

## Immaterialism

Jasper Reid

The term ‘immaterialism’ was introduced by George Berkeley in the third of his *Three Dialogues* (1713), to designate his own opinion that there was no such thing as material substance, and that bodies were not to be understood in terms of qualities that inhered in an independent, unthinking substratum, but rather as collections of mind-dependent ideas. The term ‘idealism’ would subsequently come to be used for positions of this kind, especially among German philosophers, first introduced by Christian Wolff in 1721 and first applied to Berkeley’s own position by Christoph Matthaeus Pfaff in 1725 (Bracken 1965: 19–21). Both terms are ambiguous—witness the case of Joseph Berington’s ‘immaterialism’ below—but ‘idealism’ has been used over the centuries to designate a far wider range of theories than ‘immaterialism’, and it is the latter term that I shall use here. Now, whereas the history of most philosophical positions can be traced back almost as far as the discipline itself, immaterialism is unusual in that its birth can be pin-pointed to a precise moment in time, in the first decade of the eighteenth century. There are, it is true, a few candidates for earlier precursors: but they really are very few indeed.

In a well-known 1982 article, Myles Burnyeat argued not only that immaterialism *was* not endorsed in (Western) antiquity but that, for philosophical reasons, it *could* not have been (Burnyeat 1982: 3–4). Admittedly, it has been pointed out that Burnyeat’s thesis might not be not entirely correct, at least if one allows ‘antiquity’ to extend as far forward as the fourth century A.D. Two of the Cappadocian Fathers, the brothers Gregory of Nyssa and Basil of Caesarea, did develop between them a position that was, on the face of it, not a million miles from Berkeley’s (see Sorabji 1988, ch. 4). Gregory argued that there was nothing more to a body than colour, resistance, quantity and other such properties—take these away, he claimed, and the whole idea of the body would thereby be dissolved. But, as he also claimed, these properties were intelligible ‘thinkables’, whose reality was only properly to be found in an intellectual being. His goal was to explain how it should be possible for an incorporeal God to produce bodies, and this was his solution: ‘what trouble can it be to such a thinking agent to produce the thinkables whose mutual combination generates for us the substance of that body?’ (Gregory 1994: 458; see also 414). Basil also seems to have fallen in line with his brother’s opinion (see Basil 1996: 56); and somewhat similar moves recur in the ninth century, in the works of John Scotus Eriugena (see Moran 1999 and 2006), who had in fact translated and been directly influenced by these Cappadocians.

There is room, however, to contest even these candidates for immaterialist status (see, for instance, Hibbs 2005); and, besides these exceptional cases, philosophers of antiquity and the Middle Ages simply did not propose anything comparable to Berkeley’s theory. Sir William Hamilton, writing in the nineteenth century, suggested that some of the Medieval Schoolmen might actually have been willing to embrace immaterialism, had they not faced an insurmountable theological obstacle in the doctrine of Transubstantiation (Hamilton 1839: 196–198). Hamilton’s suggestion has occasionally been taken up since (see Muirhead 1931: 107; Brown 1997: 200), and there might be something to it. It is certainly hard to see how one can make sense of a transfer of the substance of the body of Christ without its sensible

qualities, if one opts simply to identify that body with that very bundle of qualities. It is also worth just noting that, when the more unambiguous immaterialists of the eighteenth century did begin to appear, they were mostly if not exclusively Protestants. Indeed, one of them, Arthur Collier, went so far as to present it as one of the most important benefits of his doctrine, that it provided the sort of conceptual apparatus that would enable him fully to refute the doctrine of the Real Presence (Collier 1713: 95–96).

Before we properly begin to examine Berkeley, Collier and other eighteenth-century immaterialists, however, it is worth saying a few words about certain seventeenth-century currents that might also, though in different ways, be thought to have some affinities with immaterialism—in order to distinguish these from the doctrine that really concerns us. First, there were several authors in that century who (drawing on much older traditions) did deny the existence of material substance if that was understood to mean something wholly passive and dead, preferring instead to characterise the created world as a smooth continuum of more or less spiritual beings. The notion that some rudimentary form of life and even perception might be attributable to absolutely every real being can be found in such authors as Tommaso Campanella, Francis Glisson, Margaret Cavendish, Henry More, Francis Mercury van Helmont and Anne Conway. Campanella might not have attributed the *same* kind of life and perception to (what we would ordinarily regard as) inanimate things as he attributed to higher spirits—their perception was as inferior to the sensation of an animal as this was in turn to the intellection of an angel—but he did nevertheless insist that absolutely everything was indeed endowed with life and perception of some kind or other (Bonansea 1969: 156–161). For Glisson, one of the century’s leading anatomists, it was his medical research and his dissatisfaction with the explanatory power of a sharp Cartesian dualism of mind and body that led him to the conclusion that the bodies themselves were equipped with the faculties of perception, appetite and self-motion (Henry 1987). As for Cavendish and More, they both rejected (what they took to be) another Cartesian position: that motion could literally pass out of one body and enter another in a mechanical impact. Instead, they preferred to say that one body could merely ‘occasion’ (Cavendish) or ‘remind’ (More) another body to stir itself into motion by drawing on its own vital resources. This power of self-motion, from their point of view, demonstrated that ‘there is life and knowledge in all parts of nature’ (Cavendish 1664: 98–99), or that ‘all that is called “body” is really a stupefied and sottish life’ (More in Descartes 1964–1976: 5:383). In a like manner, van Helmont and Conway would also maintain that spirit and body were interconvertible, being merely two levels in a smooth and continuous hierarchy of reality. Van Helmont called the basic units in this monistic continuum ‘monads’, and he held that, even in their most degraded and corporeal state, ‘every Body is in some degree or measure Animal and Spiritual, *i.e.* hath Life, Sense and Knowledge; or at leastwise capable of those Attributes’ (Helmont 1694: 12). Although corporeal monads might, again, not get to enjoy the same kind of sense-perception as the more eminently spiritual ones, ‘yet some such like thing, and what is *Analogous* thereunto, even the *Scriptures* do ascribe to them’ (Helmont 1682: 17; on the overall system of van Helmont, which Conway largely shared, see Coudert 1999). Completely ‘dead matter’, as Conway put it, ‘is completely non-being, a vain fiction and Chimera, and an impossible thing’ (Conway 1690: 46. On Conway’s system, also see Hutton 2004. It should be noted that More’s position did shift over the course of his career, from a

denial of dead matter in the 1640s to a direct and explicit refutation (in his *Fundamenta philosophiae*, 1675) of that very denial as it had by then come to be developed in the work of van Helmont and Conway).

Now, van Helmont's position in particular is an important one, given the influence that it appears to have had on the development of the far better-known monadology that one finds in Leibniz (see Coudert 1995). For Leibniz, as for van Helmont, absolutely everything was in some sense alive, endowed with appetite as an intrinsic principle of internal change. Moreover, Leibniz endowed all things with perception, an internal representation of the entire universe. In these respects, Leibniz and his hylozoic forebears (as Ralph Cudworth dubbed those who made some form of life intrinsic to all bodies: see chapter three of Cudworth 1678) might be regarded as having embraced a certain kind of immaterialism. If matter is being understood (as it had often been defined) as an essentially dead and wholly passive thing, then these authors countenanced no such thing. But what should be appreciated is that these theories were quite unlike the sort of immaterialism that one finds in Berkeley. Berkeley and the other eighteenth-century immaterialists most certainly *did* countenance a world of wholly passive bodies, as those seventeenth-century vitalists did not: what they denied was their mind-independent substantiality. Whereas the seventeenth-century gradual monists had sought to turn bodies into *perceivers*, at least in some minimal sense, the eighteenth-century immaterialists sought to turn them into the dependent *objects* of perception. Far from treating body as merely a lowlier, more attenuated form of spirit, Berkeley and the others retained a very sharp division indeed between the two categories, in order to explain how the existence of the former was underpinned by the perception of the latter.

There is, however, a different respect in which Leibniz might be regarded as sharing some common ground with Berkeley and the other immaterialists. After all, the matter/spirit distinction had been drawn up in several different ways by different authors, and to define it as a contrast between passive, dead stuff and active, vital principles was, if anything, rather old-fashioned. What about the Cartesian distinction between *res extensa* and *res cogitans*? Descartes, for his part, was about as staunch a dualist as they come. As for those seventeenth-century gradual monists, they would often tend to muddy the waters in both directions, not only ascribing some minimal form of perception to bodies, but also ascribing extension to more eminently spiritual beings. Leibniz, however, was rather closer to Berkeley on this point. For Leibniz as for Berkeley, extension was only properly to be found within the realm of perception. In itself, a Leibnizian monad was wholly devoid of extension: had it been genuinely extended, he felt, there would have been no way to preserve it from divisibility; but monads were *defined* by their indivisible simplicity. Extension, for Leibniz, was phenomenal, merely a matter of the way the universe of monads *appeared* in the perception of any given one. Admittedly, this phenomenon was at least a 'well-founded' one. Even if the perception did not reflect the way things truly were in themselves, Leibniz did nevertheless regard it as a perception *of* things that continued to maintain their own substantial reality, quite independently of their being thus perceived. Moreover, much as every monad might have possessed its own perception, Leibniz understood 'perception' very differently from how Berkeley understood that term. For Berkeley, perception was a matter of conscious awareness. For Leibniz, although *some* monads did possess consciousness ('apperception'), and thereby rose to the level of 'souls', most of them did not. In *Berkeley's* terms, Leibnizian bare

monads were not really to be regarded as perceivers at all. And, given that their existence was also supposed to be independent of (or at least prior to) their being perceived, Berkeley simply had no place for them in his ontology. (For two important comparisons of Berkeley and Leibniz, see Wilson 1987 and chapter nine of Adams 1994).

Later on, in the 1770s, an English author, Joseph Berington, would adopt something very close to the Leibnizian scheme, and his version does merit a brief mention, if for no other reason than that he did actually *call* it an ‘immaterialist’ system. In his *Immaterialism Delineated* (1779), a reply to the materialism of Joseph Priestley (see Wolfe and Harris in this volume)—itself a rather hylozoic system, as it happens—Berington began by proposing that the term ‘body’ should be allowed to designate any being with a finite power to produce sensations in us (Berington 1779: 25–28). But, crucially, he maintained that extension as such was merely one of these sensations, on a par with ideas of the supposed secondary qualities such as colour, and that it could bear no more resemblance to anything outside our minds than those other sensations did (Berington 1779: 87–93). Berington noted that Berkeley’s ‘ideal system’ was ‘nearly coincident with what I have just advanced’. But the difference, as he saw it, was that Berkeley, believing that body ought to be understood as a wholly inert substance, had rejected it from his ontology altogether, because he correctly recognised—as Malebranche had failed to see (see below)—that a God who did nothing in vain could have had no reason to create such a useless medium, given that he was perfectly capable of directly producing all the same ideal effects in our minds without it (Berington 1779: 28–32). Elsewhere, Berington cited Leibniz with approval, and he adopted the characteristically Leibnizian terminology of ‘monads’ and ‘phenomena’ (Berington 1779: 52, 154, 179, etc.). His own opinion was that the true elements of bodies—the monads—were not inert after all, but were endowed with active powers. Indeed, although most of them were unconscious, they were nevertheless not categorically different from our own conscious minds. Aggregates of these monads would collectively operate to give us phenomenal sensations of extension, and hence we would regard those aggregates as material: but individually, since they were both active and intrinsically unextended, the monads themselves would turn out to be immaterial.

It is evident, my ideas greatly tend to establish a general system of *Immaterialism*. For, to my mind, all that is *real*, all that is *positive* in matter, is *simple* and *indivisible*: *composition* is but its *relative* essence. The simple elements which unite to form that complex substance, *matter*, are themselves, as has been seen, intrinsically *immaterial*: they constitute matter, but are not matter itself: so, *intrinsically* they are not either solid, or hard, or extended, which appearances however, they are calculated to exhibit. [...] I may be allowed to say what the *relative* nature of bodies is, because I may speak from my own perceptions; and in this sense the external world is certainly *material*. The superior Being will not speak the same language (Berington 1779: 143–144).

Again, someone like Berkeley would no doubt have regarded these unconscious, active, unextended, simple elements of bodies as wholly unintelligible and spurious abstractions. But what the case of Berington, together with that of Leibniz himself,

**“Immaterialism” © 2013 Jasper Reid. Forthcoming in Garrett, A. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. Pre-print version archived with permission.**

goes to show is how just finely nuanced the issues can become in this area. Berington's position was certainly not the same as Berkeley's: but he was surely correct to say that it was similar, and it would be going much too far for us to suggest that it somehow failed to earn the 'immaterialist' title that he himself chose to give it.

Before we arrive properly at Berkeley himself, and returning to the late seventeenth century, one more author is worth just a few words. This was a decidedly obscure Parisian doctor by the name of Jean (or sometimes 'Claude') Brunet. In a 1686 article, Brunet did indeed claim that corporeal objects only had reality in the mind, as various combinations of particular sensations of colour, warmth, shape and other such qualities. Thus far, he certainly did have the character of an immaterialist in the full Berkeleyan sense. But Brunet did not stop there. His chief concern was not to explain the mind-dependent existence of bodies, but rather to suggest that it was upon *his* mind that the whole universe depended, not just bodies but *everything*: Brunet was a solipsist (McCracken and Tipton 2000: 70–75; Robinson 1913). It was not until the eighteenth century that authors would begin to appear who, while making corporeal reality their primary focus, sought to resolve that corporeal realm entirely into the ideas of perceiving minds. But, after the philosophical world had had to wait many centuries for somebody willing to execute such a manoeuvre, the remarkable thing is that three suddenly came along at once: Berkeley, Collier and Jonathan Edwards.

The most famous among these immaterialists was, of course, George Berkeley, the originator of the word itself. (For a discussion of Berkeley's theory of perception see Falkenstein 1 in this volume). Berkeley hit upon his new theory remarkably early in life, the basic outline being firmly in place by about 1708, as the *Philosophical Commentaries*, the extant notebooks from his salad days at Trinity College Dublin, make clear. The dominant figure who overshadows these notebooks, and the published works that followed them, is John Locke. In the *Philosophical Commentaries*, we get to watch as Berkeley makes his way, fairly sequentially, through Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding*, noting down his thoughts about those theses he found cause to question. Berkeley clearly had a tremendous respect for Locke: but, feeling that Locke had erred on certain fundamental points, Berkeley sought to push Locke's general philosophical approach further than its author had himself been willing to push it.

In the case of body, Locke had followed Boyle and other corpuscularians in drawing a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. He argued that our ideas of the latter—colours, sounds, flavours, etc.—could not properly be regarded as resembling anything in a material object. Among other arguments, he observed that one and the same body could produce contrary ideas of secondary qualities according to the alterations in the state of the observer alone. The same basin of water, for instance, might feel warm to one hand, while cold to another; but surely the same water could not resemble *both* of these simple ideas at once, given how dissimilar they were from one another; and yet neither of them seemed to have any greater claim than the other to reveal the true, intrinsic nature of the water; hence, Locke concluded, neither of them could do so. By contrast, Locke was satisfied that our ideas of primary qualities—the mechanical properties that Descartes had called 'modes of extension', such as size, shape and motion—did reveal the way that bodies really were in themselves. Here, he felt, the same sort of relativity was not to be discovered. A single

body, he wrote, would not feel square to one hand and round to the other. (Locke 1689: II.viii.21).

Secondary qualities, insofar as they subsisted in bodies merely as powers to produce certain ideas in perceiving minds, would rest upon the primary qualities of the bodies' microscopic parts. But then Locke felt that these primary qualities would themselves need something even more fundamental upon which to rest. Qualities, or 'accidents' in general, did not seem to be the sorts of things that could just float freely. It seemed that something else was required, to do the job of upholding them in existence, and, indeed, of uniting several different qualities to make them all various qualities of the *same* thing. It was thoughts such as these, Locke contended, that had led philosophers—or people in general—to postulate a material substance, to stand as the ultimate foundation of the whole set of an object's qualities together. But the trouble was that material substance as such could never be perceived. Locke's epistemology was entirely grounded in experience, which, in the corporeal case, would mean sensual experience. But the senses could only ever give us ideas of the qualities of things, and never of the substratum that allegedly underlay them all. Locke felt that, even if it was possible to achieve a confused and obscure idea of the metaphysical work that such a substratum would be doing, we could achieve no idea at all of what it was that was doing this work (II.xiii.19). Substance was just 'something, he knew not what' (II.xxiii.2).

Now, Locke did not actually commit himself to the thesis that there *was* such a thing as a pure substratum, underlying all corporeal qualities. The question he was addressing in these discussions was rather that of how and why people had come to *suppose* that there was (II.xiii.17–20, II.xxiii.1–4). The reduction of secondary qualities to primary qualities was, in Locke's opinion, a major victory of the New Science: but it was a physical theory, not a metaphysical one. Likewise, if subsequent research could establish a comparable physical theory about how the primary qualities might themselves be reduced to something still more fundamental (for instance, explaining the union of parts outside parts—that is, explaining extension itself—in terms of some as-yet-unknown 'cement' between these parts), that would certainly be another great achievement. But it would just raise new questions of how to explain that *explanans*, whatever it might turn out to be (II.xxiii.26). Locke did not rule out the possibility that there might in fact be an *infinite* hierarchy of qualities, each one resting on, and in principle reducible to and physically explicable in terms of, the next one down, but without any base at all, and hence no need for an irreducible metaphysical substratum to be located at such a base. Part of Locke's project was to delineate the proper limits of human understanding, precisely in order to guard against inadvertently overstepping them, and he was consequently extremely reticent when it came to committing himself one way or the other on metaphysical questions like that.<sup>1</sup>

Berkeley, however, certainly read Locke as if he was indeed postulating the real existence of material substance, that mere 'something, he knew not what'. And he felt that Locke was indeed exceeding the epistemological constraints that he had set

---

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted, though, that, even if Locke had positively committed himself to an endless hierarchy of qualities, each dependent on those at the next level down, although it is true that there would then have been nothing substantial—i.e. independent—in a body, we would still not have been dealing with *mind*-dependence, and hence such a scheme would still not have qualified as an immaterialism in the narrower sense of the term with which we are currently concerned.

himself, and should never have suggested that there could be so much as *something* there. In *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), following a critique of Locke's account of abstract ideas in the Introduction, the first plank in Berkeley's positive argument for immaterialism drew on the observation that our ideas of primary qualities *did* in fact vary just as much as those of the secondary ones, according to changes in the observer alone (§§9–15). Hence, he concluded, the likenesses of these could not be attributed to mind-independent bodies either. But then what else remained that *could* be ascribed to such bodies? In the words of Berkeley's widow, Anne: 'The Bishop of Cloyne pursues Mr Locks own way of reasoning—& thereby proves that the *first qualities* of *matter* must from their *mutability* be *rejected* as well as the *secondary qualities*—And he saith that if Matter hath neither first or secondary qualities it is *nothing*. He only presses his (Locks) Argument as far as truth and experience leads' (Berman 1977: 18).

Drawing upon that introductory polemic against abstract ideas, Berkeley dismissed as a thoroughly unintelligible abstraction what he took to be Locke's notion of a material substance, distinct from all of the qualities it was supposed to uphold (Berkeley 1710: §§16–18). Berkeley felt that the postulation of such a substance was entirely vacuous—we could not even grasp what it would *mean* for there to be such a thing, let alone get any evidence for it—and hence that a rejection of this philosophical fiction could do nothing to undermine the reality of the corporeal world. He was at pains to stress: '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.' (Berkeley 1707–1708: §593). For Berkeley, no abstract idea of existence in general could be framed at all. The word 'existence', for Berkeley, was equivocal, to be explicated differently in relation to the specific objects whose existence was being asserted. For a mind, 'to exist' would mean 'to perceive' or 'to act'; for a body, it would mean 'to be perceived'. Berkeley dismissed the Lockean distinction between sensible qualities and our sensual ideas of these qualities, and he identified bodies with bundles of such ideal qualities, primary and secondary alike. Although Berkeley did indeed believe that such qualities required a substance to support their existence, he felt that this substance could only be an immaterial one, defined by its vital powers of perception and activity.

Now, although Locke's influence—positive or negative, and rightly or wrongly interpreted—did clearly permeate Berkeley's early writings, his was certainly not the only presence therein. The *Philosophical Commentaries* also reveal that Berkeley was carefully studying the works of (among several others) Descartes, Bayle, Newton and, perhaps most importantly, Nicolas Malebranche. Indeed, it is worth noting that, in the earliest notices of Berkeley's works, it was with Malebranche that he was most frequently associated, while no mention whatsoever was initially made of Locke. Samuel Clarke and William Whiston, for instance, instinctively ranked Berkeley with Malebranche and his English supporter, John Norris. Likewise, the *Mémoires de Trévoux* of 1713 had no hesitation in declaring him to be 'a bona fide Malebranchist'. Or again, *The Tribune* described Berkeley's *Principles* in 1729 as going 'pretty much upon the principles of the famous Father Malebranche' (McCracken and Tipton 2000: 164–65, 178, 188; also Bracken 1965: 1, 29). It should certainly be noted that Berkeley himself was not at all happy with this association, and he took care explicitly to disavow many of Malebranche's central tenets. But, after all, the same is true of Locke, and we know that some of Locke's influence was positive. It does seem plausible that, despite their differences, some genuinely constructive

inspiration from Malebranche might indeed have found its way through to Berkeley. And such an inspiration then becomes very much more explicit when we start to examine some of the other immaterialists of the period.

The problem of the existence of an external world had been set up by Descartes in the First Meditation. Given a distinction—common to both Locke and Descartes—between a mind-independent body on the one hand, and the idea we have of such a body on the other, difficulties will arguably arise over bridging the epistemological gulf between the two things. Berkeley himself alluded to this problem in the *Principles*. Having already concluded that there was in fact no real distinction to be drawn between our ideas of bodies and those bodies themselves, he identified such a purported distinction as having been ‘the very root of *scepticism*; for so long as men thought that real things subsisted without the mind, and that their knowledge was only so far forth *real* as it was conformable to *real things*, it follows, they could not be certain that they had any real knowledge at all’ (§86). Now Descartes, for his part, was satisfied that this gulf could be traversed after all, thanks to the non-deceiving nature of God. God, he felt, built us in such a way that our sensations would induce us to believe in material things, while also not providing us with any evidence to discredit such a notion; but then, if this belief had been false, then the act of giving us the propensity to form it would have amounted to an act of deception on God’s part; therefore, it was not false, and material things really did exist. Malebranche, however, was not satisfied with the force of Descartes’s proof. In his Sixth Elucidation, appended to the 1678 edition of *The Search after Truth*, Malebranche acknowledged that God did indeed endow us with an instinctive inclination to believe in material things when presented with sensual experience. But this inclination, he observed, was not irresistible. It was still possible for us to withhold judgment: that was, after all, precisely what Descartes himself had been doing for five sixths of his book. If God had given us an irresistible belief, then the falsity of such a belief would have convicted him as a deceiver; hence, we were justified in our certainty of anything that we could not help but believe. If, however, God merely gave us a weaker inclination to believe something, this showed only that it was *probably* true. The existence of the external world was *as* probable as our inclination to believe in it was compelling: but it did not lend itself to philosophical demonstration. It was only through faith that Malebranche could find absolute certainty on this matter.

But, even if he did not make full use of it himself, Malebranche also provided subsequent authors with further ammunition to use against material substance. For Malebranche as for Descartes, there was no need for matter to exist in order to stand as the object of our sensual perceptions, since the only objects these really required were ideas (as it happened, God’s own ideas in Malebranche’s case). But Malebranche was also an occasionalist, wholeheartedly committed to the thesis that created beings could not affect one another by efficient causation. Instead, he felt, God was the immediate agent of everything that happened to us. Thus, matter did not need to exist in order to *cause* our sensual perceptions either. Malebranche additionally insisted that God, in his wisdom, would always act to achieve his goals in the simplest possible ways. But it is not very plausible to suppose that God would wish to create matter for its own sake: being utterly incapable of ever receiving any kind of benefit, it is hard to see how it can have such a thing as a ‘sake’ at all. And it is equally hard to see why he would create it for our sake, given that we could not experience it or be affected by it at all. All in all, there did not seem to be any good

reason for God to create matter at all; a fact which, given that God always acted in the simplest ways, would itself seem to constitute a reason for him *not* to create it.

Even if Malebranche himself did not fully draw out this line of thought, others who followed him did so. For just one example, the Abbé François de Lanion (writing as Guillaume Wander) explicitly argued in *Méditations sur la métaphysique* (1678) that the hypothesis of the existence of matter was undermined by the simplicity of God's ways. For Lanion, the mind-independent reality of the corporeal world was, from a philosophical point of view, not merely uncertain: it was in fact decidedly improbable. Nevertheless, Lanion continued to maintain the existence of such a world as an article of faith (Lanion 1678: 300–301). But Pierre Bayle (who knew Lanion's book well, having himself edited a 1684 reprint thereof) went further still. In notes G and H to the article on Zeno of Elea in his *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697), Bayle actually went so far as to claim that, from a strictly philosophical point of view, the existence of the external world was not merely uncertain, nor even merely improbable: it was positively *impossible*. He did nevertheless continue to hold that such a belief could be justified by faith, thereby illustrating the superiority of faith over philosophy. But, after such a progression of theories—on which, see McCracken 1986 and 1998, and Parigi 1997—it was really only a matter of time before someone came along who was prepared to take the final step.

As we have already noted, Berkeley was familiar with at least some of these authors, and they probably did play some role alongside Locke in shaping the development of his immaterialist thoughts around 1707–1708. But, as it happens, Berkeley had already been beaten to the mark by another figure, the aforementioned Arthur Collier. Now, Collier's theory did not actually make it into print (in his *Clavis Universalis*) until 1713, three years after Berkeley's *Principles*. There is no hint of any kind of personal relationship between them, so it seems that Berkeley hit upon his own ideas entirely independently of Collier. He would eventually refer to Collier, but not until after the publication of the latter's book (Berkeley 1948–1957: 8:67). But it does not appear that Collier was influenced by Berkeley either. In time, he would also refer to Berkeley, and acknowledge similarities between their views, but the earliest such reference dates from 1714 (Benson 1837: 32, 37; Collier 1730: 114). There is no evidence that Collier knew Berkeley's work while he was writing his *Clavis*, and there *is* evidence that he had first begun to develop the ideas contained therein as early as 1703. In the Introduction, Collier remarked: 'I am at last, after a ten years pause and deliberation, content to put myself upon the trial of the common reader' (Collier 1713: 1). There is nothing to suggest that any thoughts of this nature had occurred to Berkeley as early as that.

The affinities between Berkeley and Collier's respective positions are surely to be explained not by any direct link, but rather by the fact that they were both reading and being influenced by the same authors from the preceding generation. But a point that is well worth noting is that there is no discernible presence of Locke in Collier's work. Instead, Collier was firmly, if not exclusively, embedded in the Malebranchean tradition sketched above. This is already plain enough from the title page of *Clavis Universalis* alone: its subtitle is 'A New Inquiry after Truth', and its motto is drawn from *De Inquirenda Veritate*, the Latin version of Malebranche's *Search*. The same impression is further confirmed by the body of the text, wherein Collier cited the authority of Malebranche directly, alongside that of his English disciple, John Norris.

(As a matter of fact, Collier and Norris were near neighbours, respectively the rectors of Langford Magna and Bemerton, just a few miles apart in Wiltshire).

*Clavis Universalis* is in two parts. In the first, Collier argued in various ways that the visible world had no existence independently of its being seen. He cited, for instance, the indiscernibility between those perceptions that were commonly taken to be perceptions of real things and those that were regarded as mere illusions or hallucinations. For example, he observed, if one presses one's eyeball whilst looking at the moon, one's perception of the moon will be doubled. Both of these apparent moons will look external; but all would agree that at least one of them was not really so; hence, apparent externity could be no proof of real externity (Collier 1713: 17). But Collier then continued by arguing that, if one of the apparent moons was allowed to be *merely* apparent, then the other one would have to be so too, on account of their indiscernibility. 'If any one will affirm, that only one of these moons is external, I must desire him to give me one mark or sign of the externity of one, which is not in the other' (ibid.: 21). In the second part of the work, Collier then proceeded to argue that it was absolutely impossible that there should be some other material world, maybe distinct from the visible world, but nevertheless neither an immediate object of perception nor itself a perceiver. Collier identified a number of—as he saw them—contradictions inherent in the hypothesis of a material world, for instance that such a world would turn out to be both finite and infinite (ibid.: 47–52). In any case, even if the hypothesis was allowed to be 'possible with regard to the thing itself', the simplicity of God's ways would still rule it out: 'an useless creature cannot possibly be made, when we regard its cause, viz. God, who can do nothing to no purpose, by reason of his wisdom' (ibid.: 46). As for the appeal to faith, to produce the justification that philosophy failed to provide, Collier responded (here following Norris) that it was without merit. When scriptural texts described the creation of material things, he insisted, they were merely referring to *visible*, and consequently mind-dependent, things (ibid.: 76–80).

As for the third independent formulation of immaterialism in the early eighteenth century, this came from the American theologian, Jonathan Edwards. Whereas Berkeley and Collier both started to devise their respective systems in their early twenties, Edwards was actually still in his teens. During the first half of the 1720s, as his early, posthumously published philosophical manuscripts make clear, Edwards was rapidly working his way towards an immaterialist position that he would never renounce thereafter.<sup>2</sup> Although the younger man was conducting his research about fifteen years after that of his seniors, Berkeley and Collier, he does nevertheless appear to have been doing so in isolation from them. Edwards, much like Collier, did eventually become aware of Berkeley's work, but not until after his own system was already firmly in place. There is nothing to suggest that he ever came to know Collier's work at all.

The evidence does, however, suggest that Edwards, like both Berkeley and Collier, was familiar with Malebranche's theories; and he also came early into a particular admiration for Locke and Newton. Edwards sided with Locke and Newton, against Malebranche and Descartes, in regarding not extension but rather

---

<sup>2</sup> The chief surviving texts of Edwards that present his immaterialism are 'Of Being' and *The Mind* (mostly composed during the 1720s; first published 1829); and *The Miscellanies*, a–500 (composed during the 1720s; first published in full 1994).

impenetrability or solidity as the defining attribute of bodies. But the question he asked himself was this: precisely what is it that is getting kept out, when such a solidity resists penetration? Initially, he seemed content to say that ‘solidity surely is nothing but resistance to other solidities’ (Edwards 1957–: 6:202), but he soon recognised the circularity in this answer. ‘It is ridiculous to say that resistance is resisted. That does not tell us at all what is to be resisted. There must be something resisted before there can be resistance, but to say resistance is resisted is ridiculously to suppose resistance before there is anything there to be resisted’ (ibid.: 351). Recognising, however, that colours would resist penetration by one another—red and green patches cannot be seen in the same place at the same time—Edwards concluded that these patches of colour ought to qualify, under the definition, as bodies. But Edwards, like Berkeley, also rejected the primary/secondary quality distinction. Therefore, since it was generally agreed that colours, as perceived, had no mind-independent reality, Edwards concluded that the extensions and solidities of these coloured patches could have none either. And he straightforwardly declared: ‘there is no such thing as material substance truly and properly distinct from all those that are called sensible qualities’ (ibid.: 398). Nevertheless, Edwards did feel that *something* needed to ground such qualities. For him, this was none other than the immaterial substance of God himself. Alluding to Locke’s notorious ‘something, he knew not what’, Edwards wrote: ‘All therefore agree that there is something that is there, and upholds these properties; and it is most true, there undoubtedly is. But men are wont to content themselves in saying merely that it is something; but that “something” is he by whom all things consist’ (p. 380). Edwards was, however, no pantheist. Although he felt that God upheld sensible qualities in a *causal* sense, they did not inhere in him as modifications of his own substance. Edwards made it very clear that corporeal creation was a creation *ad extra*: but, nevertheless, the items thus created were ideal.

With Berkeley, Collier and Edwards all coming independently to immaterialist conclusions in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, there must have been something in the air. The groundwork that had been done in the seventeenth century, by Descartes, Malebranche, Bayle, Locke and others, had so effectively prepared the stage for immaterialism that, to some philosophers, it seemed almost obvious that this was the natural next step to take in metaphysics. For, although Berkeley, Collier and Edwards would appear to be the only philosophers who *independently* devised immaterialist systems during this period, there were several others who subsequently followed their lead. Collier and Edwards, it is true, had few if any disciples. In Edwards’s case, this was probably just because he never actually published a treatise on the topic, and his manuscript notes did not start to see the light of print until 1829. In Collier’s case, it was probably—and unfortunately—a reflection of the comparatively poor quality of his argumentation. Berkeley, however, did find rather more support: although, even there, it took a little while to arrive.

Berkeley himself named John Arbuthnot as ‘the first proselyte’ he had made in England. But there is no real evidence that Arbuthnot himself would have concurred with this description, and Berkeley did subsequently back-pedal, admitting that Arbuthnot had merely ‘acknowledged that he can object nothing’ against his thesis (Berkeley 1948–1957: 8:65, 70). Again, Jonathan Swift claimed of Berkeley that he ‘became the Founder of a Sect called the Immaterialists, by the force of a very curious book which he had written upon that Subject. Doct<sup>r</sup> Smalridge and many other eminent Persons were his Proselytes’ (Swift 1963: 3:31). But this shaky anecdotal

evidence is about all we have, regarding the case of (Bishop George) Smalridge. Over in Germany, following a mention of Berkeley in a 1727 dissertation by Johann Christian Gottsched, we know that he did gain some support from one Johann Heinrich Meister (known as le Maître), a Swiss-born preacher of the Reformed Church at Bayreuth (Breidert 1987: 233). As a matter of fact, Germany was one of the few places where Collier's *Clavis* was also noticed. In 1717, *Acta Eruditorum* offered 'a copious and able abstract of its contents', prompting Wolff and Bilfinger to take notice, and leading in 1756 to a full translation by Christian Ehrenfried Eschenbach of Rostock, bound together with a translation of Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*. But still not a whole lot of firm support.

It is to France that we must turn, to find an important case of someone who, drawing direct inspiration from Berkeley, constructed his own idiosyncratic version of an immaterialist position. The Newtonian scientist, Pierre-Louis Moreau de Maupertuis, approached the issue via a consideration of what we mean—and, it would seem, all that we *could* mean—by our words and sentences. In his *Philosophical Reflections on the Origin of Languages, and the Signification of Words* (1748), Maupertuis argued that words like 'tree' or 'horse' were imposed as names for complex perceptions, and that the concept 'substance' was merely the category under which we classified those elements of perceptions that were common to many such complexes. Since we perceived all bodies as extended, it was only to be expected that we should regard extension as constitutive of material substance: but, had we instead perceived all bodies as green, we might equally well have taken greenness for their substance (Maupertuis 1748: 1:271–272. Berington actually makes exactly the same point about greenness: Berington 1779: 92–93). And, crucially, extension did still remain a *perception* for Maupertuis, and there was no suggestion of its having any absolute existence, independently of its being perceived. Once we had gathered enough repeated experience of resembling perceptions, and had thereby come to develop expectations of getting further such resembling perceptions in the future too, we might finally abbreviate the whole set of the corresponding linguistic expressions together ('I see a tree', 'I saw a tree', 'I shall see a tree', etc.), by simply saying, 'There is a tree'. We would thereby have formed a proposition about the existence of the object *as if* it was independent of us. But, as Maupertuis continued to insist, each of the preceding propositions signified only a perception and nothing more, and one would be hard pressed to discover any more content in the latter proposition than in the set of those preceding ones taken together (Maupertuis 1748: 1:279–280. On Maupertuis in relation to Berkeley, see Gossman 1960; Beeson 1992: 1–2, 159–160; McCracken and Tipton 2000: 244–251).

Across the Atlantic, Berkeley won an important convert in the American cleric and academic, Samuel Johnson, D.D. (not to be confused with the English stone-kicking lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, LL.D.). Although Johnson had been at Yale College at the same time as Jonathan Edwards, there is no evidence of a close connection between the two. (The college was split at the time into an array of rival tutorial groups, based in different Connecticut towns: Johnson was a tutor at Guildford, while Edwards was a student at Wethersfield: Morris 1991: 60, 62). But Johnson did become personally acquainted with Berkeley when the latter travelled to America in 1729. Indeed, he already knew him through his work: Johnson's book list indicates that he first read the *Principles* in 1727 or 1728, and re-read it in 1728 or 1729. After Berkeley arrived in Rhode Island, he provided Johnson with copies of his

other works, which Johnson eagerly devoured. (Johnson 1929: 1:506–509, 512–513, 521).

In their correspondence of 1729–1730, Johnson expressed his strong admiration for Berkeley’s philosophy, assuring him ‘that this way of thinking can’t fail of prevailing in the world, because it is likely to prevail very much among us in these parts, several ingenious men having entirely come in to it’ (Berkeley 1729–1730: 271). But, he admitted, there were a few outstanding concerns that he and his friends desired to have cleared up. The most important of these concerned the issue of archetypes. Berkeley had always admitted that our ideas did correspond to *something* external to and independent of all created minds, but he insisted that this was not an unthinking, unperceived material substance. Rather, God’s own mind contained ideal archetypes of all things, and he would present us with our own ideas on the model of these. But Berkeley had also always stressed that the reality of an idea could not be abstracted from its being perceived; and God certainly did not perceive things in the same passive, sensual manner as we did: so (Johnson wanted to know) what were his ideas supposed to be like?

Berkeley did not present a detailed account of the nature of the divine ideas in this correspondence, although he would say a bit about them in his later, more Platonic work, *Siris* (1744). Johnson, for his part, conducted his own study into them in his own subsequent philosophical work. In *Elementa Philosophica* (1752), a book dedicated to Berkeley, Johnson presented his own version of an immaterialist account of the nature of bodies. The things we call ‘man’, ‘horse’, ‘tree’, ‘stone’, ‘apple’, ‘cherry’ and so forth, he explained, are merely compound ideas received through sensation: ‘these ideas, or immediate objects of sense, are the real things, at least all that we are concerned with, I mean, of the sensible kind’ (Johnson 1752: ch. 1, §8). In his presentation of this position, Johnson borrowed heavily from Berkeley, and he explicitly cited the *New Theory of Vision*, *Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues* in his footnotes. As Johnson then proceeded to explain, since we are passive in the reception of these ideas, and if there is no material substance to produce them, they will need to come to us from an intelligent and active cause, namely God. Moreover, this divine intelligence will need to possess its own archetypal ideas, in order to be in a position to give us our ideas on the model of these. But, he wrote:

then those archetypes or originals, and the manner of their existence in that eternal mind, must be entirely different from that of their existence in our minds; as different, as the manner of His existence is from that of ours: in him they must exist, as in original intellect; in us, only by way of sense and imagination; and in Him, as originals; in us, only as faint copies; such as he thinks fit to communicate to us, according to such laws and limitations as he hath established, and such as are sufficient to all the purposes relating to our well-being, in which only we are concerned. (Johnson 1752: ch. 1, §10).

From this point, the footnotes start to change. As Johnson began to elevate his attention from human sensation to the divine intellect, he stopped citing Berkeley, and shifted instead to citing such Platonists as Malebranche, Norris, Fénelon and Cudworth, not to mention Plato himself. The trouble was that a strictly empiricist epistemology, such as one finds in Berkeley’s early works, was always bound to run into difficulties in coming up with anything substantive to say about the nature of the

divine wisdom. For this, as both Johnson and (in *Siris*) Berkeley himself appreciated, the proper people to turn to were the Platonists.

Back in England, an especially intriguing figure in this second generation of immaterialists was Thomas Daniel (probably born 1719: see Reid 2001). Daniel was a customs officer at Sunderland and an amateur philosopher, who entertained himself for a while by writing letters on various topics to *The Gentleman's Magazine*, signing himself 'T.D.'. From 1750–1752, he engaged in a debate on Berkeley's philosophy with one 'W.W.', a debate which included, in addition to Daniel's letters to the magazine, the anonymous publication of his *An Essay on the Existence of Matter* (1751). (This essay and some—though not all—of the associated letters, are reprinted in Berman 1989). Now, the first thing to observe is that Daniel was actually setting himself up as an *opponent* of Berkeley. It was W.W. (whoever that was) who was endeavouring to defend Berkeleyan immaterialism. But the curious thing is the *way* in which Daniel sought to oppose Berkeley. Daniel distinguished three opinions concerning the origins of our ideas. The first, which he called the 'common opinion' was that they were impressions of mind-independent, unthinking material substances. The second, which he wrongly attributed to Berkeley, was that they were excited directly in our minds by God, but did not correspond to any archetypes outside created minds. (Wrongly because, even if there were gaps in Berkeley's early account of the nature of the archetypal divine ideas, he had always insisted that there had to be such things). The third, which Daniel claimed as his own, was: 'That our sensations (properly so called) exist indeed in our own minds alone, but that the immediate causes of them are external, and are indeed no other than the divine ideas.' He described the second opinion as 'partly false, and partly imperfect, contradictory and indigested'. But his most vociferous criticisms were reserved for the 'utterly inconceivable' first view. (Daniel 1751: 2:120). It is quite striking that someone who was deliberately setting out to refute Berkeley should have done so *not* by defending the notion of a mind-independent material substance, but rather by endeavouring to develop his own alternative version of an immaterialist position.

The details of Daniel's version of immaterialism are also interesting, and rather uniquely positioned in the philosophical debates of the day. One figure whom Daniel cited as an authority was Isaac Newton, and specifically his conception (as presented in the queries appended to his *Optics*) of space as ('as it were') the sensorium of God. Now, Newton himself was satisfied that the bodies located in this space were mind-independent material substances. The analogy he was proposing was not with the mind and its ideas but rather with the brain (or the organs of the individual senses) and the corporeal images contained therein. But Daniel read the analogy in the former way, so that the bodies would turn out to be ideal, albeit identified with God's ideas rather than our own. 'It matters not', he wrote, 'whether these originals be called *bodies* or *divine ideas*, these are only different names for things whose essence is unknown; the single point in view, and all that is necessary, is to shew that [...] the originals of our sensations are external to our minds, *i.e.* external bodies do exist' (Daniel in *The Gentleman's Magazine* 21 (1751): 452). As for our own perception of such 'bodies', Daniel explained this on the model of Malebranche's theory of vision in God. In *An Essay on the Existence of Matter*, he drew a distinction between 'sensations' and 'ideas', the former being modes of created minds and the latter belonging to God himself. The secondary qualities of things were resolved into the sensations, and the primary into the divine ideas. But sensations, for Daniel just as

for Malebranche, were not mental *objects*, as Berkeleyan ideas were supposed to be. Rather, they were just different *ways* of apprehending the divine ideas. The creation of the corporeal world, for Daniel, did not involve God's producing an independent matter, distinct from spirit, but simply in his allowing us a sensual apprehension of the ideal objects that inhered in his own immaterial substance. After following Malebranche by explaining perception as vision in God, and accepting that God acted in the simplest ways, Daniel simply did away with Malebranche's otiose material substance.

As we have already observed, Malebranche does seem to have had at least some influence on all three of Berkeley, Collier and Edwards. And yet none of them actually accepted his theory of vision in God. As far as they were concerned, although our ideas might indeed have created *on the model* of God's own, they were nevertheless distinct from them. Berkeley expressly disavowed Malebranche's theory, insisting that it 'is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas' (Berkeley 1713: 214–16, here 214; also Berkeley 1710: §148). Likewise Collier: 'the visible world, which I see, exists *immediately* in my particular mind or soul' (Collier 1730: 116). Or this from Edwards: 'None will suppose that God has any such ideas as we [have], that are only as it were the shadow of things and not the very things' (Edwards 1957–: 13:257). Or, again, see Johnson's description above, of our ideas as 'faint copies' of God's. For all of Daniel's exegetical and argumentative shortcomings—which are considerable—he does deserve some credit for coming closest to realising the natural immaterialist conclusion of the philosophical path that Malebranche had opened up. The other immaterialists all rejected mind-independent material substance, just as Daniel himself did, and they all agreed that bodies were ideal: but he was the only one who understood the nature of that ideality on a faithfully Malebranchian model.

Meanwhile, North of the border, another author who was also drawn to immaterialism, but who took it in yet another direction, was a Scotsman by the name of William Dudgeon. Dudgeon developed his position in the course of a correspondence of 1735–1736 (published 1737) with John Jackson, a supporter of Samuel Clarke. Although Dudgeon did not refer to Berkeley explicitly by name, the tone and details of many of his arguments lend support to the notion that he probably knew Berkeley's work at first hand. But, if Berkeley was an influence on Dudgeon, he was not the only one. Although, again, Dudgeon did not refer to Spinoza by name, his presence can also be felt in the system that Dudgeon laid out for Jackson. The infinity of God, as far as Dudgeon was concerned, precluded the creation *ad extra* of other substances distinct from him. But, as he proceeded to explain, bodies were not merely insubstantial in that Spinozistic sense: they were also ideal. Dudgeon realised that he could not find any intelligible way of abstracting bodies, or sensible objects, from the fact of their being perceived. 'That Ideas exist in the Self-existent Mind, and in the Minds of all dependent Beings, *without* my Mind I allow; but that there are *material* unthinking *Substances*, or Objects existing *without all Minds*, I rather think that *we deceive ourselves*, by inferring the *Existence* of any such Objects from *Ideas*, which can only exist in the Mind, and which one Mind can only excite in others' (Dudgeon 1737: part 1, p. 40).

But a far greater Scottish philosopher for us to consider is, of course, David Hume. Hume, for his part, reduced all reality—at least to the extent that we could understand it—to various bundles of impressions and ideas. He was not keen on the

philosophical notion of ‘substance’ at all: but, to the extent that any sense could be made of it, he felt that its only intelligible application could be to these perceptions themselves (Hume 1739–1740: 1.4.5.2–5; SBN 232–233). Our ideas of bodies were simply bundles of sensible qualities, without any underlying substratum to support and unite these. At any rate, any such substratum was bound forever to escape our cognition, given that our ideas could not reach beyond our impressions, and our impressions could not reach beyond the superficial appearances of things: ‘tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. [...] The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects’ (Hume 1739–1740: 1.2.6.8–9; SBN 67–68). Now, the claim that we could not conceive of a material object ‘specifically different’ from our ideas and impressions did not necessarily entail that we could not conceive of such an object that was *numerically* distinct from these. Indeed, Hume regarded our belief in distinct bodies, enduring objects that would continue to exist even when we were not looking at them, as one of those things that it was simply not in our power to escape. Our minds were not built in such a way that they could suspend judgment on such a notion; or, even if we might manage this for a few fleeting moments of deep philosophical contemplation, a good game of backgammon would allow such a belief to flood inexorably back in. It did make sense for us to enquire into *how* we formed such a belief, and Hume did precisely that, giving his answer in terms of the three principles of association of ideas: resemblance, contiguity and causation. But it did not make sense to ask *whether we ought* to believe in such continuous and distinct bodies, for we had no real option but to do so (Hume 1739–1740: 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). The point that Hume particularly wished to stress was that our conviction in the continued and distinct existence of bodies could neither arise in us directly as a result of experience alone (for, clearly, there could be no such thing as the experience of an unexperienced body), nor be derived from any rational demonstration (for there was no logical contradiction in the denial of that continued and distinct existence), but that it instead had its origins in the natural habits of the imagination. When we looked away from a certain object, temporarily interrupting the vivid impression we had just been having of it, our imaginations—conditioned by our experience of the return of things after similar interruptions in the past—would fill in the gap by conjuring up an idea that more faintly resembled that impression, with the anticipation that, if we were to look back again, our new impression would resemble this or, if it differed, that it would at least cohere with it in a familiar, causal way.

Hume also gave a closely analogous account of the nature and origins of our idea of the self. The mind was also reduced to a bundle of perceptions, bundled together by the natural habits of the imagination, but with no underlying substratum to be discovered in that case either. Maybe some of the perceptions that went into making up the mind (such as the purely internal impressions of passions) might have differed in their content and character from those that made up bodies; and maybe they were bundled together in different arrangements: but nevertheless the basic building blocks of both bodies and minds were ontologically on a par. In view of that fact, any characterisation of Hume as an immaterialist does start to seem a little one-sided. If anything, perhaps he might better be regarded as a neutral monist, with impressions and ideas no more truly mental than they are corporeal. (As a matter of

fact, at least with respect to this one issue, and at least in some of his later writings, much the same point can also be made about Jonathan Edwards: see Reid 2006, especially 63–66).

Subsequent Scottish philosophers, however, were not keen on Hume's philosophy. The principle driving force behind the so-called Common Sense school that arose in Hume's wake was Thomas Reid, and it was precisely the fact that Hume had effectively done for the human mind what Berkeley had done for bodies that led Reid to conclude that it was necessary to pull back. In his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man* (1785) Reid recalled that he had actually been drawn to Berkeleyan immaterialism as a young man (Reid 1785: II.10; 142). (He was also aware, at least, of Collier's *Clavis Universalis*: *ibid.*: II.10; 151). But, however content he might once have been to reduce *bodies* to ideas, he was not prepared to follow Hume in leaving absolutely 'nothing in nature but ideas and impressions, without any subject on which they may be impressed' (Reid 1764: I.5; 20). Consequently, he sought to oppose what he diagnosed as the root cause of what he now regarded as an unfortunate false step in philosophy.

He identified this root cause as the new way of ideas that had been developed in the seventeenth century by such figures as Descartes, Malebranche and Locke. According to their account, as Reid interpreted it, perception would involve three different objects: the perceiving mind, the idea of which it was immediately conscious, and finally the material body (or, in the case of reflection, the mind itself) that this idea was supposed to represent. But, just as Berkeley had recognised, once one brought this intervening ideal object into the story, as something distinct from the material substance that it was representing, a sceptical problem would arise over securing even so much as an indirect epistemological access to the latter. However, whereas Berkeley had responded by dispensing with the supposed material substance, Reid responded by eliminating the ideal object and allowing the human mind a direct perceptual acquaintance with the material thing itself.

Reid maintained that there was no evidence for the existence of ideas, thus understood as objects distinct from acts of perception, intervening between the perceiving mind and the external object. He considered the relativity arguments—the fact that the *same* thing could appear in *different* ways to different observers—that had been instrumental in leading some earlier philosophers to conclude that sensible qualities, maybe including the supposedly primary ones, could not properly pertain to the public objects themselves but only to the observers' own private ideas thereof. In the cases of figure and magnitude, for instance, Reid distinguished between what he called 'real' and 'apparent' (or 'visible') figure and magnitude (Reid 1764: 6.7–8; 1785: II.14; 180–184). Each body would have one and only one real magnitude, which could be perceived directly by touch. Apparent magnitudes were perceived by sight, and these would indeed differ for observers in different positions. But Reid felt that this did not mean that the object did not possess any of these various apparent magnitudes, so much as that it possessed the whole lot of them together. It would have the property of appearing quite large when viewed from close up, and it would also have the property of appearing quite small when viewed from further away. But there was no incompatibility between those two properties. Indeed, such extrinsic properties of bodies could be adequately defined without even needing to refer to minds at all, let alone to ideas, in terms of the physical angle subtended at a certain point by light rays arriving from the object. It should be observed that Berkeley's own discussion of

these issues had involved a certain philosophical sleight of hand. Berkeley would begin by observing that the apparent qualities of bodies would change ‘as the frame or position of the *organs* of sense varies’, and would appear various ‘to the same *eye* at different stations, or *eyes* of a different texture at the same station’, but he would then leap immediately from this observation to the conclusion that such qualities ‘exist nowhere without the *mind*’, and ‘cannot therefore be the images of anything settled and determinate without the *mind*’ (Berkeley 1710: §11, §14, emphasis added). But the fact that some sensible qualities should be extrinsic features of a body, defined in relation to other possible *bodies*, was not enough to demonstrate that these qualities were *mind*-dependent. They could still be fully objective features of a material world, and Reid was satisfied that they were.

Philosophy, Reid insisted, must ultimately rest on *some* axiomatic first principles, which are taken for granted without requiring further justification in terms of something yet more fundamental. But why limit such first principles to the dictates of pure reason alone? Reid felt that perception had an equal right to be regarded as authoritative on matters pertaining to its own proper domain, i.e. the real existence of things. Although particular perceptions might mislead us once in a while, there was no evidence or argument that perception in general would offer us a false picture of the world. Reid felt that sensual perception did indeed put us in direct contact with external, material objects; that a belief in the existence of those objects was intimately bound up with the very fact of perceiving them; and that all this was an immediate dictate of human nature, eminently worthy of inclusion among the first principles of common sense (Reid 1764: 6.20; 1785: VI.5; 476–477). And Reid, together with his like-minded colleagues in this Common Sense school, largely came to dominate Scottish philosophy, in just the same period as the Scots largely came to dominate British philosophy. The heyday of immaterialism was drawing to a close. Even in America, where immaterialist notions had continued to hold some modest sway, their days were numbered. For instance, Joseph Periam, a Presbyterian minister and tutor, had been teaching immaterialism at Princeton, and had apparently successfully persuaded his pupil, Samuel Stanhope Smith, later President of the College, of the truth of the doctrine. But the new philosophy was sweeping in from Scotland, and Smith did not cling to his immaterialist views for very long before another President of the College, John Witherspoon of East Lothian, ‘recalled him to the solid ground of common sense’ (Harrison 1980: 42–51, here 42; see also McLachlan 1976: 399–402; and Lyon 1888: 440–443).

Meanwhile, over in Germany, another new broom was simultaneously sweeping out old philosophical cobwebs and changing the face of the subject in a rather different way. Immanuel Kant, in the Fourth Paralogism of the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) (A344–52), sought to vanquish scepticism about the existence of the objects of the outer senses. Berkeley had pursued precisely the same goal before him, and Kant’s solution to the problem was itself pretty close to Berkeley’s. Kant maintained that, even if things in themselves, understood in a ‘transcendental’ sense, were entirely unknowable, it was still possible to maintain an *empirical* realism; that is, to preserve the reality of empirically external, spatial objects. But space, as such, was treated as a form of sensibility, a structure that our minds brought to objects in perception, rather than something that pertained to things in themselves. So these phenomenal objects in space, notwithstanding their empirical reality, would still be mind-dependent in a sense—a somewhat different sense from

Berkeley's, perhaps, but mind-dependent nevertheless. As for how real things differed from illusions, Kant made it a rule that whatever was connected with a perception by empirical laws was actual: and, of course, this too was the same answer that Berkeley had given.

Following that first edition, however, a review of the *Critique* appeared, composed by Christian Garve and revised by J.G. Feder. In the course of this 1782 review, the authors associated Kant with Berkeley in such a way as to make the former feel that it was now important to put some clear water between himself and the latter. The Paralogisms were entirely rewritten in the second edition (1787), and several new passages were inserted, both there and in the *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics* (1783). In these new passages, Kant attacked various forms of 'idealism', as (following the German tradition) he was accustomed to call theories in this area. He set himself up in opposition to both (i) the 'empirical' or 'problematic' or 'sceptical' idealism of Descartes, where the separation between extended objects and the ideas thereof had rendered the existence of the former uncertain; and (ii) the 'mystical' or 'visionary' or 'dogmatic' idealism of Berkeley which, as Kant saw it, turned bodies into illusions. In opposition to both of these, Kant presented his own 'transcendental' or 'critical' idealism, explaining the various contributions that the mind made to its experience of spatial objects—not least, their very spatiality—while at the same time insisting that their empirical reality was as firm as it could possibly be. For instance, in the Refutation of Idealism from the second edition of the *Critique* (B274–279) (directed primarily against Cartesian problematic idealism), Kant argued that the very possibility of consciousness itself demanded the existence of external objects. Consciousness, he explained, was determined in time; all determinations of time presupposed something permanent; but nothing in the mind itself displayed such permanence: therefore, there had to be something *else* that was permanent. And, moreover, this external thing, an object in space, needed to be genuinely *public*. It could not be identified with the fleeting perceptions within this or that mind, precisely because those were so ephemeral. Berkeley, for his part, had sat squarely on the fence when it came to the question of whether different minds could perceive the *same* body, dismissing this as merely a trifling dispute about the word 'same' (Berkeley 1713: 246–248). Kant certainly would not have been satisfied with this evasion.

Now, there has been intense scholarly discussion about whether, when, what, and how much of Berkeley's work Kant actually read for himself, as opposed to relying on potentially inaccurate secondary sources such as James Beattie (or, for that matter, relying on Eschenbach's 1756 translation of the *Three Dialogues*, itself not as accurate as one might wish). And then there has also been much debate on whether and how he actually *understood* whatever he did manage to pick up about Berkeley's views; and on whether, how and why he might have misrepresented them in his own discussions, deliberately or otherwise. One would presume that, if Kant had actually known Berkeley's work in any real depth, he could surely not have failed to spot Berkeley's account of the stark difference between real bodies and illusions. Or was it that his suggestions that Berkeley had no such account meant simply that he did not regard it as an *adequate* account? (In fact, Johann Gottfried Herder defended Berkeley against Kant's criticisms on precisely these grounds. For Herder, it was *Berkeley* who provided a firm underpinning for the reality of bodies, and *Kant* who turned them into illusions. See Breidert 1987: 237–238; and McCracken & Tipton 2000: 260–267). And then, of course, quite aside from the issue of whether, how and why Kant

*believed* that his position differed from Berkeley's, there is also the issue of whether, how and why their positions *actually* agreed or disagreed.

These debates are rehearsed at considerable length in the articles anthologised by Walker 1989, and I do not propose to settle such vexed questions here. But what I will say is this: *even if* Kant's views on the nature of bodies were considerably closer to Berkeley's than Kant himself recognised or admitted, this particular element of his own philosophy was embedded within a *radically* different conceptual framework. Whereas Berkeley (and Collier, and Edwards, and probably all of the other immaterialists we have surveyed) had stressed the mind's passivity in the reception of those ideas that constituted bodies, Kant, with his 'Copernican Revolution' in philosophy, was keen to stress just how much the mind itself contributed to its outer experience, first imposing a spatial framework onto it, and then subsuming the resulting spatial objects under the categories of the pure understanding (including the category of 'substance' itself). Maybe Kant did successfully refute the immaterialist version of idealism, or maybe he simply preserved it: but, even if we opt for the latter interpretation, what must certainly be admitted is that he changed its character dramatically. Kant's work inaugurated an age of idealism in Germany, one that would soon spread to other parts too. But the terms in which this idealism were set up were no longer terms that the true immaterialists of the eighteenth century would have recognised or approved. If anything, *their* versions of the doctrine began to seem rather quaint.

### **Editions cited**

Adams, R.M. (1994) *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Basil of Caesarea (1996) *Letters and Select Works. A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*. P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, v. 8.

Beeson, D. (1992) *Maupertuis: an intellectual biography*. Oxford: the Voltaire Foundation at the Taylor Institute.

Benson, R. (1837) *Memoirs of the Life and Writings of Rev. Arthur Collier, M.A.* London: Edward Lumley.

Berkeley, G. (c. 1707–1708) *Philosophical Commentaries*. In Berkeley (1948–1957): v. 1.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1710) *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. In Berkeley (1948–1957): v. 2.

\_\_\_\_\_. (1713) *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*. In Berkeley (1948–1957): v. 2.

**“Immaterialism” © 2013 Jasper Reid. Forthcoming in Garrett, A. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. Pre-print version archived with permission.**

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1729–1730) *Philosophical Correspondence between Berkeley and Samuel Johnson*. In Berkeley (1948–1957): v. 2.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1948–1957) *Works*. A.A. Luce and T.E. Jessop (eds.). Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1948–1957.
- Berington, J. (1779) *Immaterialism Delineated*. London: for G. Robinson and J. Fisk.
- Berman, D. (1977) ‘Mrs Berkeley’s annotations in her interleaved copy of *An account of the life of George Berkeley* (1776).’ *Hermathena* 122: 15–28.
- Berman, D. (ed.) (1989) *George Berkeley: Eighteenth-Century Responses*. New York: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Bonanse, B.M. (1969) *Tommaso Campanella: Renaissance Pioneer of Modern Thought*. Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Bracken, H.M. (1965) *The Early Reception of Berkeley’s Immaterialism: 1710–1733*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Breidert, W. (1987) ‘On the Early Reception of Berkeley in Germany.’ In E. Sosa (ed.) *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel: 231–241.
- Brown, S. (1997) ‘Platonic Idealism in Modern Philosophy from Malebranche to Berkeley’. In G.A.J. Rogers, J.M. Vienne, Y.C. Zarka (eds.) *The Cambridge Platonists In Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics and Religion*. Dordrecht: Kluwer: 197–214
- Burnyeat, M. (1982) ‘Idealism and Greek Philosophy: What Descartes Saw and Berkeley Missed.’ *Philosophical Review*, 91: 3–40.
- Cavendish, M. (1664) *Philosophical Letters*. London: no publisher.
- Collier, A. (1713) *Clavis Universalis*. London: R. Gosling. In S. Parr (ed.) *Metaphysical Tracts*. London: Edward Lumley, 1837: 1–100
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1730) ‘A Specimen of True Philosophy’. In S. Parr (ed.) *Metaphysical Tracts*. London: Edward Lumley, 1837: 101–128
- Conway, A. (1690) *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*. A.P. Coudert and T. Corse (trs.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Coudert, A.P. (1995) *Leibniz and the Kabbalah*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Coudert, A.P. (1999) *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614–1698)*. Leiden: Brill.
- “Immaterialism” © 2013 Jasper Reid. Forthcoming in Garrett, A. (ed.) *The Routledge Companion to Eighteenth Century Philosophy*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2014. Pre-print version archived with permission.**

- Cudworth, R. (1678) *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*. London: for Richard Royston.
- Daniel, T. (Anonymous) (1751) *An Essay on the Existence of Matter*. In Berman (ed.) (1989): v. 2, 89–123.
- Descartes, R. (1664–1676) *Oeuvres*. C. Adam and P. Tannery (eds.) Paris: J. Vrin.
- Dudgeon, W. (1737) *Several Letters to the Revd. Mr. Jackson... With Mr. Jackson's Answers to them*. London: for John & Paul Knapton.
- Edwards, J. (1957–) *Works*. Various (eds.) New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Gossman, L. (1960) 'Berkeley, Hume and Maupertuis.' *French Studies*, 14: 304–24.
- Gregory of Nyssa (1994). *Dogmatic Treatises*, etc. In *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, P. Schaff and H. Wace (eds.) Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, v. 5.
- Hamilton, W. (1839) 'Idealism; with Reference to the Scheme of Arthur Collier'. In W. Hamilton. *Discussions on Philosophy and Literature, Education and University Reform*. New York: Harper and Brothers, 1855: 185–201.
- Harrison, R.A. (1980) *Princetonians 1769–1775: A Biographical Dictionary*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Helmont, F.M. van. (1682) *A Cabbalistical Dialogue*. London: for Benjamin Clark.
- Helmont, F.M. van. (1694) *Seder Olam*. J. Clarke (tr.) London: for Sarah Howkins.
- Henry, J. (1987) 'Medicine and Pneumatology: Henry More, Richard Baxter, and Francis Glisson's *Treatise on the Energetic Nature of Substance*.' *Medical History* 31: 15–40.
- Hibbs, D. (2005) 'Was Gregory of Nyssa a Berkeleyan Idealist?' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 13: 425–435.
- Hume, D. (1739–1740) *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978/2007.
- Hutton, S. (2004) *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Johnson, S. (1752) *Elementa Philosophica*. Philadelphia: B. Franklin. In Johnson (1929): v. 2, 357–518. Also excerpted in McCracken and Tipton (2000): 223–232; and in Berman (1989): v. 2, 129–137.

- \_\_\_\_\_. (1929) *Career and Writings*. H. & C. Schneider (eds.) New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kant, I. (1781/1787) *Critique of Pure Reason*. Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (ed. and trans.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Lanion, F. (as Wander, G.) (1678) *Méditations sur la métaphysique*. In P. Bayle (ed.) *Recueil de quelques pieces curieuses concernant la philosophie de Monsieur Descartes*. Amsterdam: chez Henry Desbordes, 1684: 267–333.
- Locke, J. (1689) *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*. P.H. Nidditch (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1975.
- Lyon, G. (1888) *L'idéalisme en Angleterre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1888.
- Maupertuis, P.-L. M. (1748) *Réflexions philosophiques sur l'origine des langues, et la signification des mots*. In P.-L. M. Maupertuis. *Oeuvres, nouvelle édition*. Lyon: Jean-Marie Bruyset, 1768: v. 1, 250-309.
- McCracken, C.J. (1986) 'Stages on a Cartesian Road to Immaterialism.' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24: 19–40.
- McCracken, C. (1998) 'Knowledge of the Existence of Body.' In D. Garber and M. Ayers (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth-Century Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: v. 1, 624–648.
- McCracken, C.J. and Tipton, I.C. (eds.) (2000) *Berkeley's Principles and Dialogues: Background Source Materials*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McIntyre, J.L. (1976) *Princetonians 1748–1768*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Moran, D. (1999) 'Idealism in Medieval Philosophy: The Case of Johannes Scottus Eriugena.' *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 8: 53-82.
- Moran, D. (2006) '*Spiritualis Incrassatio*: Eriugena's Intellectualist Immaterialism: Is It An Idealism?' In S. Gersh and D. Moran (eds.) *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press: 123–50.
- Morris, W.S. (1991) *The Young Jonathan Edwards: A Reconstruction*. New York: Carlson Publishing, Inc.
- Muirhead, J.H. (1931) *The Platonic Tradition in Anglo-Saxon Philosophy*. Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1992.
- Parigi, S. (1997) 'Is there a Cartesian road to immaterialism?' In G. Brykman (ed.) *Berkeley et le cartésianisme*. Paris: Université Paris X Nanterre: 23–48.

- Reid, J. (2001) 'Thomas Daniel: an unknown philosopher of the mid-eighteenth century'. *History of European Ideas* 27: 257–272.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (2006) 'The Metaphysics of Jonathan Edwards and David Hume'. *Hume Studies* 32: 53–82.
- Reid, T. (1764) *An Inquiry into the Human Mind : On the Principles of Common Sense*. D. Brookes (ed.) Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997.
- \_\_\_\_\_. (1785) *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*. K. Haakonssen (ed.) University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.
- Robinson, L. (1913) 'Un solipsiste au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle'. *L'Année philosophique* 24: 15–30.
- Sorabji, R. (1988) *Matter, Space and Motion*. London: Duckworth.
- Swift, J. (1963) *Correspondence*. Harold Williams (ed.) Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walker, R.C.S. (ed.) (1989) *The Real in the Ideal*. New York: Garland.
- Wilson, M. (1987) 'The Phenomenalisms of Leibniz and Berkeley.' In E. Sosa (ed.) *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel: 3–22.

#### Suggested Readings

- Charles, S. *Berkeley au siècle des lumières: immatérialisme et scepticisme au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: J. Vrin, 2003.
- Gossman, L. 'Berkeley, Hume and Maupertuis.' *French Studies*, 14 (1960): 304–24.
- Lyon, G. *L'idéalisme en Angleterre au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle*. Paris: Félix Alcan, 1888.
- McCracken, C.J. *Malebranche and British Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983.
- McCracken, C.J. 'Stages on a Cartesian Road to Immaterialism.' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24 (1986): 19–40.
- McCracken, C.J. and Tipton, I.C. (eds.) *Berkeley's Principles and Dialogues: Background Source Materials*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Reid, J. 'Thomas Daniel: an unknown philosopher of the mid-eighteenth century'. *History of European Ideas* 27 (2001): 257–272.

Sosa, E. (ed.) *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987.

Tipton, I.C. *Berkeley: The Philosophy of Immaterialism*. London: Methuen, 1974.

Walker, R.C.S. (ed.) *The Real in the Ideal*. New York: Garland, 1989.