

Review

David Berman. *Berkeley and Irish Philosophy*.
London: Continuum, 2005, x + 234 pp.

This volume collects some of Berman's contributions to Berkeley scholarship from 1968 to 1996 that exhibit coherence under their collective title and a new introduction.

According to Berman, Berkeley was a thinker whose responses to the concerns of Irish philosophy from 1696 to 1757 blend an attack on theological representationalism with a pragmatic and emotive account of meaning that attempts to counteract the freethinking tendencies of contemporary society. His work on the Bermuda project and his reception, in Britain, Ireland and America, are better understood with this context in view.

The introduction suggests that a common mistake and a highly developed visual sense might have informed Berkeley's thinking on abstract general ideas. In Berman's account, Berkeley was a psychological philosopher, interested in experimental observation of how the mind works. This can be seen in his work on ideas as mental images that can be recalled at will. Using the terminology of late nineteenth-century work on visual imaging, Berman suggests that Berkeley was an eidetic imager, someone who "can easily produce all sorts of imagined objects—men with two heads, parts of bodies imagined on their own—but whatever he imagines must have a particular, detailed shape and color. . . . He could not, it seems, imagine vague, sketchy ideas" (11). Berman suggests Berkeley took all minds to be alike in this respect. However, subsequent empirical work on imaging by Francis Galton demonstrates he was wrong to do so. Berman does not acknowledge what this implies for Berkeley's argument against abstract general ideas—namely, that if some people are less visually accurate than Berkeley and can "imagine vague, sketchy ideas," they may well imagine a triangle that possesses none and all of the properties of scalene, equilateral, etc. triangles. If people can imagine such triangles, then Berkeley's assault on Platonic metaphysical ideas such as "triangularity" (28) loses one of its key arguments, and this is probably not one of the "positive implications . . . for Berkeley's idealism" (15) Berman was thinking might develop from his work on Berkeley's mental imaging.

The next chapter offers a general introduction to Berkeley's philosophy, emphasizing the role of inference and emotive meaning. Inference is essential to Berkeley's arguments in the *New Theory of Vision* that the size of objects is not directly perceived (25). Inference is also essential to the argument by design: just as one infers the existence of other minds on the basis of orderly physical movements in bodies that correspond to one's own, so there is still greater evidence in the orderly movement of the entire physical universe of the existence of a governing mind (34). Berman suggests Berkeley's account of emotive meaning—"that words and utterances can be meaningful even though they do not stand for ideas or inform, since they can be used to evoke emotions, attitudes and actions" (43)—is related to his immaterialism: "'Matter' is, in short, a perniciously emotive word, masquerading as a cognitive one" (32). "Matter" is used emotively, but transgresses the

pragmatic rules that emerge for the use of such emotive terms. As Berman later shows, those rules should be used only to promote good behavior.

The book continues its general delineation of the context of Berkeley's philosophy by reproducing reviews of Jonathan Bennett's *Locke, Berkeley, Hume* (1971) and George Pitcher's *Berkeley* (1977). These two reviews are early statements of the case that Berkeley was not thinking of Locke when writing against material substance, and that he had instead Hobbes and Descartes in his sights (60-61). It is worth noting that Berman again mentions Berkeley's liberation from Lockean semantics in this context (73).

The most substantial and consistent part of the book concerns Berkeley's relation to what Berman identifies as the only period of Irish philosophy, stretching from John Toland's *Christianity not Mysterious* in 1696 to Edmund Burke's *Philosophical Enquiry* in 1757. Berman here tries to show that Berkeley's work was shaped by two forces in Irish philosophy, theological representationalism and pragmatism, both closely tied up with Berkeley's views on language. Berman argues that Irish philosophy constitutes a school of theological representationalists (116-17), thinkers who argue that a finite being cannot have a clear and distinct idea of an infinite being, but that real knowledge of God is obtained through a knowledge of the effects of God in the physical world, effects that represent God sufficiently to gain knowledge of the divine attributes. Representationalism is used by William King to justify a pragmatic approach to Christian mysteries, such as the Trinity: "If theological statements can . . . produce practical theism, then they are true. They are not cognitively, but pragmatically true which is the valid sense of true for human beings in this life" (92). Berkeley is opposed to theological representationalism: "our (supposedly representative) notions either do or do not resemble their objects. If they do, then they give us proper knowledge of God. If they do not, then it is contradictory to say that the one is like the other. There is, Berkeley urges, no third possibility, no medium between likeness and non-likeness" (98). Yet the theory of emotive meaning developed in *Alciphron* achieves the same effects with regard to Christian mysteries as representationalism. Again Berkeley's linguistic thought is recognized as central to his entire philosophico-theological project. Berman singles out Swift, in his depiction of the academy of sciences at Lagado, and Burke, on the possibility of meaningfully using words without referring to clear and distinct ideas (understood as mental images), as sympathizing with or sharing Berkeley's non-cognitive view of language. It would have been interesting at this point to see Berman's responses to Roomet Jakapi's contention that Berkeley did indeed believe utterances concerning the mysteries of the revelation could be regarded as true or false.¹ The section closes with a consideration of Hutcheson's positive answer to the Molyneux question, based on the argument that figure, like number, is a real idea, and can be grasped through any of the senses by analogy; and an account of the impact of Irish philosophy in eighteenth-century America.

The final section of the book reproduces Berkeleiana first discovered or presented by Berman. These items include a description of an essay on the world as idea and spirit, to

¹ See Jakapi's "Emotive Meaning and Christian Mysteries in Berkeley's *Alciphron*," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 10 (2002): 401-11.

be found in *The Touchstone* (Cheapside: J. Noon, 1732); an account of the MS remarks of Mrs Berkeley in an interleaved copy of the 1776 *Life* that were only partially incorporated into later biographies; Berkeley's petition to the King requesting funds for St Paul's College; and a letter from George Berkeley Jr. to George Gleig, explaining the refusal to provide Samuel Johnson (of Lichfield) with biographical materials relating to his father. Berman presents four letters of Berkeley: one on tar water that contains an echo of *Siris*; a letter to Henry Clarke about a possible trip to Dublin; a letter to Orrery in part celebrating his talents, in part recommending Gilbert West's *Observations on the History and Evidence of the Resurrection* (1747); and finally perhaps Berkeley's last extant letter, written to Thomas McDonnell, who had wanted to answer Robert Clayton's *Essay on Spirit* (1750). The book closes with a consideration of the relationship of Berkeley to Samuel Beckett, in which Berman prefers appealing to Schopenhauer or Malebranche as sources for passages in Beckett that are often called Berkeleian, and notes Beckett's public denial that he learned anything about Berkeley from his tutor at Trinity, A. A. Luce.

This book is very useful in collecting Berman's important contributions to Berkeley scholarship, and in establishing the value of Berkeley's Irish context and later career for a full understanding of his work. Incorporation of responses to his critics alongside these essays when republishing them would have made the book richer still.

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