Berkeley's Theory of Language*

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Abstract

According to the ideational theory of meaning held by most 17th and 18th century European philosophers, meaningful words signify ideas in the mind of the speaker. This view was famously rejected by George Berkeley. Some interpreters hold that, in rejecting this view Berkeley meant merely to carve out some exceptions to the general principle that meaningful words stand for ideas. Others attribute to Berkeley the view that, rather than signifying ideas, words signify speaker intentions. Finally, some interpreters attribute to Berkeley a use theory of language similar to the later Wittgenstein. This article provides an overview of this interpretive debate and a defence of the use theory interpretation.

Keywords: George Berkeley; philosophy of language; signification; ideational theory of meaning; speaker intentions; Ludwig Wittgenstein; use theory of meaning

In the Introduction to the *Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley attacks the "received opinion that language has no other end but the communicating our ideas, and that every significant name stands for an idea" (PHK, Intro 19:37). How far does Berkeley go in rejecting this 'received opinion'? Does he offer a general theory of language to replace it? If so, what is the nature of this theory?

The 'received opinion' Berkeley opposes is often known as the 'ideational theory of meaning' because it holds that a word gets to be meaningful by signifying an idea in the mind of the speaker. The aim of language is to communicate this idea to the hearer. §1 outlines this view in more detail.

Many interpreters have thought that, in rejecting the claim that language has *no other end* than communicating ideas and that *every* significant name stands for an idea, Berkeley meant to be carving out one or more exceptions to the ideational theory of meaning. I call this the 'modified ideational theory'. In §2 I argue that the modified ideational theory cannot be Berkeley's view: after

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all the 'exceptions' to the ideational theory Berkeley carves out, there is nothing left of the theory at all.

A second interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy of language holds that language serves to communicate the *intentions* of the speaker. In §3 I argue that, although this account solves many of the problems associated with the modified ideational theory, it too must ultimately be rejected.

A third interpretation attributes to Berkeley a use theory of meaning, similar to the later Wittgenstein. In §4, I defend this interpretation: Berkeley's view is that a word gets to be meaningful when it is used according to conventional rules within a community to accomplish some practical purpose.

1   The Ideational Theory of Meaning

According to Aristotle, "spoken sounds are symbols of affections of the soul" (*De Int* 1 16a4). For most early modern philosophers, beginning from Descartes, these 'affections of the soul' are, primarily, ideas. Thus Descartes writes, "whenever I express something in words, and understand what I am saying, this very fact makes it certain that there is within me an idea of what is signified by the words in question" (CSM, 2:113).

This approach to the philosophy of language was worked out in detail in the Port-Royal *Grammar* (Arnauld and Lancelot [1660] 1975) and *Logic* (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996). Although the Port-Royalists often say, as Descartes did, that all meaningful words signify ideas (e.g., Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 66), their considered view is that meaningful words "indicate what takes place in the mind" of the speaker (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 74). This includes signifying both "the objects of our thoughts" (i.e., ideas) and "the manner or mode of our thoughts" (Arnauld and Lancelot [1660] 1975, 67–68). The most important 'manner or mode' of thought is judgment, which is signified by the verb (Arnauld and Lancelot [1660] 1975, 122; Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 79). Judging occurs when, "After conceiving things by our ideas, we compare these ideas and, finding that some belong together and others do not, we unite or separate them" (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 82). The act of judging forms a *proposition*, that is, a truth-evaluable mental state with subject-predicate structure. When a complete sentence is used meaningfully, it signifies this complex mental state in the mind of the speaker—that is, it makes this state known to the hearer.[1]

Essentially the same approach is adopted by Locke. According to Locke, words are "articulate Sounds ... *use*[d] ... *as Signs of internal Conceptions*" (E, 3.1.2:402). Like Port-Royal, Locke usually says that all meaningful words stand for ideas, and argues at some length that "*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the* Ideas *in the Mind of him that uses them*" (E, 3.2.2:405).[2] However, also like Port-Royal, Locke carves out

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1. For a more detailed overview of the Port-Royal theory of language, see Pearce 2015.

2. On the interpretation of this claim, and Locke's argument for it, see Ashworth 1981, (1984) 1998; Guyer 1994, §2; Losonsky 1994, 2007; Pritchard 2013.

an important exception for the class of words he calls 'particles'. These words, Locke says, "signify the *connexion* that the Mind gives to *Ideas, or Propositions, one with another*." Included in this class are "*Is*, and *Is not*, [which] are the general marks of the Mind, affirming or denying" (E, 3.7.1:471). Locke also follows Port-Royal in taking affirmation and denial to involve "The *joining* or *separating* of signs" to construct a truth-evaluable proposition (E, 4.5.2:574). Locke distinguishes sentences, which he calls 'verbal propositions', from the corresponding mental states, which he calls 'mental propositions' (E, 4.5.3:574). The mental proposition, like the verbal proposition, exhibits subject-predicate structure.

The ideational theory, endorsed by Port-Royal and by Locke, holds that the human mind possesses a variety of ideas and the capacity to perform acts of judgment whereby these ideas are assembled into truth-evaluable states with subject-predicate structure.[3] Words are conventional signs meant to signify these ideas and judgments, that is, to let the hearer know what the speaker is thinking. This process, however, is error-prone, and many of our mistakes in reasoning actually stem from the various 'imperfections' and 'abuses' of language. These failings all come down to the problem of developing a stable association between a word and *some one single idea* (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 58–66; E, 3.9.4–5:476–477, 3.10.2–3:490–491, 3.10.5:492–493, 3.10.28:505–506). Uncertainty, inconstancy, or imprecision regarding the idea signified by a word leads to failures of communication and, as Berkeley observed, communicating ideas is, according to this 'received opinion,' "the chief and only end of language" (PHK, Intro 20:37).

2 The Modified Ideational Theory

In the manuscript and published versions of the Introduction to the *Principles* and in *Alciphron*, Berkeley quite explicitly argues against the ideational theory of meaning. His presentation of the view he is attacking looks very much like the theory of Port-Royal and Locke outlined in the previous section. Thus in the published Introduction Berkeley's opponents are said to hold "that language has no other end but the communicating our ideas, and that every significant name stands for an idea" (PHK, Intro 19:37), and in *Alciphron* the freethinking title character (representing Berkeley's opponents) says:

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 really thinks has a train of ideas succeeding each other and connected in his mind: and when he expresses himself by 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. As far as this effect is

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3. For detailed treatments of judgments and propositions in Port-Royal and Locke, see Mattern (1978) 1998; Buroker 1996; Ott 2002; Schaar 2008; Rickless 2008; Marušić 2014.

> produced, so far the discourse is intelligible, has sense and meaning. (Alc, 7,2:287–288)[4]

It is undisputed that Berkeley means to reject this view. The question at issue is *how* precisely he means to reject it. According to what has perhaps been the most popular interpretation, Berkeley does not reject the ideational theory outright, but instead carves out a series of *exceptions* to it. As John Russell Roberts has memorably put it, the proponents of this interpretation hold that "Berkeley is cutting off only a sickly limb of Locke's view rather than digging up the whole by its roots" (Roberts 2007, 43). I call this type of interpretation a 'modified ideational theory'.

Any interpretation of Berkeley must allow that ideas sometimes play some role in securing the meaningfulness of words. Thus a modified ideational theory is not just any interpretation of Berkeley's philosophy of language that somehow involves ideas. Rather, a modified ideational theory is an interpretation which attributes to Berkeley the view that there is some significant fragment of language to which the original ideational theory applies. This view is endorsed explicitly by several interpreters, including Bennett (1971, §10), Hacking (1974, 15–16, 36–39), and Bordner (2017, 263), and appears to be assumed implicitly by many others. In this section, I argue that no modified ideational theory is a viable interpretation of Berkeley.

There are at least two areas of language in which Berkeley very explicitly allows for the meaningful use of words without ideas. First, Berkeley holds that since

> an idea [is] altogether inactive... An agent... an active mind, or spirit, cannot be an idea or like an idea. Whence it should seem to follow that those words, which denote an active principle, soul, or spirit, do not in a strict and proper sense, stand for ideas: and yet they are not insignificant neither. (Alc, 7,5:292)

Second, Berkeley allows that in addition to the communication of ideas,

> There are other ends [of language], as the raising of some passion, the exciting to, or deterring from an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition; to which the former [i.e., communication of ideas] is in many cases barely subservient, and *sometimes entirely omitted*, when these can be obtained without it. (PHK, Intro 20:37, emphasis added)

Berkeley's view on this latter category of language has often been called his theory of 'emotive meaning' (e.g., Belfrage 1986a; 1987a, §3; Berman 1994, 12–17,

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4. In this passage, Berkeley interprets the ideational theory as holding that an utterance is understood just when it produces in the mind of the hearer a copy of the speaker's mental state. Jennifer Marušić (2014, 273–277) has suggested, with considerable plausibility, that in at least some cases understanding an utterance may instead require the hearer to have *an idea of* the speaker's mental state. Berkeley's critique of the ideational theory does not rely on any particular position on this issue.

144–159). However, as we shall see, there is considerable dispute about how similar Berkeley's theory here is to 20th century emotivism. Kenneth Williford (2003) has therefore proposed the more neutral label 'operative language', based on a remark in Alc, 7,14:307. According to the modified ideational interpretation, Berkeley holds that the ideational theory gives the correct account of words like 'apple' (PHK, 1:41) but a different account is needed for operative words like 'good' (PHK, Intro 20:37) and spirit words like 'God' (DHP, 231–232).

The first problem facing the modified ideational theory is to make sense of the category of operative language. Berkeley clearly includes ethical language and the language of religious 'mysteries' such as the Trinity in this category, as well as words like 'reward' and 'danger' which serve primarily to shape feelings and behavior (MI, 36–43:105–113). However, this is not a matter of a certain special class of words: Berkeley explicitly says that even the sentence 'Aristotle hath said it' may function 'operatively' if "all . . . [the speaker] means by it is to dispose [the hearer] to embrace his opinion with the deference and submission which custom hath annexed to that name" (PHK, Intro 20:38). The modified ideational theory requires some kind of account of the *scope* of the operative language exception to the ideational criterion of meaningfulness, but it must also recognize that, even in operative language, the communication of ideas is only "*sometimes* entirely omitted" (PHK, Intro 20:37, emphasis added). The word 'reward' can simultaneously function operatively *and* signify a particular ice cream cone idea (see Pearce 2017c, 40). Thus, contrary to Bennett (1971, 53–54) and Berman (1994, 148), it does not appear that Berkeley introduces a demarcation between 'cognitive' and 'non-cognitive' discourse.[5]

This demarcation problem is not the only difficulty the modified ideational theory faces in making sense of operative language. The language of religious mysteries is an undisputed example of language that Berkeley regards as 'operative', yet Berkeley argues at length that such religious language gets to be meaningful in precisely the same way as the language of physics and algebra (Alc, 7,5–8:291–299). Thus, if operative language is non-cognitive language, then not only is Berkeley, bizarrely, a non-cognitivist about Aristotle ascriptions, he is also a non-cognitivist about math and physics (Williford and Jakapi 2009, 106). Additionally, Berkeley holds that operative utterances can be true or false and stand in entailment relations (Alc, 7,7:295, 7,9:300–301; see Jakapi 2002, 2007). 'Non-cognitivism' about a domain of discourse is often defined as the thesis that the utterances in that domain are neither true nor false. On standard non-cognitivist theories, such as the emotivism of A. J. Ayer ([1946] 1952, 107–109), which Berman (1994, 155) says is the same as Berkeley's, non-cognitive words stand for 'mere pseudo-concepts' and lack the sort of semantic content needed for sentences containing them to be true or false or stand in entailment relations. This conflicts with what Berkeley says about religious mysteries (see Pearce 2017c, 61).

It might be thought that this last difficulty is not essential to the modified ideational theory and is merely the product of an anachronistic attempt

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5. For further argument in support of this claim, see Roberts 2007, 58–65.

to fit Berkeley into early 20th century debates. On the contrary, this is not merely a product of Berman's assimilation of Berkeley to Ayer, but rather a general problem that must be confronted by any modified ideational interpretation. Port-Royal and Locke made essential use of their theory of the mental proposition in their accounts of truth and inference. However, a proposition, on the ideational theory of meaning, is a joining or separating of two ideas. If the subject term or the predicate term in a sentence does not stand for an idea, then the ideational theory's account of truth and inference cannot be employed and some other account must be sought.

In fact, the difficulty is even more serious than this, and brings us to the second main problem for the modified ideational interpretation: Berkeley's rejection of abstract ideas prevents him from accepting the ideational theory's account of the meaning of even simple subject-predicate sentences like 'the apple is red' or (to use Berkeley's own example) 'Melampus is an animal'. However, this is just the portion of language with respect to which proponents of the modified ideational interpretation claim that Berkeley has preserved Locke's theory. If Berkeley cannot endorse what the ideational theory says about these sentences, then the exceptions have completely swallowed the rule and there is nothing left of the ideational theory at all.

In his discussion of the sentence 'Melampus is an animal' in the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley correctly reports that, according to the ideational theory espoused by Port-Royal and Locke, the word 'Melampus' in this sentence stands for "the Idea of some one particular...Dog" while "the Name Animal stand[s] for an Abstract, Generical Idea" of animal (MI, 34:101–103). The word 'is' stands for the mind's act of judging that these two ideas agree.

Berkeley clearly cannot endorse this account since he argues that 'Abstract, Generical Ideas' do not exist. However, it might be thought that only a very minor modification is required since, in the published Introduction, Berkeley accepts the existence of general ideas, provided these ideas are not understood to be abstract.[6] Thus Berkeley might still hold that the word 'animal' in the sentence signifies a general idea.

In fact, Berkeley cannot endorse this moderate position. When Berkeley admits the existence of general ideas in the published Introduction to the *Principles*, he writes:

> as the [general idea of a line] owes its generality, not to its being the sign of an abstract or general line, but of all particular right lines that may possibly exist, so the [word 'line'] must be thought to derive its generality from the same cause, namely, the various particular lines which it indifferently denotes. (PHK, Intro 12:32)

Since general words and general ideas get to be general *in just the same way* it cannot be the case that general words get to be general by standing for general ideas, as Locke supposed (E, 3.3.6:410–411). If this were the case, then

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6. In the manuscript, Berkeley had rejected general ideas entirely (MI, 20:83, 27:93; see Belfrage 1986b).

Berkeley would have to say that general ideas get to be general by standing for other general ideas, generating a regress.

It might be thought that Berkeley's view here is that, each time we meaningfully use or understand the word 'animal', we have some one of the ideas in its extension in mind (but not always the same one).[7] However, Berkeley explicitly rejects this view in the 1732 edition of *Alciphron* (7,7*:335) and he presents an argument against it in the 'Melampus' passage of the *Manuscript Introduction*. His argument is as follows:

> in the Proposition we have instanced [i.e., the sentence 'Melampus is an animal'] in it is plain the Word *Animal* is not suppos'd to stand for the Idea of any one particular animal. for if it be made stand for another different from that is marked by the Name *Melampus*, the Proposition is false and includes a Contradiction. And if it be made signify the very same Individual that *Melampus* doth, it is a tautology (MI, 35:105, crossed out and bracketed text omitted).

'Melampus is Melampus' is a tautology, and 'Melampus is Fido' is a falsehood, but 'Melampus is an animal' is neither tautologous nor false. Without abstract ideas, the ideational theory of meaning cannot explain this fact (see Pearce 2017b, 566–567; 2017c, 143–144). Berkeley therefore concludes, contrary to the ideational theory, that "in that Proposition [the word 'animal' does not] stand for any Idea at all. All that I intend to signify thereby being only this. That the particular thing I call Melampus has a right to be called by the Name Animal" (MI, 34:103, bracketed text omitted). In this context, there is no idea corresponding to the word 'animal'. Consequently, there can be no mental proposition corresponding to the sentence 'Melampus is an animal'.

In the notebooks, Berkeley expressed puzzlement about the absence of mental propositions in certain cases of apparently meaningful speech (PC, 728–731a:96, 738:97, 793:104, 809:106). By the time he wrote the 'Melampus' discussion in the *Manuscript Introduction*, he had rejected the mental proposition entirely.

It may be objected that my argument has relied heavily on manuscript material and on a comment in *Alciphron* that Berkeley deleted from later editions. I concede that this provides a good reason for us to wonder whether Berkeley might have rejected, or at least been uncertain about, the views in question. However, alternative interpretations still need to explain why Berkeley wrote these words in the first place, even if he later rejected them. The discussion of propositions in the *Manuscript Introduction* shows that from the beginning of his career Berkeley was aware of a compelling argument for the claim that someone who rejects abstract ideas cannot accept mental propositions, and nowhere does Berkeley do anything to undermine that argument. Without abstract ideas, the theory of mental propositions is untenable, and without mental propositions the ideational theory of meaning, together with the associated theories of truth and inference, collapses.

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7. Melissa Frankel (2009, 383n5) suggests that PHK, Intro can be read this way, though she recognizes that Berkeley rejects this view in *Alciphron*.

As soon as he rejected abstract ideas (c. 1708),[8] it became impossible for Berkeley to accept any significant fragment of the ideational theory of meaning, even restricted to some limited domain.

Berkeley thought Port-Royal and Locke were radically mistaken about the relationship between words and ideas, and he argues quite explicitly that words may sometimes be meaningful in the absence of ideas. Nevertheless, Berkeley continues to speak of associations between words and ideas in at least some contexts (e.g., NTV, 32:181–182, 51:190, 152:232–233; PHK, Intro 21–25:38–40; PHK, 16:47, 43:58). Berkeley therefore stands in need of an alternative theory of how words get to be meaningful, and this theory should explain why and how meaningfulness sometimes involves ideas and sometimes does not. In the remainder of this chapter, we consider two alternative interpretations of Berkeley's theory.

3 The Speaker Intentions Theory

In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley writes:

> It is plain therefore that a Man may understand what is said to him without having a clear and determinate Idea annexed to and marked by every particular [Word][9] in the Discourse he hears. Nay, he may perfectly understand it. For what is it I pray to understand perfectly, but to understand all that is meant by the Person that Speaks? (MI, 43:113)

Berkeley here speaks of what is *meant* by the speaker. Elsewhere, in similar contexts, he speaks of what is *intended* by the speaker. For instance, in the manuscript version of the 'Aristotle' passage, he writes, "w^n a Schoolman tells you that *Aristotle* hath said it, think you that he intends to excite in your Imagination the Idea of that particular Man? All He means by it is only to dispose you to receive his Opinion" (MI, 38:109). In these and other passages of the *Manuscript Introduction*, what the speaker *means* appears to be identified with the effect the speaker intends to produce, and understanding a speaker's utterance appears to be a matter of grasping the speaker's intention.

According to Kenneth Williford (2003), this forms the core of Berkeley's theory of language.[10] Williford argues that, in the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley

> suggests that the intended end for which an utterance is put to use, i.e. the speaker's intention in uttering, partially determines the meaning of an expression. Second and correspondingly, he suggests that an integral part of understanding an utterance is understanding what the speaker intends to accomplish with it (Williford 2003, 277).

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8. On the dating of MI, see Belfrage 1987b, 20–23. On the question of when precisely Berkeley rejected abstract ideas, see Belfrage 1986b.

9. Brackets in original.

10. A similar interpretation is hinted at by Winkler 2009, 495–496.

Williford here indicates that speaker intentions are only part of the story. Later in the paper he says that "If the speaker intends to communicate ideas, then there is a further step involved [in understanding the utterance]: [the hearer] must then also grasp the ideas answering to the terms of the speaker's sentence" (Williford 2003, 287). The point of Berkeley's discussion of operative language is to argue that this is not always part of the speaker's intention.

The speaker intentions theory, like the modified ideational theory, sees Berkeley as agreeing with the view of Port-Royal and Locke that words "indicate what takes place in the mind" of the speaker (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 74). According to this interpretation, Berkeley's innovation lies in considering the relevant items in the mind of the speaker to be intentions rather than ideas.

This approach has a number of advantages over the modified ideational theory. First, it preserves Berkeley's claim that 'operative' religious utterances get to be meaningful in the just the same way other utterances do: they serve to communicate the intentions of the speaker. Second, this view accounts nicely for Berkeley's claim about the 'Melampus' sentence. Berkeley writes, "All that I intend to signify [by the sentence 'Melampus is an animal'] being only this. That the particular thing I call Melampus has a right to be called by the Name Animal" (MI, 34:103, bracketed text omitted). The effect the speaker intends to produce here is that the hearer should come to regard the application of the label 'animal' to Melampus as appropriate.

Nevertheless, the speaker intentions theory does not ultimately succeed in making sense of Berkeley's remarks about language. First, the speaker intentions theory does not provide a plausible account of operative language. In the published Introduction, Berkeley writes:

> I entreat the reader to reflect with himself, and see if it does not often happen either in hearing or reading a discourse, that the passions of fear, love, hatred, admiration, disdain, and the like, arise immediately in his mind upon the perception of certain words, without any ideas coming between. (PHK, Intro 20:37)

Shortly after the manuscript version of this passage, Berkeley writes, "Upon hearing the Words ~~Lie~~ Rascal, Indignation, Revenge and the suddain motions of Anger do instantly [ensue][11] in the minds of Some Men without ever attending to the Definition of those Names" (MI, 42:113, some crossed out and bracketed text omitted). It seems unlikely that Berkeley thinks that the word 'danger' produces fear by making the hearer conceive that the speaker intends her to be afraid, or that the word 'rascal' produces anger by making the hearer conceive that the speaker intends her to be angry. Rather, these passions arise 'immediately' or 'instantly' and are not mediated by notions about the speaker's intentions any more than they are mediated by ideas.

Williford argues that his interpretation is supported by the final stratum of the manuscript's discussion of moral language. This is a brief but dense text and Berkeley marked it up extensively before crossing out the entire section and

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11. Brackets in original.

omitting any discussion of moral language in the published version. It is worth pausing to examine it in some detail.

In the first stratum of the manuscript, the relevant portion reads:

> I ask any Man whether when he tells another that Such an Action is Honourable and vertuous, he has at that instant the Abstract Ideas of Honour and Vertue in his [thoug][12] view, and whether in reality his intention be to raise those abstract ideas together with their agreement to the particular Idea of that Action in the Understanding of him he speaks to. Or rather, whether this be not his full Purpose namely that those Words should excite in the Mind of the Hearer an esteem of that particular Action and stirr him up to the performance of it? (MI, 41:111)

As Williford acknowledges, this is the closest thing to an explicit endorsement of emotivism in Berkeley's corpus (Williford 2003, 296). However, Berkeley was clearly unsatisfied with this formulation. Before rejecting the passage entirely, he modifies it to read:

> I ask any Man whether every time he tells another that Such an Action is Honourable & vertuous with an intention to excite him to the performance of it he has at that instant Idea of Honour & Vertue in his view, and whether in reality his intention be to raise Idea together with their agreement to the idea of that particular Action in the Understanding of him he speaks to.

In this later stratum of the manuscript, Berkeley is careful to speak, not of the sentence in general, but of the speaker's intentions on a particular occasion. Williford argues, with considerable plausibility, that Berkeley's revisions are intended to avoid the implication that moral words never stand for ideas (Williford 2003, 296–297). Again, however, it is implausible to suppose that *grasping the speaker's intention* "to excite him to the performance of" the action in question will motivate the hearer. Rather, as the concluding sentence common to the earlier and later strata indicates, this use of moral language "stirr[s the hearer] up to the performance of" the action by "excit[ing] in the Mind of the Hearer an esteem of that particular action." This, again, is an immediate effect of the words which need not be mediated by either ideas or notions.

This difficulty is closely connected with another problem that Williford briefly recognizes (Williford 2003, 288n31), which we might call 'the problem of hidden agendas'. Not only is it often the case that the hearer's grasping the speaker's intentions would not assist in realizing those intentions, sometimes it would actively prevent the speaker from fulfilling those intentions. This will happen in any case of deception or manipulation.

There is also a difficulty about the speaker intentions theory's relationship to the theory of notions. Speaker intentions are active, and hence there can

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12. Brackets in original.

be no ideas, but only notions, of a speaker's intentions. In a more recent paper Williford, in collaboration with Roomet Jakapi, suggests that in *Alciphron* words like 'force' and 'grace', which (unlike the examples found in the early works) *never* signify ideas, signify systems of relations (Williford and Jakapi 2009). Relations, according to Berkeley's mature view, are also known by notions and not ideas (PHK, 89:80, 142:106, [1734 ed.]). However, Berkeley says very little about what it is to have a notion of, e.g., spirit, other than that it is to understand the word 'spirit' (PHK, 27:53 [1734 ed.]). Some interpreters have argued on this basis that, for Berkeley, to have a notion *just is* to understand a word (Tipton 1974, 269–271; Woozley 1976; Pearce 2017c, 125–126). Williford and Jakapi's interpretation requires that we be able to think about the intentions of others and about systems of relations in a way that is prior to language, but there is reason to doubt that Berkeley's account of notions allows this.[13] In fact, in the 1752 edition of *Alciphron* Berkeley explicitly asserts that "relations, habitudes or proportions... cannot be by us understood but by help of signs" (Alc, 7,14:307). Our grasp of relations is dependent on our ability to use words or other signs, and not prior to it, as Williford and Jakapi's interpretation requires.[14]

The final and most serious difficulty for the speaker intentions theory is that Berkeley does not merely argue that words can be used without ideas to influence feelings and actions, he argues that "general names are often used *in the propriety of language* without the speaker's designing them for marks of ideas" (PHK, Intro 20:38, emphasis added). 'The propriety of language' refers to the use of words in accord with the rules of a language, as opposed to idiosyncratic uses in unusual circumstances or by unusual speakers (Pearce 2017a, 237, 248n16; compare Williford 2003, 280n18). What this shows is that Berkeley does recognize a distinction between *what a speaker means* by a particular utterance on a particular occasion and the use of those words which is authorized by the rules of language. Regarding the latter, Berkeley affirms that "propriety [is] regulated by custom" (PHK, 52:63; also see DHP, 216, 250). What Berkeley is trying to show in the manuscript and published introductions is not simply that speakers sometimes use words without intending to mark ideas, but that this use is authorized by our linguistic conventions.

In *Alciphron* the status of the rules of propriety as *our* (plural) conventions is much clearer. In that text, Euphranor sets out the central problem of the philosophy of language as follows: "Be the use of words or names what it will, I can never think it is to do things impossible [i.e., to suggest abstract ideas]. Let us then inquire what it is? and see if we can make sense of *our daily practice*" (Alc, 7,5:291, emphasis added). In the discussion that follows, the use of language is compared to a poker game, and this is followed by a series

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13. This problem is briefly recognized by Williford (2003, 287n30). Daniel Flage (1985) defends an interpretation of notions as pre-linguistic mental acts. This interpretation, if successful, would solve Williford and Jakapi's circularity problem.

14. Williford and Jakapi (2009, 113) explicitly recognize that relations cannot be grasped apart from signs, but they give no account of how, within their theory, it is possible to grasp relations by means of signs.

of reflections on not only the individual but also the social impact of various religious and scientific forms of words.

I conclude, therefore, that Williford has made a strong case for the importance of speaker intentions to Berkeley's understanding of speaker meaning. However, there are a number of reasons why this cannot be the whole story even regarding speaker meaning. Further, the essential *publicity* of language is recognized in Berkeley's early philosophy and emphasized in his later philosophy.[15] The speaker intentions theory is not, however, a theory of 'the propriety of language' and thus is not an adequate answer to the central question of philosophy of language as Berkeley himself framed it.

4   The Use Theory

4.1   Meaning as Use in *Alciphron*

The treatment of language in *Alciphron* VII, as has been observed, begins by characterizing language as a public social practice in which we are all immersed, and asks how words are *used* within this practice. "Words, it is agreed, are signs" and therefore, Euphranor suggests, in understanding their use "it may not . . . be amiss to examine the use of other signs, in order to know that of words" (Alc, 7,5:291). The first example is that of poker chips. The chips ('counters'), the characters agree, get to stand for money because they are purchased at the beginning and cashed out at the end. In between, they are simply used according to the rules and it doesn't matter whether the players ever think about the money or not.

This leads to a discussion of the *rules* according to which various problematic words—most notably 'grace' as a technical term of theology and 'force' as a technical term of physics—are used in their respective discourses, and the *ends* at which these rule-governed uses aim. Thus, for instance, Euphranor suggests that although there is no idea either of force in general or of particular forces, nevertheless,

> there are very evident propositions or theorems relating to force, which contain useful truths. . . And 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. . . shall we deny that [the doctrine of force] is of use either in practice or speculation, because we have no distinct idea of force? (Alc, 7,7:295–296)

As Berkeley had emphasized in *De Motu*, the rules for the word 'force' are precise mathematical rules that allow for predictive calculations that achieve practical ends (DM, 36–39:40–41). Euphranor indicates that this sort of mathematical

15. For defense of the publicity of language in Berkeley, see Pearce 2017c, 37–41, 58–60, 76–78. On the consequences of this view for Berkeley's metaphysics and epistemology, see Pearce 2017a.

language can be used as a model to understand language in general: "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, 7,14:307).

Euphranor draws from this discussion the following conclusions:

> 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 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 signs may imply or suggest the relations of things; which relations habitudes or proportions, as they cannot be understood but by the help of signs, so being thereby expressed and confuted, they direct and enable us to act with regard to things;][16] 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 idea to the mind (Alc, 7,14:307).

This passage creates serious problems for emotivist interpretations of *Alciphron*, since Euphranor here makes a claim about "speech, reason, science, faith, assent *in all its different degrees*." He is clearly *not* talking about "the periphery of language" as Bennett (1971, 54) claims.

It was this observation that led Antony Flew to argue that Berkeley was here endorsing a theory of 'meaning as use' that anticipated the later Wittgenstein (Flew [1974] 1993).[17] According to the particular version of this account that I have developed in detail (Pearce 2017c), Berkeley holds that language is to be analyzed by specifying for each utterance the conventional *rules* followed by speaker and hearer, and the *ends* at which this discursive practice aims. This is just what Berkeley does in the example of force above: the word 'force' is used according to rules given by the Newtonian laws and the vector calculus and this use aims at predictions which allow us "to frame engines, by means of which things difficult and otherwise impossible may be performed" (Alc, 7,7:295).

On this interpretation, *the communication of ideas is just one of the many ways words accomplish their operative ends*. In this respect the use theory is similar to the speaker intentions theory: both see the communication of ideas as a special case that fits within a more general theory of language. This aligns with Berkeley's remark in the published Introduction that the communication of ideas marked by words is "sometimes entirely omitted, when these [operative

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16. Bracketed text added in 1752.

17. Another early version of the use theory interpretation can be found in Woozley 1976.

ends] can be obtained without it, as I think not infrequently happens in the familiar use of language" (PHK, Intro 20:37).

The use theory also provides a plausible interpretation of Berkeley's remarks on operative language more broadly. Like the emotivist interpretation of operative language, the use theory interpretation takes seriously Berkeley's claims that "passions. . . arise immediately in the mind upon the perception of certain words" (PHK, Intro 20:37). However, like the speaker intentions theory, the use theory also takes seriously Berkeley's insistence that religious language is not a special case but gets to be meaningful in the same way as ordinary bits of language, such as number words (Alc, 7,5:293).

The use theory is also able to explain how Berkeley is able to make sense of belief without mental propositions. In *Alciphron*, Berkeley claims to be giving an account of "assent [i.e., in our terms, belief] in all its different degrees" (Alc, 7,14:307). Since, as I argued in §2, Berkeley rejects the mental proposition, the object of assent must be a verbal proposition, i.e., a sentence. To assent to a sentence is to regard it as true.

According to Euphranor, "Science [i.e., scientific knowledge] and faith agree in this, that they both imply an assent of the mind" (Alc, 7,11:303). The character Crito (who typically also speaks for Berkeley in *Alciphron*) insists, however, that:

> faith . . . is . . . placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding, and producing holy lives, rather than subtle theories. Faith, I say, is not an indolent perception, but an operative persuasion of the mind, which ever works some suitable action, disposition, or emotion in those who have it. (Alc, 7,10:301)

According to the use theory, this is not a point of contrast between faith and scientific knowledge, but a point of commonality: all assent is a matter of being disposed to relate to the world around one in a certain way, which is practical and emotional as well as cognitive.[18]

The most serious problem for such an interpretation, however, is how assent (belief), understood on this model, could be a kind of *taking for true*. Admittedly, Berkeley never directly addresses this issue, and any reconstruction of his views on truth must be somewhat speculative. I have attempted such a speculative reconstruction elsewhere (Pearce 2017c, 157–171).[19] It suffices here to note that since, as I argued in §2, Berkeley rejects the mental proposition and therefore could not inherit his predecessors' conception of truth, every interpretation of Berkeley is faced with this difficulty.

4.2   Meaning as Use in the *Manuscript Introduction*

When Flew originally proposed his proto-Wittgensteinian interpretation of *Alciphron* VII, he suggested that this represented a fundamental departure from

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18. For a more detailed exposition and defense of this general account of Berkeley on assent, see Pearce 2017c, 139–157.

19. For alternative reconstructions, see Olscamp 1970, ch. 5; Schwartz 2010, §4.2.2.

Berkeley's views in the early works (Flew [1974] 1993, 214). However, John Russell Roberts (2007, ch. 2; 2017) has argued that Berkeley had this theory in mind, at least in its basic outline, when he wrote the *Manuscript Introduction* in 1708. I agree.

In both the manuscript and published versions of the Introduction, Berkeley describes his task as "to try if I can discover what those Principles are, which have introduc'd all that Doubtfulness & Uncertainty, those Absurdities & Contradictions into the several Sects of Philosophy" (MI, 4:65, crossed out text omitted; compare PHK, Intro 4:26). In the manuscript Berkeley goes on, almost immediately, to identify the culprit as "the opinion that there are Abstract Ideas or General Conceptions of Things" (MI, 6:67). In this text, language is not introduced until §16, where Berkeley includes two lengthy quotations from Locke (E, 2.11.10–11:159–160) to the effect that non-human animals' lack of language is evidence that they lack abstract ideas. Berkeley uses these texts to emphasize the tight connection between abstraction and a particular theory of language (MI, 17–18:77–81). §6 of the manuscript has been extensively marked up, indicating Berkeley's dissatisfaction with his original formulation. In the published version, Berkeley has decided to emphasize the connection to language from the very beginning: before even mentioning abstract ideas, he introduces the project of the Introduction 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" (PHK, Intro 6:27).

This does not represent a change in Berkeley's position or his approach to the issues. Rather, it provides additional emphasis to prevent the reader from missing the point. In both the manuscript and published versions, immediately after completing the case against abstraction, Berkeley identifies a mistaken theory of language (namely, the ideational theory) as the source of the doctrine of abstraction (MI, 30–33:95–101; PHK, Intro 18–19:36–37). He goes on to argue, again in both versions, that there are other words that are even farther divorced from ideas than general names for sensible objects.

Additionally, while Berkeley does not present his theory in the same explicit and detailed fashion as he does in *Alciphron*, the particular examples he discusses conform to his later theory.[20] In his discussions of 'triangle' and 'animal', Berkeley treats the definition as a rule for determining which objects 'have a right to be called by' a particular name (MI, 32–34:99–103). In the discussion of 'good things' and 'reward', Berkeley discusses how we learn to give a certain practical and emotional response to these words, and how that response accomplishes various practical goods (MI, 36–37:105–109). In the discussion of 'Aristotle', Berkeley speaks of the "close and immediate . . . Connexion . . . long Custom [has] established betwixt the very Word *Aristotle* and the motions of Assent and Reverence in the Minds of some Men" (MI, 38:111). The point of the discussion is to show how the learned rule connecting the name 'Aristotle' (NB: the *name*, not the philosopher) to these mental responses is used by the 'School-

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20. For a more detailed defense of this claim, see Pearce 2017c, ch. 2.

man' to accomplish a certain end ("to dispose you to receive his Opinion with
...deference and Submission"). This rule is established by 'custom'. Finally,
the discussion of 'virtue' and other terms of moral praise and blame is focused
on explaining how the moral emotions attached to these words by conventional
rules serve to motivate actions (MI, 41–42:111–112). This also neatly explains
why Berkeley here speaks not only of the intentions of a particular speaker on a
particular occasion (as Williford emphasizes), but also of 'the ends of language'
(MI, 40:111), that is, the ends at which this conventional practice aims. Thus
it appears that, already in the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley's view is that
the way to understand any particular use of words is to understand the practical
ends at which that use aims and the conventional ('customary') *rules* by means
of which those ends are accomplished.

Admittedly, there are comments in both the manuscript and published ver-
sions that appear to favor the modified ideational theory over the use theory.
The strongest of these statements is found in MI, 30:97:

> when any Truth whether general or particular is made known to me
> by words So that I rightly apprehend the Ideas contained in it, I
> see no manner of reason, why I may not omit the Words, and yet
> retain as full and clear a Conception of the Ideas themselves, as I
> had while they were cloathed with Words. Words being, so far as
> I can see, of use [only][21] for Recording and Communicating, but
> not absolutely apprehending Ideas. [Crossed out, bracketed, and
> inserted text omitted.]

This text, as it stands in the first stratum, in fact appears to endorse the
*un*modified ideational theory, but this certainly cannot be Berkeley's view. Ac-
cordingly, it is unsurprising that this text is extensively marked up and then
entirely omitted from the published version. Most importantly, Berkeley modi-
fied this text to restrict the scope of his claim to "any Truth whether *about* gen-
eral or particular *Ideas*." (The italicized words are inserted above caret marks.)
Further, in its context, this text was likely intended as *ad hominem* to begin
with: Berkeley has just noted that the abstractionists often claim that words
are necessary for knowledge of general truths, but this, he alleges, is inconsistent
with the ideational theory of meaning which the abstractionists endorse.

Another text in the Introduction that appears to support the modified
ideational theory is this one from the conclusion:

> Since therefore words are so apt to impose on the understanding,
> whatever ideas I consider, I shall endeavour to take them bare and
> naked into my view, keeping out of my thoughts, so far as I am able,
> those names which long and constant use has so strictly united with
> them. (PHK, Intro 21:38–39; compare MI, 47:115)

This, Berkeley says, is necessary in order "to clear the first principles of knowl-
edge from the embarrass and delusion of words" (PHK, Intro 25:40).

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21. Inserted above a caret.

However, these passages can be made to support the modified ideational theory only by removing from their context. In fact, in these same concluding pages of the Introduction, Berkeley blames the ideational theory of meaning and the associated doctrine of abstraction for the problematic conflation of words and ideas (PHK, Intro 23:39–40; cf. MI, 58–60:122–123). Further, he writes, "He that knows he has no other than particular ideas, will not trouble himself in vain to find out and conceive the abstract idea annexed to any name. And he that knows names do not always stand for ideas, will spare himself that labour, of looking for ideas, where there are none to be had" (PHK, Intro 24:40; cf. MI, 61:123–135). In other words, Berkeley's view is emphatically *not* that in order to ensure that there is a 'cognitive' meaning attached to our words, or in order to find the truth, we need to use only words that stand for ideas and focus our attention on the ideas rather than the words. Instead, Berkeley holds, we need to recognize that the relationship between words and ideas is much more complex than the ideational theory would have us believe. Having recognized this fact, we will be able to separate words from ideas, and this will save us from a variety of philosophical errors (Pearce 2017c, 59–60).

4.3   Visual Language and the Use Theory

In the 1709 *Essay toward a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley argues that "the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the Author of nature" (NTV, 147:231). According to this theory, which is also defended in the fourth dialogue of *Alciphron*,

> the proper objects of sight [which] are light and colours, with their several shades and degrees. . . suggest and mark out to us the distances, figures, situations, dimensions, and various qualities of tangible objects: not by similitude, nor yet by inference of necessary connexion, but by the arbitrary imposition of Providence: just as words suggest the things signified by them. (Alc, 4,10:154)

This text and others like it are naturally read as holding that the 'words' of the visual language serve primarily to signify ideas, and this might be thought to support the modified ideational theory as against the use theory.[22]

My response to this objection is twofold: first, Berkeley frequently emphasizes the operative character of the visual language, just as he frequently emphasizes the operative character of human languages. Second, the visual language in fact does not—and, given Berkeley's immaterialism, cannot—have the kind of external signification attributed to language by the ideational theory.

The first point is simple enough. In the *Essay toward a New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley states his conclusion as follows:

> the proper objects of vision constitute an universal language of the
> Author of nature, whereby we are instructed how to regulate our

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22. I thank Samuel Rickless and Keota Fields for pressing this objection.

> actions in order to attain those things that are necessary to the preservation and well-being of our bodies, as also to avoid whatever may be hurtful and destructive of them. It is by their information that we are principally guided in all the transactions and concerns of life. (NTV, 147:231)

Similarly, in discussing the interpretation of nature in the *Principles*, Berkeley writes:

> As in reading other books, a wise man will choose to fix his thoughts on the sense and apply it to use...so in perusing the volume of nature...We should propose to our selves...to recreate and exalt the mind, with a prospect of the beauty, order, extent, and variety of natural things; hence by proper inferences to enlarge our notions of the grandeur, wisdom, and beneficence of the Creator; and lastly, to make the several parts of the Creation, so far as in us lies, subservient to the ends they were designed for, God's glory, and the sustentation and comfort of our selves and fellow-creatures. (PHK, 109:89)

Finally, in *Alciphron* IV, we read:

> while [the visual language] informs, it amuses and entertains the mind with a singular pleasure and delight...it answers so apposite to the uses and necessities of mankind, informing us more distinctly of those objects whose nearness and magnitude qualify them to be of greatest detriment or benefit to our bodies. (Alc, 4,15:160)

When the visual language 'instructs', it is not conveying Lockean mental propositions but rather *instructing us what to do*. Even when it is said to 'inform' this information is subordinate to operative ends. Indeed, if the use theory is correct then informing (i.e., helping us to form correct beliefs) cannot be separated from instructing (i.e., telling us what to do): a belief, on the use theory, is just a complex of emotional, cognitive, and behavioral dispositions. The system of visual signs is, according to Berkeley, above all a practical system aimed at human flourishing. As Berkeley puts it in *Siris*, the regular course of nature is "necessary to assist, not the Governor, but the governed" (Siris, 160:85).

In Berkeley's treatment of the visual language, as in his treatment of human languages, the suggestion of ideas is subordinated to practical ends. This, however, is not by itself inconsistent with the ideational theory: proponents of that theory often said that communication of ideas was needed by humans because of our practical need to live in society (see E, 3.1.1:402). The distinctive claim accepted by the ideational theory and rejected by the use theory is that a word gets to be meaningful by signifying some one particular idea, which in turn represents the external object. Does Berkeley's account of the visual language function in this way?

In the *New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley does frequently write as though visual ideas signify tangible ideas which in turn represent mind-independent tangible

objects. As is well-known, in the *Principles* Berkeley admits that in the *New Theory* he had assumed that tangible objects exist outside the mind. Correcting this "vulgar error," Berkeley writes:

> in strict truth the ideas of sight, when we apprehend by them distance and things placed at a distance, do not suggest or mark out to us things actually existing at a distance, but only *admonish us what ideas of touch will be imprinted in our minds* at such and such distances of time, and in consequence of such and such actions. (PHK, 44:59, emphasis added)

In 'suggesting' tangible ideas, Berkeley here tells us, visual ideas do not achieve reference to any external objects. Instead, they provide practical 'admonitions' by forming correct action-guiding expectations about what ideas of touch we might have in the future if we perform certain actions.

In fact, writers attempting to apply an ideational account of meaning to the visual language have often been puzzled regarding the interaction between the theory of visual language and immaterialism (see, e..g, Mabbott 1931, 26-27; Olscamp 1970, 32-33; Winkler 1989, 21). In the *Principles*, Berkeley speaks not merely of interpreting visual signs but of "perusing the volume of nature" (PHK, 109:89). In *Siris*, he describes "the phenomena of nature" as "a most coherent, entertaining, and instructive Discourse" (Siris, 254:121), and in a passage added to the 1752 edition of *Alciphron* he explicitly affirms that all sensory ideas are signs, and not only visual ideas (Alc, 4,12:156–157), though he here denies that smell and taste are sufficiently complex to count as language. Thus the tangible objects signified by visual ideas *are themselves only more signs*.

If Berkeley applied the ideational theory to the visual language, then we would expect visual ideas to signify some other ideas which in turn represented something extra-linguistic. But this is not what we find, at least for broad swathes of the visual language. For the most part, visual signs simply provide instructions on how to navigate the sign system itself. Like the sentence 'Melampus is an animal' which, according to the *Manuscript Introduction*, simply lets us know that the name 'animal' is rightly applied to Melampus, our visual stimulus, for the most part, serves simply to indicate the next move in a language-game. The 'suggestion' or 'signification' of which Berkeley so often speaks is most often a suggestion only of other signs.[23]

4.4 Reference in the Use Theory

In the visual language, as in human languages (according to the use theory), most words lack extra-linguistic reference.[24] However, it will be objected, Berke-

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23. For a detailed account of the visual language in light of the use theory, see Pearce 2017c, ch. 9.

24. What I, in Pearce 2017c, call 'quasi-referring terms' do not have *extra-linguistic* reference, since the referents of such words (e.g., physical forces) are created by the conventions governing the use of their names.

ley surely cannot hold that *all* words lack extra-linguistic reference. Spirits and ideas, at least, must surely exist prior to language.

The use theory can, however, accommodate this. Even Wittgenstein does not deny that naming is one of the things we do with words (see, e.g., Wittgenstein 1953, §1.7). What use theorists reject is the view that naming or referring has some kind of privileged status among the many things we do with words (see Wittgenstein 1953, §§1.11–14).

The use theory, then, has no problem admitting that I can use words like 'red' to name my ideas, and that I can use words like 'I' and 'myself' to name my own soul or spirit of which I have immediate consciousness (see DHP, 231).[25] Admittedly, there is some unclarity regarding exactly how Berkeley believes he can secure reference to other minds and the ideas within them. However, as is widely recognized,[26] this is a difficult issue on any interpretation.

4.5   Historical Continuity and the Use Theory

A further objection to the use theory is based on a methodological principle we might call 'the principle of historical continuity'. Contrary to a myth perpetuated by some old-fashioned histories, philosophical positions and arguments do not arise *ex nihilo* from the minds of a select few geniuses. Instead, they emerge in the course of philosophical debates and discussions and are shaped by historical developments both internal and external to the practice of philosophy. Thus the views of even the most original philosophers must be seen as developing out of or responding to something in their cultural environment, and we should approach with suspicion any interpretation that attributes to a philosopher a "revolutionary and historically premature insight," such as the one Antony Flew ([1974] 1993, 216) attributed to Berkeley on the subject of language. Although Berkeley's remarks on language are clearly highly original, and there is even some evidence that Berkeley himself regarded them as 'revolutionary', a plausible interpretation ought to make Berkeley's strategy intelligible in its historical context, and not read the 20th century back into it, as the use theory interpretation appears to do.

In fact, however, it *is* intelligible in Berkeley's context that he should have developed a use theory of language. The *Principles* and *Alciphron*—the two published works in which Berkeley presents his theory of language—both clearly position themselves within the deist controversy of the 18th century. In *Alciphron*, Berkeley's argument for his theory of language is framed as a response to John Toland's deistic argument for the claim that religious 'mysteries', such as the Trinity, were (as Berkeley's character Alciphron puts it), "empty notions, or, to speak more properly. . . mere forms of speech, which mean nothing, and are of no use to mankind" (Alc, 7,1:287; see Toland 1696).

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25. Wittgenstein would, of course, disagree with Berkeley regarding our knowledge of the self and its states. The use theory interpretation of Berkeley should certainly not be seen as assimilating Berkeley to Wittgenstein in all respects.

26. See, e.g., Adams 1973; Cummins 1982; Flage 1985; Bettcher 2007; Pearce 2017c, ch. 7; 2018.

Toland saw the mysteries of religion as a tool of tyranny: the clergy, backed by the state, seek to undermine the intellectual autonomy of the laity by forcing them to repeat whatever nonsense words the church prescribes.[27] Many other deistic writers, including Matthew Tindal (1706, 20–23; [1730] 1732, 27–30, 58–60, 93–99, 213–217, 331)[28] and Anthony Collins (1713, 112–122),[29] argued that the attempt to impose doctrines on the laity was contrary to the stated justification for government support of religion, namely the state's interest in promoting virtue among its citizens.[30] Although many Anglican clergy, including Berkeley,[31] supported some form of religious toleration, any defense of Anglicanism must necessarily involve a defense of the mysteries as obligatory articles of faith within a state-supported church.[32] If this promotion of the mysteries is to be justified as part of the established church's activity, it must play some role in the church's promotion of virtue, and this is precisely what many Anglican writers, including Berkeley, argue (see, e.g., Stillingfleet 1691, 28; 1697, lvii; Astell [1705] 2013, §64; Alc, 7,8–10:296–303). Furthermore, even before Berkeley, this argument about the (alleged) salutary moral effects of belief in, e.g., the Trinity is often tangled up with the argument about the meaningfulness of the words used to express such belief. This entanglement can be observed in a particularly strong form in a philosopher and clergyman whose influence on Berkeley is well documented: William King, the Archbishop of Dublin (see King 1709).[33]

In Berkeley's context, the debate about the meaningfulness of Christian mysteries and the debate about the tendency of belief in those mysteries to promote virtue were already entwined. Explicitly in *Alciphron*, and implicitly

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27. A very strong statement of this view, which may have influenced Toland, can be found in the opening of the anonymous *Account of the Word Mystery*:

> *MYSTERY* and *Persecution* are the Tutelar God and Goddess of the new Systems, framed by Worldly Christians. Upon those two Antichristian Principles they ground all their Arguments: *Mystery* makes up the Premises, and *Persecution* the Consequence or Conclusion. (Anonymous 1691, 3)

Also see Berkeley's comments on this view in Alc, 1,6–7:40–42.

28. Berkeley discusses the central argument of Tindal (1730) 1732 (referring to Tindal by the pseudonym 'Glaucus') in Alc, 6,18–19:254–255, and mentions Tindal 1706 in TVV, 2:251, 5:253.

29. *Alciphron* discusses Collins under the pseudonym 'Diagoras' (Alc, 1,12:52, 4,16–22:163–171), and Berkeley makes explicit reference to Collins in TVV, 6:254. On Berkeley's interpretation of, and response to, Collins, see O'Higgins 1976; Berman 1990, ch. 3; Taranto 2010; Pearce 2018.

30. In addition to Tindal and Collins, see Toland 1720, 133–136.

31. It is unclear exactly what Berkeley takes to be the correct boundaries of religious toleration, and there is some evidence that he becomes more liberal about this later in his career. However, both early and late, he clearly supports the legal toleration of at least some non-Anglican Christians (RGB, 70–71; Q, 191:120–121, 256–257:126, 1,297–299:160).

32. Tindal (1706, 22) argues that it is inconsistent to support religious toleration while also supporting a state church with obligatory doctrines: "if it be the highest Injustice to force Men to profess such Speculative Opinions as they don't believe, it can't savour much of Justice to make 'em contribute [through taxation] to the Support of [those opinions]."

33. Berkeley explicitly references King's sermon at CGB, 36, and likely also has King in mind at Alc, 4,16–18:163–166. Additionally, I have argued that King's sermon forms an important part of the background to DHP (Pearce 2018). On the pragmatist tendencies of King's sermon, see Berman 1976.

in the manuscript and published introductions, Berkeley is responding to these debates. He responds to the meaningfulness debate by arguing that the tendency of forms of words to affect the life and character of those who employ them is constitutive of their meaningfulness. Contrary to the emotivist interpretation, Berkeley adopts this account not only for certain special cases but for language in general. This is indeed a radical and highly original move, but it is also intelligible as a response to an existing debate, as the principle of historical continuity requires. Berkeley's view is that not only a special class of religious words, but *all* words get to be meaningful by virtue of the role they play in shaping our engagement with the world around us, including especially our relations to our fellow human beings. Words are tools for promoting human flourishing. Sometimes words perform their function by suggesting ideas, and sometimes they perform it without suggesting ideas.

5   Conclusion

According to the ideational theory of meaning, humans have certain ideas together with a capacity to perform acts of judgment assembling these ideas into truth-evaluable mental states with subject-predicate structure. Individual words, on this view, typically signify the speaker's ideas, while complete sentences signify these truth-evaluable mental states (mental propositions). Both early and late in his career, Berkeley explicitly attacks this view. I have argued that Berkeley's attack is more radical than most interpreters have recognized. Berkeley in fact entirely rejects the notion that meaningful words must signify what takes place in the mind of the speaker. Instead, both early and late in his career, Berkeley holds that words get to be meaningful when they are used according to rules in a conventional social practice aiming at some practical goods.[34]

Abbreviations

Alc   Berkeley, George. (1732) 1948–1957. *Alciphron: or, the Minute Philosopher*. In BW, vol. 3.

BW   Berkeley, George. 1948–1957. *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*. Edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop. 9 vols. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

CGB   Hight, Marc A., ed. 2013. *The Correspondence of George Berkeley*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CSM   Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny, trans. 1984–1991. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.* 3 vols. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DHP   Berkeley, George. (1713) 1948–1957. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous.* In BW, vol. 2.

DM   Berkeley, George. (1721b) 1948–1957. *An Essay on Motion.* In BW, 4:243–267. Latin edition: *De Motu: Sive, De Motus Principio & Natura, et de Causa Communicationis Motuum.* In BW, vol. 4.

E   Locke, John. (1690) 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

MI   Berkeley, George. 1987. *George Berkeley's Manuscript Introduction: An Editio Diplomatica.* Edited by Bertil Belfrage. Oxford: Doxa.

NTV   Berkeley, George. (1709) 1948–1957. *An Essay Toward a New Theory of Vision.* In BW, vol. 1.

PC   Berkeley, George. 1989. *Philosophical Commentaries.* Edited by George Hasson Thomas. The Philosophy of George Berkeley. Ohio: Garland.

PHK   Berkeley, George. (1710) 1948–1957. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge.* In BW, vol. 2.

Q   Berkeley, George. (1735) 1948–1957. *The Querist: Containing Several Queries Proposed to the Consideration of the Public.* In BW, 6:105–181.

RGB   Berkeley, George. (1721c) 1948–1957. *An Essay Towards Preventing the Ruin of Great Britain.* In BW, 6:68–87.

Siris   Berkeley, George. (1744) 1948–1957. *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflexions and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar-water, and divers other Subjects connected together and arising One from Another.* In BW, 5:31–164.

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