

Penultimate draft. Published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 57 (1997), pp. 307-330.

4-24-95 8abid Donald L.M. Baxter University of Connecticut

Abstraction, Inseparability, and Identity

1. Berkeley and Hume object to Locke's account of abstraction. Abstraction is separating in the mind what cannot be separated in reality. Their objection is that if a is inseparable in reality from b, then the idea of a is inseparable from the idea of b.

The former inseparability is the reason for the latter. In most interpretations, however, commentators leave the former unexplained in explaining the latter.¹ A fairly standard reading is

¹ The notes should be read only after reading through the main body of the paper. Mostly they are meant to show the need for another contribution to this much and well discussed issue.

Winkler and Flage say the argument proceeds from the impossibility of separation in reality to the impossibility of separation in the mind. (Kenneth P. Winkler, Berkeley: An Interpretation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), pp. 33, 36-38. See also his Editors Introduction to Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), pp. xvii-xviii, and his "Berkeley on Abstract Ideas," Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie 65 (1983), pp. 69-73. Daniel E. Flage, "Berkeley on Abstraction," Journal of the History of Philosophy 24 (1986), pp. 489.) This is right, but leaves the impossibility unexplained. The inference is made by appeal to the principle that the impossible is inconceivable. Here they follow a suggestion by Pitcher (who then tries another tack) and by Weinberg (whose subsequent argument does not rely on this principle as a general principle, but tries to explain why it applies in the particular case of abstraction). (George Pitcher, Berkeley (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), p. 67. Julius R. Weinberg, "The Nominalism of Berkeley and Hume," in Abstraction, Relation, and Induction (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 17-18.)

The problem with appealing to such a principle is that it is not clear Locke held it. Flage gives no direct evidence that Locke held the principle. (Flage, pp. 490-92) Winkler gives only one piece of evidence -- the last sentence of 3.10.33. (John Locke, Book III, Chap. X, Sec. 33, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by P.H. Niddich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975)) But there Locke implies that we can put inconsistent ideas together. If we do so we fill our heads with chimeras, i.e. we have ideas that cannot signify any real being. This would seem to be conceiving of the impossible. Locke then says such ideas "if well examined (my emphasis), cannot so much as exist in the mind." This seems to say that once, upon careful examination, we see a contradiction in something we have conceived of, we find ourselves unable to conceive of it any more. So this single sentence is Winkler's best evidence and it is inconclusive. Winkler does have Berkeley on his side here. But much as I hate to say it, at NTV.125 Berkeley misquotes Locke in a way that supports his interpretation more than Locke's own words do. (Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision, Sec. 125, in A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop,

that abstraction results in an impossible image.² The strength of this view relies not, however, on facts about images, but on the assumption that ideas resemble their objects.³ I give a formulation of such a view relying on this resemblance. However it is easy for Locke to escape the objection if he is interpreted as holding a Cartesian theory of intentionality. This failure of the objection so viewed returns attention to its true basis -- the inseparability in reality of what is separated in the mind when abstracting. I give a nearly new reading of Berkeley's objection. Nearly new because in many ways this paper is built on the extensive foundations laid by Julius Weinberg's classic

eds., The Works of George Berkeley, vol. I (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948-57).) So it is not at all clear that Locke held this principle. It would be surprising if he did, since his theory of abstraction is explicitly that we conceive separately things such that it is impossible that they can exist separately. Even if he held the principle, it would be more likely that there is an implicit restriction to complete things as occurs in Descartes: The clearly and distinctly conceivable as complete is possible in reality; thus the impossible cannot be clearly and distinctly conceived as complete. Since abstracta are incomplete, conceiving of them would not entail their possible existence in reality. See Rene Descartes, "Reply to Objections I," in E.S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross, eds., The Philosophical Works of Descartes, vol II (Cambridge: University Press, 1931), pp. 22-23. To be fair to Winkler he thinks Locke can hold the conceivability principle while believing in abstraction because, according to Winkler, abstraction is selective attention. Only if Locke holds what Winkler calls "The Content Principle" is there a conflict between abstraction and the conceivability principle. Winkler's Berkeley attributes the content principle to Locke as a way of ruling out a selective attention account of abstraction. (Winkler (1989), pp. 30, 39-43) As I argue in notes 59 and 61 below, I think Locke's own account of abstraction rules this out.

Bolton argues that for Berkeley the relation between idea and its object is identity, so inseparability in one will entail it in the other. I think she is quite right and this insight illuminates much about Berkeley's theory, but it is an assumption that Berkeley had no right to expect Locke to share. Martha Brandt Bolton, "Berkeley's Objection to Abstract Ideas and Unconceived Objects," in E. Sosa, ed., Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley (D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 61-81.

Dancy explains the impossibility of abstract ideas as follows: The abstract idea has some determination and none. But this is not yet an explanation. It seems to be so only by equivocation. Having some determinate property is a general property shared by instances, and so is part of the abstract idea. When the abstractionist says the abstract idea has no determinate property, he means that it lacks being equilateral, being isosceles, and being scalene, since none of them are properties shared by all instances. (Jonathan Dancy, Berkeley: An Introduction (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), pp. 27-28)

Some commentators leave the inseparability in the mind unexplained. Atherton's Berkeley claims that abstract ideas cannot have content: Removing the "determinants" of an idea's content removes the generic in its content too. This is certainly right, but this is to assume the inseparability which I explain. Margaret Atherton, "Berkeley's Anti-Abstractionism," in E. Sosa, ed., Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley (D. Reidel, 1987), pp. 50-51. Doney argues from the inconceivability of abstract ideas to their impossibility. But the inconceivability is not explained. Willis Doney, "Berkeley's Argument against Abstract Ideas," in French, Uehling, and Wettstein, eds., Midwest Studies in

essay "The Nominalism of Berkeley and Hume."⁴ However in trying to explain the inconsistency Weinberg makes a mistake -- one I try to correct.⁵ The resulting objection is one Locke cannot escape. He cannot even if, as some commentators claim, his theory of abstraction is really a (poorly worded) theory of selective attention like Berkeley's own.⁶

I will be assuming that Berkeley and Hume present a unified front against Locke. Hume supplements Berkeley's argument just where there are gaps. The supplementations are consistent with what Berkeley says and strengthen his argument. This is evidence that Hume understood at a deep level what Berkeley was doing, agreed with it, and so can be used to illuminate it.⁷

Philosophy, vol. 8 (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 297.

2George Pitcher, pp. 67, 70-74. G.J. Warnock Berkeley (London: Penguin Books, 1953), pp. 65-69. D.M. Armstrong, Editor's Introduction to Berkeley's Philosophical Writings (New York: Macmillan, 1965), p. 28. E.J. Craig, "Berkeley's Attack on Abstract Ideas," The Philosophical Review 77 (1968), pp. 430-37. J.O. Urmson, Berkeley (Oxford: University Press, 1982), p. 28. I.C. Tipton, Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 142-145 (though Tipton thinks this is not what Berkeley rests his case on). J.L. Mackie, Problems from Locke (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), p. 110. Winkler, Editors Intro, p. xiii.

3The fairly standard view is subject to the fairly standard objections that (i) it does not apply to Locke if he did not think that ideas were images, and (ii) in any event there could be indeterminate images. Cf. R.I. Aaron, John Locke, 3d. Ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 199; Warnock, pp. 67-68; see note 12 below. Many of the above cited commentators note the first point; for the second see Warnock, pp. 67-68, Pitcher, p. 70, and Jonathan Bennett, Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 41. Bennett, pp. 38-39, notes the role of resemblance which I emphasize.

4Julius R. Weinberg, "The Nominalism of Berkeley and Hume," in Abstraction, Relation, and Induction (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965).

5

I discuss the mistake in section 9.

6See C.C.C. Taylor, "Berkeley's Theory of Abstract Ideas," The Philosophical Quarterly 28 (1978), pp. 97-115. M.R. Ayers, editors's Introduction to George Berkeley, Philosophical Works (London: Dent, 1975), p. xx, and "Are Locke's 'Ideas' Images, Intentional Objects, or Natural Signs?" The Locke Newsletter (17) 1986, pp. 12-13. Mackie, pp. 107-112. Winkler (1989), pp. 39-41, 87-89. Urmson, pp. 26-27.

7Hume endorses Berkeley's view at (I.I.VII,17): David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), Book I, Part I, Section VII, p. 17. He does so again in a note at the end of Part I of Section XII of the first Enquiry. David Hume, Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, 3d. Ed., ed. by L.A. Selby-Bigge and P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 155. See also the reply to the third charge in David Hume, A Letter from a Gentleman to His

In particular, Hume makes explicit something Berkeley leaves implicit: The argument against Locke depends on the principle that things are inseparable if and only if they are identical.⁸ Abstraction is thinking of one of an inseparable pair while not thinking of the other. But doing so entails thinking of something while not thinking of it. This is the underlying inconsistency.

2. What sort of essay is this which supplements Berkeley with Hume? How can it be presenting Berkeley's argument, or Hume's for that matter? We're used to thinking of essays as historical presentations of what someone thought, or as systematic presentations of an argument perhaps with some resemblance to what someone thought. And we're used to requiring that the

Friend in Edinburgh, ed. by Ernest C. Mossner and John V. Price (Edinburgh: University Press, 1967), p. 26. For further support see D.E. Bradshaw, "Berkeley and Hume on Abstraction and Generalization," History of Philosophy Quarterly 5 (1988), pp.11-22. For Berkeley's influence on Hume in other matters, see Michael Ayers, "Berkeley and Hume: A Question of Influence," in Rorty, Schneewind, and Skinner, eds., Philosophy in History (Cambridge: University Press, 1984), pp. 303-327.

⁸Following Weinberg, Imlay in a compressed paragraph makes a different appeal to identity than I do. Robert A. Imlay, "Berkeley on Abstract General Ideas," Journal of the History of Philosophy 9 (1971), p. 322.

essayist respect the difference. This division neglects, however, the fact that an author can have incompletely understood, or at least can have incompletely presented, his argument. Think of the difference between one's own early draft of a sustained argument, and a later one. The later draft says more completely, consistently, and accurately what the earlier draft was trying to say. A commentator on an early draft would better approach the author's intended argument by constructing the later draft, than by summarizing the earlier. Suppose the later draft does not exist? A successor author can supply it, one who has discerned the underlying argument. Uncovering the argument is now a corporate process. Lesser authors, such as the present one, can join the corporation and clean up around the edges of the argument.

What qualifies the argument presented here to be thought the same as that manifested in Berkeley's and Hume's presentations? Interpreting them with it (i) accounts for everything they said on the issue, (ii) answers questions they left unanswered, and (iii) achieves their goal of refuting Locke. Further this interpretation does these things better than the many plausible rival interpretations (as I argue in the notes).

I.

3. Berkeley's main criticism of Locke on abstract ideas appears in the Introduction to Berkeley's Principles of Human Knowledge. There Berkeley contends that for certain specific qualities a Lockean abstract idea must be "all and none of these at once" . (P.Intro.13)⁹ Although Berkeley seems merely to be exploiting a loose phrase of Locke's, this characterization will turn out to be surprisingly apt. The objection will be primarily to the process of abstraction -- separating in the mind what cannot be separated in reality. This is how Lockean abstract ideas are formed.¹⁰ I will focus on abstraction of generic qualities, though this is just one case of mentally separating the inseparable. The argument I give on Berkeley's behalf will apply to abstraction generally.¹¹ In giving Berkeley's argument I will first give a mostly familiar surface characterization of it, starting with an assumption the surface argument relies on. A possible Lockean reply will then lead to the root of Berkeley's argument.

⁹George Berkeley, A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, Introduction, Section 13, in Luce and Jessop, vol. 2, p. 32. Here Berkeley uses Locke's own words from 4.7.9 of the Essay. Some commentators give interpretations that render Locke's words consistent, but do not save him from Berkeley's argument as I will present it. Cf. Pitcher, pp. 66-67, who cites defenses similar to his own by Aaron and Bennett. Aaron, pp. 195-97. Bennett, pp. 37-9. Cf. also Urmson, p. 28.

¹⁰Abstract ideas formed in some other way, if such there be, are not the target. The problem is not simply, could there be an idea with only a generic object. The problem is rather, could there be an idea with a specific object that comes to be an idea of a generic object by abstraction. Construing Berkeley as negatively answering the first problem, requires attributing to him various implausible assumptions. See Bolton's summary of this line of interpretation, p. 67. Atherton emphasizes that Berkeley is concerned with criticizing the process of abstraction, p. 48, as does Bracken. (Harry Bracken, Berkeley (New York: St. Martin's, 1974), p. 45) Winkler (1989), pp. 68-69, contends that Berkeley is concerned with the product, not the process, because he criticizes appeal to abstract ideas by philosophers who do not believe in abstraction. But this does not prove Winkler's point. As long as Berkeley believes that the only remotely plausible source of abstract ideas is abstraction, then criticizing this source is to criticize all abstract ideas, regardless of what their proponents think the source is. In any event my concern is with the argument in the Introduction to the Principles and there Berkeley does take specifically abstraction as his target. (P.Intro.7)

¹¹At P.Intro.7-10 Berkeley gives two uses of 'abstraction' by his opponents. In my section 6, I show that the same argument applies to abstraction in both sense.

The assumption is what I will call the resemblance assumption.¹² Berkeley¹³ as well as Hume assume that when an idea¹⁴ and its object are numerically distinct, the idea resembles its object with respect to the object's salient qualities. They regard the resemblance as required for representation: In order for an idea to represent a distinct object, the idea must resemble it with respect to these qualities.¹⁵ My guess is that resemblance is required because qualities of the idea are what represent the qualities of the object. Hume asks rhetorically, "For how can an impression represent a substance, otherwise than by resembling it?" (I.IV.V, 233)¹⁶ He gives an example when he states

12

Cf. Richard A. Watson's discussion of the epistemological likeness principle in The Downfall of Cartesianism (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), pp. 4, 33; or in The Breakdown of Cartesian Metaphysics (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1987), p. 50. See also Bracken, pp. 46-47 and Phillip Cummins, "Berkeley's Likeness Principle," Journal of the History of Philosophy 4 (1966), pp. 63-64. I don't use the phrase "likeness principle" because Cummins uses it to mean the principle that the only thing like an idea is an idea. I emphasize just the resemblance between idea and object as opposed to the idea being an image of the object, although the latter emphasis is more common in the commentators. They speak of images, I gather, because they think that introduces a premise necessary to Berkeley's argument: That there cannot be indeterminate images. But this may well not be true. (cf. Warnock, pp. 67-68, Pitcher, p. 70, and Bennett, p. 41) A more plausible premise for Berkeley to appeal to is that there cannot be, say, indeterminate triangles. So I think this is the better way to read him.

13 For further support that this is Berkeley's view see Winkler (1989), pp. 10-11, and Urmson, p. 25.

14 For Berkeley's and Locke's sake I will be using 'idea' in the broad sense which Hume expressed with 'perception'.

15 I am assuming that if two things resemble with respect to triangularity, then they are both triangles. Winkler is quite right to point out that something could resemble a triangle without being one. And his point could perhaps be extended to say that something could resemble a triangle with respect to its triangularity without being one. But I want to stipulate that resembling something with respect to, say, triangularity, entails being triangular. As Winkler notes, Berkeley seems to assume this. Winkler (1983), p. 73. That ideas can have such qualities is reinforced by the version of the concept of idea they derive from Hobbes: Ideas include mirror images and echoes, for example. Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, Part I, Chapter 1, ed. by C.B. MacPherson (New York: Penguin Books, 1968), p. 86. Hobbes, however, holds at best a restricted resemblance assumption. He thinks that many sensible qualities are, in external objects, nothing but "divers motions."

16 Hume, Treatise, Book I, Part IV, Section V, p. 233.

flatly, "To say the idea of extension agrees to any thing, is to say it is extended."¹⁷ (I.IV.V,240) In the Draft of the Introduction to the Principles Berkeley says,

Any name may be used indifferently for the sign of any idea, or any number of ideas, it not being determin'd by any likeness to represent one more than another. But it is not so with ideas in respect of things, of which they are suppos'd to be the copies & images. They are not thought to represent them any otherwise, than as they resemble them.¹⁸

Hume and Berkeley not only make this assumption, they treat it as the conventional wisdom. In the first Enquiry, Hume attributes the assumption to people (like Descartes and Locke) who believe that ideas are distinct from the objects they represent.¹⁹ In the Treatise he notes that philosophers including himself who distinguish perceptions from objects "take it for granted, that every particular object resembles that perception, which it causes." (I.IV.II, 217) In the First Dialogue Philonous (for Berkeley) attributes to Hylas, with Hylas's consent, the view that "our ideas do not exist without the mind; but that they are copies, images, or representations of certain originals that do." (3D.1,205)²⁰ In the Principles Berkeley attributes to his opponents the view "that there are certain objects really existing without the mind...of which our ideas are only images or resemblances..." (P.I.56) So Berkeley and Hume assume, and take Locke to agree, that an idea of something green is a green idea. An idea of something triangular is a triangular idea.

Locke does hold the resemblance assumption if the assumption is restricted to resemblance with respect to primary qualities (call this the restricted resemblance assumption). Locke says, "That the Ideas of primary Qualities of Bodies, are Resemblances of them, and their Patterns do really exist in the Bodies themselves." (2.8.15)²¹ He also says, "Diagrams drawn on paper are copies of the ideas in the mind." (4.3.19) And again: "Is it true of the Idea of a Triangle, that its three Angles are equal to two right ones? It is true also of a Triangle, where-ever it really exists." (4.4.6) Locke's rhetorical question has the equality in angles true of the idea. In general Locke seems to make use of resemblance to explain how particulars of a given sort all "partake

¹⁷Hume himself thinks impressions are the sort of thing that can easily be taken for a hat, or shoe, or stone. (I.IV.II, 202)

¹⁸First Draft of the Introduction to the Principles, in Luce and Jessop, vol. 2, p. 129.

¹⁹Hume, Enquiry, Section XII, Part I, p. 152-53.

²⁰Berkeley, Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous, in Luce and Jessop, vol. 2, p. 205

²¹ "...but the Ideas, produced in us by these Secondary Qualities, have not resemblance of them at all." Locke's Essay, Book II, Chapter VIII, Section 15.

of" or "agree to" the same abstract idea.²² (3.3.13) Thus it is fair of Berkeley to attribute the (restricted) resemblance assumption to Locke for at least some of Locke's uses of 'idea'.

4. Of abstraction Locke says:

[When framing the general idea of Man, children] make nothing new, but only leave out of the complex Idea they had of Peter and James, Mary and Jane, that which is peculiar to each, and retain only what is common to them all. (3.3.7)

And also:

²²cf. Bennett, p. 16.

And he that thinks general Natures or Notions are anything else but such abstract and partial Ideas of more complex ones, taken at first from particular existences, will, I fear, be at a loss where to find them. For let any one reflect, and then tell me, wherein does his Idea of Man differ from that of Peter and Paul; or his Idea of Horse, from that of Bucephalus, but in the leaving out something, that is peculiar to each Individual; and retaining so much of those particular complex Ideas, of several particular Existences, as they are found to agree in? (3.3.9)

For Locke abstraction is removing parts of ideas of individuals, and retaining other parts. The parts retained represent qualities common to several individuals. The parts removed represent specifications like specific size, shape or color.²³ Implicit in the resemblance assumption, I have conjectured, is that the qualities of objects are represented by qualities of ideas. Retaining parts representing general qualities is thus retaining the general qualities of the ideas. Removing the parts of ideas that represent specifications in the object is thus removing the corresponding specifications in the ideas. This is how Locke talks. So given the resemblance assumption (even in its restricted version) and Locke's account of abstraction, the abstract idea of a triangle is a triangular idea with the parts of it that made it a specific triangle removed, leaving only those parts that make it a generic triangle.²⁴

Thus Locke holds:

- (1) An idea of a triangle is a triangle.
- (2) An abstract idea of a triangle is a triangle with some specific qualities removed and some general qualities retained -- i.e. a generic triangle.

It is the existence of this sort of thing in the mind that Berkeley questions. Among his arguments is the following:

- (3) Any triangle must be equilateral or isosceles or scalene.²⁵
- (4) A generic triangle is neither equilateral nor isosceles nor scalene.
- (5) But a generic triangle is a triangle. ____

²³ See also Locke's Essay 2.11.9, 2.12.1, 3.3.6-9, 3.6.32.

²⁴This is certainly how Hume conceived of Lockean abstract ideas. See Hume's argument that an idea of a generic object is a generic idea. (I.I.VII, 19-20) Note that this argument implicitly makes the resemblance assumption.

²⁵This premise smuggles in the inseparability in reality of generic and specification, without explaining it. The explanation will turn out to be necessary ultimately to understand Berkeley's objection to Locke.

(6) So it must both have and lack this disjunction of qualities.²⁶

This is not exactly what Berkeley says. He uses the loose phrase of Locke's to impute to Locke that an abstract idea must have the conjunction of all the specific qualities as well as lacking all of them. (P.Intro.13) It is hard to know just what Locke or Berkeley had in mind. But the fact is that if the above is right then with respect to the specific qualities, the abstracted idea would be "all and none of these at once". If something both has a disjunction of specific qualities and lacks all of them, then a disjunctive syllogism can be used to argue for its having each of the specific qualities. So if it has the disjunction and none, then it has all and none.²⁷

²⁶This is a much discussed case with this sort of contradiction often mentioned. See for instance Bennett, P. 38, Atherton, p. 54, Bolton, p. 70, Taylor, p. 103. I think this sort of contradiction lies behind the one Dancy gives, pp. 27-28.

²⁷E.g. if it (i) has F or G and also (ii) lacks F and (iii) lacks G, then (i) and (ii) entail that it has G and (i) and (iii) entails that it has E. (Winkler makes this point in note 16 on p. 73 of his Archiv article.) Or assuming that anything follows from a contradiction, having at least one and having none entail having all. Weinberg following Aaron thinks Berkeley has just blundered in his accusation. (Weinberg, p. 14) But the arguments just given show that, whether serendipitously or not, Berkeley's charge is justified.

That Berkeley thinks a disjunction of specific qualities must be true of an abstract idea is witnessed in his statement:

Likewise the idea of man that I frame to my self, must be either of a white, or a black, or a tawny, a straight, or a crooked, a tall, or a low, or a middle-sized man. (P.Intro.10)

This assumes the abstract idea of man includes having color and having stature. Seemingly something cannot have color without having some specific color, nor have stature without having some specific stature. What goes for color and stature presumably goes for triangularity.

Likewise, that Berkeley thinks none of the disjunction of specific qualities can be true of an abstract idea comes right from Locke. Locke says that specific differences are left out retaining what is common to all. (3.3.7)

This tenet of Locke's reinforces Berkeley's claim that the disjunction holds of the abstract ideas. If an abstract idea shares what is common to all instances, then it shares the disjunction of specific qualities. To have the disjunction is simply to have one or the other of the specific qualities. But the abstract idea has none of these qualities. So given the restricted resemblance assumption, at least some abstract ideas on Locke's account are inconsistent, as Berkeley claims.

This is the surface argument against Locke. It is on the face of it a good argument, for Locke does hold the restricted resemblance assumption, and takes abstraction to be removal of specifications. However Locke has a fairly straightforward response.

5. Locke's restricted resemblance assumption commits him to (1). And his account of abstraction commits him to (2). (4) and (5) are unobjectionable. The only way out of Berkeley's surface objection, then, is for Locke to deny the crucial premise, (3). He must contend that not all triangles have specifications; in particular triangles that are ideas do not.

This response is not very plausible unless it is based on some theory of ideas that explains why they should be an exception to the rule. But such a theory is easy to come by. Descartes supplies a theory of intentionality that Locke could appeal to.²⁸ The theory will allow Locke to say that we can have as the "intentionally in-existent object" of an act of mind, a triangle that is not

28I will assume without argument that Descartes held some such theory; it is only relevant whether Locke could be said to hold it. See Haldane and Ross, vol. I, Meditation III, pp. 161-62, Meditation V, pp.179-180; vol. II, Reply to Objections I, pp. 9-10, Arguments in Geometrical Fashion, pp. 52-53. Even if Locke did not hold it, it is a view of abstract ideas that Berkeley arguably should have attacked if he wanted to "bring the killing blow...in the matter of Abstraction..." (Philosophical Commentaries 687, in Luce and Jessop, vol. I) Here I follow a suggestion by Pitcher, p. 72, that just refuting Locke is not enough.

specific.²⁹ An intentionally inexistent object, for current purposes, would be what the act of mind presents there as being, whether or not it really exists. Let me use a less cumbersome phrase -- intentional object -- with this meaning.

The outline of the Cartesian theory is this: When one has an idea of the sun, say, there is a representing and three sorts of representeds. A certain act of mind, or alternatively mode of the mind, is a "representing." One "represented" is the object represented, if such

29 Here I use 'intentional inexistence' as immanence. cf. Roderick Chisholm in the article "Intentionality" in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, vol. 4, ed. by Paul Edwards (New York: Macmillan, 1967). See also Herbert Spiegelberg, "'Intention' and 'Intentionality' in the Scholastics, Brentano and Husserl," in Linda L. McAlister, ed., The Philosophy of Brentano (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1976), pp. 120-22.

there be, whose existence is independent of the existence of the act of mind. Call this the "intended object." An example would be the sun in reality. Another "represented" is what might be called the "content" of the act of mind -- an assemblage of properties, qualities, or attributes. For Descartes an example would be the nature of the sun. What I'm calling the intentional object is a third "represented" -- the object we suppose exists if we suppose the content is instantiated in some object. The supposition is to be one made without regard to what really exists. Thus the intentional object depends on the content and the supposition for its existence.³⁰ An example of an intentional object is Descartes's sun in the mind.

Here is an analogy: If representings are like stories, then intentional objects are like characters in stories. Independent of whether it is true, a story can be supposed true and the characters are the people that would exist given that supposition. The characters depend for their existence on the content of the story and on the supposition of its truth. If a story is in fact true then its characters (sufficiently) resemble the real people or other things the story is about. Nonetheless we can distinguish the characters from the real people -- only the former depend on the story -- though we usually don't bother to.³¹

The last part of the theory is that the word 'idea' is ambiguous between act of mind, content, and intentional object, and that an idea in each of these uses can be said to be of the intended object.

Armed with this theory, Locke can contend that the crucial premise (3) is true only of

³⁰The relation between the intended object and the intentional object when the intended object instantiates the content, could be construed in various ways. They might be thought of as numerically distinct but resembling in some respects -- distinct because one is dependent on the representing and the other is not. Or they might be thought of as identical, where the intentional object is a representing-dependent aspect of the representing-independent object. Or there are undoubtedly other construals. Ayers characterizes intentional object differently than I do, as "the object represented as it is represented." In my terms it would seem that he means the intended object as instantiating the content. But he goes on to argue convincingly that Locke, at least in some moods, holds that "immediate intentional objects exist in the mind in the ontological, and not merely the intentional sense." These are intermediaries between operations of the intellect and intended object. These are very like what I am calling intentional objects, though I am making no commitment to their being locally present in the mind. Ayers, "Are Locke's 'Ideas'...", pp. 17, 26-7. See Locke (4.21.4) and (4.4.3). See also H.E. Matthews, "Locke, Malebranche, and the Representative Theory," in I.C. Tipton, ed., Locke on Human Understanding (Oxford: University Press, 1977), pp. 55-61.

31

Cf. R.M. Adams's brief characterization of intentional object in "Phenomenalism and Corporeal Substance in Leibniz," in French, Uehling, and Wettstein, p. 218. See also Joseph L. Camp, Jr., "Why Attributions of Aboutness Report Soft Facts," Philosophical Topics 16 (1988), pp. 11-14.

existing triangles. It does not apply to triangles with intentional inexistence. Those are an odd sort of dependent thing that do not really exist. Their special status exempts them from the principles governing existing things. Ideas that are generic triangles are intentional objects.

The restricted resemblance assumption makes it plausible that Locke at least sometimes thinks of ideas as intentional objects, as opposed to acts of the mind. He assumes that some ideas resemble with respect to primary qualities the external objects they represent. An act of the mind presumably could not have the primary qualities associated with matter.³² An intentional object could. That is, some act of the mind might present there as being something with various primary qualities. In this way there is a resemblance of intentional object and intended object.

Further, there is Locke's own characterization of ideas. In the Introduction he says "the Word Idea" is "that Term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks." (1.1.8) And in the Epistle to the Reader he says an idea is "some immediate object of the Mind, which it perceives and has before it distinct from the sound it uses as a sign of it."³³ It is unlikely Locke meant here that ideas are intended objects, for some ideas differ from the intended objects: In the case of

32 ...except perhaps number. Also if matter is what thinks then perhaps an act of mind could have other primary qualities. But Locke's endorsements of the restricted resemblance assumption should not be thought to preclude the possibility that the mind is immaterial.

33Locke, Epistle to the Reader, Essay, p. 14. See also 2.8.8.

secondary qualities there are respects in which ideas do not resemble the external objects they represent. This increases the likelihood that he meant ideas are intentional objects. So Locke may well believe in generic triangles which are intentional objects of some act of the mind.

A seeming problem with this possibility is that he says that even ideas are particular existences.

...but universality belongs not to things themselves, which are all of them particular in their Existence, even those Words, and Ideas, which in their signification, are general. (3.3.11)³⁴ (3.3.11 and 4.17.8) How could an idea which is a generic triangle be particular? This problem can be resolved in one of two ways:

First, if Locke grants that nothing generic is particular then there is a tension: Abstract ideas are particular and not particular. But there is a way out given the Cartesian theory of intentionality: On this theory Locke uses 'idea' ambiguously, sometimes meaning act of the mind and sometimes meaning intentional object.³⁵ To remove the inconsistency he could say that abstract ideas, as acts of the mind, are particular, yet as intentional objects are not.

However, second, Locke may not grant that nothing generic is particular. He says also at 3.3.11, "...General and Universal, belong not to the real existence of Things..." So he might be using the concept particular only in opposition to that of general, universal and not in opposition to that of generic. Something general would be something repeatable -- numerically identical despite being united with distinct particulars. Something generic would be something with a general property missing its specification. The general and the generic might overlap. But in principle some generic things might not be general. If so, at most exact resemblance -- not identity -- would hold between these generic things when united with distinct particulars.³⁶ Thus Locke might believe there can be intentional objects that are generic particulars, and that is what abstract ideas are.

To conclude: Attributing belief in intentional objects to Locke supports Berkeley's reliance on the (restricted) resemblance assumption in criticizing Locke. But it also seems to justify Locke's denial of the crucial premise (3) in Berkeley's argument. Locke apparently can

³⁴ Likewise at 3.3.1 he begins "All Things, that exist, being Particulars..." See also 3.3.6.

³⁵ Cf. Reid as quoted in John Yolton, Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press, 1984), pp. 98-99.

³⁶ In this respect generic things would be like so-called "abstract particulars." cf. G.F. Stout, "Are the Characteristics of Particular Things Universal or Particular?" Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume, III (1923), pp. 114-22.

grant that all existing triangles are particular, while maintaining that not all intentionally inexisting triangles are particular. This allows Locke to hold both the resemblance assumption, and the account of abstraction as removing specifications.

II.

6. The surface characterization of Berkeley's argument has made it inconclusive against Locke. This is a strike against the interpretation, since a goal of interpreting great thinkers is to make their arguments conclusive. Yet if there were not other defects, the interpreter would be permitted to conclude Berkeley simply failed. However there is a serious defect of the interpretation. Berkeley, in explaining the impossibility of things' separation in the mind, appeals to the impossibility of their separation in reality.³⁷ What is the relevance of the inseparability in reality? This aspect of Berkeley's explanation is left out of the surface characterization. An interpretation is needed that brings it in. If it strengthens Berkeley's argument then so much the better.

And it does. It gives Berkeley an argument against abstraction which rebuts Locke whether he thinks the abstract idea of triangularity is itself an existing generic triangle or consists of an act of mind with a generic triangle as its intentional object. The full argument is not made explicitly until Hume. But supposing that it is Berkeley's argument makes good sense of what Berkeley does say.

The argument has two parts. The first part is to emphasize Locke's contention that an abstract idea consists of parts retained from ideas of fully specific individuals, after removing parts which represent specifications. Thus an abstract idea is an idea of the generic in one or more fully specific individuals, while not being an idea of the specific in any of them.³⁸

The second part of the argument is this: Take a specific triangle, for instance a scalene one. Its triangularity is the numerically same quality as its specification, for instance scaleness. To separate one from the other would be to separate something from itself. To have an idea of one that is not an idea of the other would be to have an idea that is both of and not of the same quality.³⁹

37 Cf. P.Intro.10; P.I.5; Draft Intro in Luce and Jessop vol. 2, p. 125; and Alciphron: The Minute Philosopher, Dialogue VII, Section 5, Luce and Jessop, vol. III, p. 293; and Dialogue VII, Section 6 of the first two editions, Luce and Jessop, vol III, pp. 333-334. (See Luce and Jessop's note, vol III, p. 291, that the omission from the third edition was not a retraction.)

38One might think that Locke could appeal to ideas of generic qualities not derived from particular ideas -- perhaps the generic ideas would be innate. But this is surely not an option for Locke who is so centrally concerned to show that "even the most abstruse Ideas, ... those even large and abstract Ideas are derived from Sensation or Reflection..." (2.12.8) In any event the concern of this paper is Berkeley's critique of abstraction.

39In a related discussion Hume explains that, "A person, who desires us to consider the figure of a globe of white marble without thinking on its colour, desires an impossibility" because as he

Why would Berkeley believe that the generic quality in an individual is identical with its specification? Because he believes they are inseparable and is committed to the identity of inseparables, the doctrine that inseparability is equivalent to identity. I will give citations relevant first to the inseparability then to the identity.

Berkeley says:

But I deny that I can abstract one from another, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid. (P.Intro.10)

The 'or' suggests that Berkeley is distinguishing separately conceiving inseparable things from separately conceiving generic and specific qualities. But he is not completely

said earlier, "they are in effect the same and undistinguishable." (I.I.VII, 25) Cf. also John Norris who says, "Abstraction is, as it were, the drawing of a thing away from it self." John Norris, An Essay towards the Theory of the Idea of Intelligible World, vol. 2 (London, 1701-4), p. 174, quoted in Winkler (1989), p. 37.

distinguishing them; the latter cases are a subset of the former.⁴⁰ (Thus, although Berkeley distinguishes two "acceptations of abstraction" (P.Intro.10), the same argument applies to both.) For as Berkeley says in P.I.5:

...I will not deny I can abstract, if that may properly be called abstraction, which extends only to the conceiving separately such objects, as it is possible may really exist or be actually perceived asunder.

Berkely would grant that if two things can exist apart then he could conceive of them separately (assuming he can conceive of them at all). Since he says he cannot conceive something's generic and specific qualities apart, he must think they cannot exist apart. They are inseparable.

Inseparability was commonly taken to be a sure sign of identity. In his discussion of abstract ideas, and in several other places, Hume commits himself to the identity of inseparables.⁴¹ (I.I.VII,18, 24-25) He is a late example of someone appealing to what was an important though

40Craig's discussion of necessary concomitants betrays, according to my argument, a misunderstanding of inseparability. Thus he does not see that for Berkeley the latter is a subset of the former. And thus he overemphasises the relevance of distinguishing between abstracting a single property and abstracting common properties. See Craig, p. 428. Dancy also misconstrues inseparability with the unfortunate consequence that he claims "...abstraction as Locke conceives it will never require us to conceive separately qualities that cannot exist separately." Dancy, p. 26. My discussion of inseparability comes in the next section.

It would be hard to believe my claim to which this note is appended if one thought that at P.Intro.7 Berkeley was talking only about abstraction in the sense of mutually separating specific inseparable qualities. But nothing in the section indicates this reading. He talks generally about qualities, and leaves it open whether they are generic or specific. His example concerns how the mind "does frame the abstract ideas of extension, colour, and motion." These, in fact, appear to be general qualities distinguished from each other. One might think that his section 7 concerns mentally separating specific qualities, because one is looking for a contrast with section 8, which concerns mentally separating generic from specific. But sufficient contrast is provided by the fact that in 7, none of the mentally separated qualities are specifications of any of the others. This is not true in 8.

41 Note that separability of perceptions in the mind entails the separability of their objects in reality, given Hume's principle that the conceivable is possible. (I.I.VII,19-20). For the equivalence of distinctness and separability, alternatively of identity and inseparability, see also the Appendix, p. 634, as well as I.I.III,10; I.II.III,36; I.II.III,38; I.III.III,79; I.IV.V,233. Note secondly that my use of 'identity' for numerical identity generally, conforms to current usage not to Hume's. He commits himself to using it (or the relevant sense of 'same') just for identity through time. (I.IV.II, 201) For identity at a time he often uses 'simplicity'. (cf. I.I.I, 2, and Appendix, 637) But Hume also uses 'same' (without realizing it?) as in his discussion of the distinction of reason: "...we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable..." (I.I.VII, 25, my emphasis) See also my footnote 53.

controversial medieval doctrine.⁴²

Berkeley comes very close to explicitly endorsing this doctrine. At P.I.5 he asks rhetorically whether it is possible even in thought to separate the things we see and feel, from perception. His answer obviously is no. He says, "For my part I might as easily divide a thing from itself." So separating the inseparable is likened to dividing a thing from itself. Apparently Berkeley thinks of the inseparable as identical, though the passage is not conclusive in the 1734 edition.⁴³ This appearance is confirmed however by the concluding sentence of section 5 in the 1710 edition: "In truth the object and the sensation are the same thing, and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other."⁴⁴ The inseparability which prevents abstraction is at root identity.

⁴²Suarez took mutual separability to be a conclusive sign of a real distinction. If each could exist without being united with anything like the other, then no sort of identity holds between them. If not, then some sort of identity holds. For example he speaks of a conjunction of a mode and a thing such that the mode is "unable by any power whatsoever to exist apart from that thing" and says, "This is a sign that such conjunction is a certain mode of identity." (Suarez, Sec. I.20, p. 32; see also Sec. II.9, p. 46.) Francis Suarez, On the Various Kinds of Distinctions (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1947), p. 32 and p. 46, (Disputationes Metaphysicae, Disputatio VII, de variis distinctionum generibus, section I.20 and section II.9). There is a general way to justify the connection with identity: If a and b are inseparable they are unified, so they are one and not many. If they were distinct they would be many; so they are identical. This argument may or may not involve equivocation, but it has surface plausibility.

⁴³Tipton suggests Berkeley is here making a point confined to the inseparability of esse and percipi. This is apparently because Tipton thinks Berkeley is implicitly recognizing that his other examples of things' inseparability in the mind fail. An interpretation that makes Berkeley not reject his examples is better unless the examples are hopeless. Tipton indicates only that the example of the inseparability in the mind of extension and color is hopeless: A blind man obviously could frame an idea of extension without color. But surely Berkeley would admit this; he has provided for it. He has said no-one can form an idea of extension without "colour or other sensible quality." P.I.10, my emphasis. Presumably he thinks the blind man conceives of extension via tactile ideas. So this example is not hopeless. Now it may be that other considerations are motivating Tipton here. If so I would guess it is the reservations about inseparability that I address in section 7. Tipton's only other stated reason to view the inseparability of esse and percipi as a special case is that Tipton thinks these are for Berkeley indistinguishable, whereas in other cases of inseparability the things are not indistinguishable. Here I think Tipton is confusing identity and indistinguishability. In all cases of inseparability Berkeley is assuming identity (I argue). His own theory of abstraction given in P.Intro.16 is an explanation how to distinguish the identical. And if this theory works, I don't see why it couldn't be used to distinguish esse from percipi. One might give a proof which uses 'exists' about something without using 'is perceived'. Even if I am wrong about distinguishing esse from percipi, the main point is that this has not been shown to be the only case of inseparability being at root identity. See Tipton, p. 157.

⁴⁴Luce and Jessop, vol. 2, p. 43, note to line 18. Why did Berkeley drop this sentence? Perhaps it is because he thought it was redundant, since since he he had already included the remark I

If one takes Hume to be making explicit what is implicit in (or at least required by) Berkeley's critique then this interpretation of Berkeley is strengthened. As noted above, Hume accepts the identity of inseparables in the context of defending and elaborating Berkeley's position on abstract ideas. Hume goes on specifically to explain why the mind is incapable of receiving

...any impression, which in its real existence has no particular degree nor proportion. That is a contradiction in terms; and even implies the flattest of all contradictions, viz. that 'tis possible for the same thing both to be and not be. (I.I.VII,19)

I presume from the context that to speak of an impression in its real existence is to speak of a quality of some real object. So here Hume is saying that for a quality to exist and lack specification is for it to exist and not exist. Separating the inseparable is separating something from itself.

quoted and the sentence before it.

A suggestive but inconclusive passage occurs at De Motu 11, where he seems to say that the force of gravitation is inseparable from motion and so the term 'gravitation' means nothing different from motion. (my emphasis) Luce and Jessop, vol. 4, p. 34.

Further, but not conclusive, confirmation comes from Berkeley's use of arguments of the form "a and b are not mutually separable in thought, so they are identical." See Pitcher's discussion, pp. 54-55, of NTV 130 and 3D.I.177. Grayling criticizes Pitcher there by saying that "Berkeley has scant use for a concept of identity." (A.C. Grayling, Berkeley: The Central Arguments (Lasalle: Open Court, 1986), pp. 34-35.) If it is a just criticism of Pitcher there, it is so of my whole essay here. Grayling gives two reasons for his remark: (1) Berkeley hadn't read Frege and so didn't have the concept of identity, and (2) the concept was irrelevant to his purposes. I confess I cannot see the justice of Grayling's criticism. Certainly before Frege someone could wonder whether a and b were one or two. And I can't help but think Berkeley is saying that visible extension and color are one, not two, and likewise intense heat and pain are one, not two. In any event the confirmation I have in mind is this: Berkeley says if two things are separable in reality, then they are separable in thought. (P.Intro.10) So if they are not separable in thought then they are not separable in reality. If we grant that he thinks inseparability in reality entails identity, then we derive the principle that inseparability in thought entails identity.

In addition, interpreting Berkeley this way explains why he thinks abstract ideas are inconsistent. He says they are. (P.Intro.16) The explicit argument Berkeley gives is based on Locke's admission that an abstract idea is "something imperfect, that cannot exist." (4.7.9) Berkeley concludes from this that such an idea is inconsistent, given that "...there is no consistent idea the likeness whereof may not really exist."⁴⁵ But this argument does not get to the root of the inconsistency. The deeper argument I am supplying on Berkeley's behalf does: An idea of a scalene triangle's triangularity that is not an idea of its scaleness, would be an idea that is and is not of the same quality. Thus it is absurd that one could have such an idea.

This is true whether the idea is itself an existing generic triangle, or consists of an act of mind with a generic triangle as its intentional object.

7. It may well be that Berkeley and Hume believe in the identity of inseparables, but how ought we understand what they believe? How can a generic quality be inseparable from, much less identical with, its specification if there can be cases of one without the other? For example triangularity can occur without scaleness in an isosceles triangle. Likewise how can they be inseparable, much less identical, if a case of alteration leaves the generic while changing the specific? For instance a scalene triangle can alter into an isosceles one.

What is needed is a sense of 'inseparability' that makes these cases irrelevant. I speculate that the original notion of inseparability was this: Two things are inseparable just in case they are united, joined, and cannot be simply disjoined. What would it be for them to be "simply disjoined"? It is either that they come to be spatially separated, pulled apart as it were, or that one simply cease to exist leaving the other on its own.⁴⁶

Thus, even if it were true that triangularity could exist without the scaleness of some particular triangle, this does not entail that the triangularity of that triangle has been pulled apart from the scaleness of that triangle. Likewise even if triangularity survived the alteration from

45Section 45 of A Defense of Free Thinking in Mathematics in Luce and Jessop, vol. IV, p. 134. See also section 46, pp. 134-35.

46Here I draw on Suarez's discussion of separability: "...although a number of signs are usually proposed to assist us in recognizing a real distinction, two of them, based on separation, seem the most important. One is based on separation alone, with reference to real union; that is, a distinction is real if both extremes can simultaneously and actually be preserved apart from a real union between them. The other is based on mutual separation with respect to existence; that is, a distinction is real if one extreme can be preserved immediately and by itself without the other, and vice versa, to the exclusion of any ordination to or necessary connection with a third thing." (Suarez, sec. II.9, p. 46) Cf. also hints by Tipton, pp. 141-42, and Grayling, p. 21.

scalene triangle to isoscles, it would at no point be existing on its own. It would always be joined with some specification or other.

I speculate that this is the sort of inseparability philosophers were struck by when they contemplated the union of generic and specific in individuals.

Suppose it is. How could this sort of inseparability be viewed as equivalent to identity? How could the above case of different triangles, or the above case of an altering triangle, not militate against the identity of generic and specific?⁴⁷ The answer is that Berkeley and Hume hold principled views about identity, independent of their views about inseparability, that just so happen to eliminate these cases. Both thinkers deny the identity

47I conjecture that part of an answer for some scholastics is that they reject universals. Another part of a answer for some scholastics is that they are committed to temporary identity. So for example Suarez says that a mode "has a certain identity with the thing it modifies." (Suarez, Sec. I.26, p. 36) Yet the thing can "survive the destruction of" the mode. (Suarez, Sec. II.6 p. 44) For instance the sitter can survive the destruction of his sitting (by standing up). However Berkeley and Hume could not accept this answer. In fact the criticism of abstraction has the same form as a criticism of temporary identity. Temporary Identity: If a and b exist and are identical until b ceases to exist while a remains, then the same thing remains in existence while ceasing to exist. Abstraction: If a and b are before the mind and are identical until b ceases to be before the mind while a remains before the mind, then the same thing remains before the mind while ceasing to be before the mind. Note that Locke is a believer in temporary identity. (cf. 2.27.11) He would solve this problem, presumably, with this theory of relative identity. But I suspect Berkeley and Hume would try to find the same absurdity in that theory. Following out this possible defense of Locke would take matters too far afield.

of the generic between distinct individuals, and they deny the identity of the generic through alteration.

The first denial, the denial of universals in nature, is one they share with Locke and many of their predecessors.⁴⁸ The second denial is a consequence of their views on alteration. They reject identity through alteration. Hume thinks that something which alters is strictly speaking a succession of different things.⁴⁹ Likely Berkeley held this too.⁵⁰ The reasoning is apparently that in a case of alteration something has a quality which something lacks, so they are two on pain of contradiction. Thus a scalene triangle cannot alter into an isosceles triangle and be the same triangle. There are rather two successive triangles. Because of the denial of universals, the generic in one cannot be identical with the generic in the other.⁵¹

As a consequence of the first denial, the scaleness of this triangle can be identical with this triangle's triangularity, the isosceleity of that triangle can be identical with that triangle's triangularity, yet this one's scaleness can be distinct from that one's isosceleity. For this one's triangularity is distinct from that one's triangularity. As a consequence of the second denial there is likewise no contradiction even if the isosceles triangle is the result of alteration of the scalene triangle. Since there is no identity through alteration, they are distinct triangles. And because of the denial of universals the triangularity in one is distinct from the triangularity in the other.

Berkeley's and Hume's severe views on identity have the effect of simplifying the special sense of 'inseparable' explained above. The meaning of 'inseparable' no longer needs to select against the puzzling apparent cases of separation. The views on identity do that. So it is safe to think of inseparable things as things that if joined are necessarily joined.

8. These considerations help us make sense of the belief in the identity of inseparables, but

48So for example Hume thinks an object's "action or motion is nothing but the object itself, consider'd in a certain light..." (I.I.IV,12) See also Weinberg p. 9 and the discussion and citations in this paper's section 9.

49He says at Treatise, I.IV.III, p. 219 that variation is evidently contrary to identity.

50In the First Dialogue when talking about "outness or distance" he says approaching an object gives one a "continued series of visible objects succeeding each other." (3D.1.201) The variation in what one sees (what one sees gets bigger as one gets closer) entails that one is seeing a series.

51It would seem that another sort of case is relevant too -- e.g. when a triangle is scalene but might not have been. My guess is that the objection to alteration would apply mutatis mutandis to this case. This would be a third sort of denial of the identity of the generic through difference in specification. However I am not sure that Berkeley and Hume had a well enough worked out theory of modality as to make this sort of case relevant.

why believe in it? Why believe inseparability and identity are equivalent? In answer, consider this question: Why is it that the generic and specific in a triangle should be inseparable? Why given that they are united should they be necessarily united? There is only one answer according to Hume: They are identical. There is no such thing as necessary connection other than that provided by identity. Seeming cases of a necessary connection between distinct things, are no more than cases in which the mind is determined to "carry our thoughts from one object to another".⁵² (I.III.XIV, 165) Hume is thus denying any inseparability of distinct things. This denial is plausible, perhaps, if one grants empiricist suspicions of the unobservable: Necessary connections between distinct things cannot be observed, so we ought not believe in them. The sole exception would be

52

I realize this claim is contentious these days, but I cannot defend it here beyond saying this: The fact that Hume thinks we cannot help but suppose there to be necessary connections between distinct things, and the fact that he does so himself as constructive theorist, does not detract from his contention as skeptic that necessary connection between distinct things is inconceivable. As with other arguments his skeptical argument admits of no answer, yet produces no conviction -- at least no lasting one -- even in himself.

necessary connection between things because of their identity. For we can observe identity, or at least Hume assumes we can. Observing singleness is for Hume observing perfect identity.⁵³

Berkeley does not provide as detailed a critique of necessary connection. I assume he would agree with Hume at least for things that are not minds. (see P.I.25) In any event, I will assume Hume supplements Berkeley here, and so speaks for both of them. The result is that they hold that if a and b are inseparable then a and b are identical.

Plausibly if a and b are identical then they are inseparable. Neither could exist without the other unless something could exist without itself. So it is safe to assume Hume and Berkeley hold this.

Thus Hume and Berkeley hold the biconditional. This is the explicit Humean doctrine of the equivalence of inseparability and identity, and this same doctrine I have suggested is implicit in Berkeley. The inseparability is explained by the identity.⁵⁴ Thus the absurdity which Berkeley and Hume charge Locke with is at root a problem about identity. They hold that the generic in something and its specification are identical. So one cannot be present to mind without the other.

9. Why do they believe in the identity? Consider first what Julius Weinberg says: In his classic commentary he emphasizes the connection for Berkeley and Hume between inseparability and identity, and he emphasizes that the connection leads Locke's theory to absurdity. The erudition and insight in Weinberg's treatment are admirable. Nevertheless there is room to build on his work. In answer to the just posed question, he explains the identity of generic and specific in terms of the generic being part of the specific. He cites Aquinas as a paradigm holder of this view. (Weinberg, p. 8) Weinberg later says:

Thus Berkeley is saying that to separate the specific from the generic, on the assumption that the generic is a part of the specific, is to separate a thing from itself. (Weinberg, p. 20)

It appears that on Weinberg's explanation the argument either does not rebut Locke, or begs the question against Locke. If the specific is a whole of which the generic is a part, it would seem

⁵³ Observing singleness through a supposed variation in time is observing "perfect identity" in the sense Hume uses the phrase. (I.IV.II, 200 and I.IV.VI, 254) (Qualification: At I.IV.VI, 255 he allows that a multiplicity -- a mass of matter -- can be observed to have perfect identity if all its parts which are single things are observed to have perfect identity.) Note that current use of 'identity' comprises Hume's use of both 'identity' and 'simplicity'. Observing singleness at a time (simplicity) would be another way to observe identity in the modern sense. See Donald L.M. Baxter, "Hume on Virtue, Beauty, Composites, and Secondary Qualities," Pacific Philosophical Quarterly 71 (1990), p. 110.

⁵⁴The above explanation and the argument of this whole essay rebuts the assumptions behind Grayling's claim pp. 171-72 that numerical identity is not behind non-abstractability.

that the generic could exist without the specific: Destroying the other parts of the whole destroys the whole but leaves the undestroyed part -- the generic -- intact. Locke is not rebutted. Suppose however we add the rest of Weinberg's explanation, "...the genus can exist only in its several specific determinations." (Weinberg, p. 20) This is just to beg the question against Locke who maintains that in the mind, the genus can exist without any of its specific determinations. Weinberg needs, and we need, some other explanation of the inseparability and identity of the generic and the specific.

I conjecture that the answer lies in the assumption shared by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume with their scholastic forebears: that "everything in nature is individual." (I.I.VII,19) (cf. Weinberg, p. 21) Berkeley says via Philonous, "But it is a universally received maxim, that everything which exists, is particular." (3D.1,192) This is expressed by Hume with the maxim that "existence in itself belongs only to unity." (I.II.II,30) In other words, only single things exist.⁵⁵ If the triangularity in an individual were distinct from its isosceleity, then the individual would be a plurality. So it would not exist as a unity. So it would not, strictly speaking, exist. So the characteristics, generic or specific, of an individual are all identical with each other and with the individual itself.

This conjecture is complicated by the fact that strictly speaking for Berkeley and Hume, a triangle is a plurality of points, not a single individual. So strictly neither a triangle nor its properties exist.⁵⁶ But I assume they are granting for the sake of argument the individuality of a triangle. Were they speaking strictly they would have to conduct the argument as concerning the generic and specific properties of the peculiar atomic individuals they believe in.⁵⁷

My conjecture is further complicated by a seemingly unacceptable consequence: All properties of an individual will be identical, not just generic and specific. But again, the individuals Berkeley and Hume really believe in are relatively simple. Separable properties belong to distinct individuals. Only inseparable, so identical, ones belong to the same individual. Even so, simple individuals will have a variety of properties. Or more accurately, via distinctions of reason or selective attention we can discern various "circumstances of resemblance" between various simple things. How we can discern various properties which are nonetheless identical with each other and the individual they characterize, is what Hume tries to explain in his

⁵⁵For further discussion of this claim see Donald L.M. Baxter, "Hume on Infinite Divisibility," History of Philosophy Quarterly 5 (1988), pp. 136-37, and "Hume on Virtue...", pp. 108-09.

⁵⁶ For substantiation for Hume see the citations in the previous note. For Berkeley see Donald L.M. Baxter, "Berkeley, Perception, and Identity," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research 51 (1991), pp. 94-5. This nowadays bizarre doctrine, that pluralities do not exist although the individuals in them do, is not unique to Berkeley and Hume. Leibniz relies on it, as does an opponent of both Leibniz and Hume -- Samuel Clarke. H.T. Mason, ed., The Leibniz - Arnauld Correspondence (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), p. 121. Samuel Clarke, The Works of Samuel Clarke (London: 1738; Garland Reprint edition, vol. II, 1978) pp. 545-46.

⁵⁷This is why Berkeley mentions a kind of "abstraction" he can understand -- separating in the mind things that are distinct and so separable -- and gives the example of mentally separating the parts of what would seem to be an individual. Having parts makes it strictly speaking a plurality, but it is being supposed to be an individual for ordinary purposes. cf. P.Intro.10, and P.1.5.

discussion of distinctions of reason and in a note to Book I. page 20. line 17.⁵⁸ (I.I.VII, 24-25; Appendix, 637)

With the qualification that they are really concerned with real individuals, Berkeley's and Hume's criticism boils down to this: Everything in nature is a single thing. So the generic in an individual is identical with the specific. So thinking of its generic without thinking of its specific, is thinking of something without thinking of it. And this is a contradiction.

What makes this a devastating criticism is that Locke himself holds the individuality of things that exist in nature. This follows from his belief in the particularity of everything existing in nature. (3.3.11) Berkeley and Hume show this widely held assumption is inconsistent with a Lockean doctrine of abstraction.

10. The objection to Locke in brief, then, is this:

⁵⁸ Berkeley tries to explain the same sort of selective attention in the last three sentences of sec. 16 of the second edition of the Principles. I suspect that Hume's and perhaps Berkeley's explanations here can succeed only by undercutting the metaphysics which enables the objection to Locke.

(7) An abstract idea of a triangle is of the triangularity in some specific triangle without being of the triangularity's specification in that triangle.

(8) The triangularity is inseparable from its specification.

(9) The inseparable are identical.

(10) So the triangularity is the same quality as its specification.

(11) So an abstract idea of a triangle is of a quality without being of that quality.

If this is right, then Locke's loose phrase seized on by Berkeley is a surprisingly accurate portrayal of Locke's abstract ideas. For an abstract idea, once formed, is supposed to represent the generic in all individuals of that genus. An abstract idea of the triangularity of an equilateral triangle and of the triangularity of an isosceles triangle and of the triangularity of a scalene triangle will thus be of all the specifications, too. Yet it is supposed to be of none of the specifications. So a Lockean abstract idea is of "all and none of these at once."

III.

11. Some commentators have been tempted to read into Locke an account of abstraction as selective attention, similar perhaps to Berkeley's own account.⁵⁹ On this view, removal of a specific quality is not literally removal from being present to the mind. Rather such a removal is just ceasing to attend to the quality. However the objection to abstraction applies even to this milder form. Attending to a generic quality without attending to its specification, is attending to a quality without attending to it. The inconsistency remains.⁶⁰

One might respond by distinguishing two accounts of selective attention. The first is attending to one and not the other of inseparable entities. This account contains the inconsistency. However the second account can resolve the inconsistency as follows: The apparent contradiction arises from neglecting the complexity of what is going on. One is not simply literally thinking of,

⁵⁹Taylor, Ayers, Winkler, Urmson, and Mackie, cited above in note 6. It seems to me if Locke meant abstraction was selective attention he would have said it, for he speaks of it in another context: He mentions partial consideration in his discussion of the parts of space. (Locke also uses the phrases "partial conception" and "partial ideas" in another place, but in that context he appears to mean conception or ideas of mentally separable parts of things.) (3.6.32) He says one cannot even mentally separate parts of space, but "a partial consideration is not separating." (2.13.13) It is interesting to wonder how Locke would have accounted for our abstract idea of a single part of space, since we would not be able to separate from any idea of a particular part of space all the "circumstances of real Existence, as Time, Place, [my emphasis] or any other concomitant Ideas." (2.11.9) Had he worried about this perhaps we would have arrived at a selective attention theory of abstraction. It is true, as Winkler points out, that at 2.13.13. Locke seems to be saying that we cannot separate in thought what cannot be separated in reality. So he seems to be precluding abstraction that is not selective attention. But it is hard to believe that if this is his considered account he would not use these words when discussing abstraction. An alternative reading to Winkler's is that Locke is simply being inconsistent, because he "does not connect these remarks with his discussions of abstraction." (Winkler (1989), p. 41) A perhaps better reading is to take Locke at his word that he is simply discussing spatial separation: If formerly continuous parts of space cannot be put at a distance from one another in reality, then we cannot imagine them to be at a distance from one another. For to be at a distance is to have a part of space in between, and this part of space must be one of the original parts we were trying to separate. Thus Locke is not discussing the sort of separation relevant to abstraction.

⁶⁰This is a different criticism than the one Flage gives. He assumes that if one cannot conceive of a without conceiving of b, then one cannot attend to a without attending to b. This seems to miss the very point of selective attention -- attending to only some of what one is conceiving. Only if my argument works, does Flage's work. Flage's argument contains an additional interesting complication: He assumes what is at issue is conceiving of a mode qua mode. How one might do this is an important question, but it is not directly relevant to abstraction. All that is at issue is whether one can separate in the mind what cannot be separated in reality. Flage, pp. 492-93.

say, a triangle's triangularity and not thinking of it. This misconstrues the object of thought and the force of the negation. Rather one is thinking of the triangle in one way and not in some other. For example one is thinking of the triangle as triangular, and not as isosceles. To say one is failing to consider the triangle's isosceleity, is simply to say that one is considering the triangle, perhaps, but not as isosceles.

Thus there is no question of leaving out qualities, or attending only to some; the account dispenses with talk of qualities. Rather one leaves out some ways of considering an individual while retaining others.

This may be the account of selective attention Berkeley endorses. But it is too far from Locke's own words plausibly to be Locke's. Locke specifically talks of leaving out some qualities and retaining others.⁶¹

⁶¹Cf. the quotations given above in section 4. Also at 3.3.6 he says, "...Ideas become general, by separating [my emphasis] from them the circumstances of Time and Place, and any other Ideas, that may determine them to this or that particular Existence." At 2.12.1 he says, "The 3d. is separating [my emphasis] them from all other Ideas that accompany them in their real existence; this is called Abstraction: And thus all its General Ideas are made." Winkler ((1989), p. 41) points to Locke's phrase "without considering, how, whence, or with what others they came there" to suggest he has partial consideration in mind. But Locke has just above in the same paragraph used the phrase "considering...separate." (2.11.9) It is understandable that he would use the phrase 'consider separate' when thinking about separating ideas in the mind; it is less understandable how he could use 'separating' if he meant the process of partial consideration which is explained precisely by contrasting it with separating ideas.

So if Locke's account of abstraction is an account of selective attention, it can only be an account still subject to Berkeley's criticism. As it is, only confusing the two sorts of selective attention could make it plausible that Locke has an account of abstraction that avoids the inconsistency⁶².

NOTES

⁶²I am grateful to Michaelis Michael, Katherine Elgin, Martha Brandt Bolton, Margaret Wilson, Gary Ebbs, Joe Rouse, John Troyer, Annette Baier, Colin Allen, Martha Nussbaum, James Van Cleve, Jaegwon Kim, Gregory Gale and various anonymous referees for helpful criticism.