

Review

C. George Caffentzis. *Exciting the Industry of Mankind: George Berkeley's Philosophy of Money*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2000. 462 pp.

Constantine George Caffentzis looks at George Berkeley's *The Querist* from a new perspective. He does *not* take Berkeley's proposal for a national bank as a means of solving practical problems in everyday transactions but as "Berkeley's ingenious solution to the class problematic" (406). He does *not* accept Berkeley's statement in the "Advertisement" (added to the 1750 edition of *The Querist*) that the main objective of his book was "to feed the Hungry and clothe the Naked" Irish Catholics. On the contrary, Caffentzis argues, Berkeley wanted to develop a capitalist colonialism in Ireland. His real motive was to make himself and his Anglican colleagues richer at the expense of the poor Irish Catholics (4). This negative approach to Berkeley is a refreshing contrast to the exaggerated "To Berkeley, every Virtue under Heaven." Caffentzis points out that Berkeley accepted slavery, that his reason for baptizing slaves was to make them better slaves (p. 85), that he published degrading remarks about the mixture of Spanish and Tartar genes in the Irish natives (129-130), etc. Such things should not, of course, be swept under the carpet.

This book is the second of a three-volume work on Locke's, Berkeley's and Hume's philosophy of money. It includes valuable background information on the economic history before Berkeley published *The Querist* (15-104). When it comes to the interpretation of this work, a crucial point is what the author refers to as "Berkeley's second conceptual revolution" (241-79). The first was a dual ontology of ideas and spirits, the second was to include notions, prejudices, principles and other items in his philosophy. Once Berkeley put money into this conceptual machinery he created, according to Caffentzis, an inhuman capitalist system by which he intended to expropriate the means of subsistence from the poor native Irish Catholics. I fear that the main theses of this book are reserved for readers who share the author's political beliefs.

"I have philosophical and political-economic intentions in writing this book," Caffentzis declares in the Introduction. "I wish to show that the contemporary debates concerning Keynesian policies in the North America and Europe and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank policies in the Third World are by no means novel"; they "have their roots in the first experiments in capitalist colonialism in Ireland and the Americas centuries ago," and George Berkeley's *Querist* is a (perhaps the) paradigm case of these "first experiments." The author also intends to show that "texts like *The Querist* can be explained through an 'ampliative' approach in contrast to the positivist, structuralist and post-structuralist programs of the last scholarly generation" (10).

Following these intentions, the author starts with the information that the upper-class Anglo-Irish landowners refused to pay tithes to the Anglican Church in 1734 and assumes (without any supporting evidence) that Berkeley "desperately searched for a way out of this precarious socioeconomic situation for himself and his institution" (4-5), and that he wrote *The Querist* "as a response to the politico-economic dilemma the Anglo-Irish ruling class faced in the early eighteenth century" (3-11, 156, 407 *et passim*).

If Berkeley ever tackled the tithe problem, his solution was, according to Caffentzis, to rob poor Catholics and make rich Anglicans richer: “the burden of supporting the Anglican Church of Ireland fell on the tithes and rents paid by the Irish Catholic natives, who now were expected not only to work for the comfort of the Anglo gentry on this earth, but to finance their masters’ salvation in heaven!” (4). One of Berkeley’s steps to fulfill his plan was, according to Caffentzis, “the separation of people from their means of subsistence” (9). But the text of *The Querist* supports the very contrary view: that he wanted to *provide* the poor with means to subsist, that he developed a program for a Welfare State in which *all* citizens were supposed to have good living standards, that “wealth” was *not* confined to what was good for “the Anglo gentry,” etc. Caffentzis does not deny this, but his thesis is that Berkeley deliberately misleads his readers in *The Querist*: he says one thing but means the very contrary.

To prove this, Caffentzis develops what he calls “Berkeley’s Theory of Persuasion” (168-75). In terms of that theory, it is not accidental that *The Querist* consists exclusively of numbered questions. Caffentzis observes that seventy percent of these queries are “anti-interrogative questions” (“Is X not Y?” strongly suggests “Yes, X is Y!”), but he argues that it is a mistake to take them as declarative sentences presented “with the addition of a question mark and an interrogative word order” (157, 174). This is the traditional “transparency” reading of *The Querist*, but the queries should be understood as no more than “hints” (165-68). “Once the hint is accepted, the next point in the process of persuasion is repetition” (172). Besides hints and repetitions, the lack of a strict logical structure plays an important part in the process. “This mixture of levels and topics, this flow—interrupted to go back to previous points and switched ahead as if there was nothing to prove—creates a peculiar response in the reader as the queries accumulate. . . . The job of persuasion is actually put into effect through what might be called a ‘hypnotic trick’.” Caffentzis adds the circular argument that the fact that most scholars still use the “transparency” reading of the text “is a sure sign of the very success of Berkeley’s strategy” (174-75).

This account of Berkeley’s strategy is of crucial importance to the new perspective that Caffentzis introduces. It should be noted, however, that Berkeley himself took a “transparency” reading of his texts for granted. When he published “Queries Relating to a National Bank, Extracted from the *Querist*,” together with “A Plan or Sketch of Such Bank” in 1737, he opens the “Sketch” saying, “it should seem no difficult Matter to convert Queries into Propositions,” and then he repeats what he said in the queries—in a running text of declarative sentences. Similarly in *A Word to the Wise* (appended to the London and Glasgow editions of *The Querist* in 1750 and 1751 and reprinted in *A Miscellany* in 1752), Berkeley reformulates what he said in the first forty or fifty entries of *The Querist* Part I (1735)—again in a running text of (mainly) declarative sentences. In *A Word to the Wise* moreover (that was addressed to the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland) Berkeley emphasizes that the native Irish Catholics were living in appalling conditions and calls for an Anglo-Catholic collaboration on improving their standard of living. Caffentzis ignores this work (though mentions it in passing on 416). Neither does he note Berkeley’s proposal to the Anglican authorities “to admit Roman-Catholics into our College, without obliging them to attend Chapel-Duties, or Catechisms, or Divinity-Lectures” (Query 119).

In the “Conclusion” of his book, Caffentzis admits that a few earlier scholars were about to disclose what he regards as the true nature of *The Querist*: “Although commentators from Karl Marx to Jean-Joseph Goux have noted the conceptual affinity between Berkeley’s theory of money and his ‘idealist’ philosophy, few have noted how the Querist’s form of money was overdetermined by the class dynamics of early eighteenth-century Ireland” (405). Caffentzis completed this line of interpreting Berkeley by the assumption that he *might* have reacted to the tithe revolt, that he *might* have conspired against the poor Irish Catholics, and that he *might* have misled readers of *The Querist* by his “Theory of Persuasion.” The conclusion is that “*The Querist* still speaks directly but quizzically to us” about the “native Irish” in the 1730s, about “their total expropriation (land, body, and soul) by the Anglo-Irish settler class.” It serves as “a model of many parts of the planet that have been ‘left out’ of capitalist development. Berkeley was writing before the evolutionist paradigm of capitalist development was established; we, who are living after the crisis of this paradigm, can learn from and profitably reflect on the political and class constraints he confronted” (414). This is preaching to the converted, or making a personal confession of political faith. Perhaps it is unfair to use those criteria of scholarship that Caffentzis turns his back on (10), but, nonetheless, in the light of them, this is *not* an interpretation of *The Querist* or a scholarly examination of this work in the context of Ireland in George Berkeley’s day.

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