berkeley's life indicate how their ideas raise problems that immaterialism supposedly resolves by shifting attention away from metaphysical principles to patterns of scientifically observable regularity. I suggest that such a shift occurs in Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732) and in his 1734 additions to the *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* where he identifies the self specifically with its activities.

I. Berkeley's Merging of Substance and Person

Despite the fact that Berkeley (like Descartes and Locke) refers to a spiritual substance as the 'support' of ideas and the 'substratum' of mental activities, he insists (contra Descartes) that a spiritual substance is not conceptually distinguishable from its activities and (contra Locke) that spiritual substances are not distinct from persons.[4] Indeed, in *Alciphron*

---

[2] See Stefan Sean Gordon Storrie, "Berkeley's Apparent Cartesianism in *De Motu*," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94 (2012), 357–358.

[3] See James Jurin, *Geometry no Friend to Infidelity* (London: T. Cooper, 1734), 82.

[4] See Stephen H. Daniel, "Berkeley's Non-Cartesian Notion of Spiritual Substance," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56 (2018), 661–668. Cf. Berkeley, NB 701, 828–829; PHK 27; PHK MS 98 (*Works* 2:84).

and the 1734 additions to his *Dialogues*, Berkeley insists that a 'thinking principle or soul' is what he means by agent, person, mind, or spirit (Alc IV.5–6). To say "that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas" is to say nothing other than that there is a "thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas" (DHP 233)—which, I suggest, means something completely different from what Locke means. For as Locke tells Stillingfleet, a thinking principle need not be a *spiritual* substance.[5] That is what allows Locke to think that (1) minds to take on what Berkeley would consider illegitimate passive attributes and (2) material bodies to have attributes such as thought.

To block that move, Berkeley rejects the whole substance–attribute–mode distinction adopted by Descartes and Locke in favor of one in which substance is understood simply as the cause by which objects of mind are differentiated and related. In this way Berkeley appropriates the term *substance* but drops the metaphysical baggage associated with it. Rather than thinking of a spiritual substance as something intelligible apart from its acts, Berkeley adopts a definition of the self or person in which a mental substance is understood simply as that in terms of which specific distinctions or associations of ideas are made and for which the 'substance' is responsible. A mind, soul, or thinking principle thus becomes, for Berkeley, what Locke calls a 'person' without being framed in terms of either Descartes' substance–mode ontology or Locke's substance–person distinction.

Indeed, in his Third Dialogue (DHP 231), after admitting that he has no idea of God or any other spirit, he remarks, "I do nevertheless know, that I who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist as certainly, as I know my ideas exist"; and he insists that he knows 'immediately or intuitively' that he is a spirit who thinks, wills, acts, and perceives. He points out that we frame our notion of God on the basis of our knowledge of this 'mind, spirit or soul' simply by heightening those abilities and removing our imperfections. In the course of these few remarks, Berkeley summarizes his description of what the mind is (a spirit or thinking substance), how we know of the mind's existence (intuitively, by reflection), and how we use such knowledge to deduce literal (vs. analogous) truths about the nature of God.

No doubt, there is not much to go on here, and that might explain why commentators often resort to relating these comments to views developed by other thinkers.[6] So, it is not uncommon to see Berkeley's

---

[5] John Locke, *A Letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worchester* [First Letter to Stillingfleet], in *Works of John Locke* (10 vols.; London, Thomas Tegg, 1823), IV.33–34.

[6] Cf. Marc A. Hight and Walter Ott, "The New Berkeley," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34 (2004), 1–18, 24; Margaret Atherton, "Berkeley's Last Word on Spirit," in *Es-*

strategy for using our minds as the basis for claims about God aligned with Locke's similar account of how we develop an idea of God (*Essay* II.23.34–35).[7] Indeed, comparisons of Berkeley with Descartes and Locke on substance and intuitive knowledge of the self pop up frequently in the literature, no doubt because Berkeley shares with them a similar vocabulary. But seldom do commentators consider the possibility that he appeals to those terms precisely in order to redefine their meanings.

That latter possibility is exactly what I will here defend regarding his use of the term *substance*. Specifically, I will argue that he undermines the views of Descartes and Locke even while referring to a spiritual substance as the 'support' of ideas (DHP 234) and 'substratum' of mental activities (DHP 237). For unlike Descartes, he does not think that minds are conceptually distinct from their activities; and unlike Locke, he does not assume that spiritual substances are distinguishable from moral beings (i.e. persons).

Berkeley makes these points most explicitly in two exchanges between Hylas and Philonous added in the 1734 edition of the *Dialogues*. No doctrinally new ideas about mind appear here, but the exchanges are helpful in understanding how he views the *Dialogues* in relation to his contemporaneous works (e.g. *Alciphron* in 1732). In the additions, he sounds Cartesian, noting that he is conscious of himself as 'a thinking active principle'; but he also says (in a very non–Cartesian way) he has no idea of his soul or mind (DHP 233). He remarks that a perceiving thing is the 'subject' of ideas without being an idea itself, in that it is that in terms of which an idea is intelligible in virtue of its cause. He adds that by saying "that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas," he means simply that "a spirit knows and perceives ideas" (DHP 234).[8] So by noting that "there is not any other substance than spirit, or that which perceives" (PHK 7), he highlights how the perceiving and willing of objects constitute what a substance *is* and are not simply activities in which a substance happens to engage.

A determining (i.e. differentiating and identifying) mind thus does not become determinate or 'exist' prior to the ideas it has, nor does it just

---

says on the Concept of Mind in Early–Modern Philosophy, eds. Petr Glombíček and James Hill (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 127; and Talia Mae Bettcher, "Berkeley's Theory of Mind: Some New Models," *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011), 691–692.

[7] Cf. Daniel E. Flage, *Berkeley* (Malden, MA: Polity, 2014), 128–131; John R. Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 91; and I. C. Tipton, "Berkeley's View of Spirit," in *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. Warren E. Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966), 59–71.

[8] See Stephen H. Daniel, "How Berkeley Redefines Substance: A Reply to My Critics," *Berkeley Studies* 24 (2013), 47–48.

happen to perceive ideas in certain sequences. Rather, the perceiving of specific ideas in certain sequences is exactly what (reflexively) identifies a spirit as a particular substance. That is why, as Berkeley puts it, "if there were no sensible ideas, there could be no soul" (NB 478), for the "substance of a spirit is that it acts, causes, wills, operates, or if you please (to avoid the quibble that may be made on the word *it*), to act, cause, will, operate" (NB 829). Because the will that there be a determinate substance is not itself made determinate apart from the activity identified in virtue of its ideas, to say that a spirit is a substance is simply to say that it is the principle in terms of which ideas are perceived as particular ideas in particular relations.[9]

It is hard to overestimate the novelty of this position. Most interpreters think that when Berkeley refers to a spiritual substance, he means a particular thing that engages in certain activities (e.g. willing, perceiving). But Berkeley explicitly rejects this way of speaking, noting that we should refer instead to "nothing but a will, a being which wills being unintelligible" (NB 499a). Instead of being an identifiable thing, a spiritual substance or mind is the 'active principle' or will that there be things with identities, whose unity and identity are the products rather than the causes of activity.

This deflationary account of spiritual substance is clarified by his *Alciphron* remarks about mind on what it means to be a *person*. As with the 1734 additions to the *Dialogues*, his *Alciphron* remarks do not mark any change in views on the self in the original 1713 *Dialogues*. But in *Alciphron* he overcomes his *Notebooks* 713–714 reluctance to discuss *persons* (for theological reasons relating to the Trinity) because he recognizes that Locke's treatment of persons undercuts important features of moral attribution that a Cartesian sense of spiritual substance aims to retain.

To see how that relation is more closely approximated in Locke's account of persons, we need to consider how, for Berkeley, 'a spiritual substance or support of ideas' (DHP 234) is not an unknown substratum conceptually distinct from its properties or modes (as is Locke's notion of a spiritual substance). Instead, it is what Locke describes as a person, namely, "a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places" (E II.27.9). For Berkeley, the self is the same in different times and places because it is the activity by means of which differences in times and places are identified in the first place. Even in the context of time, to say as he does that "the soul always thinks" (PHK 98) means that the

[9] Cf. Stephen H. Daniel, "Berkeley's Stoic Notion of Spiritual Substance," in *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2008), 214. Also see Daniel, "Berkeley Redefines Substance," 48–49.

soul is the 'substance' or underlying principle in terms of which things are distinguished and related.

For Locke, though, a 'thinking intelligent being' is not linked to a particular kind of substance (E II.27.10, E 2.27.23), since the continuity of consciousness that identifies a 'person' can be of "whatever substance, made up of whether spiritual or material, simple, or compounded, it matters not" (E II.27.17). It does not matter whether a person is a spiritual or spiritual–material substance, or whether a person is a substance at all—if by substance we mean something with a real essence (E II.27.10, E II.27.23). All that matters is that a *person* be understood as having the forensic meaning of an intelligent agent "capable of a law and happiness and misery" (E III. 27.26). The 'moral man' must be a 'corporeal' rational being (E III.11.16) only because he must be publicly perceivable. Insofar as he internally perceives himself as a reflective, self–conscious being, he is a 'person' regulated by law. Questions about what kind of substance a person is—immaterial or material—or whether a person is a substance or a mode at all simply do not come up for Locke, for as a moral term, *person* refers to something whose nominal and real essences coincide.[10]

Similarly, in *Alciphron* IV.4, Berkeley has Euphranor say that he is not interested in the nature of the soul—for example, whether it is an immaterial substance. That does not stop him, however, from adopting the metaphysically–sounding vocabulary of *principles* and *souls*, because for him (unlike Locke), there is no distinction between a *substance*, a *spirit*, a *mind*, a *thinking thing*, and a *person*, for all those terms refer to a principle of thought and action:

> I only ask whether you admit that there is a principle of thought and action, and whether it be perceivable by sense. . . . Is not the soul that which makes the principal distinction between a real person and a shadow, a living man and a carcass? . . . [Cannot I] know that you, for instance, are a distinct thinking individual, or a living real man, by surer or other signs than those from which it can be inferred that you have a soul? (Alc 145)

To this Alciphron replies, "You cannot." That is, nothing can be known more surely or be more perceivable by sense than the 'real person' whose principle of thought and action is expressed in the intentionality of action. Euphranor concludes that to the extent that actions are perceived as motions that are caused, they must "appear calculated for a reasonable end" and have a 'rational cause, soul or spirit' that informs

---

[10] Cf. Jessica Gordon–Roth, "Locke on the Ontology of Persons," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 53 (2015), 105–111; Antonia LoLordo, *Locke's Moral Man* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 82–86, 94–102; and Kenneth P. Winkler, "Locke on Personal Identity," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 212–223.

them. Such rationality Berkeley associates with language use, which, he says, is the best argument for the existence of a 'thinking reasonable soul' (Alc IV.6–7). Indeed, an intuitive or 'immediate knowledge' of his own mind and ideas is based on understanding mind and mental activities as the principles of meaning itself:

> we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, inasmuch as we know or understand the meaning of those words. . . . I have some knowledge or notion of my mind, and its acts about ideas, inasmuch as I know or understand what is meant by those words. (PHK 27, 142; cf. DHP 234 and Alc VII.5)

Berkeley's point is that to think of an idea as having a meaning is to cognize it as a sign within a language. But no idea becomes meaningful apart from the activity by which it is differentiated from and associated with other ideas. Because its meaning does not lie behind or beneath its discursive function within the language, it is eminently visible or exchangeable simply as a function in the language. We have no *ideas* of such activity, but we know immediately that such activity occurs, because without it we would not recognize anything as a specific idea in signifying relations with other ideas. In this way, we are immediately aware of ourselves as principles that 'support' our specific ideas, in that we are aware of ourselves as perceiving ideas, even though we have no ideas of ourselves as their specific causes.

In this sense, Berkeley dismisses Locke's attempt to salvage talk of the 'substance of spirit', even if it is considered the unknown "*substratum* to those operations which we experiment in ourselves within" (E II.23.5; E II.23.23). Locke insists that thinking and reasoning cannot subsist of themselves (*First Letter to Stillingfleet* W4: 33), nor does he understand how it is possible that they can be characterized or produced by body. But rather than explaining thought simply as the differentiation and association of ideas that has no underlying cause, Locke resigns himself, as he puts it, to a 'useless' doctrine in which ideas are "supposed to flow from the particular internal Constitution, or unknown Essence of that Substance" (E II.23.3). That way of speaking of 'a *thing* capable of thinking' does not allow us to describe spiritual substance other than in terms of the 'confused, obscure' account of what it does (E II.13.19; E II.12.6; E II.23.3; E II.27.2; *First Letter to Stillingfleet* W4: 8; *Second Reply* W4: 448).

For Berkeley, Locke's discussion here is a missed opportunity. In Berkeley's account, we see how the discussion of a 'thinking reasonable *soul*' is meaningful to the extent that mental substance is understood simply as the intentionality and rationality of language use. *Person*, *thinking thing*, *soul*, *spirit*, or *thinking principle* can be used interchangeably, as

long as we don't confuse the invisible human or divine causes or principles of our ideas with the ideas themselves:

> In a strict sense, I do not see Alciphron, i.e. that individual thinking thing, but only such visible signs and tokens as suggest and infer the being of that invisible thinking principle or soul. . . . I do in the strictest sense behold and perceive by all my senses such signs and tokens, such effects and operations, as suggest, indicate, and demonstrate an invisible God, as certainly, and with the same evidence, at least, as any other signs perceived by sense do suggest to me the existence of your soul, spirit, or thinking principle. (Alc IV.5)

Just as in *De Motu* (1721), where Berkeley refers to the 'thinking, active thing' that we experience as the principle of motion in ourselves and that we call 'soul, mind, and spirit' (DM 30), so also in *Alciphron* he goes out of his way to link *person*, *soul*, and *thinking principle*, despite the fact that he later acknowledges the problem of speaking of the Persons of the Trinity. His point is that *person* is not a purely forensic, anti–metaphysical, or anti–theological term to be contrasted with *substance*, *soul*, or *thinking principle*. Rather, it is to draw these terms more closely together in an effort to de–mystify human agency by weaning us from a mentality in which every meaningful term (e.g. spirit, intellect, will) refers to a discrete intelligible idea. Where Locke looks for an unseen thing to unite the visible signs and tokens, Berkeley points to how the visible is seen as immediately before the mind as a determinate yet complex union or congeries of qualities. In this way, Berkeley counters both Descartes' and Locke's failure to appreciate how mind is the active, volitional principle by which objects of thought are cognized.[11]

II. Locke's Separation of Person and Substance

Berkeley's famous claim that "to be is to be perceived" does not mean, then, that existence is bestowed on already determinate ideas when those ideas are perceived by already determinate minds. Instead, it means that the existence of those things cannot be abstracted from their being perceived as those things. When Berkeley writes that the things we perceive (viz. ideas) "subsist not by themselves, but are supported by, or exist in minds or spiritual substances" (PHK 89; also 135), he means not only that ideas depend for their existence on minds but also that minds are simultaneously constituted in representing those specific ideas. So

[11] As John Yolton notes [*A Locke Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 91–92], this way of treating ideas as *thoughts* allows Locke's view on this to be closer to Arnauld's usage than Malebranche's.

when he remarks that "the very existence of ideas constitutes the soul" (NB 577), he means that this soul is the cause by which *those* ideas can be said to exist—collectively, in relation to one another.

It is no wonder, then, that in *Alciphron* VII.8, Berkeley remarks that we appeal to terms such as *person* to influence wills, passions, or conduct without thinking that we are attempting to represent ideas. In this way, belief in the Persons of the Trinity can become 'a real principle of life and conduct' without having to refer to abstract ideas:

> Whence it seems to follow that a man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, if he finds it revealed in Holy Scripture that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, are God, and that there is but one God, although he doth not frame in his mind any abstract or distinct ideas of trinity, substance, or personality. (Alc VII.8)

Berkeley's point is that a person is not defined as a thing or even the consciousness of a thing but rather the self–constituting principle of such consciousness. When Locke says that personal identity consists in consciousness, he seems to mean that a person "hath ideas and is conscious during a certain space of time" (E II.27.10). In this way, a person is not linked to a substance but rather to consciousness (E II.27.23). But that, for Berkeley, would mean that "personal identity doth not consist in consciousness" (Alc VII.8); for at different times in someone's life, he or she might not have the same overlapping ideas, and thus not be the same person as before because nothing remains the same.

Such a lack of overlap in defining the self is at the heart of the so–called transitivity problem made famous by Thomas Reid.[12] However, the objection to defining a self in terms of the continuity of consciousness applies only if the basis of the self's identity is understood in an internalist sense—that is, in terms of consciousness of one's self as a self. This would make Berkeley less concerned with Locke's theory of persons than with a notion of spiritual substance based on Locke's notion of the self.[13] But for Berkeley, a Lockean 'conscious thinking thing' (E 2.27.17) does not become a *person* simply by reasoning and reflecting on itself. Making rational self–consciousness the internalist key for personhood assumes what needs to be proven, namely, that there is a self in the first place. In order to avoid this circularity, Berkeley relies on an externalist (i.e. common sense, religious, non–metaphysical) sense of the continuity

[12] Thomas Reid, *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, ed. Derek R. Brookes (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002), 276.

[13] See Talia Mae Bettcher, "Berkeley and Hume on Self and Self–Consciousness," in *Topics in Early Modern Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Jon Miller (New York: Springer, 2009), 193–222, esp. 199.

of consciousness, in terms of which we are conscious of ourselves simply in virtue of what we have done, not in terms of what we are.

No doubt, by separating person or consciousness from substance, Locke undercuts the Cartesian connection between the actions of the self and their being metaphysically grounded in a cause in which they inhere. This does not lead Locke to deny the existence of mental substances, for he insists that operations of mind need to be supported by some substance in order to account for their being experienced in specific unities (E 2.23.1–2, E 2.23.5–6). He denies only that we can know what the mind or soul is (E IV.3.6). And as is famously seen in his exchange with Stillingfleet (which Berkeley read carefully), Locke allows for the possibility that God could superadd the ability to move or think to matter itself. For as far as we know, there is nothing contradictory about a material substance being given such a power.

The problem with this—at least from Berkeley's standpoint—is that Locke (like Descartes) thinks that we can conceptually differentiate a substance from its activities. As Locke tells Stillingfleet in his *Second Reply*, God could create an extended substance that could be made to think because God can create the 'bare being' of a substance apart from its attributes:

> God has created a substance: let it be, for example, a solid extended substance: is God bound to give it, besides being, a power of action? that, I think, nobody will say. He therefore may leave it in a state of inactivity, and it will be nevertheless a substance; for action is not necessary to the being of any substance, that God does create. God has likewise created and made to exist, *de novo*, an immaterial substance, which will not lose its being of a substance, though God should bestow on it nothing more but this bare being, without giving it any activity at all. Here are now two distinct substances, the one material, the other immaterial, both in a state of perfect inactivity. Now I ask what power God can give to one of these substances (supposing them to retain the same distinct natures that they had as substances in their state of inactivity) which he cannot give to the other? In that state, it is plain, neither of them thinks; for thinking being an action, it cannot be denied that God can put an end to an action of any created substance, without annihilating of the substance whereof it is an action: and if it be so, he can also create or give existence to such a substance, without giving that substance any action at all. . . . Both these substances [material and immaterial] may be made, and exist without thought. (W IV.464–465; also E IV.3.6)

According to Locke, in creating the bare being of a substance, God creates simply a support for powers or qualities. In terms of this bare being, minds are differentiated solely by their activities. So if God modifies a substance to think, it becomes a spirit without regard to its other modifications (*First Letter to Stillingfleet*, W IV.33). For Locke, that is what

allows (1) minds to be passive in perception and (2) material bodies to be potentially active and even think.

But for Berkeley, this misunderstands what is meant by 'mind' by making it a substance without any powers that would differentiate it from other substances. In such an environment, to say that God has created a 'material substance' or an 'immaterial substance' without any powers of action seems vacuous, since nothing follows from the distinction. Indeed, as Locke concludes, *two* such existences would be unintelligible 'without thought'. So to block Locke's move, Berkeley rejects the substance–attribute–mode distinction as a legitimate strategy for talking about substances apart from their activities.

For Locke, though, the characteristics of a *person* are identified as belonging to that person because of their associations with other characteristics, not because they are modes of some unknown substance. Of course, that allows him to retain the concept of substance, speaking of it simply as the thing to which moral and social–political characteristics are attributed (E II.27.18–19,26). It turns out, though, that there is no practical difference between the moral self and the metaphysical subject, because the metaphysical self is nothing other than the thing that thinks, wills, and acts *in the specific ways* that identify it as that substance. Apart from the divinely ordained ordering of those activities—which for both Descartes and Locke are the modes that identify that self practically—there is no substance that can be known. To think that there is such a substance is to fail to see how, in replacing talk of accidents with talk of modes, both Descartes and Locke preclude the possibility of thinking of substance (even as a bare particular) apart from its activities.

It is this lingering appeal of Descartes' doctrine of the soul that attracts the Berkeley of the first edition of the *Dialogues*, for he assumes that no action is intelligible apart from its cause. Indeed, what makes an action intelligible is that there is a reason that informs the volition that it occur, and it is this rational cause that characterizes a spirit. That is why, for Berkeley, "I have no notion of any action distinct from volition, neither can I conceive volition to be anywhere but in a spirit: therefore, when I speak of an active being, I am obliged to mean a Spirit" (DHP 239). A spirit thus does not just happen to be the cause of my ideas; I have those specific ideas precisely *because* I choose to imagine them, or another mind wills that I have them. Either way, my having those ideas defines me as a person and indicates how Berkeley frames Locke's moral or forensic account of persons in terms of practical principles of action.

For Berkeley, then, all we have to do to determine whether someone is blameworthy for an action is ask "whether he did such an action and whether he was himself when he did it. Which comes to the same thing" (Alc VII.19). In other words, what we do defines who we are, not only as moral agents but also as spiritual (volitional) substances. In this way,

Berkeley bridges Locke's gap between the moral and metaphysical descriptions of the self:

> It should seem, therefore, that, in the ordinary commerce of mankind, any person is esteemed accountable simply as he is an agent. And, though you should tell me that man is inactive, and that the sensible objects act upon him, yet my own experience assures me of the contrary. I know I act, and what I act I am accountable for. . . . 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. (Alc VII.19)

What is striking here is Berkeley's locution: "What I act I am accountable for." We would normally say that I am accountable for what I do. But that would imply that I am somehow different from what I do. Berkeley's revision of this point highlights the fact that I am defined in the *acts* for which I am accountable in the eyes of the world, not for being the subject supposedly underlying or behind those acts. That is what he means by saying that I am the being I am because of "what I act."[14] So we should be conscious of ourselves as selves only to the extent that we are the actual causes of the specific acts of which we are conscious. Those acts are '*self*–evident' because they identify the self as a moral agent precisely in terms of its acts.

In this (again) deflationary account, there is thus no person or self other than the active principle responsible for those acts. Issues about whether an agent is free to will what he wills—which Berkeley derides as a 'very idle' question—can be dismissed because they assume that a spiritual substance can be conceived apart from its activity. But "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" (Alc VII.19). Accordingly, the determination of the self is not due to God or any antecedent causes. Rather, it is due to whatever can be understood as the cause of the specific actions for which someone is held responsible—and that is all there is to it. In this sense, Berkeley's description of the soul, mind, or human being is more like Locke's notion of person than Locke's notion of spiritual substance.

[14] Locke says something similar: "we cannot act anything, but by our faculties" (E IV.xi.3), but he does so only in terms of our knowledge of external things, devoid of any elements of will.

Bibliography

Atherton, Margaret. "Berkeley's Last Word on Spirit." In *Essays on the Concept of Mind in Early–Modern Philosophy*, edited by Petr Glombíček and James Hill. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010, 115–130.

Berkeley, George. *Philosophical Works*, edited by Michael Ayers. Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992.

Berkeley, George. *Works of George Berkeley*. 9 vols., edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–1957.

Bettcher, Talia Mae. "Berkeley and Hume on Self and Self–Consciousness." In *Topics in Early Modern Philosophy of Mind*, edited by Jon Miller. New York: Springer, 2009, 193–222.

Bettcher, Talia Mae. "Berkeley's Theory of Mind: Some New Models." *Philosophy Compass* 6 (2011): 689–698.

Daniel, Stephen H. "Berkeley's Non-Cartesian Notion of Spiritual Substance." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 56 (2018): 659–682.

_____. "Berkeley's Notion of Spiritual Substance." In *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. Stephen H. Daniel. Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2008, 203–230.

_____. "How Berkeley Redefines Substance: A Reply to My Critics." *Berkeley Studies* 24 (2013): 40–50.

Descartes, Rene. *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vols. I–II. Edited by John Cottingham et al. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984–1985.

Flage, Daniel E. *Berkeley*. Malden, MA: Polity, 2014.

Gordon–Roth, Jessica. "Locke on the Ontology of Persons." *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 53 (2015): 97–123.

Hight, Marc A. and Walter Ott, "The New Berkeley." *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 34 (2004): 1–24.

Jurin, James. *Geometry no Friend to Infidelity*. London: T. Cooper, 1734.

Locke, John. *Essay concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

Locke, John. *Works of John Locke*, new ed. 10 vols. London: Thomas Tegg et al., 1823.

LoLordo, Antonia. *Locke's Moral Man*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Reid, Thomas. *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, edited by Derek R. Brookes. University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

Roberts, John R. *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Storrie, Stefan Sean Gordon. "Berkeley's Apparent Cartesianism in *De Motu*." *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94 (2012): 353–366.

Tipton, I. C. "Berkeley's View of Spirit." In *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, edited by Warren E. Steinkraus. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1966, 59–71.

Winkler, Kenneth P. "Locke on Personal Identity." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 29 (1991): 201–226.
Yolton, John. *A Locke Dictionary*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993.

Summary

In his post-1720 works, Berkeley focuses his comments about Descartes on mechanism and about Locke on general abstract ideas. He warns against using metaphysical principles to explain observed regularities, and he extends his account to include spiritual substances (including God). Indeed, by calling a substance a spirit, he emphasizes how a person is simply the will that ideas be differentiated and associated in a certain way, not some *thing* that engages in differentiation. In this sense, a substance cannot be conceived apart from its activity.

Keywords: Berkeley, spiritual substance, Descartes, Locke, activity, will

Streszczenie

Substancja i osoba: Berkeley na temat Descartes'a i Locke'a

W dziełach powstałych po roku 1720 w swych uwagach na temat Descartes'a Berkeley koncentruje się na mechanicyzmie, a w tych, w których odnosi się do Locke'a – na ogólnych ideach abstrakcyjnych. Przestrzega przed odwoływaniem się do zasad metafizycznych podczas wyjaśniania obserwowalnych regularności, przy czym kwestię tę ujmuje na tyle szeroko, aby obejmowała także substancje duchowe (włączając w to Boga). Gdy Berkeley określa substancję duchową mianem ducha, kładzie nacisk na to, w jaki sposób osoba jest po prostu wolą rozróżniania idei i wiązania ich ze sobą, a nie *czymś*, co dokonuje owego rozróżniania. W tym znaczeniu substancji nie można pojmować jako czegoś odrębnego od jej aktywności.

Słowa kluczowe: Berkeley, substancja duchowa, Descartes, Locke, aktywność, wola