

An Interpretation of Berkeley's Subjective Idealism Philosophy within His Writings and Its Legacy

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this paper is to explore Irish philosopher George Berkeley's Subjective Idealism philosophy, primarily by interpreting his famous philosophical deduction writings. Furthermore, the paper also discusses the legacy of Berkeley's philosophy in terms of its impact on both his contemporary era and modern-day development. Moreover, it is important to point out that compared to the majority of papers submitted, this paper might seem to be "short on references"; nevertheless, this is clearly aware by the author. This is because the author's purpose in writing this paper is to self-interpret Berkeley's philosophy instead of relying too heavily on other scholars' subjective interpretations. However, the overall and broad messages still draw from professional thoughts; therefore, the authenticity and accuracy of the paper remain considerably valid.

Introduction

He was a Christian bishop, but he was also a representative of the Enlightenment. He was born in Ireland during the era of the Scientific Revolution, yet he was strongly opposed to its pioneer, Isaac Newton. He was the sharpest critic of John Locke, yet he was considered Locke's most legitimate "heir." All these seemingly contradictory identities are perfectly embodied in one person. Despite his multiple identities, he is primarily remembered as a philosopher due to his outstanding intellectual achievements, who, alongside John Locke and David Hume, is considered one of the three great figures of British modern philosophy. The figure who encapsulates all these characteristics is George Berkeley, a luminary in the field of modern philosophy, whose contributions remain indispensable.

The adjectives "complex" and "diverse" run through Berkeley's life. Berkeley promoted the idea that colleges should act as hubs of advancement and enlightenment in the field of education. Hence, as a tribute to him, the renowned University of California, Berkeley, bears his name.ⁱ In the field of mathematics, Berkeley demonstrated adeptness in critical thinking and fearlessly challenged authority, utilizing his exceptional mathematical prowess to defend theology.ⁱⁱ Despite the seemingly opposing nature of these ideologies, Berkeley skillfully combined them into a unique fusion. In this journey, he uncovered the logical flaws in the theory of calculus, a flaw unaddressed even by contemporaries like Newton, leading to significant confusion and distrusts to mathematics.ⁱⁱⁱ

Since Berkeley achieved such remarkable success in other fields, why is it that when his name is mentioned, the first thing that comes to mind is still his identity as a philosopher? The answer is his creation of one of the most important theories in the world of philosophy - subjective idealism. The central idea of this theory is that there is only spirit in objective existence, and that all perceptions towards matter are a composite of the senses. This theory led empiricism—with its materialistic tendencies—down the path of complete idealism, which had a butterfly effect on the entire history of philosophy that followed. It is believed that ideas from the Enlightenment had a major influence on Berkeley, because the Enlightenment was an era that emphasized the development of rational thought and the overthrow of traditional superstitions. This makes it all the more surprising that Berkeley was born in this era and remained a devout Christian. The essay attempts to explore the

development of Berkeley's philosophical ideas in a chronological order along with his life experiences, and ultimately believes that Berkeley's philosophy has partially inherited the idea of empiricism, but further developed his philosophy with the incorporation logical deduction and theology.

Historical Context—The Enlightenment (1685)

The Age of Enlightenment, one of the most intricate yet fascinating eras, is a period for which thousands of definitions can be found, yet none can be agreed to be the most accurate. But interestingly, our modern-day heated discussions and debates about it are an epitome of this era's diverse intellectual development. With no attempts to establish and defend a new definition, the definition given of the Enlightenment in this essay is purely for the purpose of providing contextual information for the following discussion of George Berkeley. The three main terms that summarize the Enlightenment are: skepticism, freedom, and progress.

A common view of the Enlightenment is that it marked the start of people's exploration towards the essence of the world. But to be more accurate, it is believed that the more accurate way to say it, is that the Enlightenment marks the first start in which people started to explore the essence of the world without a theology perspective, it is an exploration from men ourselves. People during the Enlightenment stopped obeying the orthodox authority and doctrines, but instead started to view everything around them with a skeptical attitude. They started to question the long-held beliefs and argue that people should abandon the preconceptions that they held, and only obtaining the real knowledge after going through solitary analysis, as René Descartes succinctly puts it: "The seeker after truth must once in his lifetime doubt everything that he can doubt."^{iv} Hence, the influence of past prevailing theories, with religions as the more representative one, were significantly diminished and replaced by critical inquiry.

As a consequence of the skepticism towards traditional beliefs, people's view on themselves has also changed. Unlike the past beliefs which held that all power is derived from the god and that monarchs have deity, the Enlightenment has challenged this idea and urges for individual freedom. A key figure in this area of development is John Locke, who in his works of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) and *Two Treatises of Government* (1689) argued that human's knowledge derives from experience instead of being borned, and that people should obtain liberal and equality, that government's power should be restrained to the extent that they are protecting people's natural right, such as life, liberty, and property.^v The ideas challenged the feudal monarchy and promoted the development of democracy and liberalism.

Furthermore, the Enlightenment is a period which embraced new ideas; hence, it fueled the development of multiple areas. It has significantly propelled scientific developments, from the Scientific Method to evolutionism, and eventually laid down the foundation for the future Industrial Revolution. In the field of politics, people's reassessment of social concepts stressed the importance of individuality, which promoted the reform of political systems from absolute monarchy to a more democratic form of governance. Moreover, the Enlightenment allowed people to be more expressive when producing arts, hence, new forms of writing such as novels were able to emerge. Thus, the Enlightenment can be seen as an era of transformation and innovation from the old superstitious beliefs.

Early Life

On March 12, 1685, approximately the same year as the commence of the Enlightenment, George Berkeley was born in Kilkenny, Ireland, to an ordinary Anglo-Irish family. There are very few accounts of Berkeley's childhood, and all we know is that Berkeley's family, though not wealthy, "had gentle blood."^{vi} As the eldest son of the family, Berkeley displayed remarkable curiosity and intellect from a young age. In Berkeley's commonplace

book, he recorded: "I was distrustful at eight years old, and consequently by nature disposed for the new doctrines."^{vii} Perhaps this tendency marked the beginning of Berkeley's skepticism toward mainstream materialist thought.

According to his admission register for the summer of 1696, he started school directly in the second year.^{viii} Keep in mind that the school was known for its reputable faculty and renowned students, with alumni including the famous poets Congreve and Swift who preceded Berkeley by twenty years. Therefore, the twelve-year-old's direct enrollment into the second class seems to be a solitary instance, but at the same time, it indicates Berkeley's maturity and intelligence. By the age of 15, Berkeley advanced his academic endeavors and gained admission as a scholarship recipient to Trinity College,^{ix} renowned as one of Europe's chief universities. The academic staff at Trinity College covered an array of subjects including physics, divinity, civil and canon law, and mathematics.^x Following the progressive trend of the era, continuously developing theories and ideas also caused constant changes in college courses. Discoveries from Newton, Boyle, Locke, Descartes, and many more were gradually incorporated. Furthermore, colleges significantly increased their focus on the field of science. Lectures on chemistry, anatomy, and botany were added to the curriculum and experimental philosophy courses.^{xi} Apart from the academics, Berkeley also retained a very devout Christian living style, in which he persists in daily prayers and Sunday discourses.^{xii} Thus, the diverse experiences during his university years laid the foundation for Berkeley to achieve various academic accomplishments.

At Trinity College, Berkeley has been considered as "either the greatest genius or the greatest dunce in College."^{xiii} According to a famous anecdote of him recorded by Berkeley's friend Conterini, once, Berkeley became obsessed with the sensations experienced by criminals during an execution. Consequently, he asked Conterini to conduct an experiment with him. Berkeley tied himself to the ceiling, removed the chair from under his feet, and agreed on a signal with Conterini. The plan was for Conterini to lower Berkeley to the ground upon receiving the signal. However, Berkeley, driven by a desire to experience the most vivid sensations, ultimately lost consciousness, leaving Conterini waiting for the signal in vain. And after regaining consciousness, the first thing Berkeley said was: "Bless my heart, Conterini, you have rumpled my band."^{xiv} Regardless of the authenticity of this anecdote, it undoubtedly reflects Berkeley's innate curiosity and experimental character.

Three years after receiving the B.A. degree in Trinity College (1707), Berkeley passed all of the examinations with an excellent grade, and became a fellow researcher at the college and was ordained a priest by the Anglican Church soon afterward. Trinity College being a very modern college, Berkeley encountered the new science and philosophy of the late 17th century characterized by hostility to Aristotelianism. During the wait for the scholarship, Berkeley explored the study of vision, time, and the essence of the world. He is especially obsessed with reading romance literature that focuses on spiritual developments and at the same time detests the prevailing meta-physics books in the university. At the same time, he read the writings of John Locke and Father Malebranche, both of which contain strong critiques of material objects^{xv}, and the influence of these two on Berkeley will be further discussed later in the essay. Thus, conducting these critical studies and gaining more experiences in writing by publishing two mathematical papers, Berkeley eventually published the work that can be regarded as the first appearance of his philosophical thought, *Theory of Vision* in 1709.^{xvi}, which proposes that the five primary sensations don't have a direct causal relation with one and another, but are human who stereotypically perceive them as a correlation that appears together.^{xvii} The work exemplifies Berkeley's insightful thinking, as the main idea of this treatise is fundamentally evolving around the idea of empiricism. Thus, it also presents Berkeley's flexibility in applying philosophical ideas into real life. From 1707 to 1724, Berkeley taught at Trinity College for 17 years. During these 17 years, he served as an assistant tutor, librarian, researcher, and Hebrew lecturer.^{xviii} This period was also a peak period for Berkeley in terms of philosophical thought and creativity.

Theory of Vision (1709)

In 1709, Berkeley published his first renowned work which comprehensively presents his philosophy. Though classified differently by modern standards, this essay resembles more of a psychology paper with the main focus of exploring the relationship between vision, touch, and past experiences.

At the beginning the *Theory of Vision*, Berkeley criticized that people often arrive a truth by “false and popular suppositions”^{xxix}. In other words, people often tend to rely on experiences they consider to be correct and some popularly accepted opinion as evidence to support a theory, therefore, the logical reasoning process of the theory remains inaccurate, which may eventually lead to invalid conclusions. Hence, to avoid creating an imprudent theory, Berkeley decided to conduct a different approach: first stating the conclusion that is stiffly supported by evidence, then deduce the truth that it supports.^{xx} In the writing, Berkeley primarily discussed the essence of vision, and indicated that it is something that we all acquire, but interpret completely differently. The main argument Berkeley presents is as the follow:

Upon the whole, I think we may fairly conclude that the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It is by their information that we are principally guided in all the transactions and concerns of life. And the manner wherein they signify and mark unto us the objects which are at a distance is the same with that of languages and signs of human appointment, which do not suggest the things signified by any likeness or identity of nature, buy only by an habitual connexion that experience has made us to observe between them.^{xxi}

The argument Berkeley made here can be split into two parts: the existence of vision as a universal language/sensory that everyone acquires, and the subjectivity of vision. The first argument suggests that vision is a sensation that surpasses the border of age, gender, race, it is a universal sensory that every individual naturally obtains, and its application is intricately entwined with our daily life. It serves as a sign or language that simultaneously conveys certain information when being spotted, for instance, when we see a clump of fire, we instinctively receive the message of: dangerous, keep distance away from it. However, the second argument suggests an argument that seems contradictory with the “universal” property of vision that was stated previously. In the second part of the argument, Berkeley suggests that despite the purpose and function of vision is the same, however, it doesn’t indicate that what is being spotted is also identical among each individual, it is possible for two people, one with normal vision and the other one who’s color-blind to see a bear, both interpret the message of “danger”. Furthermore, Berkeley argues that what is being interpreted from the vision is solely dependent on the individual’s own experience.^{xxii} When an image occurs for the first time, every co-existing information is also stored in our memory. Thus, when the same image reoccurs in people’s vision, we naturally associate the co-existing information and assume that the co-existing information will also occur. As a result, the information-conveying function of vision can only be valid when we have preceding experiences with certain vision elements. To illustrate this, when adults see a clump of fire, the co-existing information that they associate with is “hot and scalding”, therefore, the message they obtain is “dangerous”. However, the same process doesn’t occur with infants. When infants see a clump of fire, they do not have any pre-existing experience with it, hence, the message that they receive from the vision might be: pretty. This then conveys the message of: go and touch it. Thus, from these two examples, it can be seen that despite two individuals visualizing the identical object, their different experiences have resulted in the completely opposite information. Next time when the infant sees the fire again, they would be able to recall the experience of being burned by the fire, and hence receive the message of: hot, don’t touch.

As the writing continues, Berkeley eventually came to the famous argument that Berkeley made in *The Theory of Vision*—the born blind man regaining sight case. In this part of the writing, Berkeley mainly discussed the two senses of vision and touch, and argued that there is no direct causal relation between the two.

^{xxiii} Berkeley questions the common perception that vision always comes together, as the reasoning goes: “I can see an apple there, so I can definitely touch it”. He raised up an example to further support his argument, and it goes as follows: If a born blind person suddenly regains sight, he would not be able to identify the connection between the image in front of him and the tangible sensations corresponding. Berkeley argues that the reason why we associate vision and touch is due to our past experience that they often occur together, but for a blind person who never had this experience, the correlation will not occur. Hence, this example further supports his idea that the key foundation of vision is an individual’s past experience, without past experience, a message cannot be gained even if colors and sights are being spotted. ^{xxiv} Furthermore, Berkeley also suggests that the concepts we develop based on sight, such as distance and angle, are also invalid, and they are referred to as “secondary”. ^{xxv} This is because distance is something that a person who has past experience with both sight and tangible sensations can acquire: we learn that when a certain color and image appear, and we put our hands in front, a tangible sensation would be gained. However, when the blind person regains vision and touches an object, they would not be able to tell that there is a correlation with the color in front and the touch in their hand, and certainly would not be able to develop the concept of “distance.”

Astoundingly, Berkeley’s hypothesized example was further proven in 1728 by a surgery from the famous surgeon William Cheselden, who successfully allows a 14-year-old boy to recover from dense congenital cataract blindness. ^{xxvi} As it was being recorded: “When he first saw, he was far from making any judgements about distances, that he thought all objects whatever touched his eyes”, “He knew not the shape of anything nor any one thing from another”. ^{xxvii} After the publication of this case, it caused a sensation in several fields, including biology, psychology, and philosophy, and was recognized by the Queen of England. But it is also astonishing that George Berkeley is able to conclude the result 19 years earlier by pure logical deduction.

A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (1710)

In 1710, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, the most reputed work of Berkeley was published, only one year after the publication of *The Theory of Vision*. In session 43 of *The Theory of Vision*, Berkeley has already mentioned that all sighted objects are within the mind instead of the external world and discussed a lot about perception, however, if comparing the two works, *The Theory of Vision* can only be considered as a brief summary of Berkeley’s immaterialism ideas, while *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is indeed a thorough exploration of Berkeley’s key philosophy—Subjective idealism, aligning with a great prove of immaterialism. The arguments being made in this writing can basically be divided into the following two: everything is a composite of perception/sensation, and that existence can only be achieved with perception. ^{xxviii}

To begin with, the first part of the writing mainly focused on the argument of immaterialism, questioning the existence of matter (which matter is commonly perceived as real and the foundation of the world), and defending that the only directly perceivable thing is sensations. ^{xxix} Since people were born, we naturally and constantly sense the world around us, and soon it becomes a habit we are so used to, that we naturally think what we encounter in our lives is real. However, when really examining the moment that we “see” an object, the truth is that we are only obtaining sensations of color, sound, smell, taste, and touch. These sensations are nothing but people’s own subjective perceptions, but we habitually misunderstood the sensations as the object itself. For instance, when encountering a red cup, it is usually understood as “there is a red cup in front, and this cup is real because I can see it”, however, what is really perceived is the color of red, the crisp sound when you knock it, and the hard tangible feeling when you hold it, and nothing else. This can be mimicked easily, imagine if a person is having a VR glasses on displaying a red cup, at the same time given a glass-made cylinder-shaped model on their hand, and plays the crisp sound when they knock the cup, if all of these sensations are provided, then it would be very likely for the person to think that they actually have a red cup in their hand. Therefore,

Berkeley stated that instead of seeing the actual object itself, what really exists is merely “sensible qualities are colour, figure, motion, smell, taste, &c., i.e. the ideas perceived by sense.”^{xxx}

Continuing his “battle” with materialism, Berkeley restated his argument in the later part of the essay in a relatively satire yet humorous way:

If you agree with me that we eat and drink, and are clad with the immediate objects of sense which cannot exist unperceived or without the mind: I shall readily grant it is more proper or conformable to custom, that they should be called things rather than ideas.^{xxxi}

Basically, the audience of this sarcasm is the majority supporter of materialism, the ones who believe that “things” and “objects” are all made out of matter, and that matter is the fundamental source of everything. It is satirical because here, Berkeley is implying that every so-called matter all cannot exist without being perceived through sensations, what is being considered as the object itself is nothing more than the combination of color, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and they derive from people's perception. Then, when receiving the combination of these sensations, people will use them to deduce the conclusion of: there is an objectively-existing matter, and the matter itself contains the characteristics (color, sound, smell, touch, and taste) being perceived. However, such a derivation process is arbitrary and inaccurate, because the five sensations are all people's own subjective sensations, not the object itself. The VR example mentioned earlier can illustrate this logic well: the VR can create all the sensations of a red cup, and the person has also sensed the red cup, but this does not mean that the red cup exists. Hence, people usually believe that sensations obtained from the object= the object itself, however, Berkeley indicates that the occurrence of sensation is not enough to prove that matter itself exists objectively. Furthermore, this theory can be illustrated by a daily event that we all experience—Dreaming. Although the sensations of color, sound, smell, and touch are present in the dream, nothing exists objectively in the dream.

To sum up, the main argument that Berkeley made in the first part of *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* is: All things are perceived by us with the help of our senses, and they result in either pure sensation or form an idea in our mind, but whether ideas and sensations are compounded or separated, they cannot exist separately from the mind.^{xxxii}

Then, the second argument of the writing follows the famous quote from Berkeley, “*esse is percipi*” (to be is to be perceived).^{xxxiii} Berkeley suggests that since everything materialistic can only exist with people's perception, because every matter perceived by people is merely people's own subjective sensations: color, sound, smell, and touch. The object itself does not have the characteristics of color, sound, smell, and touch that people perceive. Hence, matter itself can never be the primary and fundamental constituent of the world. Following this logic, it can be concluded that if something needs to be considered as objectively-existing, then it must be something that doesn't rely on other people's perception and exists independently. However, the problem is that every matter in the world is recognized after people's subjective perception. Without people's perception, none of the world exists, because whether it exists is ultimately a conclusion based on people's perception.

Consequently, if matters do not exist objectively, then there must be some other things that exist to serve as the fundamental element of the world, else what can explain the existence ourselves? Berkeley has also considered this question, and suggests that since we are making perceptions all the time, therefore, it can be deduced that “I”, something un-material, exist (this is a deduction that an individual can only testify for themselves, e.g., I can make sure that I exist, but I cannot ensure that you also exist, the logic is very similar to Descartes' famous theory of “*I think therefore I am*”). However, the concept of “I”, shall never be interpreted in a materialistic view, such as “my body,” “my hair,” and “my brain,” because these are superficial qualities that are only a collection of sensation and perception.^{xxxiv} “Hair” itself, is nothing more than the combination of: the brown color—sight, the rubbing sound—auditory, the shampoo smell—olfactory, the soft feeling—

touch, therefore, “hair” is only a combination of subjective feeling, not something that exists objectively. Berkeley succinctly puts this idea: “if by man is meant what which lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do—but only such a certain collection of ideas.”^{xxxv}

Thus, if “I” is not something that can be perceived and sensed, then it can only exist in another form, which is in a spiritual form. The spiritual essence of individual is similar to “the soul” or the “spirit” as we commonly known, and Berkeley believes that this spiritual essence has a unique principal function that makes it independent from any subjective perception.^{xxxvi} However, despite people unable to meet this spiritual essence, it is what determines us, the way we perceive things, and the perception that other people receive after perceiving us, are all dependent on it. Berkeley suggests that the role of the existence of our subjective perception is plainly to serve as an evidence that allows us to deduce the existence of the spiritual essence, as he wrote:

In addition to all that endless variety of ideas, or objects of knowledge, there is also something that knows or perceives them, and acts on them in various ways such as willing, imagining, and remembering. This perceiving, active entity is what I call ‘mind’, ‘spirit’, ‘soul’, or ‘myself’. These words do not refer to any one of my ideas, but rather to a thing that is entirely distinct from them. It is something in which they exist, or by which they are perceived. Those are two ways of saying the same thing, because the existence of an idea consists in its being perceived.^{xxxvii}

“For, After All, What Deserves the First Place in Our Studies is the Consideration of GOD and Our DUTY”^{xxxviii}

Usually, religion is accounted as a superstitious belief that stands at the opposite side of ration, logic, science, and mathematics. However, the elements mentioned above never seems to be problem for Berkeley, he had never for even a second of his life doubt his beliefs in Christianity, while conducting his academic exploration in the field of philosophy, mathematics, politics, and many more.

The heading of this section is the last paragraph of information Berkeley wrote in *The Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, which nicely embodies the importance of Christianity in Berkeley’s believes. In *The Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley eventually leads to a final conclusion that ultimately, God is the source of the world, and that people’s “spiritual essence” is also a result of the perception of God.^{xxxix} By plainly reading Berkeley’s argument that everything is mere sensation, critics may easily raise up the question of: then why am I receiving different sensations when sensing different objects? For example, if I am in a classroom, why am I sensing a table and a chair, but not two tables or two chairs? When developing his theory, Berkeley surely has also considered this question, and after deep and thorough logical reasoning, he agreed that even though people can only receive sensations when observing an object, but there must be an underlying essence of the object that accounts for the difference in people’s perception, yet it is something impossible to be met and understood by people. This theory of: there is an essence of an object that causes human perception, but is always unknowable by human, in fact laid to the foundation of the famous concept of “thing in itself” of the German philosopher Kant. Regardless other philosopher’s assumption of the essence of an object, Berkeley believes that they all derive from the power of God, as he claims: “we do at all times and in all places perceive manifest tokens of the Divinity: everything we see, hear, feel, or anywise perceive by sense, being a sign or effect of the power of God”^{xl}. In Berkeley’s believes, God remains an ultimate and omniscient role that, in *The Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley has used terminologies including “governing, supreme, free, all-sufficient, all-wise, omnipotent, almighty”, as well as “one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect”^{xli}. Berkeley believes that God also exist in a spiritual form, however, in a different way than normal people. He emphasizes that people’s spirit is very much limited, as it can only perceive sensations that doesn’t resembles the truth; whereas God’s spiritual essence is something unlimited to mere perception, and it is also something uncreated.^{xlii}

Furthermore, Berkeley's incorporation of religion is also embodied in his famous mathematical work —*The Analyst* (1734). In the work, Berkeley used his mastery mathematical logic to criticize the famous Calculus presented by Newton and Leibniz, in which Berkley accurately spotted a logical fallacy. This had a notable impact on the mathematical community at the time, but for Berkeley himself, he was simply trying to prove that there was no difference between mathematics and theology, both are studies with a purpose of finding the truth, whereas in contrast, the mathematicians and scientists are the ones who stereotypically attack theology as a type of "blind superstition". Hence, as elaborately written in the work's second paragraph, the purpose of him producing the writing is to treat the mathematicians' own beliefs with rigorous logic and prove that their blind faith in mathematics is no different from "superstitious religion":

II. Whereas then it is supposed, that you apprehend more distinctly, consider more closely, infer more justly, conclude more accurately than other Men, and that you are therefore less religious because more judicious, I shall claim the privilege of a Free-Thinker; and take the Liberty to inquire into the Object, Principles, and Method of Demonstration admitted by the Mathematicians of the present Age, with the same freedom that you presume to treat the Principles and Mysteries of Religion; to the end, that all Men may see what right you have to lead, or what Encouragement others have to follow you.^{xliii}

To sum up the logical fallacy Berkeley discovered, its basically that he noticed during Newton's deduction of the formula, certain constants are sometimes set as zero while during other times not, and this flexibility completely depends on Newton's need.^{xliv} Hence, if a constant value can have such a "flexibility" and wholly dependent on the calculator's will, then the theory is indeed very loosely built. In paragraph 35, Berkeley once again ironically asked: "May we not call them the Ghosts of departed Quantities?"^{xlv}

Moreover, Berkeley's Christian beliefs are also embodied in his theories other than philosophy, for instance, politics. In years spent in the Trinity College, Berkeley himself and his publications were way more reputed than the Trinity College, hence, with a pursuit towards a "greater world", he left Ireland and went to the cultural center of that time—London. During the journey, Berkley has served as chaplain of the Peterborough and St. George Ashe. And during this period, Berkeley has also focused his studies on religion, philosophy, European literature, and politics.^{xlvi} Berkeley's immersion in English society further strengthened his beliefs in Anglicanism and simultaneously led him to make the connection between religion and social development. When he returned again in 1720, England was experiencing the South Sea Bubble, a depressing financial crash that caused significant social imbalance.^{xlvii} This promoted the growth of egoism and corruption, as well as led to the decline in people's values of religion and moral virtue. Hence, as a response to the negative and chaotic society, Berkeley published his work *An essay towards preventing the ruins of Great Britain* in 1721, in which he strongly censured the society's abandon of religious virtue, and warned the public that:

We have long been preparing for some great catastrophe. Vice and villainy have by degrees grown reputable among us; our infidels have passed gentlemen, and our venal traitors for men of sense, who knew the world. We have made a jest of public spirit, and canceled all respect for whatever religion is sacred. The old English modesty is quite worn off, and instead of blushing for our crimes we are ashamed only of piety and virtue. In short, other nations have been wicked, but we are the first who have been wicked upon principle.^{xlviii}

Legacy of Berkeley's Philosophy

"Though this system is utterly absurd, it is the most difficult to refute, and is truly a disgrace to human intelligence and philosophy." This is a comment to Berkeley's idealism philosophy theory from Denis Diderot, a contemporary materialist of Berkeley. The quote summarizes the overall comment on Berkeley throughout time, his pure-idealism theory does sound extreme to a lot of people, yet, from a logical aspect, there is no way of defeating this theory, not even the famous philosopher Diderot who hates Berkeley's theory very much.

Berkeley's theory serves as a continuation of John Locke's empiricism, but interestingly, his theory at the same time thoroughly criticizes Locke's ideas in primary and secondary qualities. Basically, Locke suggests

that characteristics such as shape and hardness are all counted as the primary quality of an object, these characteristics are unchangeable and exist objectively. Whereas subjective sensations such as colors and touch are the secondary qualities of the object. However, Berkeley argued that without the “secondary qualities”, primary qualities are un-sensible, for example, without seeing the color red (secondary quality), how is it possible for a person to identify its shape (primary quality)? Nevertheless, despite Berkeley has cast these sharp criticisms on Locke’s empiricism, but his work is in-negligibly a further elaboration of overall empiricism.^{xlix} Berkeley both denied the objective existence of matter but also inherited Locke’s empiricist view. He provides a theory that can explain the external material world and the internal spiritual activity at the same time. But what’s ingenious about Berkeley’s theory is that it can be experienced and tested in people’s daily experience, not only by logic and reasoning. Hence, this also differentiates from a lot of rationalists who arrive at a conclusion by pure logical deduction. This view of Berkeley is more violent than that of Locke, Descartes, and even previous philosophers of the same period, because hardly any scholars before this time have expressed the view that “nothing in front of us exists objectively” in such an extreme way. So, in this sense, Berkeley was not only also an empiricist, but an even more radical one.

Berkeley’s philosophy has also challenged the philosophical and scientific communities of the time, provoking profound thought and opposition. First, his ideas provoked philosophical reflection on the nature of matter, and further questioned people’s “superstition” with materialism. Sharp questions in his writings criticize people’s common view of “I saw an object, therefore the object exists”, by thoroughly analyzing what is truly existing when observing an object, the empiricism theory of nothing more is perceived other than sensations. Coincidentally, the three “giants” of empiricism, Locke, Hume, and Berkeley, were all contemporaries of this era, and thus the works of this era can be considered foundational to empiricism, and closely related to the development of empiricism in later generations.

Berkeley’s philosophical thought has closely facilitated the development of later idealism, and eventually made later philosophy more aware of epistemology. The term “epistemology” can be broken down into two Greek roots: “epistēmē” (knowledge) and “logos” (reason), hence, when combined together, they refer to the study of the essence of knowledge through reasoning and logical deduction.ⁱ The concept might sound abstract, yet it is basically the method that Berkeley has used for his conclusion of theories. This mechanism of the acquisition of knowledge is very rigorous, hence, the theories being deduced from it are also relatively more impeccable. Consequently, later philosophies have placed a higher focus on epistemology when it comes to exploring deep philosophical theories.^{li} Famous philosophers who are influenced by both epistemology and subjective idealism include Kant, the representative of German Transcendental Idealism, was deeply inspired by Berkeley’s view of sensations are not objective existence, and proposed the concept of phenomenology, which holds that we can only recognize phenomena, but cannot know the “essence” of things. Kant’s philosophy was influenced by Berkeley’s emphasis on perception and ideas, the finiteness of human reason, and the relationship between the observer and the object of observation.^{lii} Kant claims that people can only observe phenomena, which in turn are their subjective sensations. Therefore, the world that people see is their own subjective world. People do not see the “thing-self” that gives rise to their subjective feelings. Furthermore, the philosopher Hegel, who belonged to objective idealism, was also influenced by Berkeley’s ideas. His philosophy emphasized the development and evolution of thinking, and saw the development of thought in the course of history as a representation of the “absolute spirit”. This view reflected Berkeley’s thinking on the importance of nothingness and thinking, as well as deepening the study of human consciousness and ideas.^{liii} The application of Berkeley’s philosophy that emphasizes subjective sensation in real life has also gradually increased in recent decades, specifically in scientific fields such as cognitive science, which explores the mechanism of perception.

Conclusion

Berkeley's philosophy is the product of multiple academia, including psychology, theology, cognitive science, mathematics, and philosophy. And precisely because of Berkeley's polymath in such an array area of knowledge, he eventually was able to come up with a unique and long-lasting theory that differentiates from all of the rest from his era. From an empiricism idea that everything comes from sense experiences, Berkeley extended beyond it, and eventually concluded subjective idealism. His philosophy emphasized the importance of sensations in cognition and perception, which provides a valuable insight for subsequent philosophers. Berkeley has visited multiple places in his life, including Ireland, England, Italy, and South America, and the experiences in these places has also equipped him with a more comprehensive acquisition of knowledge. Furthermore, as a Christian Bishop, he remains in a sufficient yet niche position, which eventually led to a lot of criticism on the involvement of religion in his philosophy, and hence lowers the publicity of his theory. Nevertheless, the perspective from such a distinct position also allows Berkeley to develop insightful philosophical viewpoints.

Moreover, Berkeley is a person who's never concerned by the reputation or status of others, he is purely a supporter and precursor of truth. Hence, he has cast a lot of sharp doubts and criticism on high-esteemed figures of his time. Due to his dare of challenging the authority, Berkeley has undoubtedly received harsh criticism and disapprovals, because it is ultimately far away from the mainstream ideology of the Enlightenment. Starting from the Renaissance, science has gradually gained its influence among the Western world, and this resulted in a growing critique towards religion and theology, and this sense of criticism eventually reached its climax in the Enlightenment. Hence, under such an era with a vigilant hostility towards religion, it is really important to keep in mind Berkeley's bishop identity. It is clear that Berkeley has incorporated lots of religious concepts in his work, as ultimately, he regards the essence of the world to God. Consequently, the recognition of Berkeley's work is inevitably diminished by the high involvement of religious elements. It could be radically asserted that without religion's involvement in the final argument in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley's reputation would be enhanced. However, without the involvement of religion, it might be a good piece of philosophical reasoning, yet it would be less "Berkeley", as it abandoned the source of inspiration, beliefs, and a part of Berkeley. Nevertheless, the value of Berkeley's philosophy, from how logically tight it is to its significant contribution to modern philosophy, should not be neglected due to his involvement of niche ideologies in the theory. Therefore, continuing to study, explore, and develop Berkeley's philosophical ideas today still holds significant practical significance for understanding the changes, contradictions, conflicts, and reflections of humanity in the modern world.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank my advisor for the valuable insight provided to me on this topic.

Endnotes

ⁱ Kenneth Pearce, *Who Was George Berkeley? Kenneth L. Pearce on a Book That Breaks New Ground - Books Ireland*, Booksirelandmagazine, 2021, URL: <https://booksirelandmagazine.com/who-was-george-berkeley-kenneth-l-pearce-on-a-book-that-breaks-new-ground/>.

ⁱⁱ Kenneth Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For the Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, Continuum Press, 2017, 1.

ⁱⁱⁱ D. M. Jesseph, "George Berkeley, the analyst (1734)" In *Landmark Writings in Western Mathematics 1640-1940*, Elsevier Science, 2005, 121.

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- ^{iv}René Descartes, Valentine Rodger Miller, and Reese P. Miller, *Principles of Philosophy*, (Cambridge University Press eBooks, 1985), 2.
- ^vSamuel Rickless, "Locke On Freedom," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Spring 2020 Edition, URL: <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2020/entries/locke-freedom/>.
- ^{vi} Little is known about the Berkeley family, but according to credible records, George Berkeley's father, William Berkeley, was born in Ireland towards the end of the reign of Charles II but was of English descent. It is believed that after the Restoration, his father followed Lord Berkeley of Stratton, who was reputedly a relative. William Berkeley's wife also had Irish ancestry and was remotely related to the Wolfe family in Quebec, Canada. Despite their relatively respectable family background, the Berkeley family was not very wealthy, and George Berkeley was born in a modest home.
- ^{vii} George Berkeley, *The Common Place Book*, (Clarendon Press, 1901), URL: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39746/39746-h/39746-h.html#toc11>. 79.
- ^{viii} George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley*. (Vol. 1 of 4." Clarendon Press 1901), (Ebook 2012). <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/39746/39746-h/39746-h.html#toc3>.
- ^{ix} The Trinity College is one of the world's top research universities founded in 1592 by Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland under the House of Tudor, modeled after the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge. With a history of 430 years, Trinity is the oldest university in Ireland and one of the seven oldest classical universities in the English-speaking countries.
- ^x Tom Jones, *George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life*, Princeton University Press, 2021. 38.
- ^{xi} An interdisciplinary branch of philosophy that frames up questions and methods like traditional philosophy, but uses scientific/experimental methods that are usually associated with psychology and cognitive science.
- ^{xii} Alexander Campbell Fraser. *Life and letters of George Berkeley*, DD. BoD–Books on Demand, 2023. 16-17.
- ^{xiii} Ibid, 22.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.
- ^{xv} Joseph Stock, *An Account of the Life of George Berkeley, D.D. Late Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland*, 1776, 2.
- ^{xvi} A vivid example illustrates this theory: imagine a man born blind but suddenly cured. If we give him a ball of snow, he is unable to associate the "white" color of the snow he sees with the sensation of "coolness" in touch, because in his mind he has no visual concept of "white snow" and the "icy" feeling as being related. Moreover, this somewhat fanciful-sounding theory was surprisingly confirmed in a young man born blind in 1728, and the case was recognized by a lot of surgeons and the Queen of England.
- ^{xvii} Ibid, 15.
- ^{xviii} Lisa Downing. *George Berkeley* (2004). <https://plato.stanford.edu/ENTRIES/berkeley/#Bib>.
- ^{xix} Jonathan Bennett, *George Berkeley - New Theory of Vision*, Early Modern Texts, 2017, 44.
- ^{xx} Margaret Atherton, *Berkeley's Theory of Vision and its Reception*, The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley, 2005, 94.
- ^{xxi} George Berkeley, *A new theory of vision and other select philosophical writings*, Vol. 10. Dent, 1926, 81.
- ^{xxii} Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 3.
- ^{xxiii} Ibid, 11.
- ^{xxiv} Ibid, 6.
- ^{xxv} David Vernon, *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision: Berkeley in the Modern Context*, Trinity College Dublin, 1992, 10.
- ^{xxvi} Michael Murray, *An Introduction to Bishop Berkeley's Theory of Vision*, The British Journal of Ophthalmology 28, no. 12, 1944, 604.
- ^{xxvii} Ibid.
- ^{xxviii} Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 4.

- xxix George Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, JB Lippincott & Company, 1881, 197-198.
- xxx Ibid, 197-198.
- xxxi Ibid, 214
- xxxii Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 7.
- xxxiii Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, 194
- xxxiv Ibid, 24.
- xxxv Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, 276-277.
- xxxvi Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 7.
- xxxvii Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, 194.
- xxxviii Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, 281.
- xxxix Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 11.
- xl Berkeley, *A treatise concerning the principles of human knowledge*, 276.
- xli Marta Szymańska-Lewoszewska, *Berkeley's Theodicy in A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (1710)*, *Studia z Historii Filozofii* 5, no. 4, 2014, 151.
- xlii Ibid.
- xliii David R. Wilkins, *THE ANALYST By George Berkeley*, Trinity College Dublin, (2002), 1.
- xliv Stephen Mason, *George Berkeley – the Analyst; the Defence of Free-Thinking in Mathematics*, Vatican Observatory, 2017, URL: <https://www.vaticanobservatory.org/education/george-berkeley-analyst-defence-free-thinking-mathematics/>.
- lv Ibid, 18.
- lvi Edwin Gaustad, *George Berkeley and New World Community*, *Church History*, vol. 48, no. 1, 1979. 7.
- lvii Ibid.
- lviii George Berkeley, *An essay towards preventing the ruins of Great Britain*, 1721.P. 6: 84.
- lix Pearce, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Religion For The Continuum Companion to Berkeley*, 20.
- l' Matthias Steup, and Neta Ram. "Epistemology." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005.
- li Jack S Crumley II, *An introduction to epistemology*, Broadview Press, 2009, 15-16.
- lii Yasuhiko Tomida, *Locke, Berkeley, Kant:: From a Naturalistic Point of View. Revised and Enlarged*, Vol. 119. Georg Olms Verlag, 2015, xi.
- liii Tom Rockmore, *Hegel, idealism, and analytic philosophy*, Yale University Press, 2005, 40.

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