

THE PASTORAL INFLUENCE ON THE ECONOMICS, APOLOGETICS, AND  
ETHICS OF GEORGE BERKELEY

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# THE PASTORAL INFLUENCE ON THE ECONOMICS, APOLOGETICS, AND ETHICS OF GEORGE BERKELEY

## INTRODUCTION

Virtually every author who studies and comments on the life and works of George Berkeley refers to him initially as simply an “Irish philosopher.” While this description certainly cannot be argued straightforwardly, it is critical to establish that the works of Berkeley were much more than philosophical musings. In fact, clear attention is not always paid to the fact that Berkeley was the Bishop of Cloyne in the Church of Ireland. This “detail” is essential to understanding his philosophy. Berkeley was not a philosopher who happened to be Christian. Virtually everything about his writings is built upon his faith. Many scholars who ignore the Christian influence on Berkeley’s work misunderstand his philosophies and mistakenly categorize him as the scholar whose work falls between Locke and Hume in the timeline of “British Empiricists.”

Clearly, Berkeley’s work does not receive its due. It is often lost among commentators misjudging his “immaterialism” as pure philosophy. Instead, the bishop’s strong faith is obscured, and fellow philosophers wrestle with his works from an inappropriate foothold. In a drastic oversimplification, Berkeley chose the route of “immaterialism” to confound modern skeptics who would reject God on the basis of His not being knowable by human senses. Berkeley should not be referred to as the “bridge” between Locke and Hume from a strategic standpoint, since his work was intended to serve more as a detour around the works of skeptics of whom he had anticipated.

Some work has been done to call attention to the fact that Berkeley does not neatly fit into the framework of an “empiricist.” Michael Ayers successfully argues that Berkeley was more likely a rationalist by summing,

“...he thinks will...break the traditional link between empiricism and materialism, and will demonstrate that the popular naturalistic epistemology leads directly to the main truths of religion...helps explain Berkeley’s first, hard-nosed insistence on sensory ideas as a condition of knowledge even of the soul, a line of thought that was maintained...until he became satisfied that the soul can be the object of another kind of experiential knowledge.”<sup>1</sup>

This paper will briefly evaluate the impact not only of Berkeley’s faith, but also of his ministerial commitment on his philosophical works. Slightly buried even within the confines of the preceding sentence is the differentiation between the Christian and the call of the Christian minister. Berkeley’s writings clearly reflect his faith, but less conspicuous is his intent to “lead and feed” his flock in Ireland. As a bishop in the Irish church, Berkeley had surrendered to serve other Anglican Christians, and his writings definitely reflect a sense of protective leadership that would be absent, especially from the works of the skeptical Hume, who followed Berkeley.

No place is this more evident than his work, *The Querist*, a series of 595 questions designed to raise the concerns of the Irish legislators, Christian or not, to generate a better economic system which would consequently produce a better situation in life for the Irish people.

What seems to be overlooked most frequently by contemporary Berkeleyan scholarship is the fact that the vast majority of his work is apologetic in nature. This

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Ayers, *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth Winkler (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57.

project will briefly examine how the bishop's philosophy does not simply fit into his apologetics. On the contrary, his apologetics system actually happens to be immensely philosophical. The challenge behind arguing for this point lies in the lack of available contemporary scholarship on the topic. Most modern scholars have chosen to simply ignore Berkeley's faith, much less his specific role as a minister. Most writers who have addressed the importance of God in Berkeley's philosophy wrote in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This paper will examine how removing God from Berkeley's philosophy actually removes its very spirit, and will reflect how his love for the people empowered him to build a system of philosophical theology intended to fundamentally support the faith of the people of Ireland.

Finally, his ethical system is also steered strictly by his pastoral influence. There are very few available writings from the bishop which concentrate on ethical matters. His only surviving work that converges on moral philosophy is *Passive Obedience*, although some selected works clearly have ethics as a tertiary topic. Overshadowed in the brilliance of his philosophically-based apologetics are a pastoral love for the lower-class people in Ireland, and a heartfelt desire to see them improve economically through education and industry, and teaching them truth will also help them to raise their standards of behavior as a result of his teaching.

### **THE PASTORAL INFLUENCE ON BERKELEY'S ECONOMICS**

In Berkeley's *The Querist*, the author's introduction makes evident that the work originally appeared in three stages and was published anonymously. The bishop obviously felt convicted that such an anonymous publication dealing with "materialistic"

matters was not an appropriate action for a bishop, so he staked claim to it.

A cursory look at the work will allow one to grasp that *The Querist* is a collection of 595 questions primarily involving the state of what we can easily today refer to as the economy of Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. Since economic notions had not been formalized at the time, and since many commercial concepts were still in developmental stages, many of the bishop's positions may seem elementary to 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans, but were of huge significance in that day. *The Querist* is definitely aimed at the country's legislature who would have the power to make necessary legal changes to the status quo, but Berkeley's message also serves as a pastoral empowering of the average Irish citizen. In the process of improving themselves economically and socially, Berkeley felt that the common people would benefit from his encouragement toward virtue as opposed to the vice by which they had grown accustomed.

To give further background on the topic at hand, another great writer of that setting selected a different genre to communicate his message. Jonathan Swift is best known for his work *Gulliver's Travels*, which many people still consider to be children's literature, but actually had much more bite than that. At the risk of oversimplification, *Gulliver's Travels* is more about a satirical view of the government in Europe than tiny characters tying down an average-sized man.

However, another of Swift's works has been lauded as the most important piece of satire in the history of the English language. In his 1729 essay, *A Modest Proposal*, Swift offered a "solution" to the poverty and famine-stricken condition in which Ireland found herself in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. After portraying as bleak a picture as possible, Swift concluded that the obvious answer would be for the Irish people to simply eat their own

babies. His language included some scrumptious recipes on how a gourmet would prepare a one-year-old in order to enjoy a delicious meal. His words were never intended to be taken as a serious endorsement for cannibalism, but they nearly cost him his financial support, and several years passed before the Irish people began to appreciate the work as satire rather than a literal solution to the depressed economy. Only literary experts would be able to recognize that the essay very neatly follows the rules for Latin satire.<sup>2</sup>

With this background, it may be easier to understand the conditions around which these works were based. Berkeley's words in *The Querist* are clearly not satirical, but are nevertheless biting in their straightforwardness. His years in America heavily influenced his ideas, as his exposure to printing paper money (rather than metallic) in Rhode Island, the formation of a state bank, and even a federal one, are key ideas frequently located in Berkeley's questions.

It appears that Bishop Berkeley's string of questions are rhetorical in nature, since he provides no firm answers, and although they appear to be randomly strung, a thorough attempt at categorizing the queries could easily be accomplished in a different type of forum.

A. Campbell Fraser writes a detailed account of life in Cloyne, noting that the word from which the city is named was originally translated "cave," and adequately described the virtually uninterrupted solitude with which Berkeley worked. Regarding the economic conditions in Ireland which served as the backdrop for *The Querist*, Fraser

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<sup>2</sup>, "A Modest Proposal," [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A\\_Modest\\_Proposal/](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Modest_Proposal/) (accessed April 21, 2007).

observes, “Musing on the misfortunes of Ireland, he rose from the special case to scientific principles, and worked his way to much that is true in economic science, forty years before Adam Smith published ‘The Wealth of Nations,’ and ten years before David Hume produced his political essays.”<sup>3</sup>

Stephen R. L. Clark’s prefacing remarks to a superb collection of essays on Berkeley’s moral and political thought, the earlier discovery of which would have saved numerous library hours, laments, “Those out of sympathy with theocentrism are bound to find some difficulty in Berkeley’s contention both that human beings must be supposed to be free, and morally accountable, and that God is the only cause of all that occurs in the phenomenal world, without benefit of secondary causes.”<sup>4</sup> It becomes apparent and will become increasingly so, that philosophers who ignore Berkeley’s dependence upon God in his system simply do not fully grasp the significance of the bishop’s system. Even in his erudite discussions on mathematics, vision, and motion, Berkeley points to God. To Berkeley, all these issues were part of the divine language. He even employs metaphors of currency as signs that connect humanity with God.

George C. Caffentzis follows up on the rest of the story behind *The Querist*. After detailing “how Berkeley developed the evolving matrix of philosophical and semantic concepts he developed in the three previous decades to solve the class problematic he and

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<sup>3</sup> A. C. Frasier, *Berkeley* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Co, 1881), 174.

<sup>4</sup> Stephen R. L. Clark, *Money, Obedience, and Affection: Essays on Berkeley's Moral and Political Thought*, ed. Stephen R. L. Clark (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc, 1989), (xix).

his circle faced in 1734-35 and to create a strategy of capitalist development in Ireland,”<sup>5</sup> Caffentzis offers, “Berkeley’s ingenious solution...ended in failure. *The Querist’s* proposals for a new form of money and a National Bank...did not garner enough support to even be proposed as a bill that could be voted down in Parliament...The 1752 edition...has 595 queries instead of the original’s 895. (The cuts) mostly related to (the plan for a national bank).”<sup>6</sup>

J. O. Urmson sketches the details of *The Querist* discussing the laziness of the Irish due to absentee ownership; an unnecessarily excessive trade imbalance, the true value of money, proper denominations of coinage within the Irish economy, importing luxury items and exporting basic food when peasants were starving, and the concept of a national bank. He observes, “While it is hard to claim that Berkeley ranks with Hume and Adam Smith in importance as a philosophical economist, historians of that science regard him as a significant figure.”<sup>7</sup>

David Berman makes some impressive observations in connecting *The Querist* with *Alciphron*, *The Analyst*, and *A Defence of Free-thinking in Mathematics*. The obvious link comes in the form of questions used in all four works. Both *The Querist* and *Alciphron* use the similar language of signs and counters, *The Querist* pairing counters with money, and *Alciphron* hooking up counters with signs. Berman illustrates,

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<sup>5</sup> George Constantine Caffentzis, *Exciting the Industry of Mankind: George Berkeley's Philosophy of Money* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 406.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 407.

<sup>7</sup> J.O. Urmson, *Berkeley* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 80-81.

“A piece of money...and a particular audible word, like ‘hello,’ are artificial signs, which, because of their agreed meaning or credit, can do useful things-like buying a stamp or greeting a friend. Once money is considered a sign, it will follow that those monetary signs are to be preferred which are most manageable, and most appropriate to the corresponding economic operations. This is so, because such signs will facilitate those operations, for example, purchasing, or in economic terms, the signs will promote circulation and industry...As paper money is more manageable than hard money, Berkeley preferred it; ...for the same reason, it would seem, he preferred a decimal currency- as early as 1749. Both cases represent an improvement in monetary symbolism or notation.”<sup>8</sup>

T. W. Hutchison acknowledges Berkeley’s stated desire that public discussion about his questions could lead to government intervention which would drastically improve Ireland’s general economic condition, but , more toward the bishop’s heart, help ‘feed the hungry and clothe the naked.’ After discussing the minister’s skill at economic philosophy in the same breath with Hume and Smith, Hutchison notes, “On the other hand, though going straight for topical, practical issues, Berkeley was incomparably freer from the business, financial, or party-political interests which pervaded so many of the economic pamphleteers of that...period.”<sup>9</sup>

### **THE PASTORAL INFLUENCE ON BERKELEY’S APOLOGETICS**

Since virtually all of Berkeley’s works are apologetic in one form or another, only a limited number of instances will be included in this exercise. Berkley’s primary work on apologetics, *Alciphron*, will be examined from the viewpoint of the pastor, as well as

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<sup>8</sup> David Berman, *George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 168.

<sup>9</sup> T. W. Hutchison, "Berkeley's Querist and Its Place in the Economic Thought of the Eighteenth Century," *British Journal of the Philosophy of Science* 4 (1953-54): 53-54.

some general comments on the overall apologetic impact of immaterialism.

Costica Bradatan examines the biting sarcasm of Crito and the sincere simplicity of Euphanor in expressing the view of Berkeley in *Alciphron*, but observes,

“The burning necessity Berkeley felt of ‘healing’ his neighbours’ [sic] minds and morals, of expelling the intellectual disease of free-thinking from society, required that the emphasis in *Alciphron* be placed not so much on the possible philosophical doctrines lying behind free-thinking...but on warning against...the extremely pernicious effects that these doctrines might have on customs, public and private morality, and on the civic life and well-being of the community.”<sup>10</sup>

Bradatan closes his article with a skillful anthology of past Christian apologists who likely would have influenced Berkeley in writing *Alciphron*. His message is in clear support of the notion that Berkeley’s works were pointed primarily toward converting skeptics to Christ.

In the Berkeley Newsletter, Genevieve Brykman suggests,

“The Fourth Dialogue is not simply a rehash of the New Theory of Vision. This time the heteronomy of visual and tactile ideas serves not to show the existence of a ‘language of nature’ associated with a denial that there is an extension that is the common object of these two senses, but to demonstrate the existence of God directly by a language God speaks to us through his creation. In the Seventh Dialogue, the doctrine of the Introduction of 1710 is remarkably truncated, and Berkeley puts in the mouth of his pious speakers the doctrine of the meaning of words contained in the first version of the Introduction. From here on, faith prevails over reason, authority over free thinking, and the power of words over their meaning.”<sup>11</sup>

Brykman concludes, “Beyond (*The Analyst*’s) interest for the history of mathematics, this work is an apologetic extension of the thesis contained in the

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<sup>10</sup> Costica Bradatan, "Rhetoric of Faith and Patterns of Persuasion in Berkeley's *Alciphron*," *The Heythrop Journal* 47, no. 4 (October 2006): 546-547.

<sup>11</sup> Genevieve Brykman, "Philosophy and Apologetics in Berkeley," *Berkeley Newsletter* 6, no. 2 (1982-83): 19.

*Alciphron*: the mysteries of religion are no more susceptible to being done in by rational examination than are ‘the mysteries of mathematics.’ And in mysteries the authority of God is worth more than Newton’s.”<sup>12</sup>

Sigmund Bonk encapsulates Berkeley’s proof for the existence of God in a logically-formatted argument that says since everything we perceive is an idea of sense, and since ideas of sense cannot be caused by material things, and since the ideas of sense being produced exclusively in our finite minds and are located only there is an unacceptable notion, therefore, there must be a superior intellectual being who creates the ideas of sense, and permanently stores these ideas. Bonk says, “The conclusion about the existence of God is indeed not an absolutely certain one as in mathematics, but a very natural one, because the matter corresponds completely with out knowledge of other people’s minds.”<sup>13</sup>

Kenneth Winkler does not take the view of Berkeley as an apologist, and certainly doesn’t emphasize the role of the minister on Berkley’s work. He observes, “...although God’s existence is something Euphranor certainly claims to demonstrate, the claim is not...central to his presentation; it seems more accurate to read him not as someone who hopes to convert the atheist by irresistible argument, but as a philosopher proposing a view of the world in which the Christian God finds a place.”<sup>14</sup>

Margaret Atherton’s editorial introduction to *The Empiricists* fails to mention

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<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Bonk, *We See God: George Berkeley's Philosophical Theology* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1997), 31.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth P. Winkler, *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 288.

apologetics or philosophical theology as the motive behind Berkeley's works until her closing remarks as she notes, "Berkeley argues that when I try to give an account of the cause of those of my ideas of which I am not the cause, it must be in terms of mental agency. Such an account is readily forthcoming. My ideas and the ideas of all finite beings are caused by the Supreme Intelligence, God, who speaks to us via the 'Language of Nature.' Berkeley conceived his system to be the antidote not only to skepticism but also to atheism."<sup>15</sup>

George Pappas underscores the importance of refuting religious skepticism in Berkeley's work as he says,

"He holds that scepticism [sic] is a great support for freethinking in religious matters, and this is something he opposes and even finds threatening to the faith. However, the work that the refutation of scepticism does in Berkeley's philosophy overall is something else. It counts as one of the marks of evidence in favor of his overall philosophical theory. In this respect the refutation of scepticism is like the degree of agreement with common sense. It is one of the parameters by which one judges the level of acceptability of one's philosophical theory relative to its competition. On this parameter, too, Berkeley claims to have won the competition."<sup>16</sup>

### **THE PASTORAL INFLUENCE ON BERKELEY'S ETHICS**

In Berkeley's *Passive Obedience* we find the most comprehensive representation available on his ethical system. G. A. Johnston notes the bishop's concluding remarks in *Principles of Human Knowledge* promise to handle the principles of ethics in the sequel, but "the unfinished manuscript of it was lost during his travels in Italy, and he never

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<sup>15</sup> Margaret Atherton, *The Empiricists: Critical Essays on Locke, Berkeley, and Hume*, ed. Margaret Atherton (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1999), (xiv-xv).

<sup>16</sup> George S. Pappas, *Berkeley's Thought* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 253.

attempted to re-write it.”<sup>17</sup>

One would expect a pastor of Berkeley’s profile to simply pound the pulpit and stand on the authority of Scripture in his description of moral laws, but he opts instead to prove his point on purely rational grounds. In *Passive Obedience*, he invokes Natural Law as a more universally-accepted system for arguing. In an appropriate fashion, his philosophical theology has quickly become apologetic without being biblical. However, much like his more formal defenses and his socio-economic discourses, his moral philosophy has a clearly pastoral ring to it, as he apparently intends to enable anyone to be able to understand his argument and lead consequently to the Christian faith, but for his congregation also to be able to understand it without requiring faith.

So by using Natural Law as his foundation for moral philosophy, Berkeley plays a safe strategy that will suffice against attacks from every angle. Few would seriously argue against the significance of order. The pastor side of Berkeley sees, as did Aristotle, the importance of intent in making moral evaluations. Without Natural Law and its accompanying structure, chaos would result. Social order would be impossible without natural order. Berkeley again neatly ties this into his broader scope of God being the causal agent behind every idea, especially since Natural Law is the regulating force behind specifying cause and effect. It should also be noted that scholars who separate moral law from Natural Law in Berkeley’s work have misunderstood the bishop from this angle as well. To Berkeley, and many others, moral law is a simple subdivision of Natural Law.

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<sup>17</sup> G. A. Johnston, *The Development of Berkeley's Philosophy* (London: MacMillan and Co, 1923), 282.

Paraphrasing Berkeley, another error comes in mistaking the object of passive obedience, which is not the government, but reason, which is the voice of God. (*Passive Obedience*, 39). Berkeley was certainly aware of the recurring problem in the book of Judges (17:6, 21:25) about people doing what was right in their own eyes rather than obeying a divinely-revealed code of ethics, and was aware that men will be left to their own private judgments as much as ever. (*Passive Obedience*, 29)

In examining the background behind Passive Obedience, a quick study in Irish history becomes necessary to determine the true thrust of the bishop's gentle challenge. *Passive Obedience* is in large part a defense against accusations that the pastor was a Jacobite Revolutionist. Rupert Jarvis records, "The word 'Jacobite' is derived from *Jacobus*, the latinised [sic] version of James. It was applied to the adherents of James II and VII (of Scotland) after the Revolution of 1688, and later to adherents of the whole line of Stuarts in exile...particularly to James II and VII's son and grandson, James Edward and Charles Edward..."<sup>18</sup> The essence of this section of Jarvis' work is that the Glorious Revolution of 1685 was begun after James II was replaced by Parliament with William of Orange, largely due to religious tolerance of the Catholic church being imposed upon the people, infuriating the Anglican church. A series of battles ignited over the next six decades involving multiple attempts to overthrow the sitting government. Add to that the political confusion caused by members of the Tory party supporting restoring the Stuart line to the throne, while the Whig party obviously opposed that movement. In the ultimate battle of 1745, the army of Charles (The Young Pretender)

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<sup>18</sup> Rupert C. Jarvis, ed., *The Jacobite Risings of 1715 and 1745* (Carlisle, Ireland: Cumberland County Council, 1954), 13-14.

defeated the Jacobites and Charles assumed the throne over the United Kingdom.

Berman elaborates by placing *Passive Obedience* in its 18<sup>th</sup>-Century Irish context. He observes, “Berkeley does not explicitly apply his absolutist, rule-utilitarian theory to the Glorious Revolution, but the application would have been crystal clear – especially...in 1712. Those who rebelled against James II had sinned...And as the Revolution which ousted the Stuarts had been founded on sin, so the present establishment was by implication, it would seem, sinful.”<sup>19</sup>

In the process it must be determined that Berkeley’s opinion is that passive obedience is also charged with damaging the state by allowing governors to become meaner. God can remove tyrants in a number of ways. Even the heathen philosopher Plato thought it better to pray for better times than attempt a coup d’etat (*Passive Obedience*, 47). In fact, Berkeley cannot imagine any circumstance where rebellion would be acceptable behavior (*Passive Obedience*, 48).

Arguably, Stephen Clark and Lisa Downing are among the few contemporary Berkeley scholars who make the critical connection between Berkeley’s philosophy and his faith. Clark notes, “As both his moral purpose and his acquaintance with ancient texts are obvious it is odd that so little has been written on his moral philosophy.”<sup>20</sup>

Stephen Darwall notes the shepherding influence on Berkeley’s ethics as he cites differences between Berkeley and Anthony Ashley Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury. Darwall reflects, “...Berkeley maintains that Shaftesbury’s ethical

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<sup>19</sup> David Berman, "The Jacobitism of Berkeley's Passive Obedience," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 47, no. 2 (April 1986): 313.

<sup>20</sup> Clark, (xix).

philosophy already has had pernicious effects and ...could be catastrophic, especially for the innocent and the vulnerable. These are precisely the people that morality's function is to protect...and it can do so only if morality is understood to consist in the will and sanctions of a benevolent...God.”<sup>21</sup>

Paul J. Olscamp acknowledges the bishop's pastoral tendency as he summarizes Berkeley's overarching message located in *Passive Obedience*, but concludes by observing, “What God wills us to do is to observe certain established laws, which, when universally practiced, have an ‘essential fitness’ to promote the general well-being, even if there seem to be particular exceptions... One of these rules is that we obey the rightful ruler...we can abstain from disobeying and ...obey the ‘negative’ moral rule of passive obedience.”<sup>22</sup>

Paragraph 8 of *Passive Obedience*, which describes the natural appropriateness that results from the universal alignment with moral rules, may also describe what philosophers now refer to as “rule utilitarianism.” J. O. Urmson differentiates by stating, “Act-utilitarians protest that, if one is sure that violation of some traditional rule of morality will have the best results, then it is mere conditioned rule-worship to obey the rule...So, (Berkeley) concludes that the general welfare, which is willed by God, can best be achieved by recognition of determinate rules.”<sup>23</sup>

Philip Kohlenberg is another member of the academy who comes close to

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<sup>21</sup> Stephen Darwall, *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. Kenneth P. Winkler (New York: Cambridge university Press, 2005), 318.

<sup>22</sup> Paul J. Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 57.

<sup>23</sup> Urmson, 74.

connecting God as essential to Berkeley's system, but he frequently finds faults in the bishop's arguments simply because Kohlenberg thinks Berkeley's arguments are impressive, yet nevertheless not persuasive. While seeing Berkeley's trouble with the class conflict involving freethinkers and the freethinkers seeing the church as self-preserving and extravagant, Kohlenberg concludes, "Thus Berkeley's philosophy provides a justification for what he sees as the contemporary social mission of the Church. It is likely that that was its purpose – that he developed this philosophical view in order to justify the activity of the church."<sup>24</sup>

But Berkeley's other published works did have a trace of his moral philosophy. Johnston notes that other than *Passive Obedience*, Berkeley's ethics are partially available in other works. He observes, "Most of Berkeley's memoranda on ethics in the *Commonplace Book* (Berkeley's notebooks) reveal or conceal a reference to Locke; and in order to appreciate their significance, it is necessary to bear in mind Locke's theory for ethics."<sup>25</sup>

With that foundation established, Johnston nevertheless later distinguishes between Berkeley and Locke regarding ethics. This description clearly shows the pastoral influence on Berkeley as opposed to Locke, noting,

"Ethics is for Locke a pure science, having as its subject-matter relations of ideas, and omitting all question of the realisation [sic] of these ideas in the concrete matter-of-fact of moral experience. But Berkeley's view is very different. Ethics is an applied or practical science. It is concerned throughout with actual conduct: its subject-matter is moral experience. And its great aim is the

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<sup>24</sup> Philip Kohlenberg, "Bishop Berkeley on Religion and the Church," *Harvard Theological Review* 66, no. 2 (April 1973): 236.

<sup>25</sup> Johnston, 284.

improvement of conduct, and the advancement of 'the good cause of the world.'<sup>26</sup>

After taking Fraser to task over the unfortunate tag of "Theological Utilitarian" having been applied to Berkeley, H. W. Orange observes,

"The analogy between Berkeley's ethical system, and his *Principles of Human Knowledge* is this:- The material world consists only of ideas; the *esse* of matter is *percipi*; the only true substance, spirit. But inasmuch as we find, that the ideas of different spirits vary, that ideas are void of force, and that each spirit has not control over its own ideas; since, in short, these ideas demand a metaphysical ground of unity, source of energy, and basis of reality-we infer God, as the universal spirit percipient of consistent truth, the permanent reality, and the source of energy. All that is not spirit, is idea; and the difference between true and false ideas, between life and illusion, is, that the true ideas are also God's ideas, and He is the one Spirit who sustains, consistently, and for ever, the many ideas which come and go in the minds of men. To know the truth, is to have the same ideas as God. 'Laws of nature' are observations, for practical purposes correct, of the order in which he is pleased to manifest this succession of ideas."<sup>27</sup>

Graham Conroy sees Berkeley as a bridge between Locke and Hume in ethics as well. He concludes, "Berkeley went beyond (Butler) by ...rejecting demonstration (as opposed to proof) and thereby opened the way for a further reduction of the field of moral propositions, more of which he took simply as matters of fact...Thus Berkeley stands as the transitional figure between ...rationalistic ethics and the empirical moral philosophy ... although his very position as a transitional figure has caused his interest and merit as a moralist to go unacknowledged."<sup>28</sup> Perhaps it might be better stated that Berkeley's work has gone 'misunderstood,' since it is rarely viewed in the light of his faith and pastoral

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 291.

<sup>27</sup> H. W. Orange, "Berkeley as a Moral Philosopher," *Mind*, no. os-XV (1890): 519-520.

<sup>28</sup> Graham P. Conroy, "Berkeley on Moral Demonstration," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 2 (April-June 1961): 214.

calling.

John Daniel Wild also connected Berkeley's moral philosophy with his faith as he noted,

“Berkeley's rationalistic idealism is, therefore, forced to the realism of faith, for the norm or 'idea' which forces idealism to the negation of everything including itself is not a relative absolute, but the absolute of faith. Through the avenue of transcendent faith, the only conceivable, or rather the only truly inconceivable avenue, Berkeley at last finds a justification for realism and materialism, and abolishes the last remnants of solipsism or subjectivism from his thought. The concrete logic has reached its last extremity. It can no longer accompany him, but may point the way. This way is the way of faith. Reason may 'lead' us and chart the course, for, since reason itself presupposes the absolute, 'the objections made to faith are by no means an effect of knowledge, but proceed rather from an ignorance of what knowledge is' (*Alciphron*).”<sup>29</sup>

C. D. Broad summarizes the first of what he considers as two parts of the moral philosophy that emanates from Passive Obedience by formulating, “Since God is perfectly good...and since God's own state is automatically one of eternal bliss,...and since human action can affect only human beings, any good result attainable by human action must be a state of some one man, or some class of men, or the whole human race.”<sup>30</sup> Broad continues, “God, being perfectly just, would not favour [sic] one individual or one class of men over the rest of mankind on any other ground than the superior moral desert of that individual or of ...that class. Moral desert arises entirely from conformity to the commands of God.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> John Daniel Wild, *George Berkeley: A Study of His Life* (New York: Russell & Russell, Inc, 1962), 352.

<sup>30</sup> C. D. Broad, "Berkeley's Theory of Morals," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 23-24 (1953): 75.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Perhaps some of the greatest praise for Berkeley's pastoral influence on ethics comes from those who consider their own work to be a logical following of the bishop's "empiricism."<sup>32</sup> A.J. Ayer, in his logical positivist style, presses Berkeley's work by noting,

"For the fact that all causal and representative theories of perception treat material things as if they were unobservable entities entitles us, as Berkeley saw, to rule them out a priori. The unfortunate thing is that, in spite of this, he found it necessary to postulate God as an observable cause of our 'ideas'; and he must be criticized also for failing to see that the argument which he uses to dispose of Locke's analysis of a material thing is fatal to his own conception of the nature of the self, a point which was effectively seized upon by Hume."<sup>33</sup>

However, it should not go unnoticed that Ayer and his peers clearly sought to eliminate any message of religious note that crept into philosophy. For Ayer and other Logical Positivists, the best way to accomplish this goal was to eliminate metaphysics altogether by endorsing the verification principle, which stated that any statement not verifiable via human senses is meaningless. Evidently, these scholars failed to see how their own system was internally incoherent.

In using *Passive Obedience* to support Berkeley's overall message, Olscamp nevertheless attempts to locate an inherent contradiction in the ethical system as he concludes, "All of these points...lead to a conclusion which is essential to Berkeley's position, namely that the soul is ...'naturally' immortal...(meaning) the mind, because it is not an idea or a set of ideas and therefore is not an object, is not part of the natural world, is not a part of the natural world, and therefore not a subject to the divine rules of

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<sup>32</sup> Alfred Jules Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 31.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 53-54.

grammar in the natural language (natural law). ...death results from the laws of nature.”<sup>34</sup>

Urmson concludes,

“Berkeley was a sincerely religious man. He wished to propogate the Christian religion both because he thought it true and from a religious concern for the souls of men. But he also...makes it the basis of morality. We, who aim at our own happiness, are to aim at the general happiness that is willed by God because it is only by obeying the will of God that we can achieve our own happiness. So Berkeley thinks that without religion men have no rational motive to be moral; and since political obedience has a moral justification, the atheist will also have no inner drive to obedience but only at most fear of retribution from the civil power. So for Berkeley our temporal as well as our spiritual well-being is based only on religion...Within limits Berkeley was an advocate of religious toleration...But there could be no toleration for atheists, since they had no rational motive for the preservation of moral society, as did all theists, however misguided in their theological views.”<sup>35</sup>

### **OTHER BERKELEYAN INFLUENCES**

Having seen a more general notion of Berkley’s care for his flock, it may also be helpful to take a brief glimpse at certain specific instances where the bishop influenced other people, both directly and indirectly. In the small space remaining, it would not be possible to detail the relationship between Berkeley and Jonathan Edwards, the great Reformed preacher of colonial America in the day. Marginal research uncovered considerable debate over whether the immaterialism espoused by Edwards was from Berkeley or from someone else. Edwards’ notebooks are marked with the names and works of authors he planned to read, but none of Berkeley’s were checked off, so it seems

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<sup>34</sup> Olscamp, 91.

<sup>35</sup> Urmson, 76.

not necessary that Edwards read Berkeley<sup>36</sup>. However, there were similarities, likely due to the pastoral nature of both men rather than a strict philosophical bent. In fact, “Like ... Berkeley, Edwards here defines spirit as a true substance and existence as a divine emanation from the mind of God...By thus mediating between Berkeley on the one hand and Locke, Descartes, and Hobbes on the other,...Edwards hoped to rescue Christianity from the deadweight of rationalism and the paralyzing inertia of skepticism.”<sup>37</sup>

Robert Jackson writes that Swift was a classmate of Berkeley’s at Kilkenny College<sup>38</sup>, and admired Berkeley’s founding a seminary in Bermuda, but would not support it financially<sup>39</sup>. Due to the lack of details and the passage of time, it becomes murky as to which of these great friends had the greater influence on the other. Luce notes, “The Queen asked Lord Wilmington why Berkeley was unpopular in Ireland (presumably at the time the Lord Lieutenant reported against his candidature for the deanery of Down); Wilmington replied: ‘He could not tell unless that he was very great with Dean Swift.’”<sup>40</sup> Luce also notes, “The Drapier Letters and other of Swift’s writings strongly influenced Berkeley’s politics and economics. The outlook of *The Querist* is

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<sup>36</sup> Paul Copan, "Jonathan Edwards' Philosophical Influences: Lockean or Malebranchean?," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 44, no. 1 (March 2001): 107.

<sup>37</sup> John E. Smith, *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, ed. Harry S. Stout John E. Smith and Kenneth P. Minkema (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), (xi-xii).

<sup>38</sup> Robert Wyse Jackson, *Jonathan Swift: Dean and Pastor* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939), 50.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> A. A. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, Ltd., 1949), 232.

Swiftian.”<sup>41</sup> Similarly, some of Swift’s works on socio-economic development seem to have inspired Berkeley. Irvin Ehrenpreis, in a biography about Swift, observes, “Under such influences (the mutual distrust of northern, Scottish Presbyterians, and the Anglican population of Ireland) Swift struggled to accumulate an estate for himself; he battled all his life for the strengthening of the Church of Ireland; and in his greatest political essays, *The Drapier’s Letters*, he evoked the principles of human freedom out of a controversy over the coinage of money.”<sup>42</sup>

Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* appeared some six years before the first publication of *The Querist* in 1935. *The Drapier’s Letters* were published in 1720,

Historian Edwin Gaustad records further connection between Berkeley and Swift, mentioning the success of the under-thirty scholar whose provocative works (*An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*) had allowed him to cross paths with Richard Steele, Joseph Addison, and Alexander Pope, among others. Gaustad also records that upon obtaining his deanery at Derry in his return to Ireland, Berkeley was troubled by other socio-political issues in the kingdom. Gaustad notes, “Englishmen had just come through that roller-coaster ride of speculation known as the South Sea Bubble, whose bursting left both reputations and fortunes desolated. The financial crash also left England with enormous social instability as class standings shifted, as private gain ranked ahead of public good, as all normal rules of conduct

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Irvin Ehrenpreis, *Swift, the Man, His Works, and the Age*, ed. , *Mr. Swift and His Contemporaries* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 9.

collapsed.”<sup>43</sup> Financial disaster had led England into moral decline, and the moral decline had resulted in a society drifting further from God and the church. Seeing the demise of virtue and the rise of vice in the culture of Great Britain, Berkeley unveiled his ill-fated plan in Bermuda, hoping to begin a new ecclesiastical and ethical work in the new world via Rhode Island.

Gaustad adds, “The climax of Berkeley’s introduction to London society came with his presentation at Court by Jonathan Swift...another Irishman and one with whom Berkeley enjoyed the school ties of both Kilkenny and Trinity.”<sup>44</sup>

Josh McDowell chronicles the assent to faith for C. S. Lewis, and describes the one-time atheist’s realization “that he must begin to take his philosophy seriously. This was the result of linking his previous conclusions about joy to his idealistic philosophy. Lewis knew that this joy was real...and that it had found its source in his Absolute.”<sup>45</sup> From there McDowell adds that, “The result was that he had no idea what an absolute idealism was, and Hegel and other philosophers offered no help. At this point he made the shift to Berkeley’s ‘God.’”<sup>46</sup> After realizing he could not really make sense of his absolute idealism, he turned to Berkeley. McDowell concludes that further influence came from G. K. Chesterton’s *The Everlasting Man*, and then converted to theism and then finally Christianity. Although a long evening with J. R. R. Tolkien and others

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<sup>43</sup> Edwin S. Gaustad, "George Berkeley and New World Community," *Church History* 48, no. 1 (March 1979): 6-7.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>45</sup> Josh McDowell, *Skeptics Who Demanded a Verdict* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989), 65.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

brought Lewis to faith, the door was opened by the rational explanations of God from the works of Bishop Berkeley.

### CONCLUSION

Indeed Bishop Berkeley does not receive sufficient credit as a philosopher, but primarily because his interpreters explore only at prima facie subjects. When matters of religion or God Himself are removed from Berkeley's philosophy, rarely is the bishop fully appreciated. Again, Berkeley was a great philosopher, but he is all about philosophy like *Field of Dreams* was all about baseball and the biblical account of Jonah was all about a huge fish.

Scholars who ignore or overlook the religious or pastoral aspect of the works of Berkeley frequently fail to understand the major focus behind the great philosopher. We can analyze his treatments on distance, motion, mathematics, signs, nature, and the rest of his topics but if we obscure his vision for teaching and reaching people with a truthful message about God, we have simply enjoyed academic calisthenics.

Even Berkeley's staunchest admirers misunderstand him because of this lack of understanding regarding his pastoral calling. Yenia Ra reports, "As the city of Berkeley's (CA) birthday rolls around, it may come as a shock to many that this 'People's Republic' owes its name to George Berkeley, an 18<sup>th</sup> century Irish bishop who once owned slaves."<sup>47</sup> It would come as a shock to the bishop that city's campus of the University of California system carries a reputation as being one of the most liberal universities in

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<sup>47</sup> Yenie Ra, "City's Exhibit Makes Known The Story Behind Its Name," *The Daily Californian*, February 3, 2003, <http://www.dailycal.org/sharticle.php?id=10736/> (accessed May 3, 2007).

America today. It might also shock him to know that the Irish pronunciation of the bishop's name did not survive in the California city. Ra further describes the city's exhibit honoring its namesake as having "a section that questions the ethics...of a man who left England with the intent to start a college in Bermuda to convert British colonists to Christianity. He also owned slaves while he lived in Rhode Island."<sup>48</sup> An anachronistic slap like that might be expected from a reporter in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Berkeley, but juxtaposing those two matters is the logical equivalent of seeing a balance between hanging a frame aboard the Titanic and running into an iceberg.

In a biography about Berkeley, A. A. Luce examined the pastoral duties of the great philosopher and noted, "The record of his episcopate is meagre [sic] ; he has left no monument in churches built and decorated, or in striking ecclesiastical developments; the times did not ask such things of him or permit them; but he was a faithful diocesan, and a good pastor, who ministered to the multitudes of sick and needy around him, and discharged the duties of his high office with zeal and foresight."

Jonathan Walmsley quips, "George Berkeley is widely regarded as a loony. He was not a loony. He was a bishop. I do not here mean to imply that a religious bent precludes insanity. It is rather that this particular lunacy was ascribed to Berkeley over and above that freely attributed to him as a man of the cloth"<sup>49</sup>

Walmsley concludes, "He was a deeply religious man and the place for God in his system, as the benevolent cause of the entire world, is intimate, awesome, and

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Walmsley, "Philosopher Of The Month: George Berkeley," *The Philosophers' Magazine On-line*, April, 2001, [http://www.philosophers.co.uk/cafe/phil\\_apr2001.html](http://www.philosophers.co.uk/cafe/phil_apr2001.html). (accessed May 3, 2007).

compelling. His was a consistent Christian vision that even the most hardheaded atheist cannot fail to respect.”<sup>50</sup>

George Berkeley was centuries ahead of his time. He had the foresight to prepare for the onslaught of skeptics like Hume and Nietzsche, and developed a philosophical system that is difficult to objectively question. Non-Christian philosophers have been successful at keeping his work camouflaged from most contemporary Christian scholars. His work is reminiscent of the Intelligent Design scientists, who, though Christian, leave their Bibles behind in order to formulate arguments against atheistic scientists. Their mission, like Berkeley’s, is to lovingly confront the culture in a swordless battle of wits in order for the common people to drink from the living “tar-water” of Jesus Christ.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

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