

UNDERSTANDING GEORGE BERKELEY'S PERCEPTION OF RADICAL IDEALISM

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Abstract

This research examined immaterialism in George Berkeley's epistemic principle – Esse Est Percipi (to be is to be perceived). He denied the autonomous existence of matter. And postulated that for a thing to exist, it must be perceived, and whatever is not perceived does not exist; hence for him, "to be is to be perceived." Contrary to some scholars like Johnson who thought that Berkeley totally rejected the existence of matter, this research argued the theses that Berkeley, viewed from a certain angle of vision, only denied the existence of a kind of matter and not matter as such. This research finds out that Berkeley has been misinterpreted by many scholars for he did not deny the existence of matter in its entirety but rather, a kind of matter conceived as existing independent of the mind and responsible for the cause of other things. This research submits that Berkeley only transformed the materialist conception of matter, giving it a new identity and meaning.

Keywords: Empiricism, Matter, Perception, Ideas, Sensation, Knowledge.

Introduction

We do not need to go far to begin to gather evidence that George Berkeley did not deny the existence of matter in its entirety but rather, a kind of matter conceived as existing independent of the mind. From the beginning of his work, *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley outlined three sources of human knowledge. According to him,

It is evident to anyone who takes a survey of the objects of human knowledge, that they are either ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or, lastly, ideas formed by help of memory and imagination - either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways (1).

The first category - ideas actually imprinted on the senses give us the impression that objects exist. The word – actually does not signify a representation but something that truly exist. Ideas actually imprinted on the sense are those ideas that the agent of perception (the mind) gains when it comes into direct contact with an object. There is no intermediary between the perceiver and the object. The perceiver gains the knowledge of the object as it truly is without the aid of any

other thing but solely through the use of the senses. Ideas actually imprinted on the senses are real. They are not a representation. For example, when I see a table, the table seen is real. It is not a representation of something else. It is the table as it truly is. When my nose smells, I gain the idea of odour. When my tongue test, I gain the knowledge of taste and when I touch a thing, I get the knowledge of hardness or softness, heat or cold, motion or resistance.

The second source of human knowledge as enunciated by George Berkeley is – ideas perceived by the passion and operations of the mind. These ideas are generated by the passion and operations of the human mind. The mind, having previously come in contact with the idea of the table, would continue to perceive it even if it is no longer in direct contact with the table and the table too would continue to exist insofar as it has been perceived or is being perceived some other mind. To buttress this point, Berkeley argued that “the table I write on, I say exists, that is, I see and feel it; and if I were out of my study, I should say it existed - meaning thereby that if I was in my study, I might perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it” (3). Here, the table exists on two grounds, firstly, that I had perceived it while I was in the study, even though I am out, I am convinced that the table existed because it was perceived by me. The second ground is that some other spirit perceives it even though I am no longer in the study perceiving it. Up to this extend, we have not seen that the table exist without being perceived or without perception.

The third objects of knowledge according to Berkeley are ideas formed by the help of memory and imagination. These ideas are formed by human memory and imagination. They are not the immediate product of actual ideas imprinted on the mind by the sense but product of the internal calculation of the human mind. They are not real since the human mind has the capacity to generate ideas by itself. From the first source of knowledge to the third source of knowledge, we see a transition from exteriority to interiority. Berkeley does not deny the existence of a table as some scholars tend to read him, he only asserted that the table does not exist if it is not perceived; and exist only to the extent that it is perceived. His recognition of sense perception as a source of knowledge clearly puts Berkeley within the empirical framework or tradition. Similarly, his declaration – “the existence of an idea consists in being perceived”, that is, no idea can exist without the mind perceiving it, places him within the epistemological framework of the idealist conception. Therefore, it is safe to refer to George Berkeley both as an empiricist and an idealist because he combines both empiricist and idealist ideas. This classification of George Berkeley as an empiricist and an idealist finds confirmation in the work – *On the Dilemma of Berkeley's Immaterialism* where the author, Nor, Zaato Matthew postulated that “...Berkeley is undoubted an idealist,

but of an empiricist orientation, having acknowledged that ideas are perceived by the senses before they are settled in the mind" (2). This simply means that Berkeley combines the characteristics of both an empiricist and an idealist. Badey Paul helps us to understand what empiricism is. According to him:

Empiricism is a theory of knowledge which holds that experience, rather than reason is the source of knowledge. They held that no innate knowledge exists and that whatever knowledge man possesses is acquired through experience. In other words, they asserted that all genuine knowledge is derived from sense perception and denied that reason alone without the sense can acquire any genuine knowledge (2).

George Berkeley denied innate ideas as such but upheld the empiricist theses that whatever knowledge man possesses is acquired through experience. Empirically, the sense of sight cannot perceive what is not given in experience. For example, if the table is not there, the eyes cannot see it. However, having perceived it, they are settled in the mind, they are acted upon by the passion and operations of the mind constituting our memory and imagination. From sense perception in Berkeley, we see a transition to idealism where he argued that everything that exists is an idea in the mind of the perceiver. The fact that the last two sources of knowledge in Berkeley have no direct or immediate contact with sense data, they are not clear, and so cannot be wholly relied on as authentic. However, one thing remains – their existence lies in perception. The distinction between clear, real and strong ideas; and unclear, unreal and weak ideas (30) in Berkeley's epistemic thoughts give birth to a hierarchy of knowledge, and epistemic duality. This is reminiscent of Cartesian duality and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities in John Locke.

George Berkeley's Participation in the Debate about Primary and Secondary Qualities

George Berkeley made a distinction between ideas actually perceived by the senses and those perceived by the other two objects of human knowledge – Passion and Operations of the mind; and Memory and Imagination. This is one of the contradictions in George Berkeley. Prior to the emergence of George Berkeley, there was the debate - whether sense perception could lead us to true knowledge. Rene Descartes (1596 - 1650), in his contribution, argued that sense perception cannot lead us to true knowledge since they are deceptive. According to him, our senses "...sometimes deceive us concerning things which are hardly perceptible..." (46). Presenting this view, Omoregbe stated that "Descartes despised the senses as sources of knowledge. He saw them as deceptive and

unreliable. Only reason leads to clear and distinct truths” (80). Descartes doubted the possibility of sense perception to lead us to true knowledge.

In an attempt to give an account of how we get our ideas and how they are related to the objects that produce them, John Locke, philosopher and physician, arguably one of the most influential figures of the Enlightenment Period and “father of liberalism” talked about complex ideas and made a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Locke asserted:

The mind hath also complex collective ideas of substances; which I so call, because such ideas are made up of many particular substances considered together, as united into one idea, and which so joined are looked on as one; the idea of such a collection of men as make an army, though consisting of a great number of distinct substances, is as much one idea as the idea of a man: and the great collective idea of all bodies whatsoever, signified by the name world, is as much one idea as the idea of any the least particle of matter in it; it sufficing to the unity of any idea, that it be considered as one representation or picture, though made up of ever so many particulars (300).

The mentioning of the mind and ideas in the above quotation would certainly excite George Berkeley given his own unique stance on the mind and ideas. However, the fusion of simple ideas to arrive at complex ideas united into one idea would not be tolerated by George Berkeley. This is because, in Berkeley there is no multiplicity of ideas as everything is an idea and an idea can be like nothing but another idea. Since no philosophy emanate in a vacuum, Locke laid the scaffold upon which Berkeley erected his philosophical foundation on. This is why Locke’s ideas are here x-rayed to provide a springboard or background for a proper understanding of what Berkeley says.

Speaking about the distinction between primary and secondary qualities, there are some ideas that appear inseparable from the physical objects while others change relative to the circumstance of the perceiver. How then do we know which ideas give the likely picture of the object? The answer lies in the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Describing primary qualities, Locke asserted that “Primary qualities of bodies...are utterly inseparable from the body, in what state soever it be; and such as in all the alterations and changes it suffers, all the force can be used upon it, it constantly keeps...” (117). This means that primary qualities are those qualities that are found in all bodies whatsoever and are proper to them

and unchanging. They resemble exactly those qualities that belong inseparably to the object. He included solidity, extension, figure and mobility (117). Locke held that in perception, these qualities produce ideas in us which resemble their cause (the physical objects). The secondary qualities, on the other hand are “those qualities which in truth are nothing in the objects themselves but power to produce various sensations in us by their primary qualities, that is, by the bulk, figure, texture, and motion of their insensible parts, as colours, sounds, tastes. These I call secondary qualities” (117). They are not in the object of experience; rather they are incidental to the object.

The distinction between primary and secondary qualities advanced by John Locke, for George Berkeley is a manifest contradiction. Berkeley rejects Locke’s distinction arguing that it creates the possibility of skeptical movements in epistemology which he intends to resolve. To counter John Locke, George Berkeley asserted,

Some there are who make a distinction between primary and secondary qualities. By the former, they mean extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity or impenetrability, and number; by the latter they denote all other sensible qualities, as colours, sounds, tastes, and so forth. The ideas we have of secondary qualities they acknowledge not to be the resemblances of anything existing without the mind, or unperceived, but they will have our ideas of the primary qualities to be patterns or images of things which exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance which they call Matter. By Matter, therefore, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance, in which extension, figure, and motion do actually subsist. But it is evident, from what we have already shown, that extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can be like nothing but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. Hence, it is plain that the very notion of what is called Matter or corporeal substance, involves a contradiction in it (9).

Berkeley did not mention Locke but it is easier to decipher that of the “some” implied above, Locke is a number. The distinction stemmed from the arguments about appearance and reality which at the time was a fundamental philosophical argument whereas, appearance was referred to as things as they appear or present themselves to us while reality was referred to as things are, they really are as they

are in themselves. Appearance contains properties that can change under different conditions, it is also characteristic of it that it be perceived by the senses. However, they are not real. The real thing lies behind appearance and cannot change, it is also characteristic of it not to be perceived by the senses because it is lying behind. Apart from attributing such arguments to the epistemic outlook at the time, their (the some) conception of matter was also responsible. They thought of matter as an object, for example, a table. The colours we see of a table when we look at it, the hardness when we touch it, all those elements can be altered under different conditions or with different people. For example, under blue light, the colour of the table is blue but under red light, it is red. For me, it is white but for you, it is black. These are some of the reasons that occasioned the appearance/reality argument. One thing remains that they acknowledged, that they can perceive them – secondary qualities. Because they thought secondary qualities cannot subsist, it was proper for them to think of something upon which those qualities which they can perceive inhere on since they can stand on.

Consequently, they arrived at primary qualities through abstraction. Berkeley rejects the secondary/primary distinction. He rejected their conception of matter or corporeal substance which is an unperceiving substance arguing that an idea consists in perception. For them to perceive secondary qualities without perceiving primary qualities involves a contradiction for “where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and nowhere else” (10). They are inseparably bonded by an epistemic trinity. This was a departure from John Locke who made a distinction between primary and secondary qualities and argued that the latter can exist without the mind perceiving them. George Berkeley thinks the conclusion that matter exists independent of the mind is an error and a manifest contradiction. According to him, “It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, in a word, all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding (195-196). Berkeley does not in fact believe objects unperceived by humans exist at all. The error is to think of matter as something existing independent of the mind. This error, Berkeley attributed to the doctrine of abstract ideas.

Berkeley's Critique of Abstraction and its Implications for Understanding of Reality and Knowledge

It has already been established in this paper that George Berkeley sees the conception of the absolute existence of unthinking things without relation to their being perceived as having its root in the doctrine of abstraction inaugurated and sustained by some scholars before him. Bearing that in mind, he asserted that the

doubtfulness and uncertainty, absurdities and contradictions that underlies philosophy springs from the incurable ignorance of the wisest men conceiving it to arise from the natural dullness and limitations of our faculties. Berkeley set out in his epistemology to cure the maladies knowing fully well that such misconceptions do not arise from the limitations of our faculties. This task, according to him,

it is a work well deserving our pains to make a strict inquiry concerning the first principles of human knowledge, to sift and examine them on all sides, especially since there may be some grounds to suspect that those obstacles and difficulties which stay and embarrass the mind in its search after truth do not spring from any darkness and intricacy in the objects or natural defect in the understanding so much as from false principles which have been insisted on and might have been avoided (PHK, Introduction 6).

In order to prepare the mind of the reader for the easier assimilation of what follows, Berkeley averred that it is proper to say something, by way of introduction, concerning the nature and abuse of language and the opinion that the mind has a power of framing abstract ideas or notions of things. Abstraction has eaten deeply into philosophical discourse and Berkeley asserted that he who is not a perfect stranger to the writings and disputes of philosophers must necessarily acknowledge that no small part of them are spent about abstract ideas.

When we distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived so as to conceive them as existing unperceived, that is when abstraction comes in or we experience the power of abstraction. For Berkeley, whatever you perceive, that is it. Stay with what you perceive. Light and colors, heat and cold, extension and figures - in a word, the things we see and feel. In truth, the object and the sensation are the same thing and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other. Some truths, Berkeley argues are so near and obvious to the mind that a man needs only open his eyes to see them. The truth that the object and the sensation are the same thing and cannot therefore be abstracted from each other is one of such truths. According to George Berkeley,

that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word, all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind, that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not

actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit - it being perfectly unintelligible, and involving all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any single part of them an existence independent of a spirit (6).

From the quotation above, we can affirm from Berkeley that there is no existence independent of the mind. The mind must perceive a thing before it can be said to exist. For an idea to exist, the idea must actually be perceived by me, exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit. If this is not the case, the idea must subsist in the mind of an Eternal Spirit. According to Alexander Campbell, the above quotation "does not mean denial of the existence of the world that is daily presented to our senses and which includes our own bodies... it affirms, as intuitively true, the existence of the only real matter which our senses present to us" (19). The only material world of which we have any experience consists of the appearances - called ideas of sense by Berkeley which are continually rising as real objects in a passive procession of interpretable signs, through means of which each finite person realises his own individual personality, the existence of other finite persons and the sense - symbolism that is more or less interpreted in the natural sciences. So, the material world of concrete experience is redefined and presented to us as mind - dependent and in itself powerless: the deepest and truest reality must always be spiritual. It makes us skeptics and atheists when in its name, we put a supposed dead abstract matter in room of the Divine Active Reason of which all-natural order is the continuous providential expression (19). Berkeley did not deny the existence of matter as such, rather, he denied the existence of a kind of matter, that which was conceived as unperceiving, unconscious and unthinking.

Accordingly, God must exist, because the material world, in order to be a real world, needs to be continually realised and regulated by living Providence; and we have all the certainty of sense and sanity that there is a mind-dependent material world. The introduction of an Eternal Spirit by Berkeley is not rationally explained and adequately justified keeping with his thesis - to be is to be perceived. He did not sufficiently explain how God as an eternal perceiver is perceived for Him to exist except that he assumed. This is one of the points Immanuel Kant contested about George Berkeley's philosophy. Kant argues that "...theoretical proves of God's existence provides an important backdrop here - that the appeal to divinely implanted reality tracking faculties amounts to a '*deus ex machina*' and the destruction of all philosophy" (32). Kant rejects George Berkeley's appeal to God for continuity in perception and for continuity in existence when the finite

mind fails to perceive in order that things might exist stressing that it was not a good argument.

What Kant needs before he can agree that there is in fact an object outside of him is some kind of logical and reasonable argument and not just a mere appeal to God. While Kant's argument remains valid for those who do not believe in God, it is worthy of note that perception does not start with Kant and ends with God though God is always there eternally perceiving. However, it is difficult to deny the interplay of reason and faith at this point of Berkeley's argument. The very fact of existence implies perception and the very fact of perception implies existence because either perception or existence can be without the other. This is a clear path for Berkeley to resolve the problem of abstraction. He upheld the position that for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is a manifest contradiction, for to have an idea is all one needs to perceive and for an idea to exist, it must be perceived. Hence, it is clear there can be no unthinking substance or substratum of those ideas.

George Berkeley's Critique of the notion of Independent Existence of Unperceived Things

Let it be established from the onset that George Berkeley is against the absolute existence of matter. Absolute existence in the sense that they do not have autonomous existence independent of the mind. For anything to exist, it must be perceived. Those who hold the view that matter exist, uphold the position that it exists independently of the mind, that is, absolute existence of matter. He argued that that conception is either meaningless or contradictory. Berkeley said our senses can only give us knowledge of our sensations, ideas or those things that are immediately perceived by sense but they do not inform us that things exist without the mind or unperceived. Berkeley admits that reason can induce us into believing or imagining all kinds of things but he does not lay claim to knowing how reason can induce us into believing the existence of bodies without the mind. Just like what happens in dreams where we dream about things that have never happened in our world or things that we have never encountered in reality, it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now even though they are not. The idea of unthinking agent is a creation of the mind. The mind can excite ideas at pleasure. The making and unmaking of ideas is one of the activities of the active mind. When we talk of unthinking agents or exciting ideas independent of Berkeleyan will, we only amuse ourselves with words.

An idea has no power in it. The very being of an idea implies passiveness and inertness in it such that it is impossible for an idea to do anything or to be the cause of anything. An idea cannot be the resemblance or pattern of any active being (25).

For the fact that we perceive an endless plethora of ideas, become aware of new ideas, while others change or totally disappear, that means there is something responsible causing these ideas upon which they depend and which produces and changes them. However, this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of ideas (26) since he does not admit of any unperceiving or unthinking thing called matter. It remains therefore that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal active substance or Spirit (26). Here, Berkeley again is seen running to his faith rather than staying with reason to explain the cause or reason behind the different ideas. He defined a spirit as one simple, undivided, active being (27). There can be no idea formed of a soul or spirit because no idea can represent itself unto us by way of image. An idea is an idea. It is not a representation of anything elsewhere.

The ideas I actually perceive by sense does not depend on my will and the ideas generated by my will does not depend on those perceived by my senses. For example, when I open my eyes in broad daylight, it is not within my ability to choose whether I see or not or to determine when objects imprint their reality on my vision. The ideas imprinted on the senses are not creatures of my will, and because they are not my creation, but existing even while I was asleep or dreaming, Berkeley through inference concludes that there is some other will or spirit that perceives them for them to exist or produces them. Berkeley introduces other percipient agents to explain the existence or production of other ideas without first and foremost telling us how these percipient agents he presupposes came about. To continue on that logic and trajectory, one would need to introduce another percipient agent to justify or explain the existence of another and so it will continue *ad infinitum*.

The Independent Existence of Non – Conscious Entities and the Nature of Ideas

We have to understand Berkeley within a very unique context. Contrary to the ordinary understanding of things, Berkeley called things ideas because they are perceived. For him, ideas are “several combinations of sensible qualities called things” (38). He refused to call ideas things because of the ordinary meaning it has acquired which presupposes something existing without the mind. He acknowledges the difficulty in understanding words taking a different meaning from their familiar known meanings. But understanding Berkeley requires us to blanket or recycle whatever we have known of words because for a fact, he uses words with different meanings entirely from what we known. It is in this sense that many think he reject matter as such and not just a kind of matter – an unperceiving or unthinking thing. In Berkeley, philosophical terminologies acquire specific definitions. Here, things are referred to as ideas simply just to

justify the assertion that they do not exist unperceived and whatever is perceived, is an idea.

However, Berkeley made a distinction between two ideas - the ideas we have in dreams and the ideas we have in reality or the ideas we are conscious of in sense. The former are a creation of the last two objects of knowledge enunciated from the very beginning of his work - *Treatise on the Principles of Human Understanding*. According to Berkeley, "The ideas or objects which we have in dreams differ in important characteristics from the ideas or objects of which we are conscious in sense. Those in dreams are fake or unreal while those in sense are tangible or real" (33). He argued that as it is possible for us to close our eyes and imagine trees for instance in a park or books existing in a closet and nobody to perceive them, it is the same thing with framing in our mind certain ideas which one may call books and trees and the same time omitting to frame the ideas of any one perceiving. We can possibly form ideas in the mind that do not exist in real life. It shows one has the power of imagining or forming ideas in the mind but it does not in any way show that you can conceive the objects of their thoughts existing without the mind. You cannot conceive things existing unperceived. George Berkeley says:

When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind, though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in itself (23).

Here, he comes as a midwife who is helping the mind to free itself from delusion and become conscious of its own ideas. The mind is the object of thought. It is practically impossible to conceive of an idea without the mind. So, whatever there is that exist is dependent on the mind. Without the mind, one cannot be conscious of any idea. And if one cannot be conscious of any idea, it means the idea does not exist for the person. If there can be no existence without the mind, it is therefore contradictory to talk about the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves or without the mind as some philosophers argued. This is one of the main thrusts of George Berkeley's epistemology - the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves or without a mind.

This was how Samuel Johnson mistakenly interpreted George Berkeley as presented by his friend, James Boswell in a story in which he narrated that after they came out of the church and were talking about George Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non - existence of a kind of matter, and that everything in the universe was merely an idea, he observed how Johnson stroke his leg against

a stone till he rebounded from, 'I refute it thus', (Kenneth P. Winkler, P. 1). Johnson represents scholars who think George Berkeley is against the existence of the stone. Berkeley is not against the existence of the stone; he only asserted and upheld the view that the stone cannot exist unperceived. In answering to some anticipated objections to his Principle, he said, "...we are not deprived of any one thing in nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or anywise conceive or understand remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever...they are real things in opposition to chimeras or ideas of our own framing; but then, they both equally exist in the mind, and in that sense, they are alike ideas" (34). The matter of George Berkeley is something capable of perception and thinking; not an unperceiving or unthinking thing. In Berkeley, matter is no longer an object; it is a subject. Berkeley transforms matter from an object that it was to a subject that it was not – ideas in the mind.

Refutation of "Matter"

When George Berkeley published the *Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* in 1710, it was greeted with mixed reactions and interpretations. Campbell, a Berkeleyan scholar, presents some of the reactions. In the editor's note, Campbell recounts that some thought of Berkeley as a "madman" for not just denying the existence of such a thing as matter but also that we ourselves have no being at all (21). This was as a result of misreading or misunderstanding of what George Berkeley actually meant. Berkeley philosophy was not intended to deny the existence of matter as such but to reaffirm it more solidly by giving it a new meaning. What Berkeley sought to challenge was the materialist conception of matter and to replace it with a spiritual or metaphysical one. For Berkeley, his philosophy was intended to rescue matter from misunderstanding and give it its true meaning, and not to deny its existence as such as some thought. According to Campbell, the two years that followed the publication of the Principles, Berkeley resolved to "reproduce his spiritual conception of the universe, in the dramatic form of dialogue, convenient for dealing popularly with plausible objections" (22). This means that contrary to what some critics thought – that Berkeley denied the existence of matter as such, he only gave it a spiritual or metaphysical meaning.

The *Three Dialogues* between Hylas and Philonous which was published in 1712 had Philonous representing Berkeley arguing for the absurdity of an abstract matter that is unrealized in the experience of living beings, as against Hylas representing all the "materialists" (Berkeley, 47), who put forward to justify belief in the abstract reality called, matter. They carry in mind the philosophy of the Ionians who were looking for the underlying stuff of the earth among the things that they knew – air, water and fire. If Berkeley opined that matter was behind

atheism and irreligion, this is the foundation. And his rejection of “matter” must be understood within this context and background. He rejected that kind of thinking in order to give God a pride of place over creation. For him, matter had no power, it cannot be the cause of another.

In the *First Dialogue*, Philonous gives us an idea of the kind of matter Berkeley rejects - the “materialist” (47) conception of matter as that which signifies an extended, solid, movable, unthinking, inactive substance. This kind of matter does not have power in it. Hylas confirms the definition. Philonous declared that no such substance can possibly exist. As presented in the Dialogue, Philonous asked Hylas: “And doesn’t ‘matter’, in the common current meaning of the word, signify an extended, solid, movable, unthinking, inactive substance?” (32). Hylas responded, “it does” (32). Philonous continued, “And hasn’t it been made evident that no such substance can possibly exist? And even if it did exist, how can something inactive be a cause? And how can something unthinking be a cause of thought?” (32). Analytically, from the original text, Berkeley used inverted commas (‘’) on the word matter. The invented commas should not be ignored because it conveys a very strong meaning. It is used to show that the word – matter as used there has a special or technical meaning. Undoubtedly, it is used to refer to a particular kind of matter. In this context, the one conceived by the “materialists” (47) which he rejects.

Berkeley’s matter is a conscious, perceiving and “active being” (2) which perceives. Here, we see Berkeley’s intent to de – emphasize matter as that which is responsible for all that is. Nor, averred that Berkeley “...denied the existence of matter which he believes is the cause of skepticism and atheism in the world” (7). Nor is right in the sense that the particular conception of matter which George Berkeley was against, was the cause of skepticism and atheism. This can even be seen in our days where materialism is gradually crippling in and people are gradually losing the sense of the divine and becoming very skeptical. Yes, Berkeley denied the existence of matter but not matter as such – not every kind of matter. He denied the existence of a particular kind of matter, that which signify an extended, solid, movable, unthinking, inactive substance yet seen as responsible for every other thing. Berkeley gives us the kind of matter he accepts – an active being.

Matter is one of the oldest philosophical concepts. When man first began to speculate about the world in which he lived and his own place in it, he tended to use concrete terms and images from everyday experience. In the ancient epoch of philosophy, the Ionians employed the term to answer cosmological and anthropological questions. The modern era witnessed the flourishing of the

natural sciences and secularism. People were tainted with skepticism and asked for a physical proof for the existence and immateriality of God; and the natural immortality of the soul. These were some of the negative consequences of the secular definition and understanding of matter as something existing independently of the human mind and whose nature can be known through the senses. According to Berkeley,

...so many things have been explained based on the notion of matter and motion. If you take away these considerations, you will destroy the whole corpuscular philosophy, and undermine those mechanical principles which have been applied with so much success to account for the phenomena. In short, whatever advances have been made either by ancient or modern philosophers in the study of nature, do all proceed on the supposition that corporeal substance or matter do really exist (50).

The achievements of the past were based on a faulty foundation as far Berkeley is concerned. Matter, understood as something that exist independently of the mind was an erroneous conception. However, much was achieved based on that conception. He acknowledged the difficulty that lied in trying to change the narrative since much of the world has been made to accept that definition. It is important to emphasize that Berkeley does not deny the existence of matter as such. According to Fraser Campbell (32), the Latin expression – *Moles evolvit et agitamentes* – meaning – “The mass unfolds and agitates the mind or the world develops and stires the mind – represents the formula of the materialism which Berkeley sought to dissolve while and *mens percipit et agit at molems significantem, cujus esse est percipi*, - meaning “The mind perceives and moves the significant mass whose being is to be perceived”. In the first instance, it is matter that is the determinant factor, impacting on the mind. Berkeley disagrees with that kind of position, rather, he gives the mind a pride of place over matter. In either case, matter is constant but with a different meaning. It is the latter meaning that Berkeley adopts.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argue the theses that viewed from a certain angle of vision, Berkeley did not deny the existence of matter as such as some scholars misread him, rather, he denied the existence of a particular kind of matter conceived as an object, unperceiving, unconscious and unthinking existing independently of the mind. Based on Berkeley’s understanding, it was upon such conception of matter as an object that Atheists and Fatalists drew inspiration to give materialistic interpretation to everything including the existence of God and the immortality of

the soul. To change the narrative, Berkeley upheld and defended a spiritual conception of matter and the cosmos. In a nutshell, he denied the autonomous existence of matter. He upheld and defended a spiritual conception of matter and the cosmos. By sufficiently quoting from his original text, showing how he transformed matter into ideas in the mind and giving it a conscious and spiritual identity, the misconception created that he denied matter as such has been corrected. Commenting on the misconception in this regard, Colin M. Turbayne wrote: "His contribution is commonly presented as the denial of matter and the assertion of '*esse is percipi*' but this is altogether too narrow a view of one of the most powerful criticisms of the presupposition of the modern scientific approach" (xiii). The emphasis is on the denial of matter. Turbayne also thinks that those who hold the opinion that Berkeley denied matter as such rather have a narrow or limited understanding of Berkeley. Berkeley denied a particular kind of matter and not matter as such.

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