

IS SHEPHERD'S PEN MIGHTIER THAN BERKELEY'S WORD?

Samuel C. Rickless

[forthcoming in *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*]

Abstract

In 1827, Lady Mary Shepherd published *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*, which offers both an argument for the existence of a world of external bodies existing outside our minds and a criticism of Berkeley's argument for idealism in *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. In this paper, I evaluate Margaret Atherton's criticisms of Shepherd's case against Berkeley, and provide reasons for thinking that, although Shepherd's particular criticisms of Berkeley do not succeed, she correctly identifies an important problem to which Berkeley's reasoning is subject.

In 1824, Lady Mary Shepherd published an *Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect*, and three years later, *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe*.¹ In the former work, Shepherd argues, against David Hume, (i) that reason can establish that everything which begins to exist must have a cause, indeed a cause that is distinct from itself, and (ii) that reason, rather than custom,

¹ The complete titles of these two works are: *An Essay Upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, Controverting the Doctrine of Mr. Hume, Concerning the Nature of that Relation; with Observations upon the Opinions of Dr. Brown and Mr. Lawrence, Connected with the Same Subject* (abbreviated as ERCE), and *Essays on the Perception of an External Universe, and Other Subjects Connected with the Doctrine of Causation* (abbreviated as EPEU). References to these works in the paper are to *Philosophical Works of Mary Shepherd, 2 vols.*, edited and introduced by Jennifer McRobert (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000). ERCE appears in volume 1, while EPEU appears in volume 2.

is the ground of our belief in any particular relation of cause and effect.² In the latter work, Shepherd relies on the first of these two conclusions to argue, against Hume yet again, that reason, rather than imagination, is the ground of our belief in the continued existence of external and mind-independent material objects. Shepherd concludes from this that our belief in a world of such objects is not merely explained, but also *justified*, and hence that idealists, such as George Berkeley, who take the world to consist of nothing but (immaterial) minds and their ideas, are mistaken. Leaving detailed examination of Shepherd's criticisms of Hume to another occasion, my purpose in this paper is to consider which, if any, of Shepherd and Berkeley gets the better of the other in their disagreement over the truth or falsity of idealism.

This is not the first time that this question has been discussed, though it is, as far as I am aware, the second. In 1996, Margaret Atherton published "Lady Mary Shepherd's Case Against George Berkeley", and it is with her careful discussion of the Shepherd-Berkeley debate that I begin.³ Atherton, who has done more than most to resurrect and analyze the unjustly neglected works of European women philosophers of the modern period, interestingly finds reason to think that Shepherd's case ultimately fails. For, as Atherton sees it, "Shepherd is not perhaps being quite fair to Berkeley in dismissing his position as the result of a logical error" (355), she misunderstands (359) and mishandles (361) some of Berkeley's claims, she provides "a somewhat truncated account of Berkeley's theory" as primarily "ontological in nature" (namely, that "the only things that exist are ideas and the minds that have them") (362), and, having missed "the representational theory inherent in [Berkeley's] likeness principle", "[she] puts in its place...an unjustified and

² For helpful and extended discussion of Shepherd's theory of causation and her criticisms of Hume's account thereof, see Bolton (2010), Paoletti (2011), and Fantl (2016).

³ See Atherton (1996). In what follows, I cite Atherton's paper by putting the page numbers of this paper in parentheses.

incoherent representationalism” (364). Ultimately, Atherton argues, Shepherd’s “success as a reader of Berkeley makes it difficult for her to defend her own claims..., [b]ut the position into which she is driven also results from some of her failures as a reader of Berkeley” (365).

I want to consider whether at least some of Shepherd’s arguments might actually be stronger than Atherton recognizes. I will defend two claims: first, that Shepherd mostly doesn’t make the mistakes that Atherton claims she makes; and second, that at least one of Shepherd’s criticisms is perceptive, probing Berkeley’s case for idealism at a weak juncture.

As Atherton rightly emphasizes, Shepherd’s main positive thesis is that we can (and do, at least latently, from infancy) rationally infer, on the basis of the relations among our sensations and the way in which they respond to the call of our sense-organs, that there is a world of numerous continuously existing objects external to, and independent of, our minds (and bodies). Critical to Shepherd’s case for the continuity and externality of sensible objects is that, although our sensations are often interrupted, they regularly reappear “upon each irregular call of the senses”: for example, as she puts it, “by returning on their steps men can again recover the image of the house...they have just passed” (EPEU, 14). So unless the house were created purposely just as our eyes were opened and quickly turned in the right direction, we must suppose that the house continued to exist during the time that our senses were not directed at it. Moreover, because (as Shepherd had already argued in ERCE) nothing can begin its own existence (EPEU, Preface xv, 14), the sensation of the house (itself a complex of sensations) does not bring itself into being, and, given that neither the mind nor the sense-organs are themselves responsible for that complex of sensations (for the complex changes even as the mind and sense-organs remain the same—EPEU, 15), it must have a cause that is both continuously existing (even when unperceived—EPEU, 17) and external to the mind (EPEU, 44). Thus far, Shepherd and Berkeley agree. But Shepherd had

also argued in ERCE that the causes of proportionally related effects must themselves be proportionally related, from which she draws the conclusion that our sensations, which are effects of causes whose essences are unknown (EPEU, 243-244), are similar to algebraic signs “by which we can compute and know the proportions of [the] qualities” of their causes (EPEU, 261). And from this she infers that the exterior cause of our sensations must be manifold, rather than unitary, and in particular, that these causes must comprise a number of minds and material objects (EPEU, 242). Here, then, is one important place where she parts ways with Berkeley, who holds that there is only one external and continuously existing cause of our sensations: God.

Here, then, is the logical structure of Shepherd’s reasoning:

- (1) I experience a number of different sensations that begin to exist and regularly reappear upon the irregular call of the senses (e.g., when I move away and come back, opening and closing my eyelids arbitrarily at irregular intervals).
 - (2) Nothing can begin its own existence. [See ERCE, 34-39]
 - (3) Everything that begins to exist must have a cause. [See ERCE, 34-39]
 - (4) The causes of proportionally related effects must be proportionally related (i.e., effects are as algebraic signs of their causes). [See ERCE, 61]
 - (5) My mind and sense-organs remain the same even as my sensations change.
- So, (6) My sensations are caused by a variety of different objects that continuously exist externally to and independently of my mind, even when I do not perceive them.⁴

⁴ For an extended and sophisticated discussion of Shepherd’s reasoning, see Bolton (2017).

If Berkeley and Shepherd disagree about what exists outside our minds, then it stands to reason that Shepherd would accuse Berkeley of having committed an error. But the relevant error, according to Shepherd, is “logical” (EPEU, 198), inasmuch as it consists in offering an “incomplete” definition of the term “object of sense”, a definition that includes *only* the sensations associated with the relevant object (such as the particular color, taste, smell, figure, and consistence Berkeley associates with an apple in PHK 1).⁵ For Shepherd, a complete definition of the term “object of sense” would include mention of its *genus*, namely its being “a general effect arising from a general cause independent of mind” (EPEU, 198). Atherton thinks this charge is perhaps not quite fair, inasmuch as it doesn’t acknowledge the fact that, in the second dialogue of DHP, Berkeley considers the position that “our sensations are the effects of external [material] causes”, and finds it wanting (355). She says that Berkeley offers two (really, three) arguments against this claim, arguments with which Shepherd does not contend: first, that even granting the existence of matter, we can’t conceive how our minds should be affected by it; second, that the fact that we could have the same ideas in the absence of matter shows that the explanation of our ideas does not require us to postulate its existence; and third, that, taken in a clear and definite sense (as an unperceiving support of sensible qualities), matter is an absurdity, and taken in an obscure and indefinite sense, matter is nothing at all (355-56).

But I think that this criticism of Atherton’s is itself perhaps not quite fair *to Shepherd*. For, first, even if we can’t conceive how our minds should be affected by matter, it doesn’t follow from

⁵ All references to Berkeley’s writings are to *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols. (London: Thomas Nelson, 1948-57). I will concentrate on *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* and *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous*, both of which appear in volume 2 of the *Works*; reference will also be made to *An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, which appears in volume 1 of the *Works*. The *Treatise* is abbreviated as PHK, the *New Theory of Vision* as NTV, and both are cited by section number; the *Dialogues* is abbreviated as DHP and is cited by the page number in *Works* 2.

this that matter doesn't exist; any more than it follows from the fact that we can't conceive how our minds should be affected by *God* that God doesn't exist. So this criticism of Berkeley's is weak, and it is no skin off Shepherd's nose that she doesn't address it explicitly. Second, although Shepherd recognizes that, when we dream, our sensations "are combined in the same forms in which they appear in a waking hour", the *relations* that they bear to each other are not the same: for, as she puts it, we are ignorant of "remaining in the same place during the time of the dream", and objects are neither "ready to appear upon the irregular call of the senses" nor capable of being "taken notice of by more minds than one" (EPEU, 29-30). Thus, she does not merely deny, but actually provides *grounds for denying*, Berkeley's claim, which was based on the evidence of "dreams, phrensies, and the like", that "the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas: since it is granted they are produced sometimes, and might possibly be produced always in the same order we see them in at present, without their concurrence" (PHK 18, DHP 221). And third, Shepherd has an answer to Berkeley's charge that the word "matter" means something absurd if taken as meaning "an unperceiving support of sensible qualities". For she denies that sensible qualities, *before* the impressions they make on the senses, are ideas; and this allows her to block Berkeley's argument in PHK 9 to the effect that, *if sensible qualities are ideas*, matter would have to be an unperceiving support of ideas, and hence, since the only way to support an idea is to perceive it, would have to be an unperceiving perceiver of ideas, which is a contradiction in terms.⁶

⁶ In contradistinction to Berkeley, Shepherd defines "matter" as "*the capacity of exhibiting upon a sentient nature, the sense of solid EXTENSION in general*" (EPEU, 242).

Admittedly, Shepherd doesn't consider the bulk of Berkeley's *First Dialogue*, which is designed to establish that all sensible qualities are ideas (more on this below).⁷ In this, then, she is definitely remiss. But, on the other hand, it is not clear that Berkeley has at his disposal any kind of *straightforward* response to Shepherd's argument that the causes of our sensations must be numerous, continuously existing, and exterior to our minds. Ultimately, then, regarding the question whether definitions of sensible objects as collections of sensations are complete or incomplete, my view is that the disagreement between Berkeley and Shepherd constitutes something of a stalemate.

Moving on from the "logical error" issue, Atherton claims that Shepherd misunderstands Berkeley's account of the senses and their role in the acquisition of sensations. Here I find myself largely agreeing with Atherton, though I think—and I'm not sure whether Atherton agrees—that Berkeley is partly responsible for the misunderstanding. Shepherd points out that Berkeley writes both of ideas being "imprinted on the senses" (e.g., PHK 1, 33, 90) and of ideas being perceived "by sense" (e.g., PHK 4, 5, 7, 29, 36, 40) but accuses him of "ambiguity" (EPEU, 198). There is surely something reasonable in this. For in saying that ideas are perceived by (that is, by means of) the senses, Berkeley is strongly suggesting that the senses should be understood as "the five organs of sense"; but, taken literally, it makes no sense to say that ideas are imprinted *on* the sense-organs, given that these organs (even on Berkeley's own view of them as collections of ideas) "have [as Shepherd puts it] no sense or feeling in themselves" (EPEU, 199). So on the one hand

⁷ This is not because Shepherd is unfamiliar with DHP, given that she mentions the work explicitly at EPEU, 81.

Berkeley sometimes appears to use “the senses” with a literal meaning, and on the other hand he appears to use the same phrase with a different, non-literal meaning.⁸

At the same time, I agree with Atherton that ultimately Shepherd does not read Berkeley sufficiently charitably. When Berkeley writes of ideas “imprinted on the senses”, he is speaking loosely. As Philonous puts it in the *Third Dialogue*: “When I speak of objects as...imprinted on the senses; I would not be understood in the gross literal sense, as when...a seal [is said] to make an impression upon wax. My meaning is only that the mind...is affected from without, or by some being distinct from itself” (DHP 250). When he is being more careful, he writes of ideas being imprinted “in our minds” (PHK 44), “on our minds” (PHK 150), or “on the mind” (DHP 235). More accurately drawn, the picture he accepts is this. Certain sorts of ideas are imprinted on or in our minds (that is, something external to our minds causes us to perceive these ideas) by means of our sense-organs. In saying this, as Atherton rightly emphasizes, Berkeley does not mean that our sense-organs are causal conduits whereby ideas are transmitted to our minds: he means, rather, that there are regularities (resulting from divinely imposed rules) governing the relations between the states of our sense-organs and our mental states. Thus, as God has ordained, when my eyes are closed or damaged, I experience no visual sensations. All of this is consistent with Berkeley’s idealism, according to which our sense-organs (indeed, our bodies themselves and all their parts) are nothing more than collections of ideas. Still—and this is what I think Atherton underplays—the failure of Shepherd’s criticism does not take away from her keen insight and praiseworthy desire to read her opponent literally (that is, as he would undoubtedly most often wish to be read).

⁸ There is a certain deliciousness in the *tu quoque* charge here, given the lengths to which Berkeley goes in making fun of materialists for their non-literal use of the phrase “support” when they speak of substance supporting accidents – what! in the way that “pillars support a building” (PHK 16)?

Atherton also claims that Shepherd mishandles Berkeley's treatment of the laws of nature in part because "her own views on causation seem to be firmly modelled on the physical" (361). With this (question-begging) view of causation in place, argues Atherton, Shepherd can reasonably argue, as she does, that Berkeley's argument for the existence of other minds can be extended to establish the existence of material bodies. But I am not as convinced as Atherton is that Shepherd is begging the question here, or making any other sort of mistake, for that matter.

Shepherd goes to the trouble of quoting the entirety of Berkeley's argument for the existence of other minds in PHK 145, changing only "hath" to "has":

From what has been said, it is plain that we cannot know the existence of other spirits otherwise than by their operations, or the ideas by them excited in us. I perceive several motions, changes, and combinations of ideas, that inform me there are certain particular agents *like myself*, which accompany them and concur in their production. Hence the knowledge I have of *other spirits* is not immediate as is the knowledge of my ideas, but depending on the intervention of ideas, by me referred to agents or spirits *distinct* from myself, as effects or concomitant signs. (EPEU, 208-209—italics added by Shepherd)

This piece of reasoning is abductive: it's an argument to the best explanation. I know by experience that when I speak, my lips move and sounds recognizable as English are immediately perceived thereafter. When I then see other lips move and sounds recognizable as English are also immediately perceived thereafter, I infer that something like myself (i.e., another mind, something that possesses understanding and will) is the source of their production. Shepherd merely claims that a very similar form of abductive reasoning can be used to establish the existence of other non-

minds. After all, we experience a variety of sensations in regular proportion that are ready to appear at the irregular call of our senses, and the best explanation of this experience is that it is to be referred to “*unknown proportionate causes* distinct from ourselves” that are “*always* like ourselves as continuing to *exist*, and *in other qualities, plus* or *minus* ourselves” (EPEU, 209). In putting this argument forward, Shepherd is not illicitly or question-beggingly presupposing that causation must be “push-pull”, or that the laws of nature are literally “forces” (361). She is assuming, reasonably, that if Berkeley is going to help himself to abductive reasoning to establish the existence of finite *minds* external to our minds, he can’t reasonably object if she helps herself to similar abductive reasoning to establish the existence of finite *bodies* external to our minds.

Atherton claims that in trying to run this kind of parallel argument for the existence of other bodies, Shepherd ignores the fact that Berkeley’s argument for other minds “rests on a claim that we have immediate experience of ourselves as mental agents” (360). But the argument of Berkeley’s that rests on this claim is not the abductive argument that other minds exist, but rather a different argument, to the conclusion that we can *conceive it possible* for other minds to exist. For Berkeley’s claim is that we can conceive of the possible existence of other minds using the conception of our own minds “by a reflex act” as a model (DHP 232). So Shepherd isn’t ignoring anything that she is not perfectly entitled to ignore, as she constructs her abductive reasoning for the existence of other bodies on the model of Berkeley’s abductive reasoning for the existence of other minds.

Beyond these criticisms, Atherton suggests that “Shepherd’s theoretical predilections have led her to give a somewhat truncated account of Berkeley’s own theory” (362). As Atherton sees it, Shepherd focuses exclusively on the *ontological* core of Berkeley’s idealism (namely, that “the only things that exist are ideas and the minds that have them”), leaving out the *epistemic* aspects

of his doctrine that allow him “to claim his theory is superior to the scepticism necessarily engendered by materialism” (362). In doing so, Atherton contends, Shepherd casts Berkeley as a philosopher who “has taken away a good deal of what people ordinarily take to be the case about the world” (namely, that it contains material substances, in addition to minds and their ideas) without giving “anything back in return”. But, writes Atherton, this would be a mistake, for Berkeley gives us something important back in exchange for abandoning materialism: that our sensations (really, Atherton should have said, our *visual* sensations) constitute a language that, once read and understood, enable us to acquire “knowledge of the natural world around us” (363). By contrast, Shepherd’s theory leaves us somewhat *epistemically* bereft, given that she holds that “the *positive* nature and essence of unperceived beings *cannot* be known...The real essences of matter and mind we know not” (EPEU, 243-244).

My own reaction to this criticism is that there is nothing unfair about Shepherd’s omitting to mention the positive anti-sceptical epistemic virtues of Berkeley’s idealism. In the first place, Shepherd discusses Berkeley, not primarily to explain why the virtues of her own theory outstrip the virtues of his, but primarily because she is worried that “many...will think, from what [she has] said in the foregoing pages, that there is no material difference between [her] doctrine, and his” (EPEU, 197). The reason, as she explains, is that she agrees with Berkeley about two important matters: first, that “nothing can be like a *sensation*, or *idea*, or *perception*, but a *sensation*, *idea*, and *perception*” (in other words, the likeness principle of PHK 8), and second, that “the primary qualities, *after* the impressions they make on the senses, are sensations, or ideas, or perceptions; as well as the secondary ones” (EPEU, 197). And given that the matters on which Shepherd agrees with Berkeley are *ontological*, she wants to explain, in some detail, so that she might not be mistaken for a Berkeleian, why her own theory is *ontologically* different from his:

whence her focus on the main ontological thesis that separates them, namely the existence of unperceived, continuously existing, material objects existing outside and independently of our minds. And in the second place, though Shepherd is undoubtedly aware of Berkeley's thesis that our visual sensations constitute a language spoken to us by God for our benefit (at EPEU, 68 she refers to NTV, in which the divine language thesis first appears—see section 147, and she has surely read PHK 44, in which the divine language thesis is discussed in the context of numerous references back to NTV), she clearly doesn't think that this aspect of Berkeley's theory renders it superior to hers. For her view is that "*all our ideas are as algebraic signs, which give evidence [of] the quantities...signified; whose proportions among themselves are known thereby, as well as their positive values*" (EPEU, 38), and, even more particularly, "the perceived qualities are as a *landscape*, sent from an unseen country by which we may know it; as *algebraic signs*, by which we can compute and know the proportions of their qualities; as a *language*, which must be translated, before it can explain the actions of nature" (EPEU, 261). So, at least in respect of the proposition that our visual sensations constitute a language, the differences between Berkeley's position and Shepherd's are, at least epistemically speaking, less significant than one might think.⁹

The fact that Shepherd's theory has at least some epistemic benefits enables her to answer Atherton's further charge of incoherence. According to Atherton, the purported incoherence derives from "the claim that our ideas, the product of an unknown and unknowable world, can nevertheless be used as algebraic signs to represent this unknown world" (364) and "can provide

⁹ Note that I am not saying that the two positions are the same: they're not. The major differences are these: (i) Berkeley's visual sensations *constitute* a language, whereas Shepherd's visual sensations are *as* a language, (ii) Berkeley's non-visual sensations do not constitute a language, whereas Shepherd's non-visual sensations are as much akin to a language as visual sensations are, and (iii) Berkeley's language of vision is literally imparted to us directly by God, whereas Shepherd's sensations are not literally spoken by anyone.

information about their causes” (365). But, as I’ve just argued, there is no incoherence here. For Shepherd distinguishes, as do other philosophers, between what is, and what is not, part of an object’s essence (see EPEU, 243-244). She contends, not that ideas produced by material objects whose essence we can’t know are algebraic signs that give us information about those very essences, but rather that ideas produced by material objects whose essence we can’t know are algebraic signs that give us information about the *non-essential* properties and relations of those objects, the proportions in which they stand to each other.¹⁰

Finally, Atherton claims that although Shepherd “says she accepts Berkeley’s likeness principle”, she “misses the representational theory inherent in” that principle, “that what our sensations, ideas or perceptions represent to us are other ideas and perceptions, that, because of the orderly nature of our ideas, some ideas reliably stand for others so that our experience is intelligible” (364). But this is to read more into Berkeley’s likeness principle than is actually there. All that the likeness principle says is that “an idea can be like nothing but an idea” (PHK 8), and hence that an idea cannot be like something that is not an idea. By itself, the likeness principle is not a thesis about *representation*. In order for it to be read as telling us something about representation, it must be conjoined with a thesis such as that representation is a matter of

¹⁰ For *a* and *b* to be algebraic signs of *c* and *d* is simply for the proportion(s) or relation(s) in which *a* and *b* stand to each other to be identical to the proportion(s) or relation(s) in which *c* and *d* stand to each other. A graph of the *a-b* proportion(s) would, like a map (or, in Shepherd’s parlance, a “landscape”), reveal the *c-d* proportion(s). It might be thought that the epistemic benefits of treating sensations as algebraic signs consist in the fact that sensations thereby justify us in believing in the existence of material bodies. There is some truth to this, but it is not the whole story. On its own, the fact that sensations are as algebraic signs shows that the (external, continuously existing, and independent) causes of our sensations are as numerous and as variegated as our sensations themselves, even though we cannot penetrate to the very essence of these causes or of their variegated properties. But the algebra analogy, by itself, doesn’t show that these causes are *material*. The materiality of (some of) the causes follows from the fact that, in keeping with Shepherd’s definition of “matter” (see note 6), they are capable of exhibiting upon us the sensation of solid extension.

resemblance. Like Atherton (and Winkler 1989, 138), I think that this is a thesis that Berkeley embraces. But what needs to be emphasized here is that the likeness principle and the proposition that representation is a matter of resemblance are logically independent: in particular, it is possible to accept the former while denying the latter. So there is no representational theory “inherent in” the likeness principle, and hence when Shepherd advertises the fact that she agrees with it without mentioning anything about how it enables us to render our experience intelligible, she isn’t missing anything that is logically included in it. Moreover, even if there were some thesis about representation inherent in the likeness principle, Shepherd would not be missing something that renders our experience intelligible. I say this because, according to Berkeley, the intelligibility of our experience derives not from the fact that ideas can be like (and so can represent) nothing but ideas, but rather from the further fact that some ideas (namely, our visual sensations) actually function as signs of other ideas (particularly, our tangible sensations).

Where, then, does our examination of Atherton’s criticisms of Shepherd’s criticisms of Berkeley leave us? The most we can legitimately say so far, I think, is that Shepherd understandably, though somewhat uncharitably, overreads Berkeley’s phrase “imprinted on the senses”, and that she is remiss in focusing almost exclusively on the case for idealism presented in PHK, without considering the numerous and critically important pieces of reasoning Berkeley offers us in DHP. The important question, I believe, is whether the latter form of remissness somehow dooms her case against Berkeley. My own view is that, uncannily enough, it does not. For Shepherd locates a weak link in Berkeley’s argument for idealism.

To substantiate this claim, let me start by presenting what I take to be the logical structure of the argument for idealism presented in PHK and the one presented in the *First Dialogue* of DHP. In PHK, Berkeley presents an argument for idealism that is implicit in section 1, and then

presents a close cousin of that argument in section 4.¹¹ The section 4 argument is encapsulated in two rhetorical questions: “For what are [sensible] objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations?” More formally presented, the argument looks like this:

1. Sensible objects are perceived by sense.
2. The only things we perceive by sense are ideas.

So, 3. Sensible objects are ideas.

Realizing, I think, that his materialist opponents will almost certainly balk at the second premise, Berkeley significantly expands this argument in DHP 1, and indeed re-envisioned it as having two parts, discussed in order. First, using the first premise of PHK 4, Philonous argues that sensible objects (such as tables and chairs) are nothing more than collections of sensible qualities. The argument is short:

1. Sensible objects are perceived by sense.
2. Anything that is perceived by sense is immediately perceived.
3. The only things that are immediately perceived by sense are sensible qualities and collections thereof.
4. No sensible object is identical to a single sensible quality.

So, C1. Sensible objects are collections of sensible qualities.

¹¹ I am skipping over what some have called the “semantic” argument of PHK 3, because I believe that it fails without considerable supplementation (see Rickless (2013, 93-97)). For extensive discussion of the arguments mentioned below, see Rickless (2013, chapter 3).

Second, Philonous argues that all sensible qualities, both secondary and primary, are nothing more than ideas or sensations. The argument itself divides in two. First, Philonous argues that secondary qualities are either pains or pleasures (the intense secondary qualities are pains, while the moderate ones are pleasures). Second, he argues that primary qualities are mentally inseparable from secondary qualities (e.g., that it is impossible to think of an extended thing without representing it as having some color or other), that qualities that can't be separated *by the mind* can't actually exist in separation, and hence that primary qualities must be ideas if secondary qualities are ideas. The conclusion to be drawn from all this is (C2) that primary qualities, as well as secondary qualities—in short, *all* sensible qualities—are ideas.

Perhaps because many scholars who are sympathetic to Berkeley think it obviously false that secondary qualities are pains or pleasures, they believe that the main argument of the second part of the dialogue trades on considerations of perceptual relativity: the mite sees its foot as large, I see it as small, so size is merely in the mind of the beholder. But Berkeley uses perceptual relativity to argue that a particular thesis endorsed by his materialist contemporaries leads them (though it doesn't lead idealists) to absurdity: this is the thesis that sensible objects really have all the sensible qualities we perceive them to have. This thesis is what gets the materialist into trouble, because it entails that the mite's foot is both large and small, which is absurd. (The reason it doesn't get *Berkeley* in trouble is that he has a generous ontology: there isn't just one foot, perceived by both the mite and by me; there are two feet, a large one perceived by the mite, and a small one perceived by me.) (For further discussion, see Rickless (2013, 69-79).)

Putting the two conclusions of Philonous's reasoning together, one arrives at idealism:

C1. Sensible objects are collections of sensible qualities.

C2. All sensible qualities are ideas.

So, C. Sensible objects are collections of ideas.

As I have just noted, many scholars have been bothered by Berkeley's argument that secondary qualities are pains or pleasures. But Shepherd thinks, and I agree, that this is not where the real problem lies. (For one thing, as we've seen, she happily endorses Berkeley's claim that sensible qualities are ideas; it's part of what makes her worry that others will simply take her for an unreconstructed Berkeleian.) Focusing on the simple argument for idealism at PHK 4, Shepherd claims that Berkeley equivocates in several ways. We've already seen that she thinks that Berkeley's phrase "imprinted on the senses" is ambiguous, because Berkeley sometimes gives the phrase "the senses" a literal meaning and sometimes gives the same phrase a different, non-literal meaning. But she also holds that Berkeley uses the terms "object" and "perception" in different ways, ways that lead him into the fallacy of equivocation (which, following Isaac Watts' *Logic: The Right Use of Reason in the Inquiry After Truth*, she understands in Aristotelian terms—EPEU, 202).

Here I will focus on her claim that the word "perception" is ambiguous. On the one hand, "perception" can be understood to mean "the *mental consciousness of PARTICULAR SENSIBLE QUALITIES only*" (EPEU, 202). So understood, the second premise of PHK 4 seems true (for it seems true that the only things of which we have this sort of mental consciousness are ideas), but the first premise of PHK 4 is, at least arguably, false (for it seems false, and would in any case not be granted by the materialist, that sensible objects are those things of which we are mentally conscious). On the other hand, "perception" can be understood to mean "the *notice* the mind takes

of the presence of certain qualities *in consequence of the conscious use of the organs of sense*” (EPEU, 200). And in *this* sense, although the first premise of PHK 4 seems true (for it seems true that we take notice of, say, tables and chairs in consequence of the conscious use of our sense-organs), the second premise of PHK 4 seems false (for it seems false—at least to the materialist—that the only things of which we take notice in this way are ideas or sensations). So the only way for Berkeley to ensure that the argument of PHK 4 has true premises that do not beg the question against the materialist is to interpret the word “perceive” in one way in the first premise and in another way in the second premise: but it then follows that his argument is invalid.

Is Shepherd right about all of this? The answer, I think, is no and yes. No, because I don’t actually think that the word “perceives” is ambiguous in the way that Shepherd claims. “Perception”, as the moderns understand it, is just what Shepherd calls “mental consciousness”: nothing less, but also nothing more. There is no implicit reference to the use of our sense-organs *built into* the very concept of perception, as the moderns use the word “perceive”: after all, it is standard practice for the moderns to talk of perceiving tables and chairs *by using our eyes or ears or nose or whatnot*. So, on Shepherd’s view, these moderns would be offering us something tautological under the guise of a substantive claim. Yes, because I think that the locution “perceive by sense” is indeed ambiguous, that the argument of PHK 4 does trade on equivocation on that locution, and hence that Shepherd has identified, at least in general terms, both the location and the essential nature of the problem with the argument.

The relevant ambiguity, as I see it, concerns whether it is *wholly* or *only partly* by sense that objects that are described as being “perceived by sense” are perceived. On the one hand, although it’s true to say that the only things that are perceived *wholly* by sense are ideas, it is false—at least to the materialist—to say that sensible objects are perceived *wholly* by sense: many,

including Shepherd herself, would say that such objects are perceived in part by *reason*. On the other hand, although it's true to say that sensible objects are perceived *only partly* by sense, it is false—at least to the materialist—to say that the only things that are perceived *only partly* by sense are ideas (see Rickless (2013, 188-197) for further discussion).

Notice that this problem affects not merely the simple argument for idealism in PHK 4, but also the significantly expanded argument for idealism that Berkeley offers in DHP 1. This time, the problem concerns the first two premises of the argument for C1, that sensible objects are just collections of sensible qualities. For again, it's arguably false on the one hand that sensible objects are perceived *wholly* by sense, and it's arguably false on the other that anything that is perceived *only partly* by sense is immediately perceived. Thus, whether the locution “perceived by sense” is given the “whole” reading or the “part” reading, at least one of Berkeley's premises turns out to beg the question against the materialist, and his argument for idealism is dialectically unpersuasive.

Ultimately, Shepherd doesn't identify *the exact nature* of the vulnerability to which Berkeley's argument for idealism is subject. This is in part because she doesn't quite appreciate the way in which DHP 1 extends the reasoning of PHK 4, and in part because the particular ambiguity she claims to see doesn't exist. But that doesn't take away from her accomplishment as a Berkeley critic: for no philosopher, none of his contemporaries and no other successor of his over the course of three centuries, was able to get as close as she did to the nub of the issue.¹²

¹² I am grateful to the anonymous referees for this journal for their helpful and constructive comments. I am particularly indebted to Margaret Atherton and Martha Brandt Bolton, from whom I have learned so much (in part through correspondence) and whose work I deeply admire. I presented an earlier version of this paper at a session of the International Berkeley Society as part of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association meeting in January 2017. I would like to thank the session organizer, Nancy Kendrick, my co-symposiasts, Jennifer S. Marušić and Seth Bordner, and the members of the audience for their insightful questions and comments during the session. For correspondence about an earlier version of the paper, I am grateful to Deborah Boyle, Richard Brook, Keota Fields, Jessica Gordon-Roth, and Antonia

LoLordo. This paper would not have seen the light of day had it not been for the philosophical assistance and personal encouragement of my wife and colleague, Dana Kay Nelkin. I dedicate this paper to our daughters, Sophie and Alice.

REFERENCES

- Atherton, Margaret (1996) 'Lady Mary Shepherd's Case Against George Berkeley'. *British Journal for the History of Philosophy*, 4, 347-66.
- Bolton, Martha Brandt (2010) 'Causality and Causal Induction: The Necessitarian Theory of Lady Mary Shepherd'. In Keith Allen and Tom Stoneham (eds.), *Causation and Modern Philosophy* (New York: Routledge), 242-62.
- Bolton, Martha Brandt (2017) 'Mary Shepherd'. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2017/entries/mary-shepherd/>.
- Fantl, Jeremy (2016) 'Mary Shepherd on Causal Necessity'. *Metaphysica*, 17, 87-108.
- Paoletti, Cristina (2011) 'Restoring Necessary Connections: Lady Mary Shepherd on Hume and the Early Nineteenth-Century Debate on Causality'. *I Castelli di Yale*, 11, 47-59.
- Rickless, Samuel C. (2013) *Berkeley's Argument for Idealism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Winkler, Kenneth (1989) *Berkeley: An Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.