Berkeley's Meta-Ontology:
Bodies, Forces, and the Semantics of 'Exists'*

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Abstract

To the great puzzlement of his readers, Berkeley begins by arguing that nothing exists other than minds and ideas, but concludes by claiming to have defended the existence of bodies. How can Berkeley's idealism amount to such a defense? I introduce resources from Berkeley's philosophy of language, and especially his analysis of the discourse of physics, to defend a novel answer to this question. According to Berkeley, the technical terms of physics are meaningful despite failing to designate any reality; their meaningfulness derives from the useful role they play in organizing and predicting our experience. I argue that Berkeleian bodies have the same status as these theoretical entities: they are mere 'quasi-entities' introduced by our ways of speaking and thinking in order to serve our practical purposes. Berkeley nevertheless considers this to be a defense of the existence of bodies because he endorses a radically deflationary semantics for 'exists.'

Leibniz once said of Berkeley, "The one in Ireland who attacks the reality of bodies ...is one of that sort of men who wants to be known for his paradoxes" (Leibniz 1989, 306). Three centuries later, Berkeley is still known for his paradoxes. Perhaps the most fundamental paradox in Berkeley's philosophy is his vociferous rejection of the claim that he 'attacks the reality of bodies.' Although Berkeley begins by arguing that nothing exists but minds and their ideas, he ends by claiming that he is "more certain" of the existence of bodies "than ...any other philosopher pretend[s] to be" (DHP, 237; cf. N, §80). How precisely is Berkeley's idealism meant to be a defense of the existence of bodies?

In this paper, I introduce resources from Berkeley's philosophy of language, and in particular his analysis of the discourse of physics, to defend a novel answer to this question. In *De Motu*, Berkeley's most extended treatment of the philosophy of physics, Berkeley introduces a distinction between what I will call

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'genuine referring expressions' and 'quasi-referring expressions.' Genuine referring expressions are bits of language used to *name* or *label* entities which exist and have a determinate nature independent of the language. Quasi-referring expressions are terms which function syntactically, and hence inferentially, just like genuine referring expressions, but lack this labeling use. Berkeley's way of drawing this distinction commits him to an anti-Quinean meta-ontology on which one does not incur ontological commitment by quantification, but only by attempting to use a word as a label. In this way, Berkeley accepts Newton's mechanics while avoiding ontological commitment to forces.

On standard interpretations of Berkeley's philosophy, bodies are radically unlike forces. Bodies, on these interpretations, are to be identified with ideas or collections of ideas, and are therefore among the items in Berkeley's ontology. Against this interpretation, I argue that, on Berkeley's view, bodies, like forces, are mere quasi-entities introduced by our linguistic conventions as a technology to aid us in navigating the world of sense experience. This account of Berkeley's theory of bodies, however, only deepens the paradox with which we began: how can a theory on which bodies are artifacts of our ways of thinking and speaking amount to a *defense* of their existence? I argue that Berkeley provides a deflationary analysis of the plain language use of the word 'exists' as applied to bodies, and that by means of this analysis he aims to show that the existence of an actually perceived body can be called into question only by someone who is in the grip of a linguistic confusion (N, §491). Thus Berkeley, like many latter-day ontological deflationists (e.g. Carnap 1950; Price 2009; Thomasson 2009), believes that the philosophers have erred in transforming perfectly reasonable empirical questions – e.g., whether there is a cherry tree in the garden (DHP, 234) – into nonsensical metaphysical questions which cannot be answered by appeal to the senses. The confusion is to be unraveled by careful attention to the proper functioning of plain language 'body' talk and 'existence' claims.

1 Berkeley's Philosophy of Language

1.1 Against the Reification of Meanings

Berkeley's manuscript material shows that the main theses of his philosophy of language were developed in 1708, prior even to the publication of the *Principles* (Belfrage 1985, 1986a, 1986b; Berman 1994, 11-20; Roberts 2007, ch. 2; Brykman 2010). However, Berkeley's most detailed and systematic presentation of his views occurs in the late (1732) work *Alciphron*. In that work, the title character, who serves as a 'freethinking' foil for Berkeley's Christian protagonists, gives the following account of language:

> Words are signs: they do or should stand for ideas; which so far as they suggest they are significant. But words that suggest no ideas are insignificant. He who annexes a clear idea to every word he makes use of speaks sense: but where such ideas are wanting, the speaker utters nonsense . . . Men, not being able immediately to

> communicate their ideas one to another, are obliged to make use of
> sensible signs or words; the use of which is to raise those ideas in
> the hearer, which are in the mind of the speaker: and if they fail of
> this end they serve to no purpose. He who really thinks has a train
> of ideas succeeding each other and connected in his mind: and when
> he expresses himself in discourse, each word suggests a distinct idea
> to the hearer or reader; who by that means has the same train of
> ideas in his, which was in the mind of the speaker or writer (Alc,
> §7.2; cf. PHK, Intro §19).

This view, which Berkeley opposes, holds that a word gets to be meaningful by being associated with some *entity* which is its *meaning* (cf. Quine 1948, 30-31; 1951, 22-23). Successful communication begins with a speaker having such a 'meaning' in mind, and ends with the hearer having that same 'meaning.' I will call this view 'the Theory of Meanings.'

The 'meanings' in vogue in Berkeley's day were *ideas*, but Berkeley is opposed not only to idea-based semantics, but to the reification of meanings more generally. The core of Berkeley's argument against the reification of meanings is his famous critique of abstract ideas. Berkeley insists that abstract ideas are not discoverable in introspection (PHK, Intro §10), and hence that philosophers believe in them only because they are in the grip of a theory: "it is thought that every name has, or ought to have, one only precise and settled signification, which inclines men to think there are certain abstract, determinate ideas, which constitute the true and only immediate signification of each general name" (Intro §18). The word 'triangle' is obviously a meaningful bit of language. Thus, according to the theory of meanings, 'triangle' must have a meaning and this meaning would have to be *general*: that is, it would have to apply equally to any triangle. Berkeley's argument against abstract ideas is, in part, an argument that there are not, and cannot be, any such general meanings. This has implications not only for the philosophy of language, but also for the theory of mental representation. Berkeley holds that no ideas are *intrinsically* general. Ideas, like words, can represent generally only by conventional rules for using them as signs (Intro §12).[1]

According to Berkeley, the word 'triangle' is meaningful despite not having a meaning. More generally, Berkeley denies that the Theory of Meanings accurately captures the conditions for the meaningfulness of general terms. Furthermore, Berkeley says, the Theory of Meanings is based on a view of the ends of language which is far too narrow to capture the facts:

> the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only
> end of language, as is commonly supposed. There are other ends,
> as the raising of some passion, the exciting to, or deterring from
> an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition; to

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1. This represents a departure from Berkeley's earlier view in the *Manuscript Introduction* where he had denied the existence of general ideas altogether (MI, §20). For discussion, see Belfrage 1986b, 326-328.

which the former is in many cases barely subservient, and sometimes entirely omitted, when these can be obtained without it, as I think not infrequently happens in the familiar use of language (PHK, Intro §20).

We can, then, attribute two theses to Berkeley: first, that no single idea could possibly be the meaning of a general word like 'triangle' and, second, that language is sometimes used for other purposes than the communication of ideas. This is enough to constitute a departure from the then-standard idea-based semantics. However, there is considerable controversy as to just how radical Berkeley's departure is, how far Berkeley goes toward providing a positive theory of his own, and what is the nature of this theory.

1.2   Meaning and Use

Both in the Introduction to the *Principles* and in *Alciphron* VII Berkeley seems more intent on the negative project of debunking the opposing view than the positive project of setting up his own. In the *Principles*, Berkeley introduces the discussion by writing, "In order to prepare the mind of the reader for the easier conceiving what follows, it is proper to premise somewhat, by way of introduction, concerning the nature and abuse of language" (Intro §6). The Theory of Meanings (and, more specifically, the doctrine of abstraction to which it leads) is here seen as a confusion which we need to get out of the way before we can proceed to investigate the 'principles of human knowledge.' In *Alciphron*, Berkeley is concerned to rebut the objection that core Christian doctrines contain words which do not correspond to ideas, and hence are meaningless and so not possible objects of belief (Alc, §7.4).[2] Accordingly, it is sometimes thought that Berkeley is engaged in a much narrower project than providing a general theory of language. Narrow interpretations are given, for instance, by Jonathan Bennett and David Berman (Bennett 1971, §10; Berman 1994, 145-148). According to Bennett and Berman, Berkeley continues to hold that 'cognitive' language is meaningful in virtue of the expression of ideas. What Berkeley has done is only, first, to point out that some words, such as 'triangle,' stand for many ideas rather than one and, second, to point out that there are non-cognitive uses of language.

Berkeley's actual intention is far more radical than Bennett and Berman take it to be. Although Berkeley does not develop the matter in as much detail as we might like, his aim in *Alciphron* VII is to provide at least the groundwork for an alternative approach to the philosophy of language, an approach which contains important anticipations of the later philosophy of Wittgenstein (see Flew [1974] 1993).

In *Alciphron*, when the principal protagonist Euphranor argues that no one idea could possibly be *the* meaning of a general term, Alciphron at first interprets

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2. This objection was due to Toland 1696. On the importance of Toland and his critics in Berkeley's intellectual context, see Belfrage 1985; Berman 1994, 11-17, 148-50; Pearce, forthcoming(a); forthcoming(b), §8.

him as Bennett and Berman do: "It is your opinion then, that words become general by representing an indefinite number of particular ideas . . . Whenever therefore I hear a general name, it must be supposed to excite some one or other particular idea of that species in my mind." However, Euphranor explicitly rejects this view: "I cannot say so either. Pray, *Alciphron*, does it seem to you necessary, that as often as the word man occurs in reading or discourse you must form in your mind the idea of a particular man?" (Alc, §7.7 [1732 ed.]). The intended answer, and the one Alciphron gives, is 'no.' Thus, as A. D. Woozley says, "Berkeley is making a general point about symbols (which he calls signs), that not only does intelligent and intelligible handling of them not require a concomitant shadow sequence of images in the stream of consciousness, but it does not require any accompaniment at all" (Woozley 1976, 431-432).

The Theory of Meanings is, according to Berkeley, radically mistaken, for language is simply not about transmitting to others the ideas one has. Furthermore, Berkeley's thesis here is not confined, as Bennett says, to the "periphery of language" (Bennett 1971, 54), for Berkeley does not merely deny that communication of ideas is the *only* end of language; he also denies that it is the *chief* end of language (PHK, Intro §20).

In response to Euphranor's arguments that words are not always used to suggest ideas, Alciphron asks, "what other use can we assign them?" (Alc, §7.7 [1732 ed.]). Euphranor responds, "[l]et us then inquire what [the use of words] is? and see if we can make sense of our daily practice. Words, it is agreed, are signs: it may not therefore be amiss to examine the use of other signs, in order to know that of words" (§7.8). Euphranor goes on to examine the use of two simple sign systems: the 'counters' (chips) used in card games, and the notation used for financial accounting.

What is important to note here is the way in which Berkeley has set up the question, and the approach he takes to answering it. Like Wittgenstein, Berkeley begins by rejecting the theory of meanings (see Wittgenstein 1953, §1.1). Also like Wittgenstein, Berkeley takes the failure of this theory to motivate a new inquiry into the nature of language, which inquiry, he says, must be driven by attention to "our daily practice." Finally, Berkeley, like Wittgenstein, adopts the methodology of beginning by examination of simpler sign systems (what Wittgenstein called 'language games'[3]) in the hope that this will shed light on the complex phenomena of language.

When there is this much similarity in how two philosophers set up a problem, it is hardly surprising to find a degree of similarity in their solutions. This is indeed what we find. Berkeley is focused throughout *Alciphron* VII on the *practical use* of words to accomplish specific ends in a speaker community. At the conclusion of the discussion, Euphranor gives the following summary of its results:

> Thus much, upon the whole, may be said of all signs: that they do not always suggest ideas signified to the mind: that when they suggest ideas, they are not general abstract ideas: that they have

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3. See, e.g., Wittgenstein (1958a) 2009, 105-106; (1958b) 2009, 179-185; 1953, §1.7.

> other uses besides barely standing for and exhibiting ideas, such as
> raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of
> mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of that happiness, which
> is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that
> sets rational agents at work: that the true end of speech, reason,
> science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees, is not merely, or
> principally, or always the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather
> something of an active, operative nature, tending to a conceived
> good; which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas
> marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should
> be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such ideas to the mind
> (Alc, §7.17 [1732 ed.]).

Euphranor here speaks of "the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees." This is clearly *not* a narrow thesis about religious language, but rather a general thesis about language, reason, and belief. The claim is that the use of signs, which is essentially involved in language, reason, and belief, is a kind of practical technology for navigating the world in order to get at "a conceived good."

This 'conceived good' is to be obtained by the association of signs with various sorts of conventional rules. One kind of rule is the definition of a general term which tells us to which things that word may be applied (PHK, Intro §18). Berkeley also recognizes a variety of emotional and practical connections of words as among the rules of use which constitute their meaning (see, e.g., MI, §§36-37, 41-42; PHK, §20; Alc, §7.8).[4]

1.3   Formalism about Inference

One kind of linguistic rule which will become important later on is the sort found in formal reasoning in mathematics and natural science. In both the *Principles* and *Alciphron*, Berkeley discusses at some length the nature and origin of arithmetic. In *Alciphron*, the matter is presented as follows:

> If we suppose rude mankind without the use of language, it may
> be presumed, they would be ignorant of arithmetic: but the use of
> names, by the repetition whereof in a certain order they might ex-
> press endless degrees of number, would be the first step towards that
> science. The next step would be, to devise ... [a] marking or nota-
> tion [which] would, in proportion as it was apt and regular, facilitate
> the invention and application of general rules, to assist the mind in

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4. Berkeley particularly emphasizes that the main point of much moral and religious discourse is to effect emotions and actions. Some scholars (e.g. Belfrage 1986a; Berman 1994; Belfrage 2007) have taken this as evidence that, during at least some periods of his career, Berkeley endorsed a theory of 'emotive meaning' which he applied to ethics and revealed religion. For criticism of emotive approaches, see Jakapi 2002, 2003; Williford 2003; Jakapi 2007; Williford and Jakapi 2009. It is not necessary, for present purposes, to take a position on the details of Berkeley's theory of 'operative language' (as Williford 2003 calls it).

> reasoning and judging, in extending, recording, and communicating
> its knowledge about numbers: in which theory and operations the
> mind is immediately occupied about the signs or notes, by media-
> tion of which it is directed to act about things ... [T]he science of
> arithmetic, in its rise, operations, rules, and theorems, is altogether
> conversant about the artificial use of signs, names, and characters
> (Alc, §7.15 [1732 ed.]; cf. PHK, §§121-122).

Berkeley's view here has obvious affinities with *mathematical formalism*, the
view that mathematical reasoning consists merely in the manipulation of sym-
bols according to conventional rules (Baum 1972; Brook 1973, 152-155; Jesseph
1993, 106-114; Schwartz 2010). According to Berkeley, arithmetic proceeds by
just this sort of "computing in signs" (PHK, §121). A conventional sign sys-
tem becomes a genuine *science*, rather than a mere notation game, when it has
practical application (PHK, §119; Alc, §§7.14-16).

What is of crucial importance for our purposes is that Berkeley takes the
sign systems of arithmetic and algebra as a model for understanding language
and reasoning more generally. Berkeley's character Euphranor makes use of the
following illustration:

> the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of a negative square, has
> its use in logistic operations, although it is impossible to form an
> idea of any such quantity. And what is true of algebraic signs, is
> also true of words or language, modern algebra being in fact a more
> short, apposite, and artificial sort of language (Alc, §7.17).

On the basis of this and similar passages (e.g. PHK, Intro §16; Alc, §7.8), we
can conclude that Berkeley means his formalism to be a general account of
inference, not only in mathematics but also in natural language. Furthermore,
as the inferential connections of 'the algebraic mark, which denotes the root of
a negative square' are sufficient to guarantee the meaningfulness of that sign,
despite the fact that it does not stand for an idea, so words which have inferential
connections may thereby get to be meaningful, even if they do not stand for
ideas.[5]

1.4 The Rules of Language

In Berkeley's view, a sign gets to be significant (meaningful) by being associated
with conventional rules whereby it comes to serve some practical purpose. These
may be rules of thought, permitting or requiring that we have certain ideas, but
the rules may also govern feelings and actions. Furthermore, there are rules
of inference by which we directly manipulate signs to move from one sign to

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5. Berkeley applies this principle to argue for the meaningfulness of the technical jargon of
Trinitarian theology (Alc, §7.12). This is powerful evidence against Berman's interpretation
on which 'religious mysteries' like the doctrine of the Trinity are to be understood as emotive
utterances in A. J. Ayer's sense (Berman 1994, 155). Ayer holds explicitly that emotive words
stand for 'mere pseudo-concepts' which stand in no inferential relations to anything (Ayer
1952, 107).

another. A language is simply a complex system of such signs (Alc, §4.7, 4.12 [1752 ed.]; TVV, §40). Berkeley, like Wittgenstein, holds that the meaning of a word is its use in our "daily practice" (Alc, §7.8; cf. Wittgenstein 1953, §§1.20, 43).

However, to say that 'meaning is use,' or that language is to be understood by attention to the rules governing our 'daily practice' is so far only to take a certain approach, or adopt a certain vocabulary, in describing the phenomena of language. The slogan 'meaning is use' becomes a substantive theoretical claim, ruling out alternative theories, only when some constraints are placed on the rules of use to be permitted (Craig 1982, 546). Thus, for instance, Locke could say that the rule for the use of 'a raven is black' states that one may assert this only when one is mentally joining the idea of *black* to the idea of *raven*. Berkeley departs from Locke, and anticipates Wittgenstein, in denying that most or all of the philosophically interesting rules of language are of this sort (see Wittgenstein 1953, §§1.1-5, 26-27). Berkeley moves even further away from Locke by attending to a crucial restriction on the possible rules of language: they must be rules which individuals can learn to follow. This constraint turns out to be quite important to Berkeley's metaphysical conclusions.

According to Berkeley, "what is done by rule must proceed from something that understands the rule" (Siris, §257). From this it follows that in order for language to be a rule-governed activity, speakers must understand the rules. This, however, appears to involve Berkeley in a problematic circularity. Berkeley holds that general thought is possible only by the use of signs (Alc, §7.16). For an idea to be a sign, it must be used according to a rule. Now we have Berkeley saying that to follow a rule one must understand the rule. But rules are general, hence understanding a rule would appear to require general thought. One must understand rules before one can follow rules, and one must follow rules before one can understand rules.[6]

Fortunately, Berkeley elsewhere explicitly recognizes that not all language use involves explicit, articulable knowledge of rules: "Two ways there are of learning a language, either by rule or by practice: a man may well read [a language] without understanding the grammar of it, or being able to say by what rule a thing is so or so" (PHK, §108 [1710 ed.]). So understanding a language evidently does not require the ability to *state* the rules of the language or, presumably, to think of those rules explicitly. Yet the *Siris* passage requires *some* kind of understanding of rules. A few pages earlier, Berkeley gives an explicit account of the kind of 'understanding' he has in mind: "we understand [a thing] when we can interpret or tell what it signifies" (Siris, §253). This 'interpretation' is explicitly connected with *prediction*: "According to Socrates, you and the cook may judge of a dish on the table equally well, but while the dish is making, the cook can better foretell what will ensue from this or that manner of composing it" (§253). For this reason the cook is said to 'understand' the rules of cooking: not because he can state those rules, but because he foresees

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6. This difficulty belongs to a well-known family of circularity and/or regress problems in the philosophy of language and logic. See, e.g., Quine (1935) 1976, 103-106; Wittgenstein 1953, §§1.84-87; Quine (1954) 1976, 115; Sellars 1954, 204-206; Dummett 1978, 217.

what outcomes will follow according to them. In this case, the rules understood are not the rules the cook himself follows, but rather the laws of nature whereby the cook's actions have predictable outcomes. The point, however, is that to understand a rule is to be able to 'see' what action the rule will require in any imagined circumstance. To follow a rule is to perform (or refrain from) an action *because* one sees that this is what the rule requires in (what one takes to be) the present circumstance.[7] However, if this is what rule-following is, then one cannot follow a rule unless one has some independent grasp of the conditions in which the rule gives instructions. That is, if the rule says that agents in circumstance C do A, then, in order to follow this rule an agent must have a prior capacity to recognize whether she is in circumstance C. Berkeley's view is, thus, that rule-following *does not* require the ability to state the rule one follows, but *does* require the ability to recognize the conditions of the rule's application.[8]

As will become clear below, this constraint on the rules of language – that we have pre-linguistic access to the conditions in which they command or prohibit actions – is actually doing a great deal of work in Berkeley's system, for this is what ensures that our 'body' talk cannot be ontologically committing. According to Berkeley, no pre-linguistic mental 'grasp' of bodies (or forces) is possible, and this guarantees that talk of bodies is not genuinely referential. In order to gain a clearer view of this, we turn now to a closer examination of the rules constituting the referential function of language.

2   Genuine Reference and Quasi-Reference

Central to the project of Berkeley's *De Motu* (1721) is a distinction between two uses of language, which we may call 'genuine reference' and 'quasi-reference.' Genuine referring expressions, like 'red,' are used to label objects (the red things) which exist independently of the sign system. Quasi-referring expressions are *syntactically* just like genuine referring expressions, but differ *semantically* in that they do not label objects in the way genuine referring expressions do.[9] The central thesis of *De Motu* is that the theoretical terms of physics are quasi-referring expressions. Thus Berkeley says quite explicitly that "'Force' . . . is used . . . *as if* it signified a quality" (DM, §5, emphasis added).[10] Quasi-referring expressions can be meaningful and can be used to express truths despite the fact

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7. Berkeley shows no awareness of any of the philosophical difficulties about rule-following which were later raised by Wittgenstein.

8. This is analogous to the view about epistemic principles which William Alston dubbed, 'internalist externalism' (Alston 1988).

That Berkeley holds this view about rules and rule-following is confirmed by his arguments in defense of his theory of vision. Berkeley concedes that we *comply with* the geometrical rules which form the foundation of Cartesian optics (NTV, §78; TVV, §§31-32, 37, 43), but insists that we cannot possibly *follow* these rules, since we are unaware of the 'lines and angles' used by the Cartesians (NTV, §§9-13; Alc, §4.8).

9. Berkeley's distinction here is similar to one recently defended by Hofweber 2009.

10. In the original Latin, 'as if' is in fact not 'quasi' but 'tamquam.' I will refrain from introducing the atrocious barbarism 'tamquam-referring expression.'

that they are not used to label anything (see Alc, §7.10). Quasi-referring expressions are not nonsense, and it is not the introduction or use of quasi-referring expressions which, according to Berkeley, is the cause of philosophical error. Errors stem, instead, from confusion between genuine referring expressions and quasi-referring expressions (DM, §6).

Berkeley need not (and, in my view, should not) object to such English sentences as "Gravitational attraction is one of the things referred to by 'force.'" Instead, he can merely say that the English verb 'to refer' is ambiguous and, when doing philosophy, it is important that we distinguish between its two uses – that is, between what I am calling 'genuine reference' and 'quasi-reference.'[11] As a result, I will make no attempt to avoid using such locutions as 'talk about forces;' locutions such as this one make perfectly good sense, on Berkeley's view as I understand it, but one must realize that such talk is not *about* anything in the way talk about red things is about something. Insofar as forces can be said to exist at all, they exist as an artifact of our scientific theories. Red things, on the other hand, exist quite independently of any sign system we adopt. The distinction between referring expressions and quasi-referring expressions forms the heart of Berkeley's meta-ontology: one incurs an 'ontological commitment' when, and only when, one attempts to use a word or phrase as a genuine referring expression.

2.1   Nominalism and General Terms

The use theory of language Berkeley develops in *Alciphron*, does not give referring the same foundational status it has in typical versions of the Theory of Meanings. Proponents of the Theory of Meanings typically accept the Fregean thesis that, in order for a sentence to be true, each of its (categorematic) terms must succeed in referring.[12]   Meaningful words, according to the Theory of Meanings, are associated with meanings, and these meanings (aim to) pick out objects in the world; if they do not do so, then the utterance has failed of its purpose.

Against this kind of view, Berkeley's use theory emphasizes the *plurality* of aims and purposes of language: referring to objects is just one among many things we do with words. Reference is not essential to the successful use of language, as the Fregean thesis supposes. Nevertheless, the use theorist should not deny that there is such a thing as reference. Even Wittgenstein acknowledges the existence of language-games which involve calling things by names (Wittgenstein 1953, §1.27).

Wittgenstein emphasizes a number of difficulties about this concept of 'labeling,' 'calling,' or 'naming,' which Berkeley shows no sign of having recognized. Berkeley does show considerable subtlety in dealing with questions about how a general term can be applied to any of the members of a diverse collection of

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11. Berkeley explicitly endorses this kind of move with respect to words like 'cause' and 'force' (Siris, §§154-155, 220).

12. This principle continues to be wielded with some frequency in ontological and meta-ontological disputes. See, e.g., Eklund 2009, 145-150.

ideas (see MI, §§18-20, 31-32; NTV, §128; PHK, §§12, 15-16), but he assumes throughout that there is no difficulty about what it means to call a particular idea by a particular name on a particular occasion. For purposes of this paper, I will likewise assume that these particular instances of labeling are unproblematic.

Berkeley follows Locke in holding that the 'ends of language' require general terms (MI, §19; see Locke [1690] 1975, §3.1.3). Locke, however, concludes from this that the use of language requires abstract ideas, a conclusion which Berkeley, of course, rejects. Instead, Berkeley insists, "a word becomes general by being ... made the Sign, not of a General Idea but, of many particular Ideas" (MI, §17). Ideas which are called by the same name are therefore "said to be of the Same Sort" (§19), and are grouped by similarity (NTV, §128). Berkeley is a nominalist in the strict, historical sense: he holds that it is by virtue of being called by a common name that objects belong to a common sort.[13] He happily accepts the consequence that, because the linguistic conventions governing sortal terms have vague boundaries, sorts themselves will have vague boundaries (MI, §19).

A word gets to be a genuine referring expression by being governed by a rule which tells us to use it to label things. Thus, one of the rules governing 'triangle' is the rule given by its definition, "a plane surface comprehended by three right lines" (PHK, Intro §18; cf. MI, §32). This rule tells us that anything satisfying that definition can be called 'triangle,' and this regardless of what other features it might have, for "in the definition it is not said whether the surface be great or small, black or white, nor whether the sides are long or short, equal or unequal, nor with what angles they are inclined to each other" (PHK, Intro §18).

As we observed above, Berkeley must, on pain of circularity, acknowledge that not all linguistic rules are learned explicitly, and he does acknowledge this. Although Berkeley does not discuss the learning of general term rules at length, he does discuss at some length the learning of the rules governing 'operative' words like 'reward' and 'good things' (MI, §§36-39, 42). This discussion makes it clear that these rules are learned by environmental conditioning which leads to habitual action (Berman 1994, 162). That this is Berkeley's view is further confirmed by his account of *suggestion* in his writings on vision where Berkeley holds that environmental conditioning leads to habitual, and even involuntary, 'interpretation' of visual stimulus (NTV, §§25, 51, 145; TVV, §§9-10, 68). This 'interpretation,' Berkeley explicitly holds, is just the same, psychologically speaking, as the interpretation of human languages (NTV, §51; DHP, 174; Alc, §4.11; TVV, §10). This sort of conditioned rule-following is what is involved in learning a rule 'by practice' (PHK, §108 [1710 ed.]).

This, then, is Berkeley's theory of genuine referring expressions: *some* words (as we will soon discover, only a privileged few) are governed by rules which

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13. Berkeley says at one point that he is in disagreement with "that Sect of Schoolmen Call'd Nominals," but he characterizes this 'sect' as holding that general terms stand for "Universal notions or Ideas" (MI, §19a), which shows that he actually means to refer to the conceptualists, i.e. those philosophers who hold that generality arises from (non-linguistic) human *thought*, and not the nominalists in the narrow sense, who take generality to arise from *language*.

permit us to use them to label things. By experience, we internalize certain rules for calling some things, and not others, by these names. We will not generally be able to state, or understand statements of, these rules until after we have begun following them and, in general, our explicit statements of them will fall short of capturing the full complexity of our actual practice (PHK, §108). Once we have learned these rules, the word in question comes to be a name of (to refer to) all those things to which the relevant rule permits the word to be applied. It is thus not a name only of the things to which it has actually been applied: the rules followed by a particular speaker (or community) may give a definite verdict on the classification of objects which that speaker (or community) has never actually classified. However, due to the 'fuzziness' of the boundaries of sorts, the rule will not *always* give a determinate verdict.

2.2   What We Can Name

We come now to a crucial question which is a driving force behind Berkeley's ontology: what are the necessary conditions for (genuine) naming? Berkeley's view about the necessary conditions for rule-following provides an answer. Since the rules for the use of these general terms turn on judgments of *similarity* between objects, we must be capable of rendering such judgments of similarity *prior to learning the word.* Thus, in order to learn the proper labeling use of the word 'red,' one must have prior acquaintance with some individual red things and the capacity to compare new objects of experience for similarity with the paradigmatic red things. This places limits on the expressive power of language:

> When upon perception of an idea I range it under this or that sort, it is because it is perceived after the same manner, or because it has likeness or conformity with, or affects me in the same way as, the ideas of the sort I rank it under. In short, it must not be entirely new, but have something in it old and already perceived by me. It must, I say, have so much at least in common with the ideas I have before known and named as to make me give it the same name with them (NTV, §128).

Ideas which I have never had before can have a place in my classification scheme (words I already know can name them) if, but only if, they bear some similarity to ideas I *have* had before.

This similarity condition explains what Berkeley means when he says that "we conceive the ideas that are in the minds of other spirits by means of our own, which we suppose to be resemblances of them" (PHK, §140): although I am not in a position to label ideas I do not have, nevertheless the labeling rule I follow in connection with my word 'red' gives a determinate answer to the question of whether your idea is red. This explains how I can meaningfully say such things as 'there is a red idea not perceived by me.'[14]

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14. Edward Craig uses similar considerations to answer Wittgensteinian objections to the possibility of using public language to refer to private mental episodes (Craig 1982).

We can now see that the possible scope of the (genuine) referential function of language is, for Berkeley, strictly limited by the scope of our pre-linguistic awareness. Berkeley holds that my pre-linguistic awareness is limited to reflective awareness of myself, together with the actions I perform and ideas I perceive (PHK, §§1-2, 142; DHP, 231-234).[15] The 'ideas' in question are particular, fully determinate sense images which do not intrinsically (i.e., apart from conventional rules for their use) represent anything other than themselves.[16] It follows that the entire classification scheme of our genuinely referring terms is based only on the similarities and differences among these three classes of objects of awareness: my ideas, my actions, and my mind. Furthermore, since ideas can be general only in the same way words are general – that is, by signification according to rules (PHK, Intro §12) – human thought cannot extend beyond human language in such a way as to allow us to think of things we cannot name.

2.3 Avoiding Commitment to Forces

In *De Motu*, Berkeley applies his philosophy of language to the discourse of physics in order to rebut the charge, leveled by Leibniz and his followers, that Newtonian mechanics has unsavory metaphysical implications (see, e.g., Leibniz and Clarke [1717] 1969, §§9.118-123).[17] The first sentence of the work reads, "In order to discover the truth, it is most important that one avoid being obstructed by words that are poorly understood" (DM, §1). Such words, Berkeley indicates, include "'solicitation of gravity', 'striving', 'dead forces', etc." (§2).[18] As his argument progresses, Berkeley focuses, by way of example, on the word 'force.' This word, Berkeley says, "is used . . . as if it signified a quality that is known and is distinct from motion, shape, and every other sensible thing and from every affection of living things" (§5). In other words, force is attributed to bodies in

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Note that this is only intended to explain how I can "apprehend the possibility of the existence of other spirits and ideas" (DHP, 232) or, in other words, how I am able coherently to think and talk about such spirits and ideas. The question of what reason I can have for supposing there actually are such spirits or ideas is beyond the scope of this paper.

15. The nature of the 'reflexion' by which Berkeley says I know my self and my own actions is a vexed question. For discussion see Cornman 1970; Adams 1973; Tipton 1974, ch. 7; Woozley 1976; Winkler 1989, ch. 9; Bettcher 2007; Roberts 2007, ch. 3; Cummins 2007.

16. This thesis is defended by Bolton 1987. Bolton's interpretation has been criticized by Muehlmann 1992, 51-55 and Rickless 2013, 113-115, but responding to these objections would take us too far afield.

17. Earlier treatments of *De Motu* saw it primarily as an attack on Newton. See, e.g., Popper (1953–1954) 1970, 130. However, it is now widely recognized that Berkeley's main targets are Leibniz and his followers. See, e.g., Jesseph 1992, §2.3; Downing 1995, 199; 2005, 238. Of course, Berkeley's project will require a 'rational reconstruction' of Newtonian mechanics, and Newton would likely have rejected many of Berkeley's suggestions, so Berkeley should not be seen as defending Newton or Newtonianism generally; what he aims to do is to show that Newtonian *mechanics* can be defended without defending Newtonian *metaphysics* (Peterschmitt 2003, 184-187, 196-197). Luc Peterschmitt aptly characterizes Berkeley as an 'ultra-Newtonian' who seeks "to defend Newtonianism against its own metaphysical ghosts" (197).

18. The Latin terms of the original text are 'solicitatio gravitatis,' 'conatus,' and 'vires mortuae,' respectively.

much the way sensible qualities are attributed to bodies, but force is not one of our sensible ideas, nor is it one of those states or actions of the mind of which we are aware. Yet, in Berkeley's view, there are no other known qualities than these (DM, §40). One might expect, therefore, that Berkeley would seek to eliminate 'force' talk. However, in *Alciphron* Berkeley vehemently (and no doubt rightly) rejects this radical course. After arguing that there is (and can be) no idea corresponding to the word 'force,' Euphranor continues as follows:

> if by considering this doctrine of force, men arrive at the knowledge of many inventions in Mechanics, and are taught to frame engines, by means of which things difficult and otherwise impossible may be performed; and if the same doctrine, which is so beneficial here below, serves also as a key to discover the nature of the celestial motions; shall we deny that it is of use, either in practice or speculation, because we have no distinct idea of force? (Alc, §7.10)

Berkeley needs, then, to secure the meaningfulness of 'force.' Given his theory of language, what this requires is that he explain how 'force' is used according to conventional rules to accomplish some purpose. This is precisely what we find him doing. In Berkeley's view, the aim of physics is to "direct us how to act and teach us what to expect" (Siris, §234). Especially in *De Motu*, Berkeley emphasizes the role of formal, mathematical methods in this process:

> in mechanics, notions are initially established – that is, definitions, and first general statements about motion – from which more remote and less general conclusions are subsequently deduced by a mathematical method . . . [Thus] the motions of any parts of the system of the world, and the phenomena that depend on them, become known and determined by applying the universal theorems of mechanics. This is all that a physicist should aim to realize (DM, §38).

The aim of physics is to produce a formal deductive system "by which the secrets of nature are revealed, and the system of the world would be subjected to human calculations" (§66). The notion of force plays a crucial role in this system, and it is by means of this role that the word 'force' comes to have meaning (Peterschmitt 2003, 191; Downing 2005, 249).

It is for this reason that Berkeley denies that forces have any essence or nature (DM, §67), or indeed that they even *exist* (§39), apart from the role they play in some particular physical theory. 'Force' is used syntactically in the same way as a genuine referring expression. Hence, given Berkeley's formalism about inference, it can figure in reasoning in just the same way as a genuine referring expression. However, 'force' cannot possibly get its meaning by being used to label anything. This is because we have no language- or theory-independent grasp of forces (cf. Downing 1995, 205-208).

Berkeley insists that 'force' fails to refer, yet he concedes that 'force' talk is essential to a scientific theory he accepts, namely, Newtonian mechanics. Indeed, Berkeley insists that physics would be impossible without the introduction

of some such quasi-referring terms (DM, §§38-39). Thus Berkeley is committed to the rejection of Quine's criterion of ontological commitment (Quine 1948). Berkeley denies that when one accepts a scientific theory which ineliminably names or quantifies over a putative class of entities one thereby incurs an ontological commitment to those entities. For Berkeley, one incurs an ontological commitment when one attempts to use a word as label. The argument of *De Motu* is an argument that no such labeling use can coherently co-exist with the rules for the use of the word 'force' in physics.

3   Bodies

According to Berkeley, the physical realist's mistake is to think that "'force', 'gravity', and similar words ... are used to signify certain natures" (DM, §6). This is a linguistic confusion (§1) which leads to pointless disputes which interfere with the real purpose of physics, which is to "direct us how to act and teach us what to expect" (Siris, §234). We will be better able to go about the business of physics if we pay attention to the use of such words and thereby come to realize that these things "have no stable essence in the nature of things" (DM, §67).

In the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley's character Philonous gives a strikingly similar account of the error of the materialist.[19] Philonous had argued in the first dialogue that perceptual relativity lands the materialist in either contradiction or skepticism. "Suppose now one of your hands hot, and the other cold, and that they are both at once put into the same vessel of water, in an intermediate state; will not the water seem cold to one hand and warm to the other?" (DHP, 179). If the materialist trusts her senses, she must conclude that the water is both cold and warm – a contradiction. But distrust of the senses is, for Berkeley, the hallmark of skepticism (PHK, §§40, 101; DHP, 167, 173, 211, 237, 244-245).

In the third dialogue, Hylas argues that Philonous's (i.e., Berkeley's) view faces the same objection: we perceive the same body as having many different, contradictory sensible qualities, often at the same time. If, then, the existence and nature of body is given in sensory perception, the same thing has contradictory qualities. Philonous responds:

> What ... if our ideas are variable; what if our senses are not in all circumstances affected with the same appearances? It will not thence follow, they are not to be trusted, or that they are inconsistent either with themselves or anything else, except it be with your preconceived notion of (I know not what) one single, unchanged, unperceivable, real nature, marked by each name; which prejudice seems to have taken its rise from not rightly understanding the common language of men speaking of several distinct ideas, as united

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19. Following Berkeley, I use the term 'materialist' to refer to those who believe that sensible qualities inhere in a mind-independent 'material substratum.' The 'physical realist' is one who takes the theoretical terms of physics to have ontological import, i.e., to be genuine referring expressions.

> into one thing by the mind. And indeed there is cause to suspect
> several erroneous conceits of the philosophers are owing to the same
> original, while they began to build their schemes, not so much on
> notions as words, which were framed by the vulgar, merely for con-
> veniency and dispatch in the common actions of life, without any
> regard to speculation (DHP, 245-246).

The materialist is confused about plain language *in just the same way* the physical realist is confused about the formal language of physics. Notice specifically, three parallels between Berkeley's diagnoses of the errors of the physical realist and the materialist: (1) both err in supposing that the words in question designate stable 'real natures' existing independently of the sign system; (2) both make this error because they are in the grip of the Theory of Meanings; (3) in both cases, the grip of the Theory of Meanings is to be broken (in good Wittgensteinian fashion) by attention to the *practical purpose* of the discourse. Given the parallel diagnosis, it is reasonable to expect a parallel cure. This, I will now argue, is exactly what we find in Berkeley's statements regarding the nature of bodies: bodies, like forces, are mere quasi-entities whose existence and nature are the creations of our linguistic conventions. 'Body'-talk differs from 'force'-talk only in that humans have been using it from time immemorial (cf. James 1907, lecture 5; Carnap 1950, §2).

3.1   Bodies as Linguistic Constructions

There are two crucial passages in which Berkeley lays out his view of the nature of bodies. In the first of these, Berkeley says that when

> several [sensible qualities] are observed to accompany each other,
> they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one
> thing. Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and
> consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one
> distinct thing, signified by the name 'apple'. Other collections of
> ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a brook, and the like things (PHK,
> §1).

This lines up with a passage from the *Dialogues* where Philonous says that:

> men combine together several ideas, apprehended by divers senses,
> or by the same sense at different times or in different circumstances,
> but observed however to have some connection in nature, either with
> respect to co-existence or succession; all which they refer to one name
> and consider as one thing (DHP, 245).

A body, according to Berkeley, is 'constituted by' certain ideas which "are united into one thing (or have one name given them) by the mind" (249). Note, however, that, although at the beginning of the *Principles* passage Berkeley says that "*they* [the sensible qualities] come to be marked by one name," his explanation of how this occurs does not involve the *collection* being called by

that name, nor does it involve any of the ideas *in* the collection being called by that name. Rather, Berkeley says that the "colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence" are "accounted one distinct thing," and *that thing* is called 'apple.' Furthermore, Berkeley's use of the phrase 'and so' strongly suggests that the ideas in question come to be 'reputed as one thing' *by means of* their association with a name.

In the *Dialogues*, Berkeley says that these various ideas are "refer[red] to one name and consider[ed] as one thing." Berkeley does say that the use of the name is somehow tied up with the ideas which are grouped together by their "connection in nature," and this implies that the use of the word 'apple' provides a way of talking about the "colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence." It does not, however, imply that the word 'apple' is a *label* for these ideas, either individually or collectively. Rather, 'apple' provides a way of talking about these ideas *in the same way that 'force' provides a way of talking about motion.*[20] Introducing the 'thing language' gives us a way to organize and predict our ideas, a useful way of *structuring* the deliverances of the senses, helping us to get around in the world.[21]

It may be objected that Berkeley does sometimes say that a body (or thing) is a 'combination' of ideas or sensible qualities (NTV, §109; PHK, §§12, 38). My interpretation does not, however, deny that the existence of a body consists in certain ideas being combined together. What I deny is that this combination is some pre-linguistic entity waiting to receive a label, like a sensible quality. Instead, it is *by the conventions for the use of the name* that the ideas are combined.

3.2   Alternative Interpretations

The standard scholarly interpretations of Berkeley's account of bodies divide into two categories, which may be called 'subjunctive interpretations' and 'idea interpretations' (cf. Winkler 1989, ch. 7; Dicker 2011, ch. 14). According to subjunctive interpretations, Berkeley (like later analytic phenomenalists) takes statements about bodies to be equivalent in meaning to statements about what humans would perceive under certain conditions. According to idea interpretations, Berkeley identifies each body with some idea or collection of ideas. Standard interpretations, of either family, fail to take seriously Berkeley's remarks about the function of the names of bodies. Furthermore, they fail to get the epistemological facts about Berkeleian bodies right: Berkeley wishes to hold, on the one hand, that we (already) have certainty about the existence and nature of bodies by means of our senses but, on the other hand, there is still

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20. On 'force' as a tool for talking about motion, see DM, §§6, 22; Siris, §240.

21. Similar ideas are expressed by Quine 1948, 35-37 and Carnap 1950, §2. Tipton 1974, 210 appears (though somewhat ambiguously) to be making a similar suggestion about Berkeley's view of bodies. Elsewhere, however, Tipton says that, on Berkeley's view, 'body' talk, though convenient, "involve[s] a radical distortion of the facts" (223). Here I must disagree. The facts are not distorted by the ordinary use of body talk, but by the philosophers' assumption that the names of bodies are genuine referring expressions.

much more to be learned by empirical investigation. Standard interpretations cannot hold these two epistemological theses together.

The failure of the subjunctive view, as an interpretation of Berkeley, is closely connected to one of the best-known philosophical objections to analytic phenomenalism. The analytic phenomenalist holds that the claim that there is a body in front of me is equivalent in meaning to some set of subjunctive conditionals about what human perceivers would perceive under specified circumstances. Thus, to know the first is to know the second. However, we never know more than a few of the conditionals which would be involved in such a translation. If all there is to a body is the handful of conditionals we know, then commonsense is radically mistaken about the nature of bodies, but if there is more to a body than this, then, on this interpretation, it turns out that I do not in fact know that there is a desk in front of me. The subjunctive interpretation thus fails to capture what Berkeley takes to be our epistemic situation with respect to bodies.

In addition to the question of whether we really know as many conditional claims as, according to the analytic phenomenalist, we ought to know, Quine famously raised a second worry about this kind of view: those conditionals we *do* know can only be stated by means of 'body' talk (Quine 1948, 36-37). This was supposed to show that analytic phenomenalism, as a program for reducing bodies to sense data, was a failure, since analytic phenomenalism will not allow us to do away with 'body' talk.

In this respect, Berkeley, on the interpretation I am defending, has a more sophisticated and plausible theory than the version of phenomenalism criticized by Quine. On Berkeley's view, the purpose of 'body' talk is to capture practically important regularities in our sense experience, and Berkeley can agree with Quine that we could not get around the world without it. Yet this indispensability argument, for Berkeley, will bear no ontological weight: in Berkeley's view, body talk is *nothing more than* a way of capturing these regularities. Our use of body talk as a tool of this sort does involve our having certain expectations, at varying levels of detail, regarding what we would perceive in counterfactual circumstances. Nevertheless, knowledge of body statements need not involve detailed knowledge of the ideas we would perceive in other circumstances.

Idea interpretations subdivide into two categories, which we may call 'divine' and 'human.' According to divine idea interpretations, each body is identified with some idea or collection of ideas had by God. As is well-known, although this approach has some support in Berkeley's text (PHK, §§6, 48; DHP, 212, 230-231, 248, 254), it brings back all of the skeptical problems of representative realism which Berkeley insists his view avoids (Mabbott 1931; Foster 1982, 29-32; Dicker 2011, 268). Divine idea interpretations make the veridicality of our ideas depend on some kind of 'matching' between our ideas and God's, but how can we know that the ideas really do 'match'?[22]

Human idea interpretations, by contrast, identify each body with an idea or collection of ideas had by humans. An interpretation of this sort has recently

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22. Winkler 1989, 216-224 offers a number of additional criticisms of this interpretation.

been defended by Samuel Rickless, who takes bodies to be complex ideas assembled by human perceivers (Rickless 2013, 45-46, 123). This interpretation receives strong textual support in the *New Theory of Vision*:

> By the application of his hand to the several parts of a human body [the blind man] had perceived different tangible ideas, which being collected into *sundry complex ones*, have distinct names annexed to them. Thus one combination of a certain tangible figure, bulk, and consistency of parts is called the head, another the hand, a third the foot, and so of the rest. All which *complex ideas* could, in his understanding, be made up only of ideas perceivable by touch (NTV, §96, emphasis added).

This passage causes two serious problems for my interpretation. First, it explicitly associates bodies (specifically, parts of human bodies) with complex ideas and, second, it explicitly associates these complex ideas with 'collecting,' 'combining,' and 'naming.'[23] The most straightforward reading of this passage would take Berkeley to be claiming that the blind man first collects various tangible ideas into one complex idea, then labels that complex idea (e.g.) 'head.' This would make 'head' a genuine referring term.

Although this is the most straightforward reading of this particular passage, it cannot be Berkeley's considered view. It cannot be the case that the blind man's complex idea of the head *is* the head, for the head ought to include visual ideas which, Berkeley explicitly says, the blind man does not have. This is only a vivid example of a more general problem facing the complex idea interpretation: no human has all of the ideas which make up (e.g.) a cherry (cf. Hight 2007, 86-87). As a result, no human can combine all of these ideas into one complex idea.

3.3   The Richness of Berkeleian Bodies

Whereas divine idea interpretations undermine Berkeley's response to the skeptic, subjunctive interpretations and human idea interpretations fail to recognize the *richness* of Berkeleian bodies: the bodies we know 'contain' more ideas than we have ever perceived, imagined, or expected. This issue is addressed explicitly in the *Dialogues*. Hylas objects, "Why is not the same figure, and other sensible qualities, perceived in all manner of ways? And why should we use a microscope, the better to discover the true nature of a body, if it were discoverable to the naked eye?" (DHP, 245). The objection is that, according to commonsense, bodies are much richer than momentary perception. That is, they have many more qualities than can be perceived at any one time. Furthermore, there are *contradictory* ideas attributed to the same body, as when a body looks smooth to the naked eye but rough under a microscope. Philonous responds that if "every variation [in our ideas] was thought sufficient to constitute a new kind or individual, the endless number or confusion of names would

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23. I thank Samuel Rickless for directing my attention to this passage and the difficulties it causes for my interpretation.

render language impractical" (DHP, 245). Thus the *practice of language* necessarily requires that "men combine together several ideas" so as to "refer to one name and consider as one thing" the heterogeneous objects of sight and touch, as well as the heterogeneous objects perceived by microscopes and by the naked eye (245). This combining allows us to say, in plain language, that "we use a microscope, the better to discover the true nature of a body," despite the fact that, strictly speaking, the object (idea) seen with the aid of the microscope is utterly distinct from the object (idea) earlier seen with the naked eye. By discovering "what ideas are connected together" we learn "the nature of *things*" (245, emphasis added), that is, of bodies (see Atherton 1991, §§4-6).

The examination of a body under a microscope allows us to make a *discovery* about what ideas are 'combined' in that body. But this implies that there are more ideas 'combined' in the body than the ideas I have experience before using the microscope. My claim, supported by the explicit appeal to language in this passage, is that the conventions regarding the names of bodies can determine, in advance, whether a given 'new' idea is to be attributed to the body in question – e.g., whether this never-before-experienced taste is to be called 'the taste *of* the cherry' – and that it is by these rules, which command the classification of this idea as a cherry idea, that the various ideas are combined into the cherry. In this way, by means of the conventional rules of language, *we have already combined the ideas before we have perceived them.* The combination is thus a mere quasi-entity: it owes its existence to our linguistic conventions.

If, however, this is Berkeley's considered view, then what are we to make of NTV, §96? We may begin by noting that Berkeley there says "different tangible ideas, . . . being collected into sundry complex ones, have distinct names annexed to them." Berkeley does *not* say: "sundry complex ideas are called by distinct names." Rather, the grammatical subject is 'different tangible ideas.' These ideas are said to have names 'annexed' to them. This leaves the exact relation between the ideas and the names extremely unclear. This passage *does* clearly imply that which ideas go together into complex ideas figures into the explanation of which names are annexed to which ideas. My interpretation can, however, accommodate this fact. In the *Dialogues*, Philonous says that ideas are 'combined together' because they are "observed . . . to have some connection in nature, either with respect to co-existence or succession" (DHP, 245). When the blind man feels, e.g., a head, he feels *at once* (co-existing) "a certain tangible figure, bulk, and consistency" (NTV, §96). This is one complex tangible idea. It is, in part, because of the co-existence of those simpler[24] ideas in a single sensory experience that all of them are attributed to the same body, and so 'combined together' by our linguistic practices.

3.4 Immediate Perception

I have argued that bodies, in Berkeley's view, are mere quasi-entities, like forces. It will certainly be objected to this interpretation that there is at least one

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24. Kenneth Winkler has argued convincingly that Berkeley does not believe in *absolutely* simple ideas, since he holds that such ideas would be abstract. See Winkler 1989, ch. 3.

powerful contrast, for Berkeley, between forces and bodies: bodies are immediately perceived (PHK, §§38, 95; DHP, 230) and forces are not (DM, §§4-5, 10). Furthermore, since bodies are immediately perceived, they would seem to be available to be labeled.

Berkeley's claim that bodies are immediately perceived has caused a great deal of difficulty, because it is difficult to understand how this can be reconciled with his insistence in other texts that only ideas are immediately perceived (see, e.g., PHK, §1; DHP, 175; Alc, §4.10).[25] These difficulties are exacerbated by the fact that it is unclear exactly what Berkeley means by 'immediate perception' (Winkler 1989, 149-154; Pappas 2000, ch. 6). On what I take to be the most plausible reading,[26] mediate perception, for Berkeley, is *perception by suggestion*. That is (to a first approximation), mediate perception of B occurs when, because of some prior connection between A and B, perceiving A leads me to think of B. Thus when Berkeley says that bodies are (sometimes) perceived *im*mediately, he means that when I perceive (e.g.) a table, it is not the case that I first perceive some non-table idea and, as a result of this, think of the table.

My interpretation can accommodate Berkeley's claim that perception of bodies is (sometimes) immediate. On my reading, the table is a quasi-entity arising from the rules for the use of the word 'table,' and, by those rules, the visual ideas we experience are attributed to (predicated of) the table. When I have a certain brown sensory idea, I am seeing the table, *not* in virtue of seeing an idea which suggests the table, but in virtue of seeing an idea which, by the rules for the use of the word 'table,' is attributable to the table.

I can thus agree that on Berkeley's view we perceive tables, but not forces, immediately. A force can only ever be inferred from perception of motion. Thus a transition must always be made from thinking about motion to thinking about force. However, no such transition is necessary in perceiving a body, and this is because bodies and forces are related to ideas in different ways.

That bodies are immediately perceived means only that they are perceived without suggestion. Bodies can be perceived without suggestion because perceiving an idea attributable to a body is constitutive of perception of the body, and this is the case regardless of whether the particular perceiver actually can or does attribute the idea to the body. The fact that my perception of the body is immediate in *this* sense does not imply that I have the kind of pre-linguistic awareness which would be necessary for names of bodies to be genuine referring expressions. There is, in other words, no reason why a mere quasi-entity cannot be immediately perceived, as Berkeley holds that bodies are.

4   Existence

According to Berkeley, the word 'apple,' like the word 'force,' is a bit of technology for helping us navigate the world of sense experience. Like 'force,' 'apple'

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25. For discussion, see Pitcher 1986; Winkler 1989, 155-161; Pappas 2000, 172-208; Hight 2007, 94-105; Atherton 2008; Rickless 2013, ch. 2.

26. Recently defended by Rickless 2013, ch. 1.

becomes a genuine *word*, rather than merely a sound, and becomes a useful piece of technology, by playing a role in a sign system governed by conventional rules tied to perception and action. 'Apple' is not a genuine referring expression, hence the use of this word (or of 'body' talk more generally) does not carry ontological commitment.

This, however, only serves to deepen the paradox with which we began: what becomes of Berkeley's claim to defend the existence of bodies? The answer, again, lies in Berkeley's views about language. Berkeley holds that it is only when one is confused about the use of 'exists' that one can doubt the existence of actually perceived bodies (N, §§491, 593, 604; PHK, §3, 89; Pappas 2002, 56).

At the beginning of the *Principles*, Berkeley claims that "an intuitive knowledge" of the correctness of his idealistic metaphysics "may be obtained ... by any one that shall attend to what is meant by the term 'exist' when applied to sensible things" (PHK, §3).[27] There are, on the interpretation I have been defending, two kinds of sensible things: sensible qualities (i.e., ideas) and bodies. Berkeley discusses both in this passage.

4.1 The Existence of Sensible Qualities

Regarding sensible qualities, Berkeley says, "There was an odour, that is, it was smelled; there was a sound, that is to say, it was heard; a colour or figure, and it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all that I can understand by these and the like expressions" (§3).[28] Berkeley goes on to explain, "as it is impossible for me to see or feel any thing without an actual sensation of that thing, so is it impossible for me to conceive in my thought any sensible thing or object distinct from the perception of it" (§5).[29]

In light of our previous discussion of the possible scope for labeling rules, we can clearly see how this line of reasoning is applied to sensible qualities. Sensible quality terms, like 'sound,' are genuine referring expressions. To say, 'a sound exists' would be to add a second label to the first, that is, to say that the thing I label 'sound' should also be labeled 'exists' (see MI, §§34-35). However, given Berkeley's theory of mind and language, it is easily shown that 'exists' can here only be co-extensive with 'is perceived.' In order for a mind to apply a label to a quality, the quality must be perceived by that mind. Hence no rule which would instruct a mind to label an unperceived quality as 'existing' could be followed. Thus any sensible quality that exists is perceived. But it is a truism

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27. As Berkeley explicitly asserts (PHK, §142), and as John Russell Roberts has recently emphasized (Roberts 2007, ch. 1), 'exists' has a different use in its application to minds and their actions. We shall not be concerned with this other use here.

28. Cf. N, §593: "Let it not be Said that I take away Existence. I onely declare the meaning of the Word so far as I can comprehend it."

29. Muehlmann 1992, 19 claims that this text is ambiguous between an interpretation on which 'so' is an 'inference indicator' and one on which 'so' is an 'analogy indicator.' Muehlmann favors the former. He is, however, mistaken. The word 'as' at the beginning of the quotation clearly and unambiguously indicates that an analogy is being drawn. Also, the use of 'so is it' rather than 'so it is' would sound odd if 'so' were taken as an 'inference indicator.'

that the labels 'is' and 'exists' can be applied to just anything, so any sensible quality that is perceived exists. Thus 'perceived' and 'exists' label just the same sensible qualities, namely, all of them. "Their *esse* is *percipi*" (PHK, §3).

4.2 The Existence of Bodies

In the very same passage of the *Principles*, Berkeley gives a different account of the existence of his table: "The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it" (§3). Berkeley lists three distinct conditions, each of which is sufficient for the proper attribution of existence to the table. No such disjunction is applied to the odors, sounds, colors, and figures found in the next sentence. Thus, contrary to Ian Tipton, it really is the case, on Berkeley's view, that 'there was an odour' can only ever mean 'it was smelled' (Tipton 1974, 101). An odour is an idea (sensible quality), and not a body. The account of the application of 'exists' to tables does not contradict the account of the application of 'exists' to sensible qualities, for bodies and sensible qualities are different sorts of things, and 'exists' is equivocal as applied to them.[30]

The existence of bodies is more complicated than the existence of sensible qualities, but Berkeley's general aim is clear. In his notebooks, Berkeley states the intention "to say the things . . . themselves to really exist even w^n not actually ~~seen~~ perceiv'd *but still with relation to perception*" (N, §802, emphasis added). Berkeley aims to show, on the one hand, that the existence of bodies cannot be utterly separated from perception but, on the other, that bodies exist when not actually perceived by humans. Such a rule for the use of 'exists' will make actual perception *sufficient*, but not *necessary*, for existence.

It is quite clear, on the interpretation so far defended, that Berkeley has the resources to defend this conclusion. The names of bodies are introduced into our linguistic apparatus to provide a subject of grammatical predication for sensible qualities and thereby group sensible qualities in a practically useful fashion. Since the whole point of the apparatus is the grouping of sensible qualities, to speak of the 'absolute' existence of a body, without 'relation to perception,' would be nonsensical: no grouping of sensible qualities would take place. This would be like speaking of forces in a system containing only unmovable objects. 'Force' talk lacks predictive power, and hence lacks any use, in such a system. Similarly, 'body' talk lacks any use in the absence of sensible qualities to be grouped.

Nevertheless, we can and do speak of bodies existing when not actually perceived, like Berkeley's table when he's not in his study (PHK, §3), and like the world as a whole prior to the existence of humans (DHP, 251-253). What we are doing here is grouping *imagined* or *hypothesized* sensible qualities which, we believe on the basis of the evidence available to us, would be perceived in

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30. One scholar who explicitly recognizes the need to separate the account of sensible qualities from the account of bodies is Muehlmann 1992, 13-15, *et passim.*

counterfactual circumstances (cf. PHK, §58). This suffices to show that statements about bodies not actually perceived do indeed have a use, and hence, on Berkeley's view, are meaningful. Working out the details of this use, and in particular the question of when it is correct to assert that such a body 'exists,' is, however, one of the most notoriously difficult problems in Berkeley interpretation (see, e.g., Winkler 1989, ch. 7; Pappas 2000, 107-112; Stoneham 2002, §8.4), and there is not space here to wade into it.

We can see, then, that Berkeley has an extremely deflationary understanding of the 'existence' of bodies. To say that a body 'exists' is not to label some independently existing object, the body, nor is it to say that such an object is available for labeling (as is sometimes suggested by those who insist that 'existence is not a predicate'). Such talk is merely a tool for the organization of our sense experience. According to Berkeley, the attempt to apply 'exists' to bodies in some ontologically weightier sense is not only a departure from plain English, but outright incoherent.

5   Conclusion

Attention to Berkeley's mature reflections on the philosophy of language and philosophy of physics promises to shed light on a wide variety of issues in his better-known early works on metaphysics and epistemology. In this paper, I have argued that such attention can, in particular, illuminate Berkeley's remarks on the existence of bodies, by showing that bodies are mere quasi-entities introduced by our linguistic conventions, and that this status does not prevent them from existing and being immediately perceived. Furthermore, this interpretation shows how Berkeley can maintain that certainty about the existence and nature of bodies is immediately available to the unaided senses while still making room for the benefits of empirical investigation, including investigation by means of scientific instruments such as the microscope.[31]

Abbreviations

Alc   Berkeley, George, *Alciphron.*

DHP   ———. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous.*

DM   ———. *An Essay on Motion.*

MI   ———. *George Berkeley's Manuscript Introduction.*

N   ———. *Philosophical Commentaries.*

NTV   ———. *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision.*

PHK   ———. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge.*

Siris   ———. *Siris.*

TVV   ———. *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language, Shewing The Immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity, Vindicated and Explained.*

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