

# A Revised Metaphysical Argument for Berkeley's Likeness Principle

Manuel Fasko

**Abstract:** Contra Todd Ryan's interpretation, I argue that it is possible to reconstruct a metaphysical argument that does not restrict likeness in general to ideas. While I agree with Ryan that Berkeley's writings provide us with the resources to reconstruct such an argument, I disagree with Ryan that this argument entails a restriction of likeness to ideas. Unlike Ryan, I argue that Berkeley is not committed to the claim that we can compare only ideas, but to the view that the only thing that can be compared to an idea is another idea.

## 1. Introduction

In *Principles* 8 Berkeley famously states that “[a]n idea can be like nothing but an idea.”<sup>1</sup> Over the years, this so-called “Likeness Principle” (LP)<sup>2</sup> has attracted considerable scholarly attention, particularly because it seems that Berkeley neither offers an explicit argument for the LP nor provides his readers with the resources to reconstruct an argument on his behalf.<sup>3</sup> My aim in this essay is to demonstrate, contra Todd Ryan, that Berkeley's writings offer the resources to construct a metaphysical argument on his behalf that does not restrict likeness to ideas.<sup>4</sup> This is important because, as Ryan notes

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<sup>1</sup> References to Berkeley's *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* [PHK section] and *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* [DHP page] are to *The Works of George Berkeley* [W], ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (9 vols.; London: Thomas Nelson, 1948–57), vol. 2; *New Theory of Vision* [NTV section] and *New Theory of Vision Vindicated* [TVV section], vol. 1; and *Alciphron* [Alc dialogue: section], vol. 3. References to Berkeley's *Notebooks* [NB entry] are to George Berkeley, *Philosophical Works* [PW page], ed. Michael R. Ayers (Rutland, VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> See Philip D. Cummins, “Berkeley's likeness principle,” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 4 (1966), 63.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, George Dicker, “An Idea Can Be like Nothing but an Idea,” *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 2 (1985): 39–52; Jonathan Hill, “Berkeley's Missing Argument: The Sceptical Attack on Intentionality,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19 (2011): 47–77; Michael Jacovides, “How Berkeley corrupted his capacity to conceive,” *Philosophia* 37 (2009): 415–429; Todd Ryan, “A new account of Berkeley's likeness principle,” *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 14 (2006): 561–80, esp. 561–63; Peter West, “Why Can An Idea Be Like Nothing But Another Idea? A Conceptual Interpretation of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of the American Philosophical Association* 7 (2021): 530–48, esp. 530–32; Kenneth P. Winkler, *Berkeley: An Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 141–48 to name just a few.

<sup>4</sup> It is worth noting that the existence of such a metaphysical argument *prima facie* fits nicely with the recently defended metaphysical role of Berkeley's LP [see David Bartha, “Resemblance, Representation, and Scepticism: The Metaphysical Role of Berkeley's Likeness Principle,” *Journal of Modern Philosophy* 4.1 (2022): 1–18, [doi.org/10.32881/jomp.180](https://doi.org/10.32881/jomp.180)]. Moreover, it is worth noting that this does not imply that Berkeley accepts the LP *only* because of this metaphysical argument. Rather, the claim is that Berkeley, *at the very least*, has such an argument. West (“Why Can an Idea,” 532),

(578), volitions (which are non-ideational for Berkeley) should also be “candidates for resemblance.” Moreover, a restriction of likeness to ideas, which are fundamentally different from minds (PHK 25–27), would conflict with Berkeley’s commitment to the view that other minds are like his own (DHP 231–32). Berkeley even writes that other minds are in a “large sense” the “image or idea” of his own (PHK 140). Since this claim also includes God’s mind, a restriction of likeness to ideas would entail that Berkeley could not uphold his commitment to the *imago-dei* thesis; that is, the thesis that human beings are made in the image of God after his likeness (cf. *Genesis* 1: 26–27). This thesis implies that the minds of God and human beings are alike (e.g., they are both active). Most notably and explicitly, Berkeley affirms his commitment to this thesis in his sermon “On the Mystery of Godliness” where he states: “The mind which is pure and spiritual [...] is made in the image of God” (*Works* VI, 88).<sup>5</sup> Thus, a restriction of likeness to ideas also conflicts with Berkeley’s theological commitments.

In light of these problems I argue, unlike Ryan, that Berkeley does not believe that we can only compare ideas and hence does not restrict likeness relations to ideas. Rather, I claim, Berkeley holds that the only thing comparable to an idea is another idea.<sup>6</sup>

I defend this interpretation in two steps. First, I introduce the metaphysical argument for the LP as espoused by Ryan, reconsider its problematic implications, and demonstrate why I agree with Ryan on its first premise (P1) that likeness is a relation. I then scrutinize the second premise (P2) that there are no relations without an act of comparison, and I argue that this second premise needs to be modified to indicate that there are no *likeness* relations without an act of *comparison* (P2\*).<sup>7</sup> In this second step, I draw on Berkeley’s *Notebooks* to argue that he does not assume that we can only compare ideas (P3). Instead, the only thing that can be compared to an idea is an idea (P3\*). This means that an idea cannot be compared to a mind and, thus, as Berkeley claims (PHK 89), an idea can never

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for instance, has convincingly shown that Berkeley also has conceptual reasons for accepting this principle. See also Melissa Frankel, “Berkeley on the ‘Twofold state of things’,” *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 80 (2016): 43–60, esp. 50–53, who argues there are several arguments for LP. Thus, while I remain neutral on the question of what the best reading of the LP is or what Berkeley’s strongest argument for it is, I reject George Pitcher’s claim [*Berkeley* (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), 115–20] that Berkeley has no compelling grounds to hold LP, because there is at least one metaphysical argument.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. also the seventh sermon (*Works* VI, 95f.). Moreover, there are several passages in Berkeley’s works where he commits himself to this thesis (cf. DHP 231–33; Alc 4.21–22; *Siris* 333–34). I thank Marc Hight who pointed out the passages in the sermons to me. A more recent discussion of Berkeley’s interpretation of this thesis is found in John R. Roberts, “A Puzzle in the *Three Dialogues* and Its Platonic Resolution,” in *Berkeley’s Three Dialogues: New Essays*, ed. Stefan Storrie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 152–57.

<sup>6</sup> Given my focus on the supposed restriction of likeness, I will not consider the argumentative force of the LP in more detail. It is beside the point for my purposes if the LP suffices to construe a valid argument against a Lockean type of representational realism or representational realism in general [see e.g., Georges Dicker, *Berkeley’s Idealism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–62].

<sup>7</sup> Note that this modification holds on Ryan’s understanding of the role of comparing for likeness relations, which reduces such relations to acts of comparisons (see my next section).

be like a mind. This, however, allows for the possibility of comparing minds and, thus, the possibility that minds can resemble other minds.

## 2. The Metaphysical Argument and Likeness as Relations

The metaphysical argument for the LP that Ryan attributes to Berkeley can thus be formalized in the following way:

- P1: Likeness is a relation.
- P2: There are no relations without comparing.
- P3: We can compare only ideas.
- C: There is likeness only between our ideas.

Although the LP is not explicitly mentioned in this argument, it is entailed by the conclusion, because if likeness is restricted to ideas, an idea can only be like another idea (PHK 8). However, as Ryan acknowledges (“New Account,” 578), this would be problematic for Berkeley because volitions should also be “candidates for resemblance.” Ryan solves this problem by suggesting a more charitable reading of the second argument in NB 378, particularly line 16: “Two things cannot be said to be alike or unlike till they have been compared.” This reading allows for a “more limited result,” according to which likeness in general is not restricted to ideas but “immediate objects” of awareness (Ryan, “New Account,” 578). While this allows for likeness between volitions, he points out that the resulting principle is “too narrow” because it cannot guarantee that ideas and volitions are not alike (579). As suggested in my introduction, the problem is even more fundamental because it conflicts with Berkeley’s commitment to minds being alike as well. If Ryan’s solution would be extended to cover these as well, it would then seem that Berkeley, on this reading, cannot secure his commitment to the fundamental difference between ideas and minds, which would be deeply problematic considering the textual evidence (e.g., PHK 25–27, 89).

Given these consequences it is tempting to reject the attribution of this metaphysical argument to Berkeley altogether. However, as I argue in the following, I agree with Ryan we can reconstruct a metaphysical argument, but I disagree with him that this argument restricts likeness to ideas. By considering the premises of the argument, I demonstrate that it is possible to reconstruct a metaphysical argument that can avoid the issues Ryan’s version faces.

To establish that Berkeley does in fact accept P1, one need look no further than TVV 39 where he explicitly speaks of a “relation of similitude” (see also NB 503 and PHK 43). The case, however, is slightly more complex when it comes to P2 (that is, there are no relations without comparing). The key passage for this premise is PHK 142 of the 1734 edition of the *Principles*. There Berkeley refers to “*all relations including an act of the mind*” (my emphasis). Following Muehlmann,<sup>8</sup> Ryan takes this as evidence that Berkeley endorses the view that all relations can be reduced to (mental) acts of comparing (“New

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Robert G. Muehlmann, *Berkeley’s Ontology* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992), 29, 67–68.

Account,” 578). For the sake of the argument, I will not dispute the claim that relations can be reduced to mental acts, that is, that Berkeley is an anti-realist about relations.<sup>9</sup> But even on this interpretation there is reason to push back against the assumption that *all* relations are reducible to acts of *comparing*.<sup>10</sup> After all, Berkeley never says in PHK 142 that relations include an act of comparing; instead, he says that the identification of relations is simply “an act of the mind.” In fact, never in his published works does Berkeley say that relations can be reduced to acts of comparing. On the contrary, the only time he discusses the role of comparing is in the context of likeness relations (PHK 104). And since he explicitly calls causation, for example, a “relation” as well (NTV 65), there is no good reason to assume that likeness relations are the only kind of relations.<sup>11</sup> As West notes (“Why Can an Idea,” 535), other than PHK 104, Berkeley does not discuss acts of comparing and their importance for relations outside the *Notebooks*.<sup>12</sup> In the latter, however, Berkeley’s focus is again confined to *likeness* relations and acts of

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<sup>9</sup> I argue in detail in *Die Sprache Gottes: George Berkeley's Auffassung des Naturgeschehens* (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2021), Ch. 3, that Berkeley should be understood as a “conceptual foundationalist.” [See Walter Ott, “‘Archetypes without Patterns’: Locke on Relations and Mixed Modes,” *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 99 (2017): 300–325 for a similar reading of Locke on relations.] That is, drawing from the work of Katia Saporiti [*Die Wirklichkeit der Dinge: eine Untersuchung des Begriffs der Idee in der Philosophie George Berkeley's* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2006), 242–44] and Tom Stoneham [*Berkeley's World: An Examination of the Three Dialogues* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 238–44], I contend that acts of comparing play a metaphysical role for likeness relations to obtain. Such interpretations have been (implicitly) rejected by West (“Why Can an Idea,” 542–43, 546) who has defended a “realist” interpretation of Berkeley’s notion of relations. For the sake of this essay, I remain neutral on this question because my aim is to show a metaphysical argument without a restriction of likeness to ideas can be construed even if Ryan’s anti-realist interpretation is accepted—the background assumption being that Ryan’s problem would dissolve anyway if one, for instance, were to take a realist interpretation. After all, on this interpretation the issue of whether we can compare only ideas is separate from the question of whether minds share intrinsically given features in *rerum natura*.

<sup>10</sup> Thus, according to Muehlmann’s (*Berkeley's Ontology*, Ch. 2) interpretation, Berkeley endorses the same position as Locke, who is also understood to be an anti-realist about relations, because he writes that “[w]hat we call relation [...] consists in the consideration and comparing one idea with another” [*An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), II.12.7].

<sup>11</sup> For the purpose of this essay, we can bracket the question what distinguishes different kinds of relations. In *Die Sprache Gottes* (153), I have suggested that there is reason to assume that Berkeley holds that different kinds of relations (such as likeness, causation, signification) require different mental acts to obtain. For instance, Berkeley writes that signification is “depending altogether on the arbitrary appointment of men” (NTV 152).

<sup>12</sup> In contrast to West (“Why Can an Idea,” 531–33), however, I am inclined to take the *Notebooks* seriously, to the point where its entries have the same value as other remarks Berkeley chose to publish—unless they conflict with or even contradict them [see John R. Roberts, *A Metaphysics for the Mob: The Philosophy of George Berkeley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 7], something that is not the case for his remarks about relations. After all, there are various places in the *Notebooks* where Berkeley expresses views he clearly holds on to in his published works. For a recent interpretation that takes the *Notebooks* as seriously as any other works, cf. Stephen H. Daniel, *George Berkeley and Early Modern Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 4–9, 291–301; and “Berkeley’s Doctrine of Mind and the ‘Black List Hypothesis’: A Dialogue,” *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 51 (2013), 24–41.

comparing—and he repeatedly draws a close connection between the two (NB 46–47, 51, 299, 378, 861).

In sum, the scarcity of Berkeley's remarks on the issue of relations and mental acts makes it impossible to rule out with absolute certainty that he believes that any kind of relation can be reduced to an act of comparing. But those passages, in which he discusses the issue of relations and comparing, strongly suggest a modification of (P2) that there are no relations without comparing. Rather, Berkeley's *Notebooks* entries suggest that he is committed to P2\*: there are no likeness relations without acts of comparing. With these clarifications in mind, we can now turn to the third premise (P3) which holds that Berkeley endorses the view that we can compare only ideas.

### 3. Comparing Ideas

In his *Notebooks*, Berkeley seems committed to the view that we can compare *only ideas* (P3) (NB 47, 51, 299, 378, 861). However, as I argue in the following, these *Notebooks* entries that supposedly support the attribution of P3 to Berkeley, support rather the attribution of two slightly different versions of what I will call the Comparability Claim—only one of which leads to a restriction of likeness in general to ideas. Although the textual evidence is thus inconclusive, I argue there are philosophical reasons to prefer one Comparability Claim over the other.

The first version of the Comparability Claim is expressed in NB 51, 299, and 378. According to this version we can compare *only ideas* (P3)—and nothing but ideas. Berkeley states, for example, that we can compare only what we perceive (i.e., only ideas) (NB 51). Moreover, he rhetorically asks: “How you can compare anything besides your own ideas” (NB 299). Finally, he says “comparing is the viewing two ideas together,” which entails that “the mind can compare nothing but its' own ideas” (NB 378, 17–18).

The second version of the Comparability Claim is found in NB 47 and 861. In NB 47 Berkeley rhetorically asks, “Did ever any man see any other things besides his own ideas, that he should compare them to these & make these like unto them?” In this entry Berkeley raises the question if it is possible to compare an idea to anything other than an idea. Berkeley does not explicitly answer this question at this point. But in NB 861 he writes: “What can an Idea be like but another Idea, we can compare it with Nothing else, a Sound like a Sound, a Colour like a Colour.” In this entry, Berkeley explicitly answers the rhetorical question raised in NB 47. He clearly states that we can compare an idea “with nothing else” but “another Idea.” Thus, instead of the version captured by P3 (“the only things you can compare are ideas”), those entries support the attribution of the following Comparability Claim to Berkeley (P3\*): “The only thing we can compare to an idea is another idea” (P3\*)

Briefly put, the *Notebooks* entries support ascribing two different versions of the Comparability Claim to Berkeley and, thus, are in themselves inconclusive. It could be argued the textual evidence in the *Notebooks* does slightly favor P3 because it seems to

be supported by one more entry than P3\*. However, it is worth noting that NB 861—which has hitherto not been considered by most scholars dealing with the LP<sup>13</sup>—contains the version of the comparability claim that most resembles Berkeley's published remarks in PHK 8. In particular, NB 861 is the only entry of all the entries containing a version of the comparability claim that references color:

What can an Idea be like but another Idea, we can compare it with Nothing else, a Sound like a Sound, a Colour like a Colour. (NB 861)

[A]n idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. (PHK 8)

This similarity in itself is, of course, not decisive. But acknowledging it, I suggest, is enough to push back on the assumption that the textual support for attributing P3 to Berkeley is stronger. After all, just because NB 378 is more elaborate than other entries does not mean that it contains Berkeley's final view on the matter. For even though the *Notebooks* should be taken seriously (see note 13), it is worth to keep in mind that they are notebooks and therefore may contain conflicting reflections on certain issues because Berkeley is still developing his views at the time of writing it (i.e., 1706–1708).<sup>14</sup> And while it may be possible to render the entries consistent with each other, I assume for the remainder of this paper that there is a conflict between them.<sup>15</sup> For even if there is a

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<sup>13</sup> With the exception of Saporiti (*Wirklichkeit*, 222n3)—who does not further comment on this similarity—none of the previously mentioned Berkeley scholars dealing with the LP consider it: see Dicker, “An Idea Can Be,” and *Berkeley's Idealism*, Ch. 7; Hill, “Missing Argument”; Jacovides, “Berkeley Corrupted”; Melissa Frankel, “Something–We–Know–Not–What, Something–We–Know–Not–Why: Berkeley, Meaning and Minds,” *Philosophia* 37 (2009): 381–402; Frankel, “Twofold State”; Ryan, “New Account,”; West, “Why Can an Idea,”; Winkler, *Berkeley*, 141–49. For example, Winkler (145–48) places great emphasis on NB 378 and does not pay particular attention to the others (cf. Ryan, “New Account,” 574), which is problematic in itself. For even though there is no doubt that NB 378 contains the “most extended treatment of LP” in the *Notebooks* (Ryan, 562), neither of the two arguments he develops are found in his published works. This is despite Berkeley's reminder to himself to do so (NB 378a). Thus, I agree with West's assessment that Berkeley did not feel comfortable with the arguments in NB 378—at least in the versions he develops (546–47). For a more thorough discussion of how NB 378 in particular has been exegetically overrated in previous discussions of LP, see West, “Why Can an Idea,” 532–37.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Bertil Belfrage, “The Order and Dating of Berkeley's ‘Notebooks’,” *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 39 (1985): 196–214; and Bertil Belfrage, “A New Approach to Berkeley's *Philosophical Notebooks*,” in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. Ernest Sosa (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), 217–230. On this interpretation it is assumed that Berkeley's understanding of likeness and comparing undergoes a development, and one can speculate that Berkeley comes to realize how problematic P3 and the restriction of likeness to ideas in general it entails would be for him. Also note that Berkeley seems to have been thinking about relations even after this time, because the previously discussed remarks in PHK 142 about relations (including acts of the mind) were added only in 1734 when he revised the *Principles*.

<sup>15</sup> In *Die Sprache Gottes*, Ch. 3.2, I argue that NB 51, 299 and 378 #18 can be plausibly read as somewhat hyperbolic versions of P3\*. That is, it is possible to read these entries as saying that the only thing you can compare an idea to is another idea. For instance, in NB 51 Berkeley says that you cannot compare two things *together* unless both are perceived. This does not entail that you can only compare what you perceive (i.e., ideas) but merely that you cannot compare what you perceive (i.e., ideas) with something you do not (i.e., a mind). In fact, on the anti–realist interpretation of relations,

conflict, there are still philosophical reasons that support the attribution of P3\* to Berkeley.

First, Berkeley's Conceivability Claim in PHK 8 does not require that only ideas can be compared (P3). Rather, Berkeley can make his point if he holds that an idea can be compared only to another idea, because in this section he wants to establish that it is inconceivable that an idea could be like a non-idea. Berkeley starts PHK 8 with a rebuttal on behalf of a representational or indirect realist whose position—namely, that we gain knowledge of the world in virtue of our representations (i.e., ideas) of it—he aims to refute. Berkeley argues in PHK 7 that colors and other sensible qualities only exist when they are perceived, that is, they exist only in a mind. This is accepted by his imagined potential opponent. However, the interlocutor then suggests these ideas could be “copies or resemblances” of things existing without the mind, such as matter or material substance. In response to this, Berkeley says:

I answer, an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a colour or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure. If we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. Again, I ask whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? (PHK 8).

Berkeley's Conceivability Claim is made in the following context: If *X* is an idea that represents an original, both of which is, according to Berkeley, admitted by the representational or indirect realist, then as Berkeley points out at the end of PHK 8, this original has to be an idea as well.<sup>16</sup> This is already evident as we cannot even conceive an idea should be like anything else. As the materialist Hylas puts the point in the *Three Dialogues*: “Upon inquiry, I find it is impossible for me to *conceive or understand* how any thing but an idea can be like an idea (my emphasis)” (DHP 206). Despite the different formulation, it is natural to read what Hylas says as essentially a clearer statement of the Conceivability Claim in *Principles* 8. For if we read this claim in the context of PHK 8, it becomes evident that Berkeley's point is *not* to say likeness is inconceivable except between ideas, but that you cannot conceive an idea *that is like a non-idea*.

Claiming we cannot conceive of likeness relations between an idea and a non-idea is not only consistent with Berkeley's acceptance of the impossibility to compare an idea to

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Berkeley is committed to the incomparability of ideas and minds because they are entirely unlike each other, and according to this reading, likeness can be reduced to mental acts of comparing. This is consistent with Berkeley's writings, which suggest that minds and ideas are so different that not even fundamental terms like “exist,” “know,” “thing,” or “being” can be univocally attributed to them (PHK 89 and 142). In other words, the reason that there is no likeness relation between minds and ideas is *not* that we fail to find any agreement when we compare them. Rather, Berkeley thinks no likeness relations obtain between minds and ideas because we cannot compare them in the first place. Thus, Talia Mae Bettcher is right to stress how “extreme” Berkeley's dualism is [see Bettcher, “Berkeley's Dualistic Ontology,” *Analisis Filosofico* 28 (2008): 147–73, esp. 167–68]. I thank one of the anonymous judges of the Turbayne Essay Prize committee for raising this worry.

<sup>16</sup> See also Frankel, “Something–We–Know,” 388–90.

anything but another idea (P3\*), but it also seems to be a direct consequence of P3\*. If you can only compare an idea to another idea, and comparing is necessary and sufficient for a likeness relation to obtain, it follows you cannot conceive of likeness relations between an idea and a non-idea, because such relations *do not exist*—and given Berkeley’s metaphysics, it seems impossible that they ever could. Rather, to paraphrase Philonous (DHP 206), Berkeley is committed to the view that whatever is sensible (i.e., ideas) cannot be like that which is insensible (i.e., non-ideas). To put it differently, what Berkeley draws our attention to in PHK 8 is *not* that we cannot conceive *any* likeness except only between ideas, but that we cannot conceive likeness between anything but ideas *if one relatum is an idea*.

Second, the previous section has established how problematic a restriction of likeness to ideas in general would be for Berkeley. Such a restriction would conflict with his ontological dualism which presupposes that all minds are at least *alike in one respect*—that is, in how (unlike all ideas) each mind is active (PHK 27 and 139; DHP 232–234). Moreover, a restriction of likeness to ideas, which follows from accepting P3 conflicts with Berkeley’s theological commitment to the *imago-dei* thesis, because the latter entails some sort of likeness between the divine and human minds. As Berkeley puts it: “The mind which is pure and spiritual [...] is made in the image of God” (*Works* VI, 88). These problems dissolve however, if we attribute P3\* instead of P3 to Berkeley. So, if Berkeley holds that the only thing that can be compared *with an idea* is another idea, his view is consistent with the view that minds are alike. And that has no bearing on the potential likeness of minds if ideas can only be compared to (and hence resemble) other ideas. To put it differently, just because ideas cannot be compared to minds does not entail that minds cannot be compared with each other. Thus, the fact that the problems that arise from attributing P3 to Berkeley can be avoided if Berkeley holds P3\* offers strong philosophical support for attributing the latter to Berkeley.

Third, if Berkeley holds P3\*, it is still possible to reconstruct an argument for the LP similar to the one Ryan attributes to Berkeley. To highlight the difference, compare Ryan’s reconstruction of a metaphysical argument for the LP which is primarily based on NB 378 (on the left) to my reconstruction which is based on various remarks we can find in Berkeley’s writings (on the right).

P1: Likeness is a relation.  
 P2: There are no relations without comparing.  
 P3: We can compare only ideas.  
 C: No likeness except between our ideas.

P1: Likeness is a relation (cf. TVV 39).  
 P2\*: There are no likeness relations without comparing (cf. PHK 104).  
 P3\*: The only thing that can be compared to an idea is an idea (cf. NB 861).  
 C\*: The only thing that can be like an idea is another idea (cf. PHK 8).

In sum I have argued that Berkeley accepts P1, P2\* and P3\*. If this reading is correct, the conclusion C does not follow anymore and thus the LP cannot be inferred from C. On my reconstruction, however, the LP becomes the conclusion of the argument (i.e., C\*) and does not need to be inferred from a more general claim. Thus, if we attribute P3\* to Berkeley, the argument for the LP can be retained. To put it differently, one of the key



contentions of Ryan's paper can be salvaged without any of its previous problematic consequences.

## Conclusion

My aim in this essay has been to demonstrate that it is possible, in the vein of Ryan, to reconstruct a metaphysical argument for the LP which does not restrict likeness to ideas in general. Working with Ryan's assumption that Berkeley is an anti-realist about relations (i.e., that relations are reducible to mental acts), I have argued that likeness relations can be reduced to mental acts *of comparing*. Next, I have shown that the textual evidence is inconclusive when it comes to the question of whether we should attribute to Berkeley the view that only ideas can be compared. Rather, some of the entries in the *Notebooks* support the idea that Berkeley endorses the view that ideas can only be compared to ideas. As I showed in closing, attributing this latter view to Berkeley (a) is consistent with the way he argues in PHK 8, (b) does not conflict with his dualism or theological commitments, and (c) still allows us to reconstruct an argument for the LP—and does so, crucially, by not restricting likeness to ideas.<sup>17</sup>

Universität Basel  
[manuel.fasko@unibas.ch](mailto:manuel.fasko@unibas.ch)

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