BERKELEY AND THE MIND OF GOD

by

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ABSTRACT

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I tackle a troubling question of interpretation: *Does Berkeley's God feel pain?* Berkeley's anti-skepticism seems to bar him from saying that God does *not* feel pain, for this would mean there is something to reality 'beyond' the perceptible. Yet Berkeley's concerns for commonsense and orthodoxy bar him from saying that God *does* have an idea of pain. For Berkeley to have an idea of pain just is to suffer it, and an immutable God cannot suffer. Thus solving the pain problem requires answers to further questions: What are God's perceptions, for Berkeley? What are God's acts of will? How are the two related and how is God's mind related to humans' as a result?

I argue that Berkeley's God does not feel pain by way of answering these questions. I also argue that saying so leaves Berkeley saddled with neither skepticism nor heterodoxy. Berkeley is able to preserve God's immutability, God's personality, and reality's not lying across some 'veil of perception.'

Berkeley can dissolve the pain problem since God does not perceive passively as we do. What it means to say God 'perceives' is just that God's acts of will are intentional. Yet neither God nor reality is thereby placed across some skeptical chasm. God's acts of will contain their content in virtue of and are of necessity made manifest in each human being's perceptions. The 'real world' is our world: the contents of God's mind are simply made plain to human beings by way of their experience of the laws of nature. God does

not occupy the same perspective with respect to God's own mind, however: God is "a being purely active." By way of understanding the laws of nature as a language, Berkeley renders God *more* personal than other conceptions we might call to mind. Thus Berkeley's God is not a blind 'force of nature,' despite God's not feeling pain. God is rather a personal mind which continuously communicates with humans by way of symbols, namely human perceptions. Insofar as human beings are passive, this is the way with which we must be communicated.

The cost to my interpretation is that Berkeley cannot literally vindicate the utterances of "the vulgar": talk of God's feeling pain, delighting in righteousness or grieving over wickedness is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading. Strictly speaking the only contents of God's mind are God's perceptions and God's acts of will, and neither class of contents contains such feelings.

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A philosopher, however, should abstain from metaphor.

–*George Berkeley,* De Motu §3

PART ONE – THE MIND OF GOD

Section One: Berkeley, God, and the Problem of Pain

George Berkeley is an idealist: he believes the world is mind-dependent, there are only minds and ideas, and for objects "to be is to be perceived."[1] Objects human beings do not perceive continue to exist because God perceives them. In this paper I focus on the issue of whether or not for Berkeley God feels pain. In his concern to preserve orthodoxy Berkeley "positively denies" that God feels pain.[2] It is unclear however how to square this denial with Berkeley's idealism. For instance, Berkeley argues that we can infer God's existence from the fact that we encounter ideas we do not will ourselves to have. Since only minds and ideas exist, and only minds cause ideas, then involuntary ideas must be caused by some other mind, and most of the time this mind is God's.[3] Yet if God causes our idea of pain, then according to Berkeley God must have an idea of pain. If God has an idea of pain however, God must feel pain, and this because of Berkeley's analysis of pain. There is an apparent tension then, between Berkeley's idealist commitments and his insistence that God does not feel pain. Indeed, we seem perched on the precipice of a dilemma: if Berkeley cannot deny that God feels pain he falls into heterodoxy; if Berkeley does deny that God feels pain he sets up a distance between our ideas and God's, opening the door to a skepticism which threatens to undermine the motivation for his project.

Here I answer the following question: Is there a way for Berkeley to deny that God feels pain without engendering skepticism or endorsing heterodoxy? My answer is yes, but at some cost: I will show that Berkeley's God does not 'feel' in a way which would

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[1] PHK §3.
[2] DHP §240.
[3] Why must it be God's mind as opposed to someone else's? Berkeley is more than comfortable saying other (finite) minds cause some of our involuntary ideas. But most of our involuntary ideas (especially those of sense) exhibit inordinate complexity and lawlike behavior, and so justify an inference to a mind much greater than our own.

license the utterances of “the vulgar.”

In Section Two I examine the pain problem and interpret Berkeley on the nature of God’s perception. I outline the relationship between the pain problem and the spectre of skepticism, and highlight the importance of getting clear on the nature of Berkeley’s God, in particular the relationship between God’s perception and will. I present Kenneth Winkler’s denial of blind agency thesis: the denial of the view that God can will a thing without an perception of it (act 'blindly'). I examine the implications of the denial of blind agency thesis (DBA) for the relationship between God’s perception and God’s will. In Section IV I defend the thesis against criticism. I then employ Winkler’s view in returning to the pain problem and the spectre of skepticism. I argue that with DBA in hand, Berkeley indeed has a response to the pain problem, although it is not one he explicitly endorses. God does not feel pain because God does not perceive–not in the way we do. God’s 'perceptions' are the intentional contents of God’s acts of will; God 'perceives' pain only insofar as God wills that human beings perceive pain. My solution does not fall prey to the skeptical worry because for Berkeley the standard of reality is not what God perceives but what we perceive. In this way the initial assumption driving the worry is undermined; if the pain problem is still a problem, it is not a problem due to Berkeley’s idealism.

In Part Two I examine the nature of God's will. I argue that for Berkeley God's acts of will are the laws of nature, and the laws of nature are such that God is the cause of the apparent motive and causal interaction among bodies. Thus our individual perceptions–perhaps especially "the laws of pain and pleasure"[4]–are God's means of *symbolic communication with human minds*. What is communicated are facts concerning one's flourishing. In just this sense the laws of nature constitute God's "language."

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[4] PHK §146.

As a result God does not feel pain, but saying so does not land Berkeley in skepticism or heterodoxy; on the contrary, he renders God *more* personal than other conceptions we might call to mind. Berkeley can dissolve the pain problem, since God does not perceive passively as we do. What it means to say God 'perceives' is just that God's acts of will are intentional. Yet neither God nor reality is thereby placed across some skeptical chasm. God's acts of will contain their content in virtue of and are necessarily made manifest in each human being's perceptions. The 'real world' is our world: the contents of God's mind are simply made plain to human beings by way of their experience of the laws of nature. God does not occupy the same perspective with respect to God's own mind: God is "a being purely active." Thus God is not an impersonal 'force of nature,' but a personal mind which actively communicates with humans *by way of symbols, namely human perceptions*. Insofar as human beings are passive, this is the way with which they must be communicated.

In Part Three I reveal the cost of my interpretation: Berkeley cannot *literally* vindicate the utterances of "the vulgar": talk of God's feeling pain, delighting in righteousness or grieving over wickedness is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading. Strictly speaking the only contents of God's mind are God's perceptions and God's acts of will, and neither class of contents contains such attitudes.

Section Two: Pain and the Spectre of Skepticism

In *Principles* 26 Berkeley presents the passivity argument for God's existence:

> We perceive a continual succession of ideas, some are anew excited, others are changed or totally disappear. There is therefore some cause of these ideas whereon they depend, and which produces and changes them. That this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of ideas, is clear from the preceding

> section. It must therefore be a substance; but it has been shown that there is no corporeal or material substance: it remains therefore that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal *active* substance or spirit (my emphasis).

The argument runs roughly as follows:

> *Premise 1*: Every idea is caused by some mind.
>
> *Premise 2*: My idea of pain (for example) is not caused by my mind.
>
> *Premise 3*: If my idea of pain is not caused by my mind then it is caused either by another finite mind or by God.
>
> *Premise 4*: Not all my pains are caused by a finite mind.
>
> *Premise 5*: Thus some of my pains are caused by God.
>
> *Premise 6*: If some of my pains are caused by God, then God exists.

Why must it be God's mind as opposed to someone else's? Berkeley is more than comfortable saying other finite minds cause some of our involuntary ideas. But most of our involuntary ideas (especially those of sense) exhibit inordinate complexity and lawlike behavior, and so justify an inference to a mind much greater than our own.

Naturally, a consequence of the above argument is that God has an idea of pain. But for Berkeley pain is a *sensation*: there is no intentionality or 'aboutness' to pain, we simply feel it.[5] Unlike our perception of a chair, which we take to be distinct from the chair itself, our idea of pain just is the pain. To have an idea of pain is to feel pain. Either God has an idea of pain with which to cause our pains (in which case God feels pain), or God does not have an idea of pain (but cannot be the cause of our pains).

When Hylas presents this point to Berkeley's mouthpiece, Philonous, in the

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[5] A point made in Melissa Frankel, "Berkeley and God in the Quad," *Philosophy Compass* 7 (2012): 391.

Dialogues, Philonous gives a lengthy series of replies:

> That God knows… what pain is, even every sort of painful sensation, and what it is for His creatures to suffer pain, I make no question. But that God, though He knows and sometimes causes painful sensations in us, can Himself suffer pain, I positively deny. We who are limited and dependent spirits, are liable to impressions of sense… which being produced against our wills, are sometimes painful and uneasy. But God, whom no external being can affect, who perceives nothing by sense as we do, whose will is absolute and independent… can suffer nothing, nor be affected with any painful sensation, or indeed any sensation at all. We are chained to a body… our perceptions are connected with corporeal motions. By the law of our nature we are affected upon every alteration in the nervous parts of our sensible body: which… is nothing but a complexion of… ideas… But God is a Pure Spirit, disengaged from all such sympathy or natural ties. No corporeal motions are attended with the sensations of pain or pleasure in His mind. To know everything knowable is certainly a perfection; but to endure, or suffer, or feel anything by sense, is an imperfection. The former, I say, agrees to God, but not the latter.[6]

The first reply Berkeley gives is to draw a distinction between intellectual knowledge and experiential knowledge. In the same way I might know what the color red is without ever having seen it (I might know what wavelengths constitute the color), God can know what pain is without ever having felt it. Yet this reply generates a new problem: reconciling God's omniscience with the fact that we seem to know something God does not–how pain feels. Berkeley perhaps is aware of this, and so continues to offer distinct replies. The second reply to the pain problem is to say that finite minds are both passive and

[6] DHP §240-241.

active while the infinite mind is only active. This looks like a stronger response, although without further explanation it amounts to no more than insisting that God does not feel pain. The third response Berkeley gives is to note that our pain is "connected with corporeal motions." God is incorporeal, so God does not feel pain. Similarly, "[God's] ideas are not conveyed to Him by sense." Here Berkeley creates a distance between our ideas and God's. This distance is further emphasized later in the *Dialogues*, where Berkeley acknowledges

> a twofold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal and eternal. The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God.[7]

In drawing a thick line between the contents of God's mind and the contents of our own Berkeley now seems to have given up on his project to render our access to reality direct. He seems no better off than the Lockean who concedes that we perceive the world only mediately. Berkeley's God has taken the place of matter.

Berkeley's explicit responses to the pain problem are inadequate. More troubling, his third reply raises the spectre of skepticism. The most promising route looks to be that on which God is "a being purely active." Yet more needs to be said about just what this means if such a reply is to succeed.

Section Three: Denying Blind Agency

For Kenneth Winkler, traditional interpretations of Berkeley's God's perception are defective. He endorses a blend of these interpretations, arguing that their strengths can be joined and weaknesses overcome. For Winkler, Berkeley's God keeps objects in

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[7] DHP §254.

existence by perceiving them, yet statements about unperceived objects are only statements about the actual and possible perceptions of finite minds. He argues that these two claims are consistent and that their consistency is guaranteed by the nature of God's will, specifically that it cannot occur "blindly," or without accompanying perceptions.[8]

The first of the two traditional interpretations Winkler considers is the perception interpretation.[9] Roughly, the perception interpretation states that unperceived objects continue to exist because they are perceived by God.[10] A concern, though, is that if the perception interpretation is correct then God is diminished. When we perceive, more often than not we perceive via the senses, and sense perception is marked by being involuntary. When we sense we are acted upon 'from the outside,' and this represents an imperfection. Because God cannot suffer imperfection, the perception interpretation seems false.[11] Still, Berkeley understands perception such that *every* operation of the understanding (versus act of will) is a 'perception,' and thus it is open to God to perceive those objects we do not in some non-sensory way.

The second interpretation Winkler considers is the phenomenalist interpretation.[12] According to the phenomenalist interpretation, to say that an object exists when none of us perceives it is to say something about the perceptions we *would* have if we turned our attention in a certain direction.[13] This interpretation is supported by passages like the following from the *Principles*:

> The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my

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[8] Kenneth Winkler, "Unperceived Objects and Berkeleys Denial of Blind Agency," *Hermathena* 139 (1985) 81.
[9] Winkler 82.
[10] *Ibid.*
[11] *Ibid.*
[12] *Ibid.*
[13] Winkler 83.

> study I should say it existed, meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it.[14]

A unique feature of the phenomenalist interpretation is that in Winkler's words "it dispenses with natural objects without putting anything in their place."[15] On the phenomenalist interpretation natural objects like tables are no longer identified with ideas–mine *or* God's. Rather, tables are not strictly speaking 'objects' at all: statements about them are true in virtue of the relations that obtain between actual and possible perceptions, not in virtue of the fact that the term 'table' has for its referent some discrete object in the world.

It is worth briefly noting how God functions differently in Berkeley's schema depending on which of these two interpretations we adopt. I will pay closer attention to just how we are to make sense of God's role in this schema later. For now it suffices to simply point out how the interpretations differ. On the perception interpretation primary importance is given to God's perception: God's perceiving causes a thing's existence.[16] On the phenomenalist interpretation primary importance is given to God's will: God's decrees sustain the order and regularity of our perceptions, as well as the relations that obtain between them. In this way God's will determines what can truthfully be said about what we commonly call 'objects.'[17]

Winkler's goal is to synthesize the two interpretations: on his view they are not mutually exclusive. He argues that Berkeley assumed "the denial of blind agency" in the *Principles* and the *Dialogues*.[18] That is, Berkeley denied the view that God can will a thing without an accompanying perception of that thing (i.e., act "blindly"). Much of

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[14] PHK §3.
[15] Winkler 83.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] Winkler 84.

Winkler's evidence for this second claim is historical. Descartes, Malebranche and Locke unanimously denied blind agency, and there are numerous and explicit indications in Berkeley's notebooks that at least at the time he was reading them he agreed.[19] The question is whether he changed his views.

The most compelling reason to think Berkeley's denial of blind agency continued into the *Principles* and the *Dialogues* is that the denial of blind agency (DBA) helps us make sense of Berkeley's arguments for the existence of God, his view of what it is to exist, and his views on the nature of God's ideas. For instance, Jonathan Bennett argues that Berkeley makes an equivocation in the so-called "continuity argument" for God's existence:

> Berkeley takes the premiss that some ideas are independent of (not caused by) my mind, muddles himself into treating it as the premiss that some ideas are independent of (not owned by) my mind, and so infers that some mind has ideas when I do not.

Yet on Winkler's interpretation there is no mistake. The move from ideas "not caused by" my mind to ideas "not owned by" it is justified by appeal to a suppressed premise: DBA.[20] The ideas I have that I myself don't cause must surely be caused by something, and of course on Berkeley's ontology this something will be another mind. Yet with DBA in hand we must say that this mind too has ideas of what it causes.[21] It is a point in favor of Winkler's interpretation that it is able to save Berkeley from committing what Bennett sees as a rookie mistake.

Another strength of the DBA view is that it provides a unique and surprising

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[19] Winkler 96.
[20] Winkler 87.
[21] Winkler 88.

response to a worry many have had over Berkeley's position that unperceived objects continue to exist in God's mind. The concern, as Winkler puts it, is that the kind of existence Berkeley reserves for objects in God's mind isn't the 'first-class' kind of existence we typically expect of ordinary objects. In other words, existence in God's mind doesn't seem quite what we're after when it comes to preserving our common sense intuitions about the unperceived. On Winkler's interpretation, however, "archetypal existence" (the kind of existence reserved for objects in God's mind) is *not* sufficient for real existence.[22] Winkler argues that it isn't explicit in the *Principles* or the *Dialogues* that Berkeley thinks archetypal existence should be enough to satisfy those with the above worry. Further, Winkler interprets Berkeley in such a way that *ectypal* existence is sufficient for real existence.[23] He considers the possibility that for Berkeley, "the divine perception sufficient for existence is not mere intellection, but the perception which, according to DBA, must accompany every act of will."[24] The evidence for this feature of Winkler's view is in Berkeley's comments on the creation of the universe:

> HYLAS: What then are we to make of creation?
>
> PHILONOUS: May we not understand it to have been entirely in respect of finite spirits; so that things, with regard to us, may properly be said to begin their existence, or be created, when God decreed they should become perceptible to intelligent creatures… You may call this a *relative* or *hypothetical* existence if you please.[25]

and of course

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[22] Winkler 92.
[23] Winkler 95.
[24] Winkler 93.
[25] DHP §253.

> PHILONOUS: What would you have! do I not acknowledge a two-fold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal and eternal? The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God.[26]

The point Winkler makes is one that can seem strange: for Berkeley, real existence is *relative* and *ectypal*. It turns out that the 'first-class' existence we were after was right in front of our noses, in the world of our perceptions. Real existence is *relative to us* on Berkeley's schema, such that an object exists "if and only if God intends to cause certain ideas in the minds of finite spirits."[27]

Section Four: Objections

Stanley Tweyman objects to Winkler's arguments, claiming that two of the passages he cites turn out not to support his thesis.[28] The first is from the *Principles*:

> A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being–as it perceives ideas it is called "the understanding," and *as it produces* or otherwise operates upon them it is called "the will" (Tweyman's emphasis).[29]

Tweyman takes it that here Berkeley allows for idea formation without some precedent identical idea. That is, he allows for blind agency. A similar criticism is raised against another of Winkler's passages:

> I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. *It is no more than willing*, and straightway this or that idea arises in

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[26] DHP §254.
[27] Winkler 95.
[28] Stanley Tweyman, "Berkeley's Denial of the Denial of Blind Agency," *Hermathena* 139 (1985) 145.
[29] PHK §27.

> my fancy… This making and unmaking of ideas does very properly denominate the mind active (Tweyman's emphasis).[30]

Tweyman thinks that here Berkeley admits that experience reveals instances of willing that occur without a perception–though Tweyman takes care to note that Berkeley is silent as to how this kind of willing occurs.[31] Tweyman goes on to draw attention to those passages in the dialogues where Philonous (Berkeley) criticizes the Malebranchean view Hylas considers:

> I only ask whether the order and regularity observable in the series of your ideas, or the course of nature, be not sufficiently accounted for by the wisdom and power of God; and whether it does not derogate from those attributes to suppose He is *influenced*, *directed*, or *put in mind*, when and what He is to act, by an unthinking substance (Tweyman's emphasis)?[32]

and

> The will of an Omnipotent Spirit is no sooner exerted than executed, *without the application of means*, which, if they are employed by inferior agents, it is not upon account of any real efficacy that is in them, or necessary aptitude to produce any effect, but merely in compliance with the laws of nature… prescribed… by the First Cause, *who is Himself above all limitation or prescription whatsoever* (Tweyman's emphasis).[33]

What are we to make of this? The point Tweyman drives home is that for

[30] PHK §28.
[31] Tweyman 146.
[32] DHP §220.
[33] DHP §219.

Berkeley, it is an axiom that God's nature is such that God's willing cannot be constrained *at all*. For Tweyman we have no choice but to make room for blind agency, even if we must resign ourselves to never knowing how it operates. If this seems unsatisfying, it might pacify the reader somewhat to recall that Berkeley takes himself to have cogent and novel arguments for God's existence and nature, not to mention a broader philosophical system which is supposedly the sole safeguard of common sense. Considered in this context, it can seem clear that for Berkeley any other view on blind agency must lead to contradiction. If common sense is to be vindicated and skepticism dispatched, we *must* accept blind agency–or so things are for Tweyman's Berkeley.

There is another objection to Winkler's position: it seems to generate an infinite regress. Recall that for Winkler's Berkeley, God cannot will something without at least one perception 'behind' this willing. There must be a perceptual component to the volition which gives it its content.[34] Recall as well, however, that all objects are supposed to have an eternal existence in God's mind. Tweyman argues that this means God must then have perceptions 'behind' God's volition to hold all objects in God's mind, but these perceptions themselves must then be supported in God's mind some other act of will... and so on. It can seem we must reject Winkler's interpretation in favor of one which allows room for blind agency.

Section Five: Objections Answered

Tweyman's arguments can seem compelling. Berkeley's reference to the mind willing "as it produces" ideas, and his insistence than we imagine things by "no more than willing" appear straightforward enough. But there are subtleties Tweyman overlooks. For one, he argues that Berkeley's axiom that God is unlimited requires he

[34] Winkler 96.

endorse blind agency.[35] *Contra* Tweyman however, it can be the case both that (1) God is unlimited, and (2) God's acts of will involve perceptions. Perceptions are not an instrument by which God achieves his ends, and so do not limit the kinds of actions God may perform. Tweyman merely assumes that if God's perception would limit God, in which case he would be justified in rejecting Winkler's view. Instead he offers this line of reasoning:

> *Premise 1*: If the denial of blind agency thesis is true then either God requires an instrument to act, or else God is limited in some other way.
> *Premise 2*: It is neither the case that God requires an instrument to act, nor that God is limited in some other way.
> *Conclusion*: Therefore, the denial of blind agency thesis is incorrect.

Is Premise 1 true? Recall that Winkler thinks it is a consequence of DBA that God's will *presupposes* perception. Winkler uses the language of the will's "involving" perception. The important point here is that on Winkler's view the will and perception are not distinct. The will and perception are not discrete faculties–"cuts" in mind– but rather modes of it. Yet if the will and perception indeed arise mutually, then Tweyman is incorrect in his assertion that DBA limits what God might do. On Winkler's view it is not that God *cannot* will a thing without a perception of it, but rather that to will a thing simply *is* to perceive it. If one wills a thing she perceives it, but if one perceives a thing she does not thereby will it (for one might be human). Perception is a constitutive element of the will, and as such an act of will that lacks a perception is a contradiction in terms. Insofar as an act of will is a *particular* act of will (that a *particular* thing occur), each act of will has its perception. To say that God wills a thing is to say that God is that

[35] Tweyman 147.

thing's cause; to say that God perceives a thing is to say that God wills that *that* thing be perceived by *that* human. The DBA view neither claims that perceptions are instruments by which God acts nor insists that God's powers are limited, and so Premise 1 is false.

There are more reasons to think Berkeley assumed DBA. For one, it seems hard to make sense of blind agency given how Berkeley defines minds and ideas. In the *Principles*, Berkeley defines minds in relation to ideas and *vice versa*: minds are that which perceives, and ideas are that which is perceived. Thus Berkeley says that in truth, we can have only a *notion* of spirit (or mind). Since given these definitions wherever a mind is, so are ideas, it seems that there is no conceptual space for blind agency on Berkeley's schema. For Berkeley, whenever we hold an idea in our minds, we perceive. Thus it *must* be the case that Berkeley denies blind agency: a mind without perceptions is a contradiction in terms.

What of the initial passages Tweyman emphasizes? Unfortunately they do not support a conclusion with the strength of the one he draws. Recall Tweyman's emphasis on Berkeley's remarks about the mind willing "as it produces" ideas, as well as his claim that we can imagine things by "no more than willing." Let us take each of these in turn.

> A spirit is one *simple*, *undivided*, *active* being–as it perceives ideas it is called "the understanding," and as it produces or otherwise operates upon them it is called "the will" (my emphasis).[36]

Does this passage support the view that blind agency is possible? On the contrary, it suggests just the opposite. Berkeley's claim here is that the mind (or spirit) is one, and that it is only when we speak of a particular aspect of the mind's activity that for practical purposes we call that aspect "the understanding" or "the will." This means that, as

[36] PHK §27.

Winkler suggests, volition and perception are in truth one substance considered in different contexts. The passage Tweyman cites is not even intended to address the issue of whether volition is possible without perception. The same criticisms can be raised against the second passage Tweyman cites:

> I find I can excite ideas in my mind at pleasure, and vary and shift the scene as oft as I think fit. It is no more than willing, and straightway this or that idea arises in my fancy… This making and unmaking of ideas does very properly denominate the mind active.[37]

Here again Berkeley's comments only support Tweyman's objections on a misreading of Winkler. Since on Winkler's view to will *is* to perceive, to say that an idea arises in my fancy through "no more than willing" tells us little about whether blind agency is possible. It is premature to simply assume Berkeley's "no more than" here means "without perceptual content" or "blind."

What then remains of Winkler's proposal? God's sovereignty isn't threatened, and Tweyman's criticisms of the passages Winkler provides prove harmless. But what of the final objection? Does Winkler's interpretation generate an infinite regress? Tweyman supposes that if Winkler is correct God must will all of God's perceptions to appear to God, this act of will must be prefaced by its own perception, and this perception must itself be produced by a separate act of God's will. Tweyman overlooks the possibility however, that only each *particular* perception must be kept in God's mind by an act of will, as opposed to the whole set's needing to. But of course, the perception that accompanies each *particular* act of will is just the object of that act of will: its intentional content. Furthermore, Winkler is careful to note that "to deny blind agency is *not* to

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[37] PHK §28.

claim that a volition must always follow a perception or judgement in time, but merely to insist that volition, like perception and judgement themselves, is intentional." Yet the objection exploits this very misunderstanding. Given Winkler's claim here, as well as his premise that volition and perception arise mutually, Tweyman's regress is forestalled.

Section Six: Pain and Skepticism Reconsidered

In the blind agency debate, Winkler's interpretation of Berkeley proves the victor. This is less because there is room for response to Tweyman's objections, and more because his arguments exploit what simply turn out to be misunderstandings of the position. Yet if we grant Winkler his thesis, what implications does this have for the issues explored at the outset: the problem of God's pain and the skeptical worry which shadows it?

It will help to spell out some of the implications there are, given Winkler's hypothesis, for the nature of God's perceptions. On Winkler's interpretation, "God certainly perceives all things, but his perception–insofar as it contributes to real existence–is nothing more than the perception inevitably involved in his volition."[38] What this means is that *contra* what Winkler calls "the perception interpretation," God's perceiving an object is *not* sufficient for its continued existence, at least not when this perception is divorced from God's willing ideas to appear in finite minds. It is not the case, despite appearances, that God keeps things in existence just by watching them.

Is Winkler vulnerable to the skeptical worry? The dissimilarity between our perception and God's has traditionally been the motivation for such a worry, most especially when it is employed as a safeguard against the pain problem. Winkler's arguments, however, do not rely on an analogy between how we perceive and how God perceives. Winkler instead offers a *deflationary* conception of God's perception as

[38] Winkler 96.

"nothing more than the perception inevitably involved in his volition."[39]

A crucial feature of Winkler's interpretation is that real existence is *relative,* and *ectypal*.[40] The initial assumption driving the skeptical worry, that what *God* perceives provides the standard of reality, is thereby discarded. Rather, God's perceptions provide the intentional content of God's acts of will. The standard of reality is what *humans* perceive, and what humans perceive is willed by God.

With this in hand we can counter the pain problem as originally presented, at least to a degree. Must God feel pain in order to know all things? Not at all. On Winkler's interpretation, God's 'perception' of pain is just the content of God's willing that humans experience pain. God's perception is what makes God's acts of will intentional. This move no longer opens the door to skepticism given the ectypal nature of existence, and as such can serve as an adequate response to the pain problem. If Winkler is right, perception is a necessary feature of God's willing something to occur (like my feeling pain). The motivation for thinking God's impassivity limits God' omniscience was that, in effect, to deny that God feels pain is to say that the objects of God's perception and the objects of our own do not intersect.[41] But with the denial of blind agency at our disposal we can say that–on the contrary–the object of God's perception of pain and the object of our perception of pain are *the same pain*. The pain is merely willed on one end and felt on the other.

Note, however, that this solution only shows that if the pain problem *is* a problem, it is not a problem because of Berkeley's idealism. There are consequences however for his theism. So far however I endeavor only to show that in the case of the pain problem and the spectre of skepticism, Berkeley's idealist commitments are not the

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[39] Winkler 96.
[40] Winkler 95.
[41] This is how the worry is characterized in Melissa Frankel, "Berkeley and God in the Quad," *Philosophy Compass* 7 (2012): 391.

cause of the trouble.

Section Seven: Concluding Remarks

The ways of addressing the pain problem explicit in the *Dialogues* engender a skepticism anathema to Berkeley. This skepticism undermines the motivation for taking on his idealist project in the first place. A detour into the blind agency debate reveals, however, that God's will and perception are not distinct. The sense in which God 'perceives' is the sense in which God's willing that the world appear to us is intentional. There are no ideas in God's mind to ground the standard of reality–at least not the sort which create a divide between the contents of God's mind and those of our own. Rather, God's acts of perception are concomitant with God's acts of will. God's perceptions are merely the contents of these acts. There is nothing more to reality beyond what we perceive–and our perceptions are God's symbols. Reality then is *ectypal*; the standard of reality is what *humans* perceive, and so the initial assumption driving the skeptical worry is undermined. God does not feel pain because God does not perceive as we do, but this leaves reality where it always was: right in front of our noses.

PART TWO – GOD AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

Section One: Considering God

I have tried to show that for Berkeley God's perception cannot be considered apart from God's will. *Ontologically* speaking the two are not distinct. God is after all a unity: "a being purely active." God's pure activity, when considered from an *epistemic* perspective (with regard to God's knowledge) involves God's perception. God's perception just is God's knowledge, the intentional contents of God's acts of will–God is not blind. Indeed, there is nothing else for God to know beyond God's own activity, for

God's acts of will are made manifest in the laws of nature, which govern (indeed, *are*) the relations over the course of time and at any given time between minds and their ideas. In this way God can be said to both 'perceive' (insofar as God is aware of the content of God's intentions) and yet remain impassive, for God does not experience pain in the way we do (as receiving it), but rather as its Author (as willing that *that* pain occur).

There is more to say here. An appeal to God's nature as "purely active" in conjunction with an insistence that God is not blind does not clarify to the full the relationship between finite and divine ideas. Even if God's will 'just is' our (say) feeling pain, and God 'perceives' or knows that pain insofar as God's acts of will are intentional, we can still wonder about *just what it means* to say that God's nature is 'pure activity,' and about the *specific* nature of the intentional content of God's willing (say) that I feel pain. If, in the end, Berkeley's *specific* remarks about the nature of God's will (God's pure activity) simply regurgitate the pain problem *et al.*, we are no better off than when we started. We must fill in the details of *how* God operates and what God's acts of will *are* before we can hope to lay to rest such problems by way of appeal to them.

Even if Berkeley is able to dissolve the pain problem or associated problems by way of a more exacting analysis of God's activity, there is the lurking threat that his articulation of this analysis will mire him in heterodoxy. There are multiple hurdles to jump here: making God *personal* (avoiding conceptions like Spinoza's); giving God epistemic access to *our* perceptions (so as to render God omniscient); and yet keeping God *immutable* (perfect and unchanging). Given the importance of God's role in Berkeley's system, such theological quibbles have grave philosophical import. For Berkeley would be dissatisfied with a system which, however elegant, commits him to unusual theological claims (such as that God is an impersonal activity, or 'force,' or 'nothing more' than the structure present in human experience–the laws of nature). Such a task can seem admittedly Herculean. I turn now to Berkeley's execution of this task.

Section Two - The Laws of Nature and "A Being Purely Active"

In interpreting Berkeley on the laws of nature (*qua* acts of God's will), there are two distinct perspectives to keep in mind: that (1) Berkeley's *immaterialism* must be preserved–that is, some *ontological* story underpinning the interpretation must be told–and (2) Berkeley's *analogical* understanding of the laws of nature *as a language* must be preserved. The laws of nature must serve as the means of 'communication' between our minds and the mind of God. I take up these two interpretative tasks in turn.

I begin with Berkeley's immaterialism. How does Berkeley's ontology 'trickle up' into his understanding of the laws of nature and in the end the natural sciences? Here Berkeley must be compared with his historical context: a time when what Lisa Downing calls "dynamic realism" flourished.

According to Downing, Berkeley's primary target in the *Principles* and the *Dialogues* is "materialist mechanism," the view on which (1) our perceptions are caused by material objects, (2) these objects are mind-independent, (3) these objects are composed of submicroscopic particles endowed with *primary* qualities (e.g. shape), and (4) our perceptions are comprised of *secondary* qualities (e.g. color) that do *not* represent or resemble the mind-independent primary qualities of objects. The materialist mechanist endeavor in science is thus to explain physical events solely in terms of the motions and interactions of these submicroscopic particles–and these in terms of the particles' primary qualities. Interestingly enough however, Downing argues that Berkeley's views on the laws of nature are illumined by way of his *De Motu*, in which his target is much more focused.

Downing argues that although Berkeley rejects theses (1) through (4) above, he

may yet endorse the materialist mechanist endeavor in the natural sciences.[42] The relevant question here of course is how this endeavor might be linked up to Berkeley's immaterialist ontology. *In just what sense* is God active? What *are* God's acts of will *qua* laws of nature? *In what way* are these laws God's "language," and how are we to interpret it? The last of these questions I take up in the following sections. For now I will distill the most salient *desiderata* and consequences of interpreting Berkeley on the laws of nature out of the analysis Downing presents.

Section Three - Finite Minds and the Will of God

When we interpret Berkeley's commitments here we must be clear at the outset about a critical point: there is no conceptual room on Berkeley's system for what I will call 'realism about motion.'[43] Because my intention here is not to survey various theories of motion, I will define 'realism about motion' as simply any view that ascribes more than apparent causal power (and motive force specifically) to non-minds.

There are two chief reasons, both of them conceptual, why Berkeley cannot endorse such a view. The first is by way of analysis of our perceptions and the bodies they form (this takes place primarily in the *Principles* and the *Dialogues*); the second is by way of analysis of realism about motion (in *De Motu*). For Berkeley realism about motion cannot possibly be true. Consider the following remarks he makes:

> "All those who [presume to] explain the cause and origin of motion [outside of a mind]... are to be considered as having said something rather than thought it... [they] either say nothing particular and determinate, or if there is anything in what they say, it will be as difficult to explain as that very thing it was brought

[42] See Lisa Downing, "Berkeley' Natural Philosophy and Philosophy of Science," *Cambridge Companion to Berkeley* 236.
[43] Downing 241-2.

forward to explain..."[44]

The significance of these remarks is ontological: the laws of nature and discoveries of the physical sciences may very well get at causes, but only insofar as they capture the structure of *God's mental* activity. Human beings' investigations in the natural sciences are thus their descrying the will of God. Further still, each present-moment perception one has is God's will as expressed to human beings. While investigations in the natural sciences may offer us predictive power, or precisify descriptions of happenings in the natural world, one need go no further than what her eyes present to her right now to encounter the will of God. Insofar as Berkeley's conceptual arguments and fundamental ontology rule out any realism about motion, any and all apparent motion or causation we experience is God's communicating with us at that time. His symbols are our perceptions,; in this way the laws of nature constitute a language by which God communes with human minds continuously.

Section Four: The Language of God

Just what is it that is being communicated to finite minds by way of the laws of nature? What is it that God would wish us to know? The regularity by which our perceptions succeed one another allows us to experience ourselves as navigating within an orderly world in which predictions can be made and plans and intentions carried out–a world in which choices have non-random consequences. The language of God–the laws of nature–establish the conditions on which human flourishing rests. In his *New Theory of Vision*, Berkeley illustrates this sense in which our perceptions constitute a language by way of analogy to a blind man:

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[44] DM §20.

> "Suppose one who had always continued blind be told by his guide that after he has advanced so many steps he shall come to the brink of a precipice, or be stopped by a wall; must not this to him seem very admirable and surprising? He cannot conceive how it is possible for mortals to frame such predictions as these, which to him would seem as strange and unaccountable as prophesy doth to others. Even they who are blessed with the visive faculty may (though familiarity make it less observed) find therein sufficient cause of admiration. The wonderful art and contrivance wherewith it is adjusted to those ends and purposes for which it was apparently designed, the vast extent, number, and variety of objects that are at once with so much ease and quickness and pleasure suggested by it: all these afford subject for much and pleasing speculation, and may, if anything, give us some glimmering analogous prænotion of things which are placed beyond the certain discovery and comprehension of our present state."[45]

There is a near-literal sense in which all human beings can be said to occupy the position of the blind man. All that is given to one at any moment is a heterogenous aggregate of perceptions, each of which cannot itself change or move. Apparent change is a substituting of one perception for another in the way a "motion picture" is a substituting of one frame for another. Yet the apparent motion and change in our perceptions is orderly, and this order is describable. The language of God, interpreted by humans, allows us to 'prophesy' over what will follow from our actions. God's language secures a place for the human pursuit of virtue. Even the human experience of pain and pleasure occurs in a lawlike fashion. Indeed, the "laws of pain and pleasure" may very well prove the *most* useful as an instrument by which we might discover the good.

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[45] NTV §148.

Section Five: God, Humans, and the Laws of Pain and Pleasure

As I have shown, when we attempt to answer even a seemingly simple question like *Does God feel pain?* we have to dive into the details of how God's perception and will operate for Berkeley. I argued that the nature of God's perception is as Kenneth Winkler argues: God is not "blind"; to say God perceives a thing is just to identify the content of a particular act of God's will. I then turned to the nature of God's activity, arguing that the laws of nature constitute a language. Here at last I return to the original pain problem in discussion of the laws of pain and pleasure.

Berkeley understands the laws of nature to capture 'full-blooded' motion or causation only in the form of God's motion or causation of human perceptions. The laws of pain and pleasure then are just those regularities by which humans experience pain and pleasure over the course of their lives. Berkeley mentions laws of pain and pleasure in the context of discussing "the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole [of natural law]"[46] which serves as "the strongest incentive to virtue, and the best guard against vice." This, and the fact that he says the laws of pain and pleasure are "never-enough-admired,"[47] suggest that Berkeley thinks these laws are exceptional in their contribution to human flourishing. God thus does not feel pain; God wills our pains. Yet a pain-free God is not *ipso facto* impersonal.

Recall that for causes to have their effects in any genuine sense it must be as the willing of a mind. *This* then is the sense in which God is personal: he moves the sun and the stars. Insofar as God is personal in this way, the *desideratum* of orthodoxy is preserved. The cost, however, is that in the strictest sense God does not feel *anything*,

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[46] PHK §146.
[47] PHK §146.

and thus cannot know the passions in the way that we do. But this was guaranteed from the outset in virtue of the conceptual points Berkeley makes anyway; God is a being purely active, and so God's knowledge and experience of pain is as the ground of "the laws of pain and pleasure" and their role in a greater structure of laws according to which human actions have consequences in non-random fashion.

Section Six: Concluding Remarks

By way of refuting what I have called 'realism about motion' Berkeley is able to establish that human beings' investigations in the natural sciences are their descrying the will of God. Insofar as God's will is made manifest to us by way of the laws of nature–perhaps especially in the case of "the laws of pain and pleasure"–human beings are in a position to discover ever more concerning their well-being and the path to virtue. Again, however, we must not read this as a mere changing of the words of materialist mechanists. Neither bodies *nor* ideas 'move'–God's will is the cause of all but our own volitions. God's will is even a partial cause of the effects of *our* volitions, or at least the lawlike fashion in which these effects arise. God 'speaks' to humanity *via* willing what ideas they encounter when, and how these ideas are related to their others. Even in the dull throb one feels when she stubs her toe, God is communicating something about how one should live her life (even if this something is only that one should be more mindful of her surroundings).

I will re-emphasize the point that Berkeley's God is nevertheless *personal*, despite God's communicating with humans only in natural law. Berkeley's God is impassive and immutable, and does not for instance "hate all who do wrong and destroy

those who tell lies," strictly speaking.[48] For Berkeley's God does not perceive (as we do), and so cannot feel: God is not affected 'from the outside.' Nevertheless, Berkeley's God is intimately personal. Indeed, Berkeley's God relates to us far more directly than God might on an alternative picture: for on Berkeley's system God communicates with humankind every moment in every way in which we *are* affected from the outside. This is not quite heterodoxy; this is rather a more principled understanding of orthodoxy.

Still, there is a significant sense in which the utterances of the vulgar that God "laughs at the wicked" and "feels indignation every day," for instance, are quite false.[49] If God offers us rewards or punishments in this life, or answers prayers, it is only by way of the laws of nature, by way of the order according to which our choices have their consequences. Yet Berkeley is not left with some fully-automated Prime Mover, for motion and causation themselves can only be understood as the activity of a mind. God's mind is indeed very different than our own, but in a way which brings the contents of God's mind *closer* within our reach. God's will is made plain–insofar as it can be to humans–right here and now in the playing out of their present-moment perceptions.

PART THREE – BERKELEY AND HIS GOD

Section One: Starting with God

Berkeley's system and arguments are ingenious: his idealism is not easily matched in elegance of presentation and manoeuvrability. Yet like so many, Berkeley's reach exceeds his grasp; his passion to preserve orthodoxy whatever the cost generates, after fisticuffs, questions that at the end of the day are likely unanswerable. Can the essentially infinite know the essentially finite? Can an essentially non-sensory being

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[48] As God is described in Psalm 5:5-6.
[49] From Psalm 37:13 and 7:11 respectively.

perceive what I do? Can a non-sensory being perceive *at all*? Here and there, interpretations offer their replies. But none are the sort which serve Berkeley's theological agenda. The fundamental principles to which he is committed do not allow for any fog wherein the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob might reside. Berkeley's own insistence on clarity of ideas and of inference, the very perceptiveness by which he has been inducted into the canon, dig the grave of just this God.

And yet, Stephen Daniel interprets Berkeley in a way which resolves more than one of the problems at hand–and quite dazzlingly–by appeal to *more* explicitly theological concerns. Daniel extrapolates from Christian *Neoplatonic* principles (which he argues influenced Berkeley to a considerable degree) an understanding of Berkeley's God that presumes to dissolve all difficulty.[50] I consider his interpretation worth examining insofar as it serves as a straightforward example of what I take to be the tension at the heart of Berkeley's system: that when it comes to ontological artistry and robust theological orthodoxy, something has got to give.

Daniel begins his analysis by highlighting the most salient goals in interpreting Berkeley's ontology. The first (as is perhaps obvious) is to have in hand by the end of the procedure a *personal* God–a God with a mind like ours.[51] Daniel takes this aim rather seriously, insofar as God's relational nature establishes the rock-bottom ontological primitive from which his interpretation is constructed. An oft-lauded facet of Christianity is that it offers us a God who is intimately personal, who loves sinners and hates sin, who comforts the righteous and bemoans the wicked. God's *triune* nature after all is supposed to provide human beings with an image of themselves: creatures defined in their essential nature in terms of their relations to one another and to the Divine. God is thus cast as a Mystery made manifest by way of three distinct *personae*: the Father, the Son,

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[50] See Stephen Daniel, "Berkeley's Christian Neoplatonism, Archetypes, and Divine Ideas," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 240.
[51] *Ibid.*

and the Holy Ghost. These are the ontological building blocks with which Daniel begins.

Section Two – The Trinity as a Model for Mind

For Daniel the relations that obtain between the three persons of the Trinity ground and mirror the relations that obtain between finite minds, their ideas, and God. Insofar as the God of Christianity is a unity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost cannot be conceived apart from each other. God *just is* this Trinity, and each of its members has its nature in virtue of its participating in relationships with the other two. Daniel argues that finite minds are related to their ideas and to God in just such a way. Finite minds *are* God's acts of will made manifest by way of sensible ideas. Ideas require a mind to receive them, but more significantly God's acts of will require ideas and finite minds to be realized.

Finite minds and their ideas arise in coordination with God's acts of will. The minds of God and humans meet in the actual world. Thus the upshot of Daniel's interpretation for the nature of God's ideas is that God's ideas are *identical to* our own. Our ideas are God's medium. This is good news so far as the sameness and continuity of everyday 'objects' are concerned. The consequence is worse for God's feeling pain. While Daniel does not speak to the second issue, it seems to me there are only two ways of moving forward. The first is to say that God does indeed feel pain; God's ideas are robustly identical to our own. Berkeley's victory here would be bittersweet, tinged with a distasteful heterodoxy–the "Divine Being" demoted to a suffering demi-god. The second route is to say that God cannot feel pain, because God does not sense; *our* pain is reflected back *to God* by way of God's pure intellection. Yet knowledge of pain so purified can seem false knowledge of *what pain is*. Is not the *nature of pain* that it feel the way it does to us? This especially given Daniel's ontological assumptions. Can pain abstracted

from its real-world relations to finite minds even *have* a nature for Daniel? A God of pure intellection hardly seems like a God who might love and hate in the way Daniel insists God must for Berkeley.

These consequences illustrate what is at stake with the second of Daniel's listed *desiderata*: that God not be rendered "blind."[52] A blind God–a God without full-blooded perceptions–has already been shown to be troublesome. Indeed, the very need to avoid such a God endows the questions above with bite. *Just how is it* that God might remain impassive, given God must perceive? I have argued that the best move is to appeal to God's nature as "a being purely active." This what Daniel does, but in the most bewildering of ways.

Section Three – A Being Purely Active

According to Daniel, Berkeley's God is active *in virtue of* God's personal nature as borne out in the Trinity. Daniel claims that "God cannot subsist without knowing and acting." Without diving into too much detail, we can see how a specifically *Neoplatonic* Trinitarianism implies this. To Christian Neoplatonists, God is a substance which has its being in three *hypostases* or states of activity. These states of activity are stamped in the nature of all beings, insofar as all creatures partake in the nature of their Creator.[53] While these three states are in the end acknowledged to be the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost of traditional Christian theology, *philosophically* speaking the three hypostases are identified as the principles of "Being," "Mind/*Logos*," and "Life," respectively.[54] The perhaps exotic metaphysics is significant insofar as it contributes, Daniel argues, to an understanding of why Berkeley characterizes God, finite minds, and the relationship

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[52] Daniel 245.
[53] Daniel 242.
[54] *Ibid*.

between the two in the way he does. For instance, the Christian Trinity is supposed on this reading to consist of three states of activity, neither substances nor distinct centers of consciousness lying somewhere 'behind' or 'beneath' their intercommunication. The perennial commingling of the Trinity–its internal relations–define its contours and constitute its nature. Its nature is Its structure. Finite minds mirror this triadic structure by being related to their ideas and to God's acts of will such that *none can exist or have its nature without the relations they* <u>*in fact bear*</u> *to one another* <u>*in the actual world*</u>. It is difficult to overstate the point: on Daniel's picture, our minds *just are* the real-world relationships that arise between our experienced succession of ideas and God's acts of will, the laws of nature. The total network of divinely decreed relations between finite minds, ideas, and God's volitional activity makes up the nature of three seemingly 'distinct' classes of entity. Daniel sees evidence of this in Berkeley's remark that "will and understanding [or perception] constitute *in the strictest sense* a mind or spirit" (*D* 240, emphasis mine). Daniel argues that Berkeley is trying the best he can in the terms available to him to articulate a fundamental difference between his system and those of, for instance, Descartes and Locke. For Berkeley 'a mind' is not a substance or 'a thing,' but rather an activity and its relations to other activities.[55] By way of this perhaps radical approach, Daniel takes himself to have both grounded the sameness and continuity of objects and streamlined the structure of the relationship between human minds and the Divine Mind. He captures his strategy by saying that "for God to know and act is imply for God to be, just as for any created being to know and act if for God to be. In this sense, 'God alone exists.'"

Here, however, Daniel lets too many cats out of the bag. In overemphasizing his point he draws attention to looming trouble: just why is it, one wonders, that it isn't the case in a *robust* sense that 'God alone exists,' for Berkeley? If the Trinity is all we start

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[55] Daniel 243.

with, it is hard to see how we might end up with anything else.

Section Four: Reaching for God

This detour into Daniel's interpretation and his admittedly startling theo-metaphysical considerations is meant to show that there are those who would wish to interpret Berkeley as (and themselves accomplish) a safeguarding of the metaphors of "the vulgar". I have argued that Berkeley is too systematic, his principles too stringent, to allow for this. Just this kind of personality in God is what is not preserved on my interpretation. Daniel's interpretation embodies perfectly the tension between ontological artistry on the part of Berkeley or interpreter, and orthodoxy literally taken on the part of "the vulgar." Berkeley's concern for the intuitions of the common-man is what it is only insofar as these are derived from, represent, or align with rigorous and principled philosophizing. But this concern will not have him licensing metaphorical utterances like those presented. The commitments of Berkeley's that I have examined here show that one should not read Berkeley as a simple case of Christian apologetics gone horribly wrong. He is far more ambitious.

PART FOUR – CONCLUSION

I began with a singular interpretive puzzle: *Does Berkeley's God feel pain?* Very quickly it became clear that any answer generates further difficulties. What *are* God's perceptions? What *are* God's acts of will? I took up each of these questions in turn. I argued that Berkeley's God is not "blind"; Berkeley's God perceives. Yet Berkeley's God does not perceive as we do: while our perceptions come to us by way of the senses, God's 'perceptions' are just the intentional contents of God's acts of will. What it means to say that God perceives my feeling pain is that God wills that *that* pain occur *to me*. God's *will*

does the work of bringing things into existence, while to say that God perceives these things is just to say that God wills that *these* things appear to the minds to which they *in fact* appear.

I argue that for Berkeley God's acts of will are the laws of nature, and as such God is the cause of the motion and causality apparent in our perceptions. Individual human beings' perceptions–and perhaps especially their experience of "the laws of pain and pleasure"–are thus the symbols by which God communicates with human minds. In just this sense the laws of nature constitute God's 'language.' The orderliness by which human beings experience the world establishes and grants them access to facts concerning their flourishing.

The upshot of these analyses is that God does not feel pain, and saying so does not land Berkeley in a mire of skepticism on the one hand or heterodoxy on the other. Berkeley is able to preserve both (1) God's immutability, (2) the intimacy of God's relation to human minds, and (3) reality's not lying on the other side of some 'veil of perception.'

Indeed, by way of his understanding of the laws of nature as a language, Berkeley has a way to render God *more* personal than certain other conceptions we might call to mind. Berkeley is able to dissolve the pain problem, since God does not perceive passively as we do. What it means to say God perceives is just that God's acts of will are intentional. Yet God is not thereby placed across some skeptical chasm. God's acts of will contain their content in virtue of and are of necessity made manifest in each human being's perceptions. The 'real world' is *our* world: the contents of God's mind are simply made plain *to human beings* by way of what we experience as the laws of nature. Of course, God does not occupy the same perspective with respect to God's own mind: God is a being purely active. Thus God is *not* an impersonal 'force of nature,' but a personal mind which continuously communicates by way of symbols, namely human perceptions.

Insofar as human beings are passive, this is how we must be communicated to.

There is a cost to my interpretation. There is no way for Berkeley to literally vindicate the utterances of the "vulgar": talk of God's feeling pain, delighting in righteousness, or grieving over wickedness is at best metaphorical and at worst misleading. Strictly speaking the only contents of God's mind are God's perceptions and God's acts of will, and neither class of contents might contain such attitudes. Either God delights and grieves–and feels pain–or God does none of the three. Other ways of interpreting Berkeley may offer solutions to one or more of the discussed problems, but they cannot simultaneously accommodate his other commitments concerning the nature of God's perception, will, and 'language.' This consequence illustrates the importance of getting clear on the internal structure of Berkeley's system, so as not to take him for an apologist bending over backwards to safeguard “vulgar” metaphor.

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