DUTY AND THE NATURE OF GOD
A Pragmatic Reconstruction of Berkeley's
Divine Command Theory of Moral Obligation

by

MARK CAMPBELL

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Department of _Philosophy_

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

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ABSTRACT

George Berkeley's moral philosophy postulates the commands of God as constitutive of moral obligation. However there are different forms that a divine command ethics can take, and the form that Berkeley's takes has not received the attention that has been paid to his metaphysical theism. The most common interpretation would have Berkeley respond to the question posed in Plato's *Euthyphro* by insisting that moral predicates are applicable purely on the basis of God's so deeming them, rather that by allowing that God recognises a propriety of application that would yet be proper were God not to recognise it.

This interpretation is encouraged by what Berkeley says in *Passive Obedience*. However I challenge this interpretation, on the strength of what Berkeley has to say in *Alciphron*, his *Essays*, his *Sermons*, the *Principles of Human Knowledge* and a variety of other sources. My thesis contends that Berkeley in fact offers two, radically different theses that conclude with a version of the divine command theory of ethics. He holds that, given certain divine attributes which are empirically verifiable by people, God's commands serve an epistemological function; logically, they indicate the best possible actions people should undertake. This argument is not a success, however, because the attributes in question are not suggested by empirical investigation as Berkeley thinks; Hume's objections to Berkeley's style of argument in this area are sufficient to block it.

However, while this reason to treat divine commands as prescriptively exhaustive is not compelling, Berkeley produces an alternative route to the same conclusion that is informed by a different type of reason people have for adopting beliefs. Berkeley, I argue, is a pragmatist, and is committed to the legitimacy and rationality of adopting beliefs on the basis of their conduciveness to securing certain ends, as long as minimal evidential considerations are met – that they do not tell against the proposition in question. He argues persistently that an intelligent grasp of what people wish their activities to achieve, including the activity of accepting propositional belief, will reveal the necessity of adopting the belief that our moral duty is defined by the will of God (as well as the subsidiary beliefs that

this involves, such as that God exists and has a certain nature). Berkeley's pioneering pragmatism has not been adequately excavated, and my thesis makes a contribution to this task.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ... it is impossible to frame any petition better suited to our present true interests.

Berkeley, *Sermon* X

Instead of a fabric, I hold in my hands a bundle of a thousand knotted threads which would occupy hundreds of hands for years to disentangle and straighten out, even if every thread did not become terribly brittle and break between the fingers as soon as it is handled and gently drawn.

Hesse, *The Journey to the East*

INTRODUCTION

In this thesis, I take a divine command theory of moral obligation to be any theory which boasts as its central component the proposition that one's moral duty consists in compliance with the commands of God. Actions are right insofar as and because they obey divine commands and wrong to the extent that they breech them; what one 'ought' to do is defined exclusively with reference to God's will; a good person is someone who acts in accordance with God's will, a good action one that respects it, and so on.

Theories that share this analysis of moral obligation may differ in important respects. One advocate might believe the meaning of moral concepts to be inextricable from the will of God, regardless of the type of being God is, so that the content of divine commands is strictly irrelevant (as to whether they define the good) – as long as the source of an injunction is divine, that injunction describes moral propriety. We can refer to this as a 'pure' divine command ethics.

Another might say that it is the content of God's commands that exalt them – that is, because God has the characteristics he in fact does, divine commands must establish moral obligation. A certain type of entity, for instance a benevolent one, will issue commands that contain the recipe for right action. In this case, but not in the former, a change in the characteristics of the entity with consequent variation of the content of commands could, conceivably, negate their moral sovereignty, though theorists may disagree here about whether such variation is actually possible.

Of course, even for the purists there must be *something* about the entity which originally prompted them to accord it the title 'God' and all the moral sovereignty that position enjoys. Typically, such features as having created the world, or being extremely powerful, distinguish the being whose commands we are told to defer to if we are to be good. It is not as if one could designate a crow, a calculator or any old village idiot as 'God' and define morality in terms of whatever squawks, bleeps or eccentric ramblings they produce. Purism has a limit, surely; though the purists can say that the entity they believe to exist and call God just is, by definition, the

source of moral prescription, it would be absurd to apply the same trick to anything whatsoever. One could stipulate any foundation one pleases for explaining the meaning of moral language, but for a serious discussion to proceed there needs to be some rationale behind the choice. It is not a coincidence, after all, that so many have settled on a divine command theory of moral obligation, while avian command theories are so thin on the ground. Still, purism does not have to collapse completely. If the commands of the putative entity 'God' (all-powerful creator of the world) are taken to be constitutive of moral obligation no matter what is commanded, we shall speak of a purist theory. There is a sufficiently significant logical space separating this from a 'modified' theory, whereby divine commands, if they were to be aimed at bringing about something other than the particular outcome which in fact they are believed to be aimed at, would no longer be constitutive of moral obligation. The precise nature of that outcome makes no difference, but since filling it in may clarify matters, one candidate might be 'general welfare'. God's commands, a non-purist could say, exhaust moral obligation as long as they are aimed at promoting general welfare, and they are.

If Berkeley ever produced a systematic statement of his views on ethics, he famously mislaid it while travelling in Italy. As a result, though he certainly held some sort of divine command theory of morality, connecting the rightness of a given action to its alignment with God's will, the scattered insights afforded by the extant works remain open to a variety of interpretations. In *Passive Obedience*, of all his works perhaps the most readily recognisable as the deliberate exposition of a theory of morality, Berkeley instructs us that 'God alone is maker and preserver of all things. He is, therefore, with the most undoubted right, the great legislator of the world; and mankind are, by all the ties of duty, no less than interest, bound to obey His laws.'[1] Proceeding to reason from God's nature (specifically, his impartial benevolence) to 'universal well-being' as the goal of divine law, he enjoins us to act so as to promote this, not apparently because of any intrinsic characteristic of utility as such, its moral desirability or justice, but rather just because this is how God wills us to act. As Warnock has it, 'utility ... comes in only incidentally to determination of the question what *are* the laws of a benevolent deity.'[2]

In this text Berkeley derives God's right to legislate from his creative and supportive activities, inviting an interpretation at the purist end of the spectrum. One ought to do what God commands one to do. Were the promotion of general welfare not God's will, it would have no special claim to influence decision-making; but given that it is, our actions are right as far as they tend to it. Hence, perhaps, the tendency of some commentators to focus in the main upon Berkeley's affinities with utilitarian thought, his anticipation of utilitarian formulations of a criterion for the moral assessment of action, at the expense of the theological foundations of his recommendation that one act to promote 'the general well-being of all men, of all nations, of all ages of the world.'[3] Whatever Berkeley has got right ethically speaking, it seems, is so in spite of the reasoning that took him there, and should be divorced from its rationale, which can only impugn its credibility.

The stigma attaching to that rationale is generated in part by unhappiness with the purist solution to the dilemma of the *Euthyphro*. This is typically posed for any divine command theorist as a preliminary purportedly to showing that both options are unsavoury. Do God's commands direct us to our moral duty in virtue of their divine source, or because they are the right commands? Does what is right mean whatever God happens to command, or have the particular commands issued been issued because they instruct us about what is right? – in which case their rightness must be defined apart from the mere fact that God commands them. In Plato's early formulation, is the holiness of a thing a function exclusively of its being so deemed by the gods, or do the gods deem holy the things they do because of the holiness of those things? If Berkeley appears to incline to the first of the two responses – the source, rather than the content, of divine commands entails the rightness of acting in accord with them – then the objector will enquire *why* God's will should be accepted as definitive of the right thing to do.

No doubt, for Berkeley, God's will is perfectly germane to rational decision-making, to the extent that it involves consequences of action that no-one concerned with their happiness will wish to ignore. Given as a premise the principle of self-love, of all movers to action 'the most universal, and the most deeply engraven in our hearts',[4] Berkeley can surmise that we ought to do what God commands as long

as our happiness is ultimately subject to the will of God, who intends, and is able, drastically to punish actions which flout it. But Berkeley asserts, we observed, that obedience is not merely in our interest, but is also our 'duty'. There is something beyond self-interest, it seems, that should bear on decision-making, something that we should conceive of as a *moral* incumbency to act in a certain way, which is distinct from the motivations established by a future state (though God's word gives both types of reasons for acting in a single, compelling combination). 'I grant it is a general law of nature that in every animal there be implanted a desire of self-preservation, which though it is the earliest, the deepest, and most lasting of all, whether natural or acquired appetites, yet cannot with any propriety be termed a moral duty.'[5] What makes God's will relevant to *moral* decision-making? Rewards and penalties seem not immediately distinctive of moral reasons, and indeed are routinely denounced as antithetical to moral authenticity. What is it about God's word that distinguishes it from temporal exigencies such that deference to God is good while behavioural adjustment in the light of those is but convenient? Knowing the right thing to do cannot simply be equivalent to knowing what some entity directs us to do, unless some special circumstance privileges its wishes. Or so one might object.

Perhaps God's qualification for the office of moral arbitrator resides in some feature of the relationship in which he stands to us. This seems to be what Berkeley is getting at with his emphasis on God's role as creator.[6] But God's having bestowed existence upon us cannot constitute the ground of moral behaviour, as it already presupposes a theory of moral obligation. If we owe God obedience for certain actions he has performed, a moral obligation must be understood to precede the one to conform to God's will, namely the understanding that debts ought to be repaid. If God's commands are the ultimate source of moral criteria, debts ought to be repaid if and because God commands debts to be repaid; one cannot assert that morality consists in deferring to God's will on the grounds that we morally owe God such deference. Or if the claim is that God's vast superiority in some sense binds us to acknowledge his legislative right, over and above his might, it surreptitiously derives our moral principles from a deeper principle that one

respect one's superiors - but honouring the wishes of a superior, if it is the right thing to do, must be so on any divine command thesis in virtue of being another item on the list of things that are right to do which God has drawn up.[7]

Making the demand for justification of this choice of site for moral orientation more urgent, and what is perhaps more challenging for an advocate of the automatic moral rectitude of obeying divine commands, is the implication that commands to behave in, for example, welfare-unfriendly ways, would nonetheless still describe moral duty. As long as God commands what people may already consider to be good things, the doctrine can sustain a modicum of unreflective plausibility; but the further they diverge the harder it becomes to swallow, and the very possibility of divergence suffices to expose the doctrine's unacceptability, its opponents will maintain. Of course, to ask why morality ought to be defined in this manner implies a standard against which to judge the value of competing definitions of morality, whereas *ex hypothesi* there is either no such standard or the standard is already expressed in divine judgement. To complain that this stance renders morality arbitrary is only troublesome if it can be explained why arbitrariness is a bad or impossible source of value; but to say it is bad begs the question, and there is no reason to think it impossible. So God's commands are arbitrary – they nevertheless exhaust prescription, one might argue. A proponent might even in clean theory hold that God does have reasons for selecting his commands, as long as these reasons are irrelevant to the fact that obedience is right. One can stick fast to the thought that morality consists in obedience to God's commands whether they are arbitrary or not, and even if they have been conceived with a view to inflicting misery if not. Equally, to object that purism entails the rightness of the most heinous practices, as long as God commands them, has no logical impact upon it. Their having been commanded on the contrary entails their non-heinousness. It is possible, on this view, for God uninhibitedly to act under laws other than those that govern his choice, or under none at all; possible for him uninhibitedly to issue different commands, so possible for our duty to involve the most – ostensibly, but question-beggingly – 'heinous' activities.

I propose, however, that an adequate excavation of Berkeley's understanding of

5

the relation between God and moral obligation will point us towards an alternative interpretation which is more responsive to at least some traditional concerns about divine command ethics, the declarations of *Passive Obedience* notwithstanding. In what follows I examine Berkeley's divine command theory with the intention, if not of rehabilitating such theories in general, at least of exposing the structure of his ingenious version, elements of which may be more compelling than hitherto suspected. Combining various discussions throughout his extant works with an extrapolation of the implications of positions we know him to be committed to more broadly, we can reconstruct the type of argument he must have had in mind, or at any rate the most cogent one attributable to him if his overall enterprise is to hang together.

I think Berkeley is best understood as first and foremost a pragmatist. He believes that certain goods, the pursuit of which inform intelligent human activity (and ought to inform all human activity), are best secured by seriously adopting the belief that one ought to obey the commands of a certain type of entity – and by implication also the belief that this entity exists. Indeed he adopts the stronger position that they can *only* be secured in this way.

As it happens, Berkeley does believe in the existence of this entity, and that it has issued certain commands, beliefs he derives from reasoning about matters of fact. Obeying those commands is the only way to secure the goods in question, he thinks, and for that reason he imputes to divine commands the function of transmitting moral obligations. The first part of the thesis explores this argument, and explains why it fails.

Even in the absence of such an entity, however, Berkeley would adhere to the position that what we ought to do is obey the commands it *would* issue were it real. Matters of fact, he thinks, are not the only legitimate grounds for treating a proposition as true. Practical considerations may also provide such grounds, and he argues that these should induce us to *affirm* God's existence whether or not we can *confirm* it. This *pragmatic* phase takes precedence in Berkeley's thinking. He is willing to contemplate the possibility of the non-existence of God, and nevertheless to prefer the 'pleasant error' of believing in Him; he 'had rather my wife and

6

children all believed what they had no notion of, and daily pronounced words without a meaning, than that any one of them should cut his throat, or leap out of a window.'[8] From this perspective, it is conceivable that his professed theism, and consequently the vast majority of his philosophical product, is strictly strategic. Perhaps the first method of delineating our duty to obey God's will is a means of inculcating beliefs the general holding of which will bring about desired ends, a means which he may have thought more likely to be effective than his fall-back method, which if explicitly proselytised could be self-defeating. However this may be, attention to his argument in this area is overdue, and received in the latter part of the thesis, where I explain why I classify it as a variety of divine command theory.

My thesis is as follows. I first put the case against a purist interpretation of Berkeley's divine command theory (Chapter One). Then I discuss the theory that should be attributed to him, which has the following shape:

A There exists a spiritual entity which is the cause of all phenomena ('God').

B God is omniscient and omnibenevolent.

C The actions God wishes us to perform (conveyed via 'divine commands') are the actions that will best promote general welfare (because **B**).

D People are unable to identify the actions that will best promote general welfare.

E Our moral duty is to promote general welfare.

F (*Conclusion*) Our moral duty is to comply with divine commands.

A and B are examined in Chapter Three, **C** and **D** in Chapter Two, and faults with these premises in Chapter Four. Contrasting with this 'top-down' argument (in which morality is said to be generated from above, regardless of human input), I then present a 'bottom-up' interpretation of Berkeley's divine command theory, which starts from human wants and needs and concludes that a proper understanding of how these can be satisfied in the world as it is will prompt us to treat divine commands as constitutive of moral obligation.

G An agent ought to act so as to maximise his or her prospect of happiness.

H Agents are prone, individually and collectively, to act in ways that are significantly less effective in maximising their own happiness than they could

be.

I Secular moral codes are inadequate for solving the problem stated in **H**.

J It is possible to treat as true ('believe') propositions **A** and **B**.

K It is legitimate to believe propositions **A** and **B**.

L It is possible to reason about the will of the entity described in **A** and **B**, and such reasoning yields general rules designed to promote the greatest possible amount of human happiness.

M It is possible to conceive of these rules as actually the commands of God.

N Agents who believe propositions **A** and **B** ('believers'), and conceive of the rules human reason calculates that God issues as actual divine commands, are significantly better equipped to solve the problem of **H** than agents who do not; indeed, only believers can solve that problem.

O (*Conclusion*) One ought to treat a particular set of rules (whichever seems to reason best to promote human happiness), which are putatively divine commands, as actually divine commands and as constitutive of morality.

This argument is handled in Chapters Five to Eight.

CHAPTER ONE

Berkeley was working at a time when philosophical and especially theological speculation was readily taken to have political implications. For instance *Passive Obedience* was received in many quarters, with a certain amount of justification, as endorsing Jacobite claims to loyalty and castigating the Glorious Revolution, an impression that did his career no favours.[9] This politicised context, and the fact that Berkeley clearly writes with the intention of making a real difference in the behaviour of specific groups of readers, can make it difficult to extract a consistent line of argument in the field of ethics, so that different interpretations seem to have their own claims. Olscamp, Warnock and Johnston all identify Berkeley as more or less what I have termed a purist, and, as we have seen, Berkeley does say things that leave him open to such an interpretation. He does frequently talk about God's commands as if they entirely *define* what is good, fairly explicitly in *Passive Obedience* and more loosely in other places. I wish to challenge this interpretation, however. Berkeley thinks it is a proper object of empirical investigation to determine whether or not God is good, a position I judge to conflict with the assumptions of purism. This conflict has seldom received the airing it deserves. In this chapter I shall explain its significance, and show how what Berkeley has to say, considered as a whole, can support a coherent alternative interpretation.

Berkeley reckons that 'moral goodness' consists in 'conformity to the laws of God'.[10] This seems to imply that any ascription of goodness to God himself is based on his compliance with his own laws. But, as Alston says, 'even if it makes sense to think of God as obeying commands that He has given Himself, that is not at all what we have in mind in thinking of God as morally good. We aren't just thinking that God practices what He preaches, whatever that may be.'[11] It would be more natural to say that what it is for God to be good is different from what it is for people to be good – God just is, embodies, defines or exemplifies goodness, whereas people are good who imitate him.

This implication, that the goodness of God is of a different type from the type of moral goodness applicable to humankind, such that ours consists in obeying God's

commands and his in something else, however, cannot be intended by Berkeley. The goodness he detects in God is the same sort of quality as the goodness he talks of people displaying. It is worth considering why in some detail.

What can it mean to say that God is good, if not that he is good the way people can be? Berkeley's short answer is, nothing at all. This is a special instance of his general thesis that the various attributes we impute to God are qualitatively identical with the attributes we impute to people. Any difference is of degree and not of type. His view stands in opposition to one advocated by certain of his contemporaries, to the effect that the properties credited to God are not *literally* instantiated, by which means they hoped to eliminate potential inconsistencies which the joint ascription of those properties is thought to entail. David Berman records that 'King [William, Anglican Archbishop of Dublin] had tried to defend the theistic conception of God from charges of incoherence – for example, that God's perfection is incompatible with evil in the world; that his prescience is incompatible with man's free will – by arguing that we have no literal knowledge of God's attributes. For if we have no proper knowledge of God's prescience or perfection, King holds, then we cannot know that it is in conflict with human freedom or evil in the world.'[12] Berkeley's adversaries were also unhappy with a perceived consequence of his conception of God's attributes, which has it that the analogy between key divine and human attributes is one of proportion; Peter Browne, another prominent Irish theologian thought that, for Berkeley, 'God becomes nothing but a perfect man.'[13]

It is true that Berkeley's proofs for God's existence prove a personal mind with certain intelligible capacities if they prove anything, and not simply that 'something', essentially inscrutable, exists. If the price of this is that God is effectively just an excellent person, he must pay it. For the idea that when we speak about God being good, knowledgeable, having ends and so on, we are not using the terms in their usual sense or in any sense we can possibly grasp is anathema to Berkeley, who objects that speaking in this way is to make a meaningless noise, conveying no information. If we call God good without really knowing what we are saying, if the divine instantiation of an attribute cannot be comprehended, then our

supposedly metaphorical application of it is intolerably *free-floating,* compatible for all we know with any sort of divine dispositions. When we speak metaphorically of God seeing things, a meaning is conveyed – it is understood that a function of eyes is to gather information, and that though God does not literally see through eyes, he is capable of accessing information. When we speak of God *knowing* the information, however, our audience either understands this literally (he knows as people know), or does not understand it at all. There is no foothold there for a metaphor, for the negative theologian (who refuses to commit to any positive characterisation of God, and must be content to say only what He is not like) is not saying that some feature of human knowing is captured the way a feature of seeing was captured in the previous example. He is saying that *no* features are captured, and God's knowing shares *nothing* in common with ours (this is how he gets around the threatened incompatibilities of various of God's powers and dispositions). If he is using the word in this latter way, he is no longer speaking the same language as his audience but some other language, 'blictri' perhaps. God becomes 'an unknown subject of attributes completely unknown,' a doctrine that will be welcomed by the atheist as 'innocent', since God is now a 'name, without any meaning annexed to it'.[14]

It is not uncommon to hear people talk of the universe 'knowing what it is doing', or something as being 'meant to happen', where they intend to distinguish an occurrence from the outcomes of pure chance or of physical necessity or probability, but where they also wish to dissociate themselves from a vision of the 'meaner' as a personal entity who deliberately arranged it. This is wanting to have one's cake and eat it too, according to Berkeley, who distinguishes two stark possibilities: 'there is no medium; God has ends in view, or he has not.'[15] Having ends in view means just that. God can properly be said to have a mind which surveys possible ends, prefers some to others, and lets the preferred ones ensue. Berkeley believes that 'there is a God in some intelligible sense; and not only that there is something in general, without any proper notion, though never so inadequate, of any of its qualities or attributes: for this may be fate, or chaos, or plastic nature, or anything else as well as God.'[16] There is nothing in the mere name

11

'God' to distinguish the theistic perspective from the atheistic. Berkeley never set out to prove that the world has some sort of cause, but that its cause is intentional, and good – and if one doesn't agree, one has no reason to modify one's behaviour with regard to the world's cause, which, as we shall see, would make most of Berkeley's exhortations quite pointless: 'the being of a God is a point in itself of small consequence ... The great point is what sense the word *God* is to be taken in.'[17]

Recall the point Berkeley dedicated a career to arguing, that the concept of matter as an unknowable 'something' underlying the ideas that represent it, a substance that cannot be described by referring to any of the qualities it is supposed to impart to phenomenal experience, is unintelligible, an absurd and contradictory notion equivalent in the impact it makes on our intellect to 'nothing'.[18] Similarly, there is nothing to be said about God once his specifiable attributes are excised. Unqualifiable traits, without proper or definite sense, are cognitively vacuous. 'Unknown attributes' cannot count as attributes.

There is a further unwelcome corollary of the type of theology which is Berkeley's target. It is *inert* – it permits nothing in the nature of God to be attained as a conclusion of, nor deployed as a premise in, any argument. To appreciate the first contention, observe that any argument a defender of the rival account wishes to adduce to show that God enjoys a given attribute is incapacitated by equivocation, for even if we could make head or tail of a God that was good in some special but incomprehensible way, not equivalent to its usual sense, no evidence of that attribute in its usual sense counts as evidence for its residence in God, where the sense has changed: 'it is evident that every argument brought to prove those attributes, or (which is the same thing) to prove the being of a God, will be found to consist of four terms, and consequently can conclude nothing.'[19] Worse, as the parenthetical aside indicates, without some qualitative content attached to the name 'God' his very being is abolished, for he could then have any character, or none. The proposition that a 'principle' (we know not what) exists which is the ultimate cause of the world is quite compatible with the proposition that God does not exist, as had been noticed by freethinker Anthony Collins in his *Vindication of the Divine Attributes* (1710).

Similar reasoning applies to the latter contention. '[Y]ou cannot argue from unknown attributes, or, which is the same thing, from attributes in an unknown sense. You cannot prove that God is to be loved for His goodness, or feared for His justice, or respected for His knowledge' using as premises 'attributes admitted in no particular sense, or in a sense which none of us can understand.'[20] If we ought to respond with love to moral goodness, and God is good, we ought to love God. But if we ought to respond with love to moral goodness as people can embody it, and God is 'good' in some other way, the conclusion does not follow.

Thus putting God's attributes beyond the mortal ken sacrifices too much. One may thereby succeed at reconciling God's alleged attributes with each other, but only because 'they may by this means be reconciled with everything or with nothing.' The upshot is that 'by denying those attributes belonged to God in this, or that, or any known particular sense or notion,' the school represented by King and Browne was 'denying that they belonged to Him at all,' and 'denying the attributes of God, they in effect denied His being.'[21]

I shall refer to Berkeley's metatheological positivism under the head of the Principle of the Transcendental Continuity of Characteristics. PTCC seems well-motivated, and coheres with Berkeley's broader commitments: 'we understand the meaning of the word, otherwise we could not affirm or deny anything of it.'[22] We have no business, Berkeley would say, in calling God good unless we mean by it the same thing as we mean in the human context. If we don't want to invoke the same quality, we ought to use a different term.

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So if people are good who do as God wishes, then it seems God is good when he does as he wishes, whatever that might be. However, this cannot be Berkeley's position either. That would vitiate the empirical investigation he conducts, discussed in detail in Chapter Three, which culminates in deciding that God is good based on the discovery that his deeds satisfy certain conditions. Had that investigation instead issued in a conviction that God failed the conditions, he could not persist in defining the good in terms of his wishes, for in that case his whole enterprise is misconceived. We would have no idea what to check for under the

rubric of goodness until we have seen what God is like. If God is good no matter what he does or what he is like, there is hardly much point in showing that God must be good because he is a certain way and has done certain things.

Specifically, Berkeley founds his belief that God is good upon the evidence of his benevolence: human welfare seems to be God's plan. We can tell that since the general welfare is promoted by the design of the world, it must have been uppermost in the concerns of the world's architect, whom we are therefore constrained to believe good. Goodness is taken to have something to do with human happiness and its broadest possible promulgation regardless of individual differences (the happiness of each counting equally with the happiness of every other) – *before* God's commands are ushered in. It is the affinity of the latter with a utilitarian structure which merits their recognition as righteous. To the question, who gets to decide what goodness consists in, God or people, the answer is people, who conceive of the good before noticing that God partakes of it. Anyhow this is unequivocally Berkeley's answer, inextricable from his procedure for discovering that God is good.

Therefore a purist interpretation of Berkeley's divine command theory is untenable. He thinks there is a real question about whether the cause of the world is good or not; so he must think moral language is more than a fancy set of synonyms for what God wants done. It is *informative* to describe God's ends as good ends; one is adding something substantial in saying that an end proposed by God is a good end, over and above simply rephrasing the statement that an end God proposes is an end proposed by God. To borrow from MacIntyre's variation on the theme, 'if [evaluative] statements are to have any substantial content, then expressions such as "good", "virtue" and the like must be defined in terms the use of which does not presuppose theistic beliefs ... theism, if it is to be coherent, must rely for its statement upon an independently understood moral vocabulary.'[23] A purist interpretation could only be sustained if the investigation into God's attributes were construable as an academic exercise in finding whether God exhibits some human types of characteristics that in no way affects the attribution of those characteristics in a different, divine sense. But PTCC bars this construal. People

have a moral vocabulary that informs their characterisation of God, and there can be no meaningful characterisations of God in any distinct vocabulary where the words are disconnected from their usual implications.

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To entrench the rejection of a purist interpretation of Berkeley, consider how one can tell what God's commands in fact are. However this is done, reasoning about their content either in light of knowledge about God's nature, or in light of what a command that is otherwise given must imply about God's will, cannot be the purist's method. Both kinds of speculation involve sifting out the motivation that inspires divine commands. One looks at what God is like to deduce the sorts of things such a being must wish done, or one studies commands that are (in whatever way, independent of the aforementioned reasoning process) certifiably divine. Then one concludes that they were inspired by some consideration or other, and extrapolates from this essential kernel to draw up further commands that must dictate what God wishes done. This attention to God's motivation is illicit from the perspective of one who holds that moral prescription is a function of divine command regardless of what is commanded or why. If we are to say, on one side of the *Euthyphro* dilemma, that as long as the source is God then whatever he says goes, morally speaking, then only whatever is definitively known to be said by God goes, and what is assumed however confidently by people has no authority, for matters are quite clear cut as far as this type of divine command theory is concerned. We can't extrapolate from actual commands, for these might be the only commands intended as such for all we know; we only have what God actually commands to define what is good. Extrapolating from them fallaciously supposes that there is something more to the concept of goodness than what is said there (there is something other than their said-ness that demands respect). We can't reason from perceived attributes, for we may be mistaken about them or about whether they have any connection with what God wishes done; God's nature is not fixed but only at best constant in human perception. So deriving the content of commands from it must be to recommend what is humanly perceived as worthwhile, lasting or essential, fallaciously supposing that there is something

<center>15</center>

more to the concept of goodness than what is true of God, *pace* any theory genuinely committed to God's semantic supremacy in moral affairs. We can't go round interpreting the spirit of God's will – the whole point is that the letter of his law is all.

Objection: God is necessarily good, so there is no question of a change in his nature, so it may confidently be extrapolated from. But the idea is that whatever God is, that is good; speaking of his being as necessarily good indicates that the possibility of being good precedes him. The objection to our narrowing of purism's command-identifying opportunities needs restatement.

Refined objection: God is necessarily whatever he is, so there is no question of a change in his nature, and whatever he is, defines good. So from his nature we can confidently extrapolate divine commands.

I doubt that this defence can hold up. In any event my concern is to show that Berkeley could have been no purist. Berkeley does not agree that God necessarily is what he is.[24] If this is the only way a purist can consistently defend their logical right to reason about what the commands of God must be, I can allow it. Rational interpretation of God's will, given God's nature, is Berkeley's favourite procedure for working out what God commands. He identifies the things God must want based on what he perceives to be God's nature. Because God is benevolent he wants human welfare to be promoted; because he is impartial, he wants it to be promoted impartially. If Berkeley is serious about this method, and also insists that God is free to will whatever he likes, then he must not believe that God's word is *arbitrarily* definitive – no matter what it says or what it's speaker is like.

<p style="text-align:center">*   *   *   *   *</p>

One needs a concept of goodness independent of God's word, if one undertakes to discover whether or not God is good. If this is the case, why consider Berkeley to be a divine command theorist at all? If goodness is a function of conformity to divine laws as long as they are inspired by some appropriate external factor, then isn't it really a function of conformity to that motivating factor (in this case, impartial benevolence)? Berkeley, who allows a human contribution to the delineation of divine law, must as I have argued be seen as solving the *Euthyphro* dilemma on the

<p style="text-align:center">16</p>

non-purist side. On such a view it is the propriety of certain states of affairs that recommends them. The fact that God also recommends them tells us something about God but is not the be all and end all of their commendability. Then isn't Berkeley no longer really a divine command theorist? God's commands now seem (at best) *coincidental* with duty. Is not our moral obligation *directly* to the promotion of the general welfare whose promotion confirms God's goodness? What sustains God in a special position of moral arbitration such that our duty is to obey his commands? Why is he not an agent like any other in the realm of moral action, under the same duty to promote general welfare?

CHAPTER TWO

If we already have an idea of what goodness is about, why do we need God to tell us what is right – couldn't we proceed immediately to work it out for ourselves? In *Passive Obedience* Berkeley dispels this hope, which encounters two chief difficulties. 'First, it will thence follow that the best men, for want of judgement, and the wisest, for want of knowing all the hidden circumstances and consequences of an action, may very often be at a loss how to behave themselves, which they would not be in case they judged of each action by comparing it with some particular precept, rather than by examining the good or evil which in that single instance it tends to procure … to calculate the events of each particular action is impossible; and, though it were not, would yet take up too much time to be of use in the affairs of life.' Second, 'we can have no sure standard to which comparing the actions of another, we may pronounce them good or bad, virtues or vices.'[25] Nor for assessing our own prospective actions. We may think we have a standard, but we don't know, or know only very hazily, what it calls for in practice. Disagreements cannot be settled. Furthermore each agent, called upon to do whatever will advance general welfare, is prone to perceive it as refracted through the biases of her own nature, aspirations, prejudices and interests.

Only unwavering commitment to an agreed set of rules gets us clear of conflicting interpretations of a given situation. Human analyses will be polluted by individual quirks and emotions, and hobbled by a lack of knowledge. Since we can access a set of prescriptions which we *know* must have been constructed with human welfare in view (in Berkeley's hypothesis), one whose constructor is omniscient, it is therefore sheer lunacy, or anyway morally atrocious, to forego it. We cannot go wrong in adhering to it - this follows from God's attributes as Berkeley conceives them: 'that the moral actions of men be conformable to the Divine will in this life. This shewn reasonable from the power and wisdom, the goodness and providence of God, and the weakness of men.'[26]

The dangers associated with people taking it upon themselves to judge the pros and cons of a course of action are illustrated in *Alciphron* by the story of the minute

philosopher (Berkeley's polemical term for a 'freethinker') 'who, being desirous to benefit the public by circulating an estate possessed by a near relation who had not the heart to spend it, soon convinced himself ... that it would be a very worthy action to dispatch out of the way such a useless fellow, to whom he was next heir.'[27] This type of thought experiment has been levelled against utilitarianism as an indication that exclusive concern with welfare outcomes will wrongly override rights individuals are supposed to enjoy. One promising retort makes reference to the harms wrought by absence of security, peace of mind and so on that, reflectively, bring utilitarianism back in line with intuition. Such intuitions are said to be justified if critical thought displays their tendency to promote welfare, and in fact critical thought does certify our most treasured intuitions, while also providing a benchmark for distinguishing good intuitions from bad ones, which is a great advantage.[28]

Our present concern, however is not with objections to and defences of utilitarianism, but with their applicability not only to the promotion of welfare on the basis of case by case calculation, but *specifically* to its promotion on the basis of a set of rules of *secular* origin. Berkeley's apprehensions reach to a deeper level than can be assuaged by the sort of critical reconciliation touted above: even at the critical level people are capable of error, and their results can always be charged with springing from a self-serving motive by anyone who finds them not congenial, just as, on the level of immediate action, an interest in an inheritance must make us distrust the potential heir's reasoning. Murder, however, affronts rules uttered by God, which elude the difficulties besetting utilitarianism that the example exploits. The arguments for a divine-rule interpretation of utilitarianism are considerably stronger than they can be made to appear in the secular-rule interpretation.

True, people suffer incomplete information, and an imperfect capacity for judging how to employ the information they have, and are liable not to apply the utilitarian benchmark as conscientiously as would be ideal. As Berkeley has it, the human impulse to benevolence is just that – impulsive, so not trustworthy; and likewise vulnerable if overwhelming personal advantage favours discarding it. However, in a secular world these considerations cannot be decisive. After all the

19

originators of the rules were similarly disadvantaged, bereft of perfect knowledge and expertise.[29] One may also be anxious about the reliability of the intentions behind the rules, as one worries about the biases of acting utilitarians. No shortage of interested agendas, conscious or otherwise, have been unmasked behind moral codes and social conventions. Even if it is not the case that *any* way of life must embody some ideological structure, unlikely to be perfectly aligned with general well-being (or as Berkeley says, not possibly so aligned when devised by people), certainly there is sufficient substance to some of these arguments to deter one from investing absolute faith in the welfare-orientation of the rules a way of life encodes.

So confronted with an action that seems to promote welfare despite its divergence from the relevant rule, it is tempting to second-guess the rule, and to denigrate the general practice of rule-following as 'rule worship'. But these problems won't infect Berkeley's rule-utilitarianism, as the rules have come down from God, perfectly informed, perfectly wise, disinterested. Indeed these problems *are* the problems which must lead us to privilege God's rules over any of mortal extraction. It is not objectionable on its face to posit an optimal set of rules, the implementation of which would best realize the general welfare, if everyone followed them; better realize it, that is, than any possible alternative set of rules, or than any degree of unruly behaviour. There *must* be such a theoretical set, which were it humanly accessible would describe the best possible (utilitarian) outcome overall. It is true that there is always a bigger number than any you can think of, but not true that there is always a better set of rules than any that could be described, or not if the extended world is ultimately closed in a way that the mathematical world is not. In that case the ideal set is available in principle – from a God's-eye point of view. Berkeley's point, as I construe it, is that the ideal set is accessible in fact. It is, logically, the very set that God presents to us. Since it is plainly inaccessible in any other manner, it is our moral *duty* to observe God's set. Offered this alternative to the partisan chaos of constantly renewed decision-making, it is negligent to refuse it.[30]

Berkeley can therefore coherently maintain that deference to God's commands exclusively comprises our duty without committing himself to saying that the

reason for this connection is just that they are God's commands. The reason for the connection is that utility is thereby best promoted. There is a being whose commands logically must contain the best possible advice for moral living, and we ought to obey them because they are so finely attuned to moral living, and not because they are the commands of that being. God's will has epistemological value: it lets us know what is right. This certainly differs from its defining what is right, but it is nevertheless valid to class Berkeley's theories as a divine command theory. God's will necessarily includes all actions that are right to perform and excludes all that are not; his commands give the rules that must be the best rules for people to follow, and there is no reason to look beyond them.

We learn what is right by checking what God has classed as such. We know that is aimed at what is right because we have the antecedent knowledge that he is good.

The coalescent interpretation can be solidified by advertising an advantage that accompanies it. It permits us to sidestep a significant criticism of divine command ethics, of Kantian pedigree, to the effect that *exclusive* attention to God's commands when deciding how to act infringes on human autonomy, constituting an abdication of our moral integrity. Rachels puts the criticism this way:

> To say "I will follow so-and-so's directions no matter what they are and no matter what my own conscience would otherwise direct me to do' is to opt out of moral thinking altogether; it is to abandon our role as a moral agent. And it does not matter whether 'so-and-so' is the law, the customs of one's society, or God. This does not, of course, preclude one from seeking advice on moral matters, and even on occasion following that advice blindly, trusting in the good judgement of the adviser. But this is to be justified by the details of the particular case, eg that you cannot in that case form any reasonable judgement of your own due to ignorance or inexperience in dealing with the types of matters involved.[31]

The response is to point out that said ignorance is precisely our (comparative) situation universally, with regard to *every* case. Even if there are cases in which we do have all the relevant information, we can't tell which these are, having no

21

reliable way of distinguishing them from cases of ignorance. God's advice, in Berkeley's view, is indubitably for the best, and *since reasoning makes this evident to us*, the abdication of moral responsibility lies rather with the hubris of *foregoing* that advice and trusting in our own calculation. Far from being precluded from taking any but the rare piece of advice in moral matters, we are obliged to seek it in divine commands, the source of which is prescient (virtually!) beyond comparison. We can therefore easily dissolve the conflict Rachels perceives, 'between the role of a worshipper, which by its very nature commits one to total subservience to God, and the role of moral agent, which necessarily involves autonomous decision-making.'[32] Moral agents trust in God's plan, not blindly, but because reasoning about God's nature produces the autonomous decision to be subservient.

Failure to appreciate this is puzzling. It is false to say with Robinson that 'concern to obey a God is less likely to diminish human misery than is concern to diminish human misery,'[33] if humans are fallible in all the ways Berkeley identifies, and God pointedly is not. He cannot be distracted by personal interest, and he knows everything. In that case, Robinson's estimation of likelihoods is back to front. Warnock argues that Berkeley is overconfident in thinking there is a prescriptive schematic that tells us what to do in every situation. 'Is a system which holds that one must *never*, in *any* circumstance or for *any* reason, lie, more conducive, or less, to the welfare of mankind in general than a system which admits at least some lies in some circumstances to be at least permissible? Berkeley holds, by implication, that 'Thou shalt not lie, *ever*' is *obviously* the only admissible principle. He is not obviously right.'[34] But Berkeley is obviously right, if he is right that this precept has been handed down by an omniscient and omnibenevolent entity. Warnock finds it 'doubtful' that a principle of non-resistance 'to any political authority however wicked or sanguinary or oppressive'[35] is really the best principle from the perspective of human welfare, but its conduciveness to that end is guaranteed, if Berkeley is correct in including it amongst God's directives.

The criticism is sidestepped in virtue of having surrendered the claim that God's commands are constitutive of goodness, in favour of a prior conception of goodness which enables us to conclude that following God's commands best advances it, and

is therefore our duty. Berkeley says it is our interest and duty to obey God. Kant dismisses the relevance of interest as a heteronomous impulse alien to proper moral thinking. And if duty is construed as reflecting God's place in a hierarchy or some other such circumstance, it is similarly irrelevant: 'moral laws are not dependent upon any lawgiver, as if a difference in the nature of God (or the non-existence of God) would make any difference in the determination of duty. Theological morals commits a *hysteron proteron*; for our entire concept of God, so far as it is valid, grows out of our moral conceptions.'[36] For Berkeley, our concept of God grows out of experience, but he thinks the result *answers* to our moral conceptions. Our duty to obey God is created by this circumstance, given the implications we have unfolded from it. A different or absent God would not alter our duty - Berkeley honours Kant's general point, with the proviso that we would have terrible trouble discerning our duty were God different or absent. Since he is present and good, our prime duty is to discern our duty by consulting his commands.

Berkeley's argument, summarised in the Introduction (**A** to **F**), is inferentially sound, but are the premises reliable? It only upholds a blanket ban on lying, or a rigorous theory of political obligation if Berkeley has correctly identified their deviser. It seems *prima facie* reasonable otherwise to think that it is within the power of people to sort some meritorious or innocent instances of lying from detrimental ones. It seems sensible otherwise to suspect that concern to obey God has not historically lessened human misery. And notwithstanding the logical possibility that one is mistaken, it seems safe to say that some vicious regimes have been rightly resisted, and that others ought to have been - that this would have promoted welfare. Human reason, however feeble it is, delivers persuasive verdicts on such issues, and one can be excused for hesitating to abandon it or to place uncritical trust in the dictates of God. We need assurance that God's prescriptive schematic coincides with the optimal rule set. Is God everything Berkeley cracks him up to be?

CHAPTER THREE

In the *Dialogues*, having deduced that 'there is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I receive,' Berkeley casually adds that 'from the variety, order and manner of these, I conclude the Author of them to be wise, powerful and good, beyond comprehension.'[37] Ideas must be willed, and we are not their exclusive willers, so there is a mind of a sort capable of causing them (to be brutally rough); and from certain features of the sensible impressions we are treated to, indicated here only vaguely, we can infer certain aspects of that spirit's personality. More detailed exposition of the inference can be gleaned from the *Principles*. Again,

> the far greater part of the ideas or sensations perceived by us, are not produced by, or dependent on the wills of men. There is therefore some other spirit that causes them, since it is repugnant that they should subsist by themselves. But if we attentively consider the constant regularity, order, and concatenation of natural things, the surprising magnificence, beauty and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, but above all, the never enough admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals; I say if we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and import of the attributes, one, eternal, infinitely wise, good, and perfect, we shall clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid spirit, who works in all things, and by whom all things consist.[38]

It is not within the scope of this thesis to consider whether Berkeley's proofs for the existence of a spirit capable of supporting the phenomenal world are successful. So I propose to grant premise **A**, there exists a spiritual entity which is the cause of all phenomena ('God'). Nor can I here assess, in the detail that it would require, the safety of Berkeley's predication of the several attributes of God mentioned. That God is 'one, eternal' may not strictly fall out of a proper grasp of the implications of phenomenal experience, and talk of infinite attributes may be prohibited by PTCC,

but we needn't press the point.[39] The attributes that matter most for the argument are those mentioned in **B**. Berkeley must show that God is omniscient and omnibenevolent ('wisdom' being a variation on omniscience, with perhaps an element of goodness).

B1 God is omniscient.

B2 God is omnibenevolent.

If Berkeley is correct in his explanation of the world, its creator is intimately involved in every aspect of it The conclusion that God is acquainted with everything in the world, aside from the question of whether the world is infinite, is suitable for Berkeley's needs.[40] The enormity of divine power and knowledge is, for practical intents and purposes, equivalent to infinity. To interrogate Berkeley's argument, it will suffice to scrutinise the most telling among God's attributes, what Berkeley conceives to be his goodness. How do we know that God is good? Phenomenal experience directly and quite literally expresses his activity, and we can tell whether he is good by the same means we employ to decide whether people are good, by inspecting what he does.[41] What the enactor of the world does tips us off that he is good (and this consists in rather more than the 'mere' act of creation), proving:

> not a Creator merely, but a provident governor, actually and intimately present, and attentive to all our interests and motions, who watches over our conduct, and takes care of our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives, informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly, in a most evident and sensible manner. This is truly wonderful.[42]

Certain features of phenomenal experience, then, testify to their contrivance by a good creator. Chief amongst the 'divine traces of wisdom and goodness that shine throughout the economy of nature',[43] one which Berkeley repeatedly alludes to, is the structural uniformity of the world, its operation according to laws. 'If we follow the light of reason, we shall, from the constant uniform method of our sensations, collect the goodness and wisdom of the spirit who excites them in our minds.'[44] The 'ideas of sense' (as opposed to those of imagination) exhibit 'a steadiness, order, and coherence'; they fall 'in a regular train or series, the admirable connection

whereof sufficiently testifies the wisdom and benevolence of its Author ... [the laws of nature] we learn by experience, which teaches us that such and such ideas are attended with such and such other ideas.'[45] Why does regularity imply God's goodness and wisdom? It promotes human well-being, the chief benefit of the arrangement being predictability. Regularity is a magnificent blessing, in that it permits nature to be *informative*:

> it gives us a sort of foresight, which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. And without this we would eternally be at a loss: we could not know how to act anything that might procure us the least pleasure, or remove the least pain of sense. That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us, that to sow in the seed-time is the way to reap in the harvest, and, in general, that to obtain such or such ends, such or such means are conducive, all this we know, not by discovering any necessary connection between our ideas, but only by the observation of the settled laws of nature, without which we should be all in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life, than an infant just born.[46]

Observing that nature adheres to definite patterns, we are able to anticipate and manipulate them in an effort to make ourselves comfortable in the world. This would be unthinkable in a lawless world, or one where correlations were any less sturdy. In a random, jumbled world, or one where induction was any less reasonable than it actually is, we would doubt the benevolence of the creator because in that case we would have no means of discerning how to secure our ends, which Berkeley here boils down to the maximisation of pleasure and minimisation of pain. As things stand, there is no reason to succumb to such doubt. So the argument, in essence, is as follows:

P Happiness is the good for people.

Q God has so ordered the world that people are able to find happiness.

B3 (*Conclusion*) God is good.

There is a difference between being good and being all-good. This isn't very serious, as long as we understand by **Q** that the world's organisation shows no partiality to any particular person (which lack of favour Berkeley terms God's

justice).[47] The conclusion to be drawn about the goodness of the world's creator is therefore that it is a universal goodness, **B2**, whereby God is disposed to desire the good of all people, regardless of individual difference.

More seriously, **P** is hardly self-explanatory. We must understand what Berkeley means by happiness, and expand on its identification as the *summum bonum* that drives value, and Chapter Six attempts this. For the time being, let's go along with the proposal that what is good is whatever contributes to the gratifications of human life encapsulated as happiness. The world, Berkeley thinks, is evidently designed such that gratification is possible and amenable to planning. Therefore the designer of the world must be good. His wish must be for the maximisation of happiness. Because there is nothing to distinguish people's deservingness of this good (at least, not prior to their behaviour, and God's wishes for our behaviour plainly must precede it), this wish is for the most possible happiness across all people who-, where- and whenever they are. Hence Berkeley believes both **B2**, that God is omnibenevolent, and **C**, that his commands must optimally promote well-being.

In effect, then, the world for Berkeley just is an arena for happiness-seeking agents, the contents of which are exhaustively conditioned as so many signs mapping out the various routes to happiness and warning of perilous directions and dead ends. In this way the natural language 'answers so apposite to the uses and necessities of mankind'.[48] For instance, 'the fire which I see is not the *cause* of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it [contra the materialist], but the *mark* that *forewarns* me of it.'[49] It does not cause, but advises me of, the warmth I will feel near it. God tutors us in how to succeed in our endeavours. And he has so disposed the universe that we can rely on the knowledge we gather along the way, counting on its never being rendered bereft of value or application (nature is regular, so experiential knowledge is in no danger of obsolescence).[50]

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We are to judge God's goodness by his deeds. Berkeley focuses, in making that judgement, on the tendency of those deeds to promote human well-being. It is because God is benevolent in this way that Berkeley calls him good. The method is

empirical. The best explanation of aspects of the phenomenal order is that its proclaimer is endowed with characteristics that are reflected there. Though belief in God's existence must necessarily follow from a grasp of what is involved in the concept of ideas and their relation to minds, he can be shown to be good only *a posteriori*, as Olscamp notes:

> Although the inference from passive ideas to a supreme cause is necessary, the inference from the regularity of effects in the natural world to the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God is probable, because it is based not on the relation between ideas and effects, but only upon the contingent and observed continuity of nature, which can only be known probably ... To know *that* there is a supreme mind which causes the natural world involves but an *a priori* inference based upon an understanding of the terms "idea", "cause" etc. But the knowledge that this supreme mind has the attributes we normally predicate of God must be based upon our observations of the sign relations in the natural language.[51]

Berkeley's deduction that God exists is necessary, but not I think a claim that God necessarily exists. Given human minds and their liability to sense impression, there must necessarily be a God. This is not to say that God necessarily exists *tout court*. His existence is necessary *given* the actual world, but not necessarily necessary across all possible worlds. The possibility is left open that there could have been no divine mind, no human minds, no ideas to animate them; God is not shown to be categorically necessary. Perhaps Berkeley was satisfied with actual necessity, or saw no point in modal speculation beyond this.[52] Be that as it may, and however Berkeley conceives of the argument to the cause's intelligence, it is clear that the argument which interests us, to the cause's goodness, is an inductive one.

There is no recourse to a purely conceptual derivation of God's goodness, such as an attempt to include it amongst the things that must be thought about a necessary being, or about the greatest possible or most perfect being.[53]

Nor does Berkeley *rely* on intuitive experiences of fundamental goodness behind the scenes, and he shouldn't, as long as he looks for knowledge to our overall experience of phenomena which as a thorough empiricist he is committed to doing.

28

For it is possible, at worst, that positive religious experiences misrepresent the true nature of their instigator, who might actively deceive its recipients were he other than good. At best, Berkeley must count such experiences as a further piece of evidence amongst the rest of the sensible evidence, as raising the likelihood that God is good (in which case a perceived communion with outright malevolence or intuition of cosmic indifference will also count, unfavourably).[54]

Similarly, scriptural revelation of God's goodness cannot be handled by Berkeley as a separate category of reason for believing that God is good. In isolation, it is compatible with an evil deity, whom we would not be surprised to find perpetrating a deception, even if we agree that the testimony of its messengers provides a reasonable basis for consigning its origin to a transcendent entity in the first place, as Berkeley urges.[55] No single piece of evidence can be privileged in a probabilistic assessment. Its implications must be considered in the light of the rest of God's actions. This source of information, if such it is, can only form a portion of the overall evidence (and 'if there was no other attestation to the truth of the Christian faith, this must be owned a very weak one.'[56]) For example, the (self/)sacrifice of Jesus might be offered as 'proof' of God's concern for humankind. But as a discrete datum it is impotent. At worst we may once more envisage a deception (as in this case does Islam); at best it provides only a pastoral defence of the possibility of God's goodness in the midst of doubt-inducing trauma.[57] It becomes constructive only when integrated with the rest of the empirical evidence, of which it is another token.

In short, both mystical intuition and the revelations of sacred texts either *presuppose* that God is good, and so cannot attest to it (for this supposition is required to rule out the possibility that the goodness they convey is deliberately misleading), or they are to be evaluated as factors in a seamless array of inductive evidence, where they can (and do) raise the likelihood that God is good. God seems good; a demonstrative inference of actual goodness from seeming goodness already requires actual goodness also; a probable inference of actual goodness requires only seeming goodness. Berkeley is right not to afford these considerations and their ilk any special role; and anyway their import is minuscule compared with the rest of

the evidence (i.e. everything that happens[58]).

Perhaps, though, by grafting Hume's globally sceptical thesis about induction onto the current topic, it could be objected that the inference from this unified evidential corpus also presupposes the feature, belief in which it sets out to secure as warranted, 'taking that for granted, which is the very point in question.'[59] For Hume's thesis seems to urge, with respect to this topic, that all the available evidence can show is that God has been good in the past, and that this provides no reason for thinking he will be good in the future. If he were truly good, however, then he will not cease to be good; so since we cannot know that he will not cease to be good, but only that he has been good so far, we cannot know that he is truly good. To draw the inference of persisting goodness assumes without rationale that God is the sort of being that is persistently good. He might be 'grad': good before 2012 and bad afterwards.

It is true that our assurance of God's goodness is contingent, which is only to say that it is not logically guaranteed. Because, as Berkeley thinks, God is free, he could choose so to alter the course of nature that we would be stripped of our reasons for thinking him good. As Olscamp puts it, 'effects are "necessary" because of God's goodness and benevolence and power, if he wills that they occur; but he need not'.[60] The logical possibility of non-persisting goodness, however, is no menace to the inference of persisting goodness from observed goodness. Probable reasoning makes no pretence to logical guarantee. The sceptic has the cart before the horse: from the evidence of God's goodness to date, we are entitled to infer that God is probably good; since he is probably good, he will *just as probably* continue to be good, which is a part of what is said in saying that he is good. Whether the Humean ruse wielded against any instance of inductive reasoning whatsoever is equally guilty of confusing conclusions with presuppositions, we shall not inquire.[61] We are at liberty in the present instance to treat the method of Berkeley's inference as legitimate: 'probable arguments are a sufficient ground of faith.'[62]

Whether the inference, that the probability that God is good is persuasively high, is in fact yielded by that method is another matter.

CHAPTER FOUR

The singular utility Berkeley credits to predictability allows him to explain why God has so limited the number of miracles he has wrought. 'God seems to choose the convincing our reason of his attributes by the works of Nature, which discover so much harmony and contrivance in their make, and are such plain indications of wisdom and beneficence in their Author, rather than to astonish us into a belief of His being by anomalous and surprising events.'[63] Unlawful events would undermine our confidence in the causal train and inhibit our planning abilities. Hume concurs that predictability is desirable: 'if everything were conducted by particular volitions, the course of nature would be perpetually broken, and no man could employ his reason in the conduct of his life.'[64] He agrees, that is, that things could be worse.

In his discussion of the problem of evil in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, however, Hume parts company when Berkeley infers divine goodness from natural uniformity. In Hume's view, things could, apparently, also be *better*, which circumstance, he protests, blocks Berkeley's conclusion. If we can imagine ways that the world could be better suited to our purposes (of procuring pleasure and avoiding pain), the point that it could be worse-suited will not sway our assent towards an all-powerful and benevolent deity. From Hume I extract sketches of four imaginable improvements upon the prevailing order (which for ease of discussion are summarized in an order different from his).[65]

First, though a regular causal chain is preferable if there has to be *some* sort of causal chain, there does not have to be. The world could instead take a short-cut straight to happy events, abolishing the need to hunt for their promoters. This amounts, louchely but pointedly, to querying why we are not in heaven already. On Berkeley's hypothesis, God guides us through an obstacle course, and this is good of him. But Berkeley thinks God also established the very obstacle course he helps us negotiate, and this kind of help isn't so obviously good. *If God can award happiness without first placing obstacles in the way, he ought to.*

Second, granting the desirability of this type of law-governed forum, it is really

31

only the *appearance* of regular laws which we require. Given our ignorance of much of their detail, God could intervene to effect a multitude of happy outcomes where we would be blithely unaware of any unsettling disruptions of the habitual course of events. Storms could be less severe, the fertilization of an egg that will grow into a brutal despot could fail, and so on. *The obstacles could be gentler without disrupting our faith in the rules of the game.* (Perhaps God does cheat in this way, but if so, not as often as one could expect in view of his purported concern with human well-being.)

Third, granting the desirability of a *thoroughly* law-governed forum, the laws could in general be less exacting. For example, pains and sorrows need not be a part of the legislated fabric. Why must failures in deciphering the divine language, or in properly applying what has been learnt, be attended by pain? They are not required as a motivator: 'men pursue pleasure as eagerly as they avoid pain; at least they might have been so constituted ... why then is an animal ever rendered susceptible of such a sensation?'[66] *The penalties for poor solutions to the obstacles could be less severe.*

Fourth, granting the desirability of a thoroughly law-governed forum complete with (sometimes excruciatingly) painful penalties, people could be better adapted to their environment, more skilled at dealing with the obstacles that compose it. There are any number of ways in which our powers could conceivably be enhanced. Hume singles out a greater share of diligence or industriousness as one improvement to the human frame which a benevolent Creator might have seen fit to inculcate. As things stand, 'nothing but the most violent necessity can oblige [people] to labour', whereas if we naturally found work more pleasant, less burdensome, the satisfaction of the needs of life would be enormously facilitated. This deficiency seems particularly resonant for Hume, who is at his most poignant when decrying it: 'it is hard: I dare repeat it, it is hard, that being placed in a world so full of wants and necessities, where almost every being and element is either our foe or refuses its assistance ... we should also have our own temper to struggle with.'[67] *We could be better equipped to master the obstacles, thereby avoiding the penalties.*

Berkeley's idea, then, that we learn from the natural language how best to avoid pain, does not dissolve the problem for theism of self-inflicted ('should-have-known-better') pain and sorrow, because God could (for all we know) have created

32

a world where people do not face threats to be coped with in the first place; never mind the problem of other sorts of suffering, like inevitable suffering (which no amount of tuition helps us avoid), or gratuitous suffering (which makes no contribution to our well-being, teaching us no lessons), or excessive suffering (more intense than it's function of alerting us to harms and danger requires), or irresistible suffering[68] (where we are so constituted as to bring it upon ourselves, and not so constituted as to be able to learn our lessons), or animal suffering (redundant in Berkeley's scheme, it appears).

Further, although we are capable of many successful predictions, many events remain uncertain and many disappoint our expectations. Nature is not as informative as it could be, and how can one infer a perfectly good God from an imperfect amount of good-enhancing information?

The cause of phenomena is either spiritual or not. If the latter, then it is indifferent to moral qualities, and neither goodness nor evil may appropriately be predicated of it. If the former, then it is either perfectly good, perfectly bad, indifferent to good and evil, or conflicted between them. The phenomena being 'mixed' with respect to good and evil (pleasure and pain, fortune and misfortune, the satisfaction and frustration of desire, the fulfillment and thwarting of plans), Hume finds a perfectly good or evil cause unlikely. A conflicted spiritual cause for phenomena disposes us either to think that it is monolithic but not all-powerful, and must do its best with recalcitrant material.[69] But of course for Berkeley there is no material, of any degree of pliability. Or it is diversified as more than one individual, with different priorities, and again the potency of each competitor is limited, encouraging a Manichean thesis, which 'has more probability than the common [theist] hypothesis, by giving a plausible account of the strange mixture of good and ill which appears in life,'[70] but which Hume rejects in light of the 'uniformity and steadiness of general laws' - there is no sign of a struggle amongst antagonistic spirits who control them. Berkeley must reject the warring spirit hypothesis for the same reason. As he says, that God is 'one' is indicated by the organisation of sense-impression.[71]

Hume, accordingly, settles on 'by far the most probable hypothesis', that the

original principle of the world has neither goodness nor evil, but is 'entirely indifferent' to those properties.[72] '[N]othing,' Berkeley avers, 'can render our lives more conformable to the will of God than a steady endeavour to promote the well-being of his creatures, whose happiness is so constantly, uniformly and impartially promoted by the laws of nature, that they sufficiently declare and speak out the will of Him that framed them.'[73] Natural laws seem impartial with respect to human happiness, but not because they promote it impartially. Rather, they disregard it impartially.

Predictability does not verify a good creator, given the many evils which the world (albeit predictably) contains. As to whether the indifferent cause is spiritual or not, Hume is happy to grant the possibility of spirituality. He is doubtless alive to the irrelevance of an indifferent God; Berkeley, we saw earlier, argues that this 'innocent' doctrine leaves theism and atheism practically equivalent. Belief in such a being could not induce one to make any behavioural modifications whatsoever: given its apathy, its reaction to any of our activities is unpredictable, if it will react at all. (A non-spiritual, therefore predictably non-reacting cause may be preferable to subjection to whims). If our procedure is to be evidential, the object of the cause of phenomena does not appear to be human happiness (and the compensations of beauty and so on are feebly inadequate):

> You ascribe, Cleanthes (and I believe justly), a purpose and intention to Nature. But what, I beseech you, is the object of that curious artifice and machinery, which she has displayed in all animals? The preservation alone of individuals, and propagation of the species. It seems enough for her purpose, if such a rank be barely upheld in the universe, without any care or concern for the happiness of the members that compose it. No resource for this purpose: no machinery, in order merely to give pleasure or ease: no fund of pure joy and contentment: no indulgence, without some want or necessity accompanying it. At least, the few phenomena of this nature are overbalanced by opposite phenomena of still greater importance.[74]

The world is, by all appearances, replete with evil, with occasions for suffering. This circumstance has sometimes been portrayed as *logically excluding* the

possibility that the traditional God of theism exists.[75] Hume is more circumspect, being 'sceptic enough to allow, that the bad appearances, notwithstanding all my reasonings, may be *compatible* with such attributes [as goodness, omnipotence etc.]; but surely they can never *prove* these attributes.'[76] It is not probable, given the evil in the world, that any otherwise God-like entity responsible for creation is good. Even if it is logically possible that God is good, we cannot glean knowledge to this effect from observation of the natural world - and if observation of the world is to be our method of knowledge-acquisition, an honest assessment of likelihoods will lead to an atheological conclusion.

This conclusion, allowing a possibility but declaring it improbable, is sufficient for Hume's purposes (as we shall see). His modesty, balking at the strong atheological conclusion, is also appropriate in view of ripostes open to a theist confronted with our imagined improvements. To the claim that a God-given world would be a static hedonic utopia devoid of the threats that must accompany a dynamic causal chain, he can object that, for all we *know*, God has an adequate moral reason, an end we would appreciate as good could we but grasp it, for putting us through our paces. He can even say that we can know what that end is, and are unable to comprehend only how fleshy life is necessary to bring it to fruition. Perhaps our highest possible good is the cultivation of our souls, and perhaps that involves being subjected to character-building adversity. God is willing and able, but not ready, to relieve us of suffering.[77] Perhaps we could not be significantly free without being free to inflict suffering upon one another.[78]

To the claim that God could soften at least some blows without alerting us, the theist can reiterate the unforeclosed possibility of a good reason for suffering, and perhaps this requires a minimum quantity of suffering, which is the quantity to be had; or maybe the advantages of free action in a constant world require the possibility of suffering (of no predetermined quantity), and there must (logically) be a limit to the suffering-events that can be curtailed.[79] He might add that the atheist is dishonestly *pretending* to argue from the quantity of suffering, as he would make the same argument from any other quantity of suffering, no matter how much smaller, so what he is really arguing from is the fact that suffering occurs *per*

35

se, which has been dealt with.[80] The third and fourth categories of amelioration are equally amenable to these general defences.

Berkeley does say some of these things. He must be careful about positively identifying a plan which requires suffering, of course, for it has to be a plan that answers to his utilitarian conception of the good. As Penelhum reminds us, 'in calling God good a theist is committed to saying that God's reasons for permitting evils must be reasons that are acceptable according to the believer's own set of moral standards.'[81] He appeals to our ignorance of the grander scheme of things, of what might be necessary to promote the *summum bonum*.

> It is an allowed point that no man can judge of this or that part of a machine taken by itself, without knowing the whole, the mutual relation or dependence of its parts, and the end for which it was made ... ought we not, by a parity of reason, to suspend our judgement concerning the moral fitness of a single unaccountable part of the divine economy, till we are more fully acquainted with the moral system, or world of spirits, and are let into the designs of God's Providence, and have an extensive view of his dispensations past, present and future?[82]

When Berkeley tries to account for the evils of the world he hints further that, our ignorance notwithstanding, we are capable of grasping the role that evil has to play in a good scheme:

> As for the mixture of pain or uneasiness which is in the world, pursuant to the general laws of nature, and the actions of finite imperfect spirits: this, in the state we are in at present, is indispensably necessary to our well-being. But our prospects are too narrow: we take, for instance, the idea of some one particular pain into our thoughts, and account it evil; whereas if we enlarge our view, so as to comprehend the various ends, connections, and dependencies of things, on what occasions and in what proportions we are affected with pain and pleasure, the nature of human freedom, and the design with which we are put into the world; we shall be forced to acknowledge that those particular things, which considered in themselves appear to be evil, have the nature of good, when considered as linked with

the whole system of beings.[83]

The coherence of any theodicy or defence is, however, irrelevant to our enquiry. While there may be a consensus that the logical form of the atheological argument from evil is a non-starter, and however the lively controversy about the prospects of various evidential forms turns out, Berkeley is in trouble. Even if it is correct to say that we are in no epistemic position to assign probabilities to whether or not God is this or that kind of being, this is only to say that despite evil we remain *at liberty to believe* in a good God, and not that we are 'forced to acknowledge' God's goodness on the basis of the evidential corpus. Pike agrees with Hume that no demonstration of the compossibility of a good God and suffering can compel us to move from the indubitable existence of the latter to the probability of the former, and decides that this obvious fact shouldn't bother the theist: 'Philo's closing attack on Cleanthes' position has extremely limited application. Evil in the world has central negative importance for theology only when theology is approached as a quasi-scientific subject, as by Cleanthes. That it is seldom approached in this way will be evident to anyone who has studied the history of theology.'[84] Berkeley is one of the foolhardy theologians Pike ranks, with justice, amongst the Cleantheans. When one insists on an empirical survey of what the evidence tells us, the mere logical possibilities that Hume is prepared to recognise become irrelevant.

In the absence of presumptions which it is beyond the remit of any evidence to show founded or unfounded, an empirical demonstration that God is good is fatally undermined by what Pike calls the 'recalcitrant datum' of evil. Berkeley explicitly advertises his enterprise as supplying the *best explanation* for phenomena being the phenomena they are: ' it is evident that the being of a spirit infinitely wise, good, and powerful is abundantly sufficient to explain all the appearances of Nature.'[85] It is only capable of explaining evil, however, if it is coupled with non-evident propositions (e.g. that refer to an unknown plan), which violates the method *qua* evidential method; or if it is coupled with 'evident' propositions conceived as providing an independent (and irreducibly basic) ground for belief (e.g. spiritual communion), which flouts the unity, or 'exclusivity' of the method (Chapter Three); or if it is coupled with 'evident' propositions that reason judges as

requiring, or justifying or outweighing the evils (e.g. that people are free, that nature is uniform), but which in turn rely on non-evident propositions (since there are not evidently angels and demons, and though given a natural world it might be true that it is best for it to be uniform, we *could* skip nature and go straight to heaven, stranding us with the unknown plan appeal); or if it is coupled with a principle that divorces God's end from the mere happiness of people, but this violates PTCC.

Leibniz excoriates 'that false maxim ... that the happiness of rational creatures is the sole aim of God' on the grounds that 'God would fail in what is due to the universe.'[86] Berkeley can make no such move, because what is due to the universe does not enter into his decision to call God good. Here his difficulty bites deepest, because he admits that '*[t]his present world is not designed or adapted to make rational souls happy.*'[87] Making rational souls happy is the essence of goodness. Speculation about the provisions of other worlds is not to the point: the inductive method that seeks evidence of God's goodness only has this present world to go on. Hume's strategy, then, is a subtle one. Though it only averts an argument for proving God good, when Berkeley's fails we are stranded with the unlikelihood that God is good. It is not a meaningful possibility unless a definite sense in which God is good is supplied. The only definite sense Berkeley wants to supply, however, is improbably applicable to God, because the only proper method that lets us know it is applicable is unsuccessful. Berkeley is trapped.

> Did Hume have Berkeley in mind when he threw down this gauntlet?
>
> if we abandon all human analogy ... I am afraid we abandon all religion, and retain no conception of the great object of our adoration. If we preserve human analogy, we must for ever find it impossible to reconcile any mixture of evil in the universe with infinite attributes; much less can we ever prove the latter from the former.[88]

King and Browne prefer the reconciliation to the human analogy of the 'anthropomorphite' theologian. Cleanthes and Berkeley prefer to retain a clear conception of the object of their adoration. The dilemma smothers Berkeley's attempt to show that God is good.

B is not falsified, but it is not proved. The point of defining moral obligation with exclusive reference to divine commands was that we *know* that God knows all and is good, and that we know that we don't know enough, and aren't good enough, either to do the right thing act by act, or to design the best rules or inculcate the best inclinations for promoting the right acts. But we can't know that God is good. Therefore we cannot treat whatever God commands as constitutive of our obligations. They may not in fact coincide with the optimal rule set, and human powers of reasoning must be called upon to decide whether and where they do. If promoting general welfare is the right thing to do, we again face the problem of figuring out how it is best promoted, since we cannot imitate an entity who by appearances is not, or cannot be known to be, particularly concerned with promoting it. This problem is exacerbated. For our skeletal argument **A** to **F** evidently requires the extra premise:

R We know what is divinely commanded.

There is nothing to be gained by learning that one ought to do God's bidding if one does not or cannot know what it is that he bids us to do. More precisely, since the absence of human involvement is what elevates divine commands to the status of moral definitions as opposed to a hopefully coincidental two cents worth, the argument I credit Berkeley with implies:

R1 We know what is divinely commanded without any (possibly interfering) human contribution.

And **R1** is false, on any interpretation that honours the constraints which must bind Berkeley. The tenth *Sermon* identifies three methods for ascertaining the will of God: 1) revelation, 2) conscience and 3) reason.

1) Let's distinguish two modes of access to God's will which occasionally share the designation of revelation. In *direct* revelation, an agent is privy, or so she believes, to the will of God as communicated personally, be it via an inner voice, or a disembodied outer voice accompanied by a burning bush, or a vision of an angel with a message. In *indirect* revelation, a message which presumably originated in direct revelation is transmitted by word of mouth or through scripture. Berkeley

appeals to this conduit as a means of learning God's will:

> The will of God hath been promulgated, by the preaching and miracles of our blessed Saviour and his apostles. By these means the most sensual men are made acquainted with their duty, and the sublimest truths and principles of morality sounded into the ears of the most ignorant and barbarous people.[89]

Granting for a moment that the will of a supernatural entity in possession of an ideal set of rules has been revealed, the problem arises that only a small proportion of that set seems to have been expressed. God's revealed commands scarcely cover every contingency, as free thinkers like Matthew Tindal complained. Perhaps it is clear from revealed commands that one should refrain from spilling one's seed in front of one's brother's wife, but it is far from clear whether one should forbid human cloning, drive a car, count dimpled chads, develop or eat genetically modified organisms, censor certain forms of aesthetic expression, or discourage economic migration.

Perhaps there is a right and a wrong way to behave in unaccounted-for situations, but that we don't know what it is, nor ever can unless and until God chooses to reveal some extra commands. But though this is a possibility in the most generous sense, it is extremely unsatisfying. Such secrecy on God's part is worse than confusing; one still has to make a decision, and risks displeasing him through no fault of one's own. Alternatively, one could say that there is no right or wrong way to behave in unaccounted-for situations. This response is scarcely more attractive. It would seem odd for God not to care either way about some of the decisions people have to make which will have an important impact on their lives.

Ought we to construct a dam that will extinguish multiple species and several cultures, foster certain diseases and alter the climate but which will also heat homes, provide jobs, fuel an economy? We certainly ought to do one or the other, but it's a secret which. Or: whatever – there is no right or wrong answer to the question, no morally important consequence of either action. Have a nice day! Anyone here need to know whether to practice sodomy?

The best thing for Berkeley to say is that from known explicit commands one can work out what ought to be done in unlegislated cases by implication. We might

reason from what we know (from scripture) of God's will to what he would wish us to do where he has not been explicit.

We observed in Chapter One that this option is not open to the purist. There is nothing to make an action right apart from its having been commanded – one must cleave to the letter of the commands in a system where arbitrainess is not a drawback but the point. The intransigent purist must opt for one of the first two responses to the incompleteness criticism outlined above. The problem is compounded, perhaps beyond retrieval, by the appearance of internal conflict within many extant sets of religious commands, and by the variety of interpretations of God's commands offered by rival sects. The possibility of discerning what one ought to do begins to appear hopeless, if one is to rely as the purist must upon revelation.[90]

Conversely, a divine command ethicist of Berkeley's type *can* and now *must* give the final response. God's moral supremacy is grounded in his majestic comprehension of what is best for human welfare. If that is going to be affected, then evidently there is a right and a wrong decision to be made; but if God has not provided an appropriate command, then the reason for privileging his commands as embodying the totality of moral obligation vanishes at once. So what is said to be known from revelation must be supplemented with what can be inferred by reason. God orders whatever will raise welfare outcomes, so this is what he *would* order where no relevant order is forthcoming.

2) Divine will is 'suggested by a natural conscience, an inward feeling implanted in the soul of every man, previous to all deductions of reason, there being nothing more natural to our minds, than that distaste, disquiet, and remorse attending evil actions, and on the other hand, that joy and satisfaction which is the constant encouragement and reward of good ones.'[91] These dispositions are 'natural or innate', being 'universal', 'not confined to any age or country, and not to be accounted for by custom or education, but alike in all nations and all times.'[92] Since they are not planted by men, they must have been planted by God, and therefore strongly indicate how he wishes us to act. An example of a 'principle originally engrafted in the very first formation of the soul by the Author of our nature' might

be the 'social appetite in human souls', which is 'the great spring and source of moral actions. This it is that inclines every individual to an intercourse with his species, and models everyone to that behaviour which best suits to the common well-being.'[93]

Put to one side the apparent falsity of the claim that everyone is endowed with a conscience, or with the same conscientious reactions across time and space.[94] Put aside the possibility that some other agent, neither human nor divine, is responsible for planting said affections, perhaps one from amongst the 'innumerable orders' of intelligent agents Berkeley believes populate the universe. (We cannot technically be certain that only the supreme being enjoys the requisite power, nor even that the arrangement must have his blessing if those intermediate orders are endowed with free will.[95]) Put aside alternative explanations of the phenomenon of conscience, embracing some combination of genetic and socio-environmental conditioning, say. Suppressing these reservations, we must still doubt the reliability of conscience, as a source of knowledge about the content of God's will. The anxiety that people are fallible when it comes to identifying their moral duty is potentially exacerbated by mining their knowledge of it from the reservoir of moral emotion, as Berkeley acknowledges: 'impressions on the conscience' are often 'defaced through indolence and neglect, through custom, prejudice and passion.'[96] We are apt to *go wrong* when we turn to conscience.[97] Conscience, it might be added, does not typically manifest itself in general commands as such, but in abhorrence or relish of particular scenarios.

The feasibility of comprehending God's will must stand or fall on our ability to reason to it.

> [I]t being manifest to the natural reason of every man, that God is good and just and holy, it cannot be doubted, that acts of beneficence, purity, and justice are agreeable to His will. Besides, as God is the common father of us all, it follows it cannot be His intention, that we should each of us promote his own private interest, to the wrong or damage of his neighbour, but that such conduct or behaviour, as tends to procure the general well-being of mankind, is most acceptable to him.[98]

42

God need not actually exist for this reasoning process to operate. If human reason is capable of discerning what God prescribes given that he exists, it is equally capable of discerning what he *would* prescribe *if* he existed. It makes no difference whether God is an imaginary construct (a strictly idealised prescriber) or a real entity (in fact the ideal prescriber): any residual bias is inescapable on either story, for we are going about precisely the same procedure. If reason can be 'pure' it does not require God to exist to figure out what an omnibenevolent being would want; if it is inherently 'corrupt' (incapable of detaching itself from ideological influence, for example), its verdicts are contaminated whether or not the God it conceives exists. The motivation for Berkeley's divine command theory, however, is the ability of God to perceive without miscalculation or bias the set of rules that best promote general human happiness. Now, whether or not God is there to perceive them, and regardless of whether he cares about them, we find that we can't get at God's set of rules except by reasoning about what they must be. Disastrously for this form of the divine command thesis, the resulting set of rules are bedevilled by the same tribulations that prompted us to invest duty in God's word over and above the utilitarian standard. If that standard is the right one, we might as well use it directly.

Is it unfair to Berkeley to separate these routes to knowledge for individual consideration? Couldn't they reinforce each other in combination, as Berkeley certainly envisages? Not beyond a very limited point, because reason must do the bulk of the work or there is very little in the way of useful commands against which to judge behaviour. Even up to that point, the possibility is somewhat beside the point in the general context of Berkeley's argument. Yes, God's revealed or intuited-by-conscience commands might satisfy one that a real being has a certain nature and wills certain behaviours, and implications could be drawn from these which no-one could reasonably deny as a part of such a being's plan. However, the problem is to explain why God's will is to be treated as definitive of duty, and its mooted solution refers to his comparative knowledge and goodness. If we can calculate what an omnibenevolent being would like to happen, that solution withers, whether or not we have reason to think God exists and is omnibenevolent,

43

or to suppose that we know what he wants. Revelation may form a (small) part of the evidence about God's intention. Still this circumstance only bears on the classification of Berkeley's theory as a divine command theory in case it also tells us everything we need to know about what he wants us to do. It doesn't; human reason does most of that work. So the idea of allotting moral sovereignty to God on the grounds that human reason is incapable of discovering the best possible set of benevolent rules is rather abortive.

In *Passive Obedience*, Berkeley argues:

whatsoever practical proposition doth to right reason evidently appear to have a necessary connection with the universal well-being included in it is to be looked upon as enjoined by the will of God. For he that willeth the end doth will the necessary means to that end; but it hath been shown that God willeth the universal well-being of mankind should be promoted by the concurrence of each particular person; therefore, every such practical proposition necessarily tending thereto is to be esteemed a decree of God, and is consequently a law to man.[99]

This lets us devise a set of rules for all occasions. But while we can 'look upon' what to reason seems to promote well-being *as if* enjoined by God, we have no reason to think that it actually *is* so enjoined (Berkeley having failed to establish God's omnibenevolence) which is *independent* of our ability rationally to endorse what God would enjoin if he existed. God and his commands become quite redundant. People are forced to figure out what they would be like, that is, effectively to invent them, and once in possession of them have no reason to credit them to God. Practical reasoning has no point of contact with the will of God *qua* living God, though it may find the construct of such a neutrally loving being to be of practical value for getting a clearer picture of how utilitarianism might be legislatively embodied (if one has decided that utilitarian ideals are really the engines of prescription).

If it is true that people can't reliably reason about the best rules, then it is not true that we can know what God commands, and if it is true that we know what God commands, then it is not true that people can't reason to the best rules. So not

only is premise **B** false, but one must also ditch either **R1** or **D**.

The introduction of God's will whether in the form of scriptural doctrine or conscientious intuition creates an impression that commands originate with a living God, elevating them from mere candidate for the ideal set which reason can and must revise when it sees fit, to the office of actual ideal set, the further subjection of which to reason is superfluous, if not downright perilous. But the introduction of these sources is not helpful, for they are vulnerable to human distortion and require the intervention of reason to be viable. The ideal set remains out of reach to the extent that we require the exclusion of human participation in its contrivance. On our reading of Berkeley's ethics so far, as Orange notes, 'we can go all the way, without God, by the process which the word utilitarian suggests. God is only necessary as the original willer that the formulae of universalistic hedonism should be correct, and the ultimate avenger of their validity'[100] (except that, for Berkeley, God is not even necessary as original willer of the *summum bonum*, as we have seen). Divine commands are redundant on the account of Berkeley's ethics which his metatheology has constrained us to reconstruct for him. If God's apparent commands coincide with moral duty, we ought, as it happens, to follow them, but there is no impetus for conflating the two.

CHAPTER FIVE

There is no reason so far to believe divinely ordained those rules which appear to reason most efficiently to encode benevolent action, since, on the one hand, their connection to that source can be but hypothetical at best, and on the other, any spiritual entity who may be responsible for the natural world is not by appearances especially concerned to be benevolent. Berkeley offers a reason, however, for believing in a good God quite apart from the cognitive apprehension of his good deeds, which he thinks not only allows one to treat the set of rules by which the best efforts of rational thinking approximate to the ideal rule set as if it is commanded by God, but in fact is such that we are *obliged* to conceive our duty as determined by God's will, and therefore that we ought to believe in the existence of the type of God that would wish to see people follow certain rules. Let's recall the argument. My reasons for attributing it to Berkeley will become clear as we proceed, along with extensive supporting references. This chapter discusses **J** and **K**; **G** is the subject of Chapter Six; **H, I,** and **N** are the subjects of Chapter Seven. The conclusion pulls the argument together.

G An agent ought to act so as to maximise his or her prospect of happiness.

H Agents are prone, individually and collectively, to act in ways that are significantly less effective in maximising their own happiness than they could be.

I Secular moral codes are inadequate for solving the problem stated in **H**.

J It is possible to treat as true ('believe') propositions **A** and **B** (that God exists, and is omnibenevolent and omniscient).

K It is legitimate to believe propositions **A** and **B**.

L It is possible to reason about the will of the entity described in **A** and **B**.

M It is possible to conceive of these rules as actually the commands of God.

N Agents who believe propositions **A** and **B** ('believers'), and conceive of the rules human reason calculates that God issues as actual divine commands are significantly better equipped to solve the problem of **H** than agents who do not; indeed, only believers can solve that problem.

O (*Conclusion*) One ought to treat a particular set of rules (which seem to reason best to promote human happiness), which are putatively divine commands, as actually divine commands and as constitutive of morality.

I perceive no important difference between this conclusion and **F** ('it is our moral duty to comply with divine commands'); it simply goes into more detail about what these commands amount to on critical analysis. One difference perhaps is that the concept of 'morality' is bandied about in **F**, whereas the argument just presented is driven entirely by individual self-interest. Didn't we set out to find grounds for identifying obedience to God as obligatory that went beyond self-interest, so that they could be characterised as moral? The benefits of theistic belief and a divine command definition of moral duty are agent-centred, but in adopting the beliefs needed to obtain them the agent is forced to make the transition from seeking nothing but their own happiness to seeking the happiness of all people. I construe as a movement into the moral realm the commitment to other-regarding behaviour even though its critical genesis lies with self-regarding factors. If we construct moral duty – how one ought to behave – from the most basic and ontologically uncluttered of materials, an agent's desire for his own happiness, then we are on as unshakeable a ground as there can be.[101] '[W]e do at last arrive at something solid and real, in which all mankind agree, to wit, the appetites, passions, and sense: these are founded in nature, all real, have real objects.'[102]

After all, Berkeley can only submit a thin version of what Mill has termed the fallacy of composition in response to the proposition that 'the individual happiness of every man alone constitutes his own entire good. The happiness of other men, making no part of mine, is not with respect to me a good.'[103] Berkeley is prone to engage in 'metaphysical' egoism, 'because the good of the whole is inseparable from that of the parts', but Mandeville is correct to be disparaging: 'they are silly people who imagine that the good of the whole is consistent with the good of every individual'.[104] Still, the cynical demand for an explanation of why one should care for the welfare of others needn't be the end of moral philosophy. Taken as a beginning, the demand to show how one gets from here to moral codes will produce the sturdiest of them.

We will be studying Berkeley's attempt to satisfy this type of demand. If he can show that any emergent moral duty is a function of the will of God, then his achievement merits our interest. First, let's be clear why the deity, belief in which is said to be an indispensable practical tool, must impartially wish for universal happiness. One that did not wouldn't be the effective practical tool 'God' is. It is not possible to believe both that a being exists that is all-powerful, all-knowing and the creator of everything, and that it cares only about the believer: this is a matter of logic, as far as Berkeley is concerned. Even if he is mistaken on this score, the belief that the deity favours one personally would leave one with no motivation to alter one's behaviour, so that one will inevitably fall prey to the problem of **H**. The God Berkeley thinks we have a practical justification for believing in happens to be a utilitarian. An all-powerful and impartial God is the sort one should want everyone (including oneself) to believe in, as the resulting predictable behaviour will collectively permit the realisation of certain co-operative goods; moreover, one should wish for others to believe in a utilitarian God in case their power exceeds your own, so that there is a restraint on the abuse of it. But we are getting ahead of ourselves. Having explained the sense in which Berkeley's pragmatic argument can be said to produce a conflation of moral duty with obedience to divine commands, it is time to look closely at the premises. I will first consider **J** and **K**. What is the precise nature of the ground for belief adoption here?

Though one is not forced by the facts of the world to acknowledge the goodness of God, those facts are not decisive against the hypothesis either. One is free to believe in a good God. And:

> [w]ho ever supposed that scientifical proofs are necessary to make a Christian? Faith alone is required; and provided that, in the main and upon the whole, men are persuaded this saving faith may consist with some degrees of obscurity, scruple and error. For although the light of truth be unchangeable, and the same in its eternal source, the Father of Lights: yet, with respect to us, it is variously weakened and obscured, by passing through a long distance or gross medium, where it is intercepted, distorted, or tinctured, by the prejudices and passions of men.[105]

48

Scientifical proof would have been sufficient, but is not necessary for religious belief. The question is still live, whether the agnostic ought to take the option up. But what would prompt one to do so? If a scientific approach delivers no reason for forming such a belief, what other type of reason could there be? Berkeley distinguishes the reasons for belief grounded in matters of fact from reasons of a different kind:

> The *moral evidence* and probable arguments within our reach are abundantly sufficient to make prudent thinking men adhere to the faith handed down to us from our ancestors, established by the laws of our country, requiring submission in points above our knowledge, and for the rest recommending doctrines the most agreeable to our interest and our reason.[106]

Berkeley, then, recognizes two broad classes of consideration as bearing on the validation of belief in general, and utilises both in his effort to persuade us to believe in God in particular. The first, referred to above as 'probable arguments', is cognitive in character. Reflecting on certain aspects of experience, we are driven to conclude that a particular type of spirit, the only tenable explanation of those aspects, must exist. The justificatory framework here is truth-oriented. Conclusions generated by this method can be disputed on the grounds that they are not in fact indicated by the evidence. Perhaps the existence and nature of God is not demonstrable by reasoning about structural features of phenomenal experience nor from facts surveyed amongst its contents; and the method has indeed proved feeble with respect to the results Berkeley expects from it. The method *per se*, however, is generally deemed acceptable (as far as theism's detractors are concerned, if not to some fideists), such that if it *were* to indicate God's existence it would be acknowledged as sufficient to validate belief in God. As it turns out, it does not.

But there is a contrasting class of consideration, of a practical cast, referred to above as 'moral evidence'. Reflecting on the ends of our activity, we realise that a steady religious faith is an indispensable means to their attainment. The adoption of belief is an activity like any other insofar as it too is subject to approval as a promoter, or to rejection as an inhibitor, of one's ends. Therefore, we have a good reason to believe there is a God. Here the justificatory framework is practice-

49

oriented, validating religious belief on the grounds of its instrumental efficacy.

An immediate objection could abort this argument. Not only may it be questioned whether belief in God actually is useful, but it may also be thought that the usefulness of a belief is not a legitimate basis for adopting it in the first place. Even if the substantial claims regarding the rewards that accompany the belief are made out, they could be dismissed as irrelevant, if rewards do not constitute good reasons for believing. This objection could make either or both of two distinct claims: adoption of belief without evidence is not possible, or it is not permissible.

There is not a great deal that can be said to someone who insists, in spite of the evidence of many non-evidentially-convinced belief-adopters, that it is psychologically impossible to adopt a belief in the absence of supporting evidence. First notice that we are not considering the suspension of disbelief but its outright expulsion. 'Suspension' might be tricky, if it is supposed to mean that really one is clinging on to disbelief somewhere beneath a non-committal veneer; but people are perfectly capable of expelling disbelief or unbelief and replacing these with belief, though no probative evidence prompts them to do so, as long as the condition pertains that there is no decisive countervailing evidence (as 'no moral evidence can make contradictions consistent'[107]). If people are free to act and to reason, they are free to adopt beliefs within the constraints imposed by reason. If it is fair to say that there is no way to assign a probability as to whether or not God is good, then it is possible to believe that he is good.

Even if there were reason to doubt that people are able to do what Berkeley urges they do, this should not put us off *trying* to adopt a belief, if by the constant attempt we would achieve goals that otherwise elude. Similarly, the fact that it is not possible precisely to identify the optimal rule set does not mean there is no point in trying to do so. The attempt to approach perfection, though doomed to come up short, may yet secure much of value. Berkeley, plausibly, argues for this principal from its usefulness in a different context: '[d]oth anyone find fault with the exactness of geometrical rules, because no one in practice can attain to it? The perfection of a rule is useful, even though it is not reached. Many may approach what all may fall short of.'[108]

The interesting complaint is that there is something *wrong* with adopting beliefs for prudential reasons. This could mean there is something *irrational* about doing so. That would be the case only if it has already been stipulated that reasoning proceed strictly according to the evidence, but there is no non-circular argument for this ban on reasoning according to prudence. As Rescher says,

> it is (quintessentially) rational to follow the dictates of prudence - to act on that alternative which seems optimally advantageous. (Indeed that is how economists and decision theorists define "rationality.") And if this is so with actions in general, then why not in the particular case of "acts of acceptance"? Throughout the sphere of rational decision, acceptance is a matter of combining and mixing considerations of probability (evidence) and utility (value). So why not in this sphere of propositional acceptance as well?[109]

It ought to be bulgingly obvious that either pragmatic reasons justify no acts ('which seems very strange' to Rescher), or they justify some acts but not acts of propositional acceptance ('which needs a supportive argument that has never yet been given' and which is intolerably arbitrary), or they justify the acts that they justify, of belief adoption or otherwise. Acts of acceptance are not irrational *per se.*

Alternatively one could mean there is something *morally* wrong with doing any believing for the reasons Berkeley espouses. A good example is Robinson's opinion that 'it is always wicked to recommend anybody to believe anything on the ground that he or anybody else will feel better or be more moral or successful for doing so, or on any ground whatever except that the available considerations indicate that it is probably true.'[110] The practice is 'disgusting and degrading'. 'No belief is as such morally wrong; but it is morally wrong to form one's beliefs in view of something other than truth and probability.'[111] Robinson has his own idea about what is meant by 'morally wrong', though his secular platitudes are unencumbered by anything resembling an argument for his view 'that the only good reason for a moral law is that its reign in a society substantially decreases misery in that society ... the reason for morality is the alleviation of suffering.' So he must think that it is 'true' (or probably true) that anything that can be done is well done if it diminishes human misery, *except* for the formation of belief. Were it true that some belief, whose truth

51

cannot be cognitively ascertained or defeated, would if accepted *maximally* diminish human misery, one would *nonetheless* be morally wrong to adopt it! No argument is forthcoming to explain why the basis for choosing moral laws and deciding how to behave should not also form a basis for accepting beliefs; it seems some other, unnamed factor constitutes moral wrongness just for the special case of belief adoption. Truth-seeking takes priority over diminishing human misery, even when all other things are equal. If this thesis is not outright incoherent, it is certainly unsympathetic, unsubstantiated, and eccentric.

Robinson forms his belief about the moral iniquity of certain routes to belief acceptance on the basis, we must presume, of evidence, and not of some value like prudence or utility. I am at a loss to imagine what evidence points him to both the rightness of diminishing human misery, and to the *overriding* rightness of global truth-orientation. The unfathomable dogma of Clifford, who asserts value-influenced belief acceptance to be inherently evil regardless of the consequences – 'it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence' – has been sufficiently discredited by James, in my opinion, and Robinson produces nothing to resuscitate it. [112]

A preference for truth that overrides the promotion of welfare, unless one mistakenly thinks that reality necessarily corresponds to human needs, betrays either a lack of genuine commitment to diminishing human misery, or a failure to appreciate its scale, imminence, and importance. Such an appreciation is the point from which Berkeley's practical theology starts. Prudential belief-adoption is not wishful thinking, but the reverse. It takes reality and its threats seriously, and will consider any potential defence, refusing to sacrifice these for an obscurely motivated and impossible to fulfill requirement that belief restrict itself not merely to what the evidence permits, but what it makes highly likely. We met with a theoretical problem of evil, and decided that the ill-adaptedness of the world to the happiness of rational souls barred Berkeley's probable argument for a good God. The world appears as a complex of prizes to be gained or unclaimed, misfortunes to be hurdled or sucked into, incentives and deterrents, promises and risks, and it is not designed to abet rational agents in their navigation of it, or anyway the extent

to which it is so adapted is unsatisfactory. Misery is inevitable. This circumstance does not herald the end of speculative theology in general, if it is possible that our unsatisfactory adaptation serves some good purpose; but it does embarrass Berkeley's speculative theology. However there is another problem about evil, understanding evil broadly as denoting states of affairs one would prefer not to pertain, which is the practical problem of how to fend off those states of affairs. From this perspective, Berkeley's frank and virtually universally shared observation of the inevitable unhappiness of rational agents in the present world becomes, not a fatal terminus but the point of departure for a theological argument. Given a desire on the part of rational agents to be happy, and given the world's refusal to co-operate, those agents must not fail to avail themselves of solutions that promise to relieve unhappiness and fuel their prospects for contentment and satisfaction. In particular, they ought to believe in God, because doing so is an indispensable means to the end of happiness.

So when Berkeley has his adversaries protest in the *Alciphron* that '[c]onvenience is one thing, and truth is another'[113], he is ready to minimise the significance of the distinction. He regards it as paramount to know 'whether the notions of your minute philosophy are worth proving. I mean, whether they are of use and service to mankind,'[114] and insists that 'the general good of mankind ... be regarded as a rule or measure of moral truths, of all such truths as direct or influence the moral actions of men.'[115] It is plain that though there is obviously a role in Berkeley's thought for evidentially prompted belief adoption, in the arena of choosing actions one's desired ends take precedence: there, 'utility and truth are not to be divided; the general good of mankind being the rule or measure of moral truth.'[116] Once the usefulness of religion is adumbrated, there is no real or sensible further question about its truth or falsity.

This disposition in Berkeley is remarkable for its ubiquity, once one is alert to it: 'one great mark of the truth of Christianity is, in my mind, its tendency to do good, which seems the north star to conduct our judgement in moral matters, and in all things of a practic nature; moral or practical goods being ever connected with universal benefit.'[117] For Berkeley such notions as 'the immortality of the soul' are

ones he is 'fond of, as what supports the mind with a very pleasing prospect. And if it be an error,' Berkeley would be 'sorry to know the truth.'[118] For 'knowledge of such perfections as might either give us pleasure in the contemplation of them, or direct our conduct to the great ends of life, are valuable perfections ... shall a wise man prefer the knowledge of a troublesome and afflicting truth before a pleasant error that would cheer his soul with joy and comfort, and be attended with no ill consequences?'[119]

He is cheerfully guilty of perpetrating Robinson's 'sinister suggestion ... that we ought to preach religion whether or not it is true ... which implies that truth is below comfort in value'.[120] Robinson thinks that 'the main irrationality of religion is preferring comfort to truth',[121] but there is nothing irrational about this preference. Berkeley is entitled to it, and in general to the principle that beliefs can be adopted with the attainment of benefits in view. It remains to be seen exactly what benefits he expects to flow from adopting a divine command theory of moral obligation, and why. I must begin by fulfilling an earlier promise to discover what Berkeley means by happiness, and why he thinks one ought to act so as to maximise one's prospect of it. Berkeley's view, the key to his philosophy, that 'liberty and truth are not in themselves desirable, but only as they relate to a further end ... viz human happiness',[122] is one which it is legitimate to hold. Are the rest of us constrained to share it?

CHAPTER SIX

In the early stages of Berkeley's thought we see him equate the 'summum bonum' with 'sensual pleasure', and refer to this equation as 'the great principle of morality. This once rightly understood all the doctrines even the severest of the gospels may clearly be demonstrated.'[123] And this fundamental identification of the end of human endeavour as pleasure and, equivalently, the avoidance of its opposite, persists through his work. 'Profit and pleasure are the ends that a reasonable creature would propose to obtain by study, or indeed by any other undertaking.'[124] Here he refers to profit and pleasure, but it is clear that profit is profitable only insofar as it is pleasurable, that interest is inseparable from happiness. 'I allow not of the distinction that is made twixt profit and pleasure.'[125] Pleasurable states of consciousness are the goal aimed at in rational activity; if we fail to assess prospective action in terms of the end it serves, we will not be acting but mechanically reacting, and when we ask what that end is, pleasure figures as the sole relevant feature in the final rational analysis. Conroy aptly labels this position as 'sensate eudaemonism.'[126]

It should be stressed that this position is progressively qualified. Berkeley is not advancing the ideas of the 'Epicureans', who 'err in making brutes and infants the speculum nature.'[127] Fully fledged human agents are much more complex, their 'happiness or pleasure' being divisible into more subtle categories: 'the gratification of sense, or passion, or our rational faculties ... gratification of passion may be subdivided into that which may be acquired by natural or fantastical goods.'[128] The goal of our actions is not the ephemeral sensuality of the hedonist, against whose life plan Berkeley pitches the Platonic thesis that 'the appetites are always craving, to preserve pleasure alive ... [the hedonist is] a leaky vessel, always filling and never full.'[129] In the case of the unsophisticated sensual pleasure seeker 'the cravings are tedious, the satisfaction momentary'.[130] There is a hierarchy of pleasures. The 'rational' gratifications of righteous conduct are the most fulfilling, as human nature is so contrived as to respond most deeply to them; the pleasurable effects of sensual activity, as shared with other animals, are both the least

rewarding and the most deceptive, or self-defeating, as they typically entail threats to longer term, more satisfying pleasures; between these are passionate motivations to act, which may be more or less suited to human nature:

> It is of great use to consider the pleasures which constitute human happiness, as they are distinguished into natural and fantastical. *Natural pleasures* I call those, which, not depending on the fashion and caprice of any particular age or nation, are suited to human nature in general, and were intended by Providence as rewards for the using our faculties agreeably to the ends for which they were given us. *Fantastical pleasures* [which he also calls 'conventional' pleasures] are those which, having no natural fitness to delight our minds, presuppose some particular whim or taste accidentally prevailing in a set of people, to which it is owing that they please.[131]

He gives an example: 'it is evident that a desire terminated in money is fantastical'. Money is but a means to the end of happiness, but like other means it can be mistaken for an end in itself, in which case obsession with it might threaten the attainment of the end it can be useful for. (Philosophy is another means to the end of happiness, which one is misperfoming if it doesn't culminate in happiness promotion.)

> [A]s wise men engage in the pursuit of means from a farther view of some natural good with which they are connected; fools ... blindly pursue the means, without any design or prospect of applying them. The result whereof is, that they entail upon themselves the anxiety and toil, but are debarred from the subsequent delights which arise to wiser men; since their views, not reaching the end, terminate in those things which, although they have a relative goodness, yet considered absolutely are indifferent, or it may be evil.[132]

Berkeley is a type of perfectionist then. '[W]e are prompted to natural pleasures by an instinct impressed on our minds by the Author of our nature, who best understands our frames, and consequently best knows what those pleasures are which will give us the least uneasiness in the pursuit, and the greatest satisfaction in the enjoyment of them.'[133] People are constituted in such a way that some

pleasurable pursuits will be more pleasurable than others, and so should dictate our choice of action. His concept of what people should act so as to realise is derived from his idea of what their nature is most apt to respond happily to over time. The question, given this understanding of Berkeley's teleology, is why one 'ought' to agree with it. For Berkeley rational behaviour is not a question of what an agent wants to do at any given moment, where desired outcomes however fleeting yield a prescription for what one ought to do. But any assignment of an end of endeavour has been vigourously contested. Why should an agent have to seek happiness; why cannot they take teleological responsibility for themselves, and act so as to achieve whatever end they feel like?

<p align="center">* * * * *</p>

G An agent ought to act so as to maximise his or her prospect of happiness.

Robinson protests that 'everything whatever logically could be sought by someone as a means to something else. And it seems very probable that everything that is sought by anybody is sought by somebody as a means to something else.'[134] This is correct. The question is whether Berkeley may dismiss any seekings that do not terminate in happiness as simply mistaken. What is fundamental for him is that, however you slice it, happiness (relating to the gratification of senses, passions, reason, ephemeral or contemplative) is basic to and universal in human motivation, and any other end is sought ultimately as a means to that end. For instance, knowledge is not the be-all and end-all of human life. The truth is desirable to have, not as an end in itself, but as a means to a different end, which is the only end-in-itself. Anything that is valuable is so in virtue of being a means to this end. Happiness is therefore the ground of value, and is not just a place-holder, or catch all word for whatever it is that people want. Berkeley has specified exactly what it is, and what is valuable is so to the extent that it gratifies in the Berkeleian sense. Who is he to say so? '[S]urely everyone may be allowed to know what he wants, and wherein his true happiness consists?'[135]

Berkeley does not offer anything amounting to a *proof* of the contention that happiness is the goal of any reasonable activity, or that it is to be defined with a hierarchy of pleasure in view. He does in places suggest, in an Aristotelian fashion,

<p align="center">57</p>

that there can be experts in moral matters,[136] likening the discernment of good and bad writing to the discernment of good and bad ends, the 'maturity and improvement of understanding' needed for which do not make them any 'less real'. I won't delve into these question-begging arguments here. Berkeley wants to explain to people how to have (his idea of) a happy life – the task of philosophy – and is exasperated by the trend to demand first whether one ought to have a happy life – the distraction of sophistry. But an argument proving what people ought to want is certainly unavailable.

He furnishes a substantive standard for rational choice. There are correct and incorrect answers to questions about what is good – preferable – that need not appeal to any actual preferences. There are objects or states of affairs which are valuable regardless of whether any agent exhibits or expresses a preference for them. A subjectivist will find this claim illegitimate, since 'to treat the content of preference as subject to rational assessment ... requires an objective conception of value,'[137] and no such thing is sustainable. One cannot be confused about the point of one's own activities. If one does have a clear and considered preference for, say, the true over the useful, no mistake is made, since there is no standpoint for evaluation beyond that expressed in actual preferences from which to evaluate it. One could quite legitimately take imprudence, a disregard for one's well-being, to be the goal of activity. 'Our view is that prudence is rational for those who have a considered preference for being prudent, but not for those who on full reflection do not.'[138] To one who prefers to be happy, a preference for unhappiness will seem paradigmatically unreasonable, but no reason can be produced to confirm that perception. 'To suppose one preference superior to another is simply to prefer the one to the other.'[139] Mandeville, one of Berkeley's principal 'freethinking' targets, denies that there is a 'real worth and excellency in things, a preeminence of one above another, which everyone will always agree to that well understands them',[140] and finds that notions of the 'real worth of things are most commonly precarious and alterable as modes and customs vary.'[141] Now, however suggestive he finds changing tastes as regards the reality of a proper taste, Berkeley could rightly insist that there is a proper taste all the same. However, the general point that no-one can

58

be forced by reason to acknowledge any particular end as their own is, I think, entirely valid. We must keep Berkeley to the diluted form of his argument:

G1 An agent acts so as to maximise his or her prospect of happiness,

understanding this to say that this is what in fact does lie at the basis of psychological motivation of everyone's actions, though these can miss the mark due to poor reasoning about what happiness consists in and the means of attaining it. 'What it is for a man to be happy, or an object good, everyone may think he knows. But to frame an abstract idea of happiness, prescinded from all particular pleasure, or of goodness, from everything that is good, this is what few can pretend to;'[142] pleasure is 'the great spring of action, and that from which the conduct of life takes its basis.'[143] On this modified argument, one could take unhappiness to be the goal of one's activity, contra Berkeley, but no-one in fact does, and the argument can be directed *ad hominem* to anyone interested in being happy in the expectation that this will involve virtually everyone. Ultimate ends are not amenable to direct demonstration: '[y]ou can't argue people into accepting an ultimate end, utility or any other, if they in fact reject it. But the whole case of utilitarians is that people don't reject it, that they do all operate on it, albeit in a confused and self-defeating fashion.'[144]

So the argument can mollify the anti-objectivist if it proceeds as an invitational argument, expecting still to have a significant audience. 'No agent can be conceived as indifferent to pain or pleasure,'[145] Berkeley thinks, and while this may not after all have the force of logically excluding such indifference, one may think that it should attract sufficient attention to make the argument that builds on it an important one.

Though so far the argument does not depend upon an objective conception of value, one of its outcomes, of course, is intended to be that people will adopt such a conception, treating the will of God as constitutive of morality. If happiness if what is preferred, it is rational to subject one's preferences to assessment, and that procedure will result in mandating an objectivist stance. It remains to see why this is so. Given the possibility and legitimacy of adopting a certain set of beliefs, and the fact if it is one that one wishes to be happy, and a consensus about what

happiness consists in, how do the theistic beliefs in question operate to get individual agents what they want, and why could not a different set of beliefs do the same job?

CHAPTER SEVEN

The perceived amoralism of Mandeville and his ilk forms one of the main targets in *Alciphron*, represented in the character of Lysicles. Berkeley rejected the elevation of what he regarded as the more superficial pleasures (not *qua* pleasures, but as ultimately entraining a surfeit of pains, and in the meantime disabling, replacing or preventing one from looking into more satisfying, or pleasurable pleasures).[146] He also thought the cynics neglected what is due to the community, denying the rationality of other-regarding behaviour. The second target, personified as *Alciphron* himself, is the sentimentalism recently popularised by Shaftesbury. Like Mandeville's, this system offends Berkeley by its excision of God from the prescriptive scene. Although the moral sensibility identified by Shaftesbury as the source and self-justification of moral dispositions may be more admirable to Berkeley than the pre-reflective egoism he (perhaps a little harshly) attributes to Mandeville, neither found any room for God in their conception of moral life. Both could be scathing about the motive of religious belief. For Mandeville, this is a delusory and oppressive shackle bordering on the preposterous.[147] For Shaftesbury, it is an unworthy preoccupation with selfish rewards that form no part of a good person's goodness. For Berkeley, these are pernicious errors. Belief in God is the only motivation that will do the job; in true pragmatist spirit, doing the job is what matters.

Berkeley's principal concern is that disbelief in God will remove the motivations of rewards and punishments in a future state, which are the only ones that can actually move people to act so as to achieve their ends and avoid misery in the present state. He agrees that virtue is rewarding in itself for most people, but sympathetic sentiments are opposed by other impulses which can easily overwhelm them: 'a natural gratification attends good actions ... yet titles, estates and fantastical pleasures are more ardently sought after by most men'.[148] According to Berkeley, moral sense theories leave ethical judgement on the same footing as aesthetic judgement, entailing a motivational imbalance. Desires are familiar motives to act, but aesthetic apprehension is less clearly so. What sober person

thinks that 'the mere *beauty* of fortitude, temperance, and justice is sufficient to sustain the mind of man in a severe course of self-denial against all the temptations of present profit and sensuality'?[149]

Whether the charge of aestheticism is a fair diagnosis of moral sense theories in general is not clear, though it has some application to Shaftesbury. The point is that, in an analysis of the sources of 'virtue', the moral sense has a role to play, but, in any more ambitious quest to give agents reasons to abide by their more virtuous instincts, a moral sense theory has nothing to offer. It explains certain behaviours, but justifies none. Virtuous sentiments are readily ignored, but virtue based on religious belief paves the way to rewards which agents will find more rewarding than the mere exercise of virtue itself.

We said that:

H Agents are prone, individually and collectively, to act in ways that are significantly less effective in maximising their own happiness than they could be.

Berkeley thinks the sentimentalist is mistaken in expecting whatever natural propensity to act morally a given person may be endowed with to help them engage in the actions that will promote their interest and refrain from those that will damage it. The right thing to do is a matter of reason, not emotion, which involves uncertainty and relativism unacceptable to Berkeley. But why would virtuous behaviour, which he claims will follow the adoption of religious belief, help one maximise one's own happiness? How exactly is one mistaken, who considers himself perfectly well equipped to figure out how to achieve his ends?[150]

'One great cause of miscarriage in men's affairs is that they too much regard the present.'[151] This 'short-sightedness' is an ubiquitous phenomenon in human psychology, Berkeley notices. Now a compelling argument derived from Frank apprises the evolution of certain ('moral') emotions in the light of their role as an advantageous check on just this tendency, the irrational discounting of future goods and harms when allured by 'specious' present rewards. Faced with an impulse-control problem, emotions such as shame 'shift the relevant payoff into the current moment' so that the desire to abstain from tempting, but ultimately

62

deleterious behaviour can compete on a sounder footing with the instinct to grab any easily available valued object, fine-tuning the default psychological reward mechanism which opts for the bird in the hand. For example, one might be tempted to steal, and the attraction of the object would lead one both to underestimate the likelihood of being caught and to discount the costs of being caught, which become proportionally less vivid and compelling, psychologically, the further into the future they are. In that case, the phenomenon of conscience and the foretaste of shame it confers bring the costs into the present, giving them a reality that allows one to act more rationally by protecting the reputation that will allow more sustained productive activity.

More generally, such emotions serve the strategic function of solving commitment problems. '[M]aterial incentives at a given moment prompt people to behave in ways contrary to their ultimate material interest', making them difficult to trust in co-operative projects for mutual benefit.[152] Emotions allow the agent to be swayed by long-term considerations despite the inversely proportional attractiveness of a reward relative to its delay, so that the agent can make believable threats and promises despite the strong possibility that it will not in the event be rational to carry them out: '[b]eing known to experience certain emotions enables us to make commitments that would otherwise not be credible.'[153]

The check supplied by such emotions as shame is frequently overridden, however, and this fact is known to all parties negotiating mutually beneficial enterprises. Moral sentiment is inadequate to the task, Berkeley believes. Presented with what Frank calls a 'golden opportunity', it may not intervene in favour of restraint for agents who, as we saw Berkeley candidly observe, are fools if they operate on any principle other than self-interest: 'it should even seem that a man who believes no future state, would act a foolish part in being thoroughly honest. For what reason is there why such a one should postpone his own private interest or pleasure to the doing his duty? ... he that ... should yet conscientiously deny himself a present good in any incident where he may save appearances is altogether as stupid as he that would trust him at such a juncture.'[154] The device of religious belief assures co-operative behaviour, and reassures potential co-

operators, permitting all concerned to get on with the projects that will pay off materially, projects that could never go forward if everyone had to rely on each others' natural virtue and trustworthiness, leaving them worse off. So Berkeley argues, at any rate.

We can now see why Berkeley thinks both unadulterated egoism (not filtered through wise adoption of religious belief, with all that this must logically entail) and optimistic sentimentalism fail to produce the goods. The egoist wants to improve his lot, but, apart from being prone to select enticing activities that are personally detrimental, he is constitutionally prone to be an ineffective co-operator, and co-operative enterprise is the surest way to improving one's lot. And the built-in compensations of moral sentiment that allow agents to trust one another in spite of the 'compliance gap' that inevitably arises are not sufficiently effective:

> Punishments and rewards have always had, and always will have, the greatest weight with men, and the most considerable of both kinds are proposed by religion ... Human regards may restrain men from open and penal offences; but the fear of God is a restraint from all degrees of crimes, however circumstanced.'[155] 'I will not say, these men [sentimentalists] act treacherously in the course of virtue; but will anyone deny that they act foolishly, who pretend to advance the interest of it by destroying or weakening the strongest motives to it ... they must be destitute of passion themselves, and unacquainted with the force it hath on the minds of others, who can imagine that the mere beauty of fortitude, temperance, and justice is sufficient to sustain the mind of man in a sever course of self-denial against all the temptations of present profit and sensuality.[156]

If an agent, as a rule, requires a presumptive set of moral dispositions to earn admittance to beneficial joint projects (business, marriage, agriculture), a facility for overriding the disposition if and when it looks especially smart threatens the integrity of the otherwise desirable moral outlook. The readiness of an opportunist to cheat or defect where it seems a decent gamble may itself be detectable by fellow agents, if overridden scruples still stimulated physical 'tells',[157] of course, but this has not proved much of a deterrent. What is a deterrent, says Berkeley, is the

prospect of punishment by an all-seeing entity; and the reason that belief in the moral sovereignty of such an entity is rational to adopt is that individual agents will be better off in the present world for having a ground for restraint that equips them to participate long-term in social activities. We ought then to make explicit a tacit premise in the argument laid out in Chapter Five:

S God will reward compliance with divine commands and punish non-compliance in a future state, such that potential benefits and costs there dwarf any to be had by complying or not complying in the present world.

I cannot assess the merits of this complex piece of argumentation in the present study, wishing merely to outline the interesting philosophical structure and the ambitious ground that Berkeley covers, though one might recall in passing Mill's reservation: 'rewards and punishments postponed to that distance of time, and never seen by the eye, are not calculated, even when infinite and eternal, to have, on ordinary minds, a very powerful effect in opposition to strong temptation.'[158] The very problem of discounting non-vivid future costs and benefits seems equally to affect the very mechanism adoption of which is supposed to solve it. And the movement from selfish desire through the enforcement of social contracts to religious belief is shaky in so far as it assumes a large amount about what an agent does want precisely, and neglects costs that may result from such religious belief (as long as it is, factually speaking, false) on the egoist model that the structure revolves around.

On the other hand, if an agent is of a type to properly take on board the religious world-view, the depth of commitment to it in fact seems to lessen the effect of distance on the force of its incentive scheme and, Berkeley argues, provides additional, unique benefits in the immediate personal sphere, above and beyond any that accrue in the social environment.

<p style="text-align:center">* * * * *</p>

Berkeley bolsters the argument (produced in Chapter Five) with this premise:

T Believers have access to a source of happiness not available to non-believers.

Believing in God (the provident deity, as described) and accompanying propositions, such as the immortality of the soul, is a self-standing, intense and

irreplaceable fund of happiness: 'if we shape our lives by the divine will they are sure to be easy and delightful, this being the only method to promote private as well as public happiness',[159] because God is 'a perpetual spring of gladness in the mind. This lessens our calamities, and doubles our joys. Without this the highest state of life is insipid, and with it the lowest is a paradise.'[160] Belief in God is a source of inestimable comfort which helps agents cope with setbacks and tragedies, and which no agent concerned with happiness can therefore afford to overlook. No matter how badly things go, one can reconcile oneself by the seeing undesired states of affairs as encompassed within the purview of a loving deity. Communion with a greater being beyond the terrors and foibles of earthly life answers to a pressing need, enabling the discernment of pattern and sense. This is a familiar refrain, for sure, but that very familiarity may encourage its underestimation, whereas Berkeley's prose transmits at least his own successful exploitation of the divine resource.

The capacity of religious belief to permit transcendence of present difficulties is not, however, entirely to its credit if, as detractors suggest, one is thereby induced slavishly to suffer intolerable conditions which otherwise one might attempt to alter, asserting one's rights perhaps. It is true that powerful elites have exploited religious commitments to perpetuate the subjugation of their human resources, but Berkeley was not alone in noticing that 'powerful', and not 'elite', is the operative word here. Hobbes fathered the contractarian tradition with his realism about the inevitability of many agents having to deal with more powerful agents, and his idea that morality must take its cue from the expediencies of the balance of power. Berkeley harbours no illusions about the inevitability of rational acquiescence at some point, confronted with a power able to inflict costs that outweigh any benefits of resistance. This once acknowledged, it is then surely all the more rational to derive whatever comforts are available from one's attitudes to that acquiescence, Berkeley implies; and the more so by fostering a system that supplies a substantial check on the activities of the powerful, to the extent that they are swayed by it. Such a system he thinks religion supplies, as long as it meets certain conditions about the impartial lovingness of God. (*Passive Obedience* is in large measure just such a

political argument to the wisdom of refraining from resistance to established power.)

Does this type of doctrine enjoin an ugly, counter-productive stoicism? This thought led some to accuse Berkeley of possessing 'an ideology that justified neglect of the material conditions of human life.'[161] But it is a mistake to polarise the issue thus, and there is such a thing as neglecting one's spiritual condition. Berkeley's sincere declarations of the joy he derives from his faith, facile as it is to belittle conversationally, cannot be dismissed by serious seekers of happiness who have made no open-minded attempt at it. Berkeley perceives himself as steering a course between 'the nastiness of the cynic and the insensibility of the stoic'[162] Because his God must be a loving, responsive and hope-giving one, human needs are not arbitrarily trodden on. One should be a realist about the workings of the world, he contends, but if one is a realist one will come to see the value in idealising God; one should be an idealist, but one should be a realist about what one is an idealist about. It is at this interface of conscientious human striving to make the best of one's condition in the face of opposition that Berkeley's philosophy operates.

CHAPTER EIGHT

[S]ceptic as you are, you own it probable there is a God, certain that the Christian religion is useful, possible it may be true, certain that, if it be, minute philosophers are in a bad way. This being the case, how can it be questioned what course a wise man should take? Whether the principles of Christians or infidels are truest may be made a question; but which are safest can be none.[163]

Whether or not to believe in God is a live choice. Evidential reasoning warrants neither belief nor unbelief; this circumstance does not kill the choice off though, since practical reasoning may yet deliver one option as superior to the other.[164] This insight is shared by Berkeley and Pascal, although Berkeley attempts to do with evidential reasoning what Pascal asserts cannot be done, claiming to turn up facts about God's nature. (Pascal is right to be sceptical on this score.)

Whether or not to believe in God is also, in the Jamesian idiom, a forced choice, according to Pascal. If the only reasons for which the choice could legitimately be made were evidential, this would not be the case. For the truth detecting faculty is at liberty to suspend assent when it is not satisfied that the evidence supports a conclusion. There is another kind of reason that warrants a choice, however, a prudential kind of reason, and in this case, as in many practical situations, the decision to make no decision is irrational. It leads to outcomes the prudent agent should not prefer. In the case of a man trapped on a mountain ledge whose only possible means of survival is to pull off an improbable leap, and who can either believe he can pull it off, believe he can't pull it off, or refuse to settle on one or other of these beliefs, his chances of pulling it off are raised by adopting the first belief; in the case of a man who has no idea of the probability that God exists, or thinks that the probability is .5, he can either believe in God, disbelieve, or withhold judgement, and the costs of misguided belief are negligible when set beside the advantages of a belief that will be exonerated and the costs of disbelief that will not be.

To withhold judgement in the choice under consideration is to side with

disbelief, because of the sort of God the choice contends with. This is the weakest point in Pascal's pioneering argument. For the person wondering whether or not to believe in a Christian God, the wager argument is quite plainly decisive; and this will be sufficient for a large number of actual wonderers, who ought therefore to enter the fold when they understand what Pascal has to say. It is not sufficient for everyone[165]: not for self-described freethinkers, not for agnostics without substantial tradition or spiritual 'home', and in particular not for fellow philosophers. For the hardest set of choosers, whom one should address if one wishes to find the strongest possible arguments, belief-suspension is an option – the choice is no longer forced, since, just as evidential reasoning found no grounds for preferring one option, neither does their prudential reasoning.

Berkeley addresses the hardest set of choosers, attempting to reinstate the Christian God as the most attractive option by including amongst the payoffs some benefits and costs that accrue to belief and disbelief respectively in the *present* world, as well as the trans-world benefits with which Pascal is exclusively concerned and which prevent him from reaching out to the 'distanced' non-believer.[166] If belief in a particular type of God is rational for prudential reasons directed at present-world goods, and if the benefits outweigh whatever costs attach to the belief's being mistaken,[167] then we have an argument that shares with Pascal a compelling practical ground for choice but boasts a mightier invitational reach. And the choice becomes forced again - prudence cannot ignore definite information about costs and benefits.

Rescher notes an attempt to defend Pascal by Lachelier, which attributes just this expansivness to his argument; but, as Rescher says, the 'prudential-in-the-here-and-now' argument may be interesting but 'just is not Pascal's'.[168] Had Pascal argued in this way, the point of including otherwordly considerations would have been lost, for if the belief-choice is prudential temporally speaking, then it dominates the decision regardless of those considerations. (Conversely, if the Christian God exists and can be known to exist, then Berkeleian practical arguments aimed at persuading one to construe the belief-choice as a duty, above and beyond its promotion of one's interest, are *de trop*. If belief in God is so

69

obviously in one's interest, then one ought to believe in him and act the ways he wills one to act, and there is no need to say anything further about duty, which from the point of view of practical reasoning introduces no added compunction.)

* * * * *

It is instructive to contrast Berkeley's practical theistic 'proof' with Kant's. Like Berkeley, Kant holds that human ends are manifestly elusive in the phenomenal realm - 'the welfare proportioned to [holiness of life] ... under the name of happiness, cannot be attained at all in this world (so far as our own power is concerned).'[169] Both think that this condition serves to generate religious faith (in what Kant announces as its core sense, divested of those historical or psychological accretions which are strictly speaking accidental). For Kant, the highest good (*summum bonum*) consists of both morality ('the first and principal element') and (the second element) 'happiness proportionate to that morality'. Our duty as rational agents is the pursuit of that state of affairs which realises the *summum bonum*; but happiness attained and happiness merited are flagrantly inharmonious; but ought implies can: 'we ought to endeavour to promote the *summum bonum* which, therefore, must be possible'.[170] Therefore, our duty as rational agents entails that an immortal soul, and a good God to whose judgement its fate is subject, be *necessary postulates* of our practical reasoning. Only on these presuppositions can the highest good which action aims at conceivably be implementable.

It is far from obvious that Kant's reasoning on this score is not reversible to obtain a more pessimistic result. If it is beyond one's power to bring about the highest good - which is why God's power is introduced - one might determine that there is no obligation to do so, since there is no obligation without possibility of fulfilling it, as Kant stipulates. Instead of enjoining religious faith, the argument might on the face of it prompt one to dismantle or adjust the description of the highest good, and to suspect the thinking that committed one to it. This is at the root of Hick's dissatisfaction. The factual possibility of the *summum bonum*, he says, depends on there being a moral obligation to bring it about, which obligation must lie with people and not with God, who as the target of the argument cannot be used to propel it:

we are not however under obligation to bring about the second part of the *summmum bonum*, for this is not within our power; and therefore there is no implication, from any obligation lying on us, concerning the factual possibility of this second part, or accordingly, of the *summum bonum* as a whole. Nor therefore is there any proper ground in our moral duty for postulating the existence of God as the agent necessary to bring about the *summum bonum*.[171]

Kant starts to go wrong by equivocating between 'ought to' and 'ought to try to'. *Ought* implies *can*, but *ought to try* does not imply *can*, only at most *can try*. That one ought to try to do something carries no implications about the probability or even possibility of success. So granting what many will doubt, that 'we ought to endeavour' to realise a state of affairs which aligns happiness with holiness, nothing follows concerning the realisability of that state of affairs. Kant, tellingly, refers constantly to our obligation to 'endeavour' to realise the highest good, no doubt because it is queer to speak of our obligation to realise something which is unrealisable by us. He then pulls the divinity postulate from his hat on the strength of the patent fact that there is no sense in thinking of an action as obligatory when it is impossible. But there are perfectly sensible ways in which we can construe a situation as one where one ought to *try* to do something though it remains uncertain whether we actually can do that thing. This is after all the force of 'try' in many cases, the point of including it. As we have already ascertained, Berkeley grants a legitimate function for endeavour in situations where it is *doomed* to failure - even when we know it (though oftentimes you never know until you've tried). There is, he maintains, a point in trying to live up to a standard, however unlikely or unfeasible its full satisfaction might be. If the approach itself yields desirable outcomes, and if these will only be harvested by shooting above them, then the attempt to do what cannot be done is rationally vindicated. There need be no contradiction, inconsistency, or denial of one's purposive rationality involved in aspiring to instantiate a state of affairs without a firm conviction of its possibility.

For both Berkeley and Kant, '[t]he human condition is a *problem*; the ultimate response to it, therefore, is not *contemplation* but *decision*.'[172] But the theological

argument which I have claimed to be Berkeley's core, and strongest argument is launched by ('hypothetical') considerations which Kant would have abhorred, namely an individual agent's desire for happiness, which Berkeley thinks is best served by adopting God, and subsequently concern for the well-being of others, as a regulative ideal. For Kant, a rational agent must already be committed to the substantive ideals of the golden rule before his theological argument starts out, as Wood oberves: '[t]he object of need in this case is not based on subjective inclination, but arises from the moral law.'[173] Kant the rationalist favours happiness proportionate to morality; Berkeley the empiricist is content with happiness: 'on the basis of practical considerations holding for each man personally as a moral agent, Kant proposes to justify and even rationally to require of each man the personal conviction that there exists a God and a future life.'[174] If we substitute for the word 'moral' here the phrase 'happiness-seeking individual', we come close to a synopsis of Berkeley's view.

The differences and similarities between Berkeley, Pascal and Kant help illuminate Berkeley's position.[175] There is one more argument for belief in God which Berkeley may sometimes seem to veer close to, but from which he should be dissociated. Conscience, he says, 'always supposeth the being of a God' (from which it follows that 'when the fear of God is once extinguished the mind must be very easy with respect to other duties, which become outward pretences and formalities, from the moment that they quit their hold upon the conscience.')

He is *not* here arguing from the *existence* of conscience to the existence of God. Some have tried to deploy phenomenological obligatoriness, for example, as proof that God exists, since (they say) obligation would be very 'queer' in a Godless world. In conscience, likewise, one seems to have internalised an external and personalised pressure to feel a certain way, the 'power' and 'knowledge' of which are fearsome. The argument from queerness, however, may not assume there are obligations, as if this were not the very point at issue in much of metaethical dispute.[176] People can 'step outside' what feels obligatory and ask whether it really is, and whether anything is. Perhaps apparent obligations have been inculcated to further some purpose of the inculcator; perhaps our moral emotions in general

72

oppress us to some extent or other, and we ought to question what obligations to commit to, emancipating ourselves from those we rationally reject. Whatever obligations one commits to, if any, they are no longer obligatory because God exists, but because of whatever reason led to the commitment, and the perception of spiritual continuity with a greater being that sometimes reminds one to stick with them is not necessarily veracious, for there are alternative plausible explanations of the phenomenon. It could be an evolutionary mechanism for protecting one's reputation, for example.

Instead Berkeley is making the point that the phenomenon of conscience does not operate effectively unless accompanied by belief in God - it *will* be deserted by rational evaluators unless they apprehend it as an expression of the will of God. The 'queer' force of conscience does not form part of his cognitive arguments for religious belief, nor should it.

CONCLUSION

Berkeley maps out two routes that purportedly lead to a divine command theory of moral obligation. In the first instance, we saw that he tries to demonstrate the existence of a good, all-knowing and provident deity, and urges that we ought to our adjust our actions so as to obey its will on the basis, not of the mere fact that it is God's will, but because of the epistemological value God's commands have for us in illuminating the best possible rules for promoting human welfare. This understanding allows us to see how Berkeley must respond to the dilemma of the *Euthyphro,* and it is of interest mainly because that type of argument in Berkeley has been largely overlooked. Berkeley cannot be a purist, we saw, because of the conflict between the assumptions of purism – which defines what is good entirely as a function of what God deems good – and the very fact that Berkeley thinks it a proper object of empirical investigation to determine whether or not God is good. This conflict too deserved an airing it has seldom received.

Why Berkeley starts from the presumption that the promotion of human welfare is good in that inquiry, we did not establish. The argument not succeeding at securing another key premise, there was no need to go further. That premise, that God can be known to be omnibenevolent, is fatally vulnerable to Hume's objections from the phenomenon of evil. While, as Hume allows, evil does not logically defeat theism, he is correct in arguing that it does prevent an inference from the natural order to a good creator. Berkeley deploys precisely the sort of method that Hume finds fault with, pronouncing the probability that God is good to be the best explanation of the natural order. However, while a good God might be possible in spite of aspects of the natural order that appear to tell against it, it cannot be claimed to be probable.

Hume's argument moreover is explicitly directed at theists who conceive of the attributes of God as qualitatively distinct from the attributes of people. Partly to allow the reconciliation of evil and a good God, some theologians deny that we can properly or literally comprehend what God is like, though they still think themselves entitled to talk of his goodness. Berkeley vehemently attacks this

74

position, and the arguments that motivate his metaphysical idealism compel him to. Consequently the dilemma posed by Hume is acute for Berkeley. I find it acute for speculative theology in general. As Wood comments in a slightly different context:

> It may seem paradoxical that, on the one hand, Kant should have so strenuously insisted on a concept of God so precisely determined from the moral and metaphysical view as an ontologically perfect intelligent volitional agent possessed of supreme holiness, benevolence and justice; while on the other hand he was so anxious to render this concept as empty, vague, and indefinite as possible by placing it beyond the power of our faculties to comprehend. The paradox ... seems to belong in one form or another to the whole Western tradition of orthodox rational theology, which usually combined its detailed inventory of divine attributes with an extreme degree of agnosticism about the real nature of what was being inventoried.[177]

From the *moral* point of view Berkeley is very clear about the attributes he advertises belief in. However before leaving Berkeley's metaphysical turn, what I called his 'top-down' argument, I compounded the ineffectiveness of the first major argument evaluated in the foregoing study. Reason as a route to knowledge of God's will was shown to be at odds with a key premise in that argument, since reason about what will promote general welfare is susceptible to error and bias. God's commands can be known (if God is good) to delineate optimal welfare promotion in a way that evades the limits of human reason; however these commands can only be worked out by human reason, with the result that divine commands are essentially redundant in the argumentative scheme which a broad view of Berkeley's output suggested we allot to him.

These conclusions are of intrinsic interest, but tell only half the story. Further delving into Berkeley's views on the considerations that justify accepting propositional belief reveals that as long as a good God is possible (which, with Hume, I allowed), whether he actually exists is of much less importance than whether it would be good for one to believe that he exists. Berkeley is a thoroughgoing pragmatist, who holds that one is entitled to adopt beliefs if doing

so will help one succeed at some practical endeavour, even if there is no other, evidential, reason to do so. I argued that this is a sensible position, and certainly not vulnerable to the objections that have been brought against it. Berkeley is also an objective pragmatist, who thinks that there is a proper practical goal at which all actions should be aimed. While I found it difficult to sustain an objective conception of value in this way, the goal of happiness (as Berkeley construes it) is likely to prove sufficiently appealing as to allow for an *ad hominem* argument with impressive invitational reach, the more so because I restricted Berkeley to those arguments which speak to the egoist, avoiding any assumption of altruistic motivation. People do have other-regarding concerns, but I accept the advantages of adopting the 'veil of sensitivity' of methodological egoism, which is so manifest in Berkeley's thinking about actual motivations.

Given those motivations, and their liability to misdirect agents in self-defeating fashions, as discussed in Chapter Six, Berkeley recommends religious belief, which overcomes the inadequacies of moral sentiment as a control on behaviour that may tend to lessen one's chances of happiness.

> [A] life of virtue is upon all accounts eligible, as most conducive both to the general and particular good of mankind; and you allow that the beauty of virtue alone is not a sufficient motive with mankind to the practice of it. This led you to acknowledge that the belief of God would be very useful in the world.[178]

The God that effects this control, belief in whom Berkeley says is a glorious fund of deep happiness in itself, must not be concerned with any particular agent as opposed to any other. Since one must think that he will punish the kind of anti-social behaviour that conscience already (but not sufficiently forcefully) suggests will risk undesirable consequences, refined by a reflective understanding of the rational justification for sustained co-operative behaviour, one will envisage an impartial judge, which vision is also, Berkeley thinks, a consequence of his role as creator of everything. In that case, as Berkeley repeatedly argues in works such as *Passive Obedience* and the *Sermons*, God will logically will the rules broadly recognisable to us as utilitarian. We are to treat these rules as definitive of moral

duty, and we are to do so in recognition of the fact that they are God's rules, even though we arrive here from the attempt of the individual to seek happiness in the world as it is. It is in this sense that divine commands constitute moral obligation.

Though I have concentrated on the exegesis necessary to disclose Berkeley's position, and in consequence have not been able to consider the full range of possible objections, my preliminary judgement is that it is coherent, as long as it has been modified to accommodate the unforecloseable possibility that an individual may insist on certain different tastes, or be so constituted so as not to find certain of the premises appealing.

G2 As long as it is true that an agent wishes to act so as to maximise his or her prospect of happiness, then since:

H Agents are prone, individually and collectively, to act in ways that are significantly less effective in maximising their own happiness than they could be; and since

I Secular moral codes are inadequate for solving the problem stated in **H**; and since

J It is possible to treat as true ('believe') propositions **A** and **B**; and since

K It is legitimate to believe propositions **A** and **B**; and since

L It is possible to reason about the will of the entity described in **A** and **B**; and since

M It is possible to conceive of these rules as actually the commands of God; and since

S1 God will reward compliance with divine commands and punish non-compliance in a future state, such that potential benefits and costs there dwarf any to be had by complying or not complying in the present world; and *if*

N1 Agents who believe propositions **A** and **B** ('believers'), and conceive of the rules human reason calculates that God must issue as actual divine commands, are the only agents suitably equipped to solve the problem of **H** (but this may only work for some people); and *if*

T Believers have access to a source of happiness not available to non-believers (this may be true only for some people); *then*

O1 One ought to treat whichever set of rules seem to reason to be the rules of an omnibenevolent, omniscient and omnipotent God (i.e., those which best promote human happiness), which are putatively divine commands, as actually divine commands and as constitutive of morality.

Berkeley thinks it is rather obvious, in the end, 'that virtue is highly useful to mankind; but that the beauty of virtue is not alone a sufficient to engage them in the practice of it; that therefore the belief of a God and Providence ought to be encouraged in the State, and tolerated in good company, as a useful notion,'[179] that nothing 'renders this world habitable, but the prevailing notions of order, virtue, duty, and Providence'[180] and that to 'this single point' of 'conforming our faith and practice to the will of God … may be reduced, all religion, all virtue, all human happiness.'[181] The argument justifies the holding of a divine command theory of moral obligation for a *certain* set of agents, the extent of which remains unclear; but such agents there must be: clearly Berkeley at least is the sort of person for whom the argument works, and my reconstruction of his pragmatic argument sheds much light on his own attitudes to the claims of faith and the purposes of philosophy.

Ironically, his pragmatic theology dynamically transforms those very same obstacles to worshipfulness which give one pause when considering his more traditional and better known metaphysical speculations about the nature of God – the perils that beset people as the world is presently arranged, and the human tendencies that threaten to prevent people from working as fruitfully as possible to respond to them – into (potential) opportunities for worshipfulness, a new rationale themselves for religious faith.

NOTES

[1] *Passive Obedience*, §6.

[2] Warnock 1990, p.49.

[3] *Passive Obedience*, §6.

[4] *Passive Obedience*, §5.

[5] *Passive Obedience*, §33

[6] Without really arguing for it, Warnock notes: 'The moral duty of mankind is to obey God's laws. Berkeley though it self-evident, apparently, that a created being possessed of a will has a duty to such obey such precepts as its creator may issue; the point is perhaps not so obvious as all that, but in any case Berkeley feels no need to raise a question here' (Warnock 1990, p.48). In *Alciphron* IV.25 Berkeley says a bit more, but not persuasively. 'We worship God ... because it is good for us to be so disposed towards God; because it is just and right, and suitable to the nature of things, and becoming the relation we stand in to our supreme Lord and Governor.'

[7] Honouring superiors makes Berkeley's list of 'such notions and principles as every wise governor or legislator would covet above all things to have firmly rooted in the mind of every individual under his care' (*Discourse*, p.204). If this is true in more than a conspiratorial sense, for well-meaning governors like God, then it is coveted for well-meaning reasons. Such honour is rightly coveted and is not the ground of right coveting.

[8] *Alciphron* II.24.

[9] See Berman 1986.

[10] *Passive Obedience*, §7.

[11] Alston 1989, p.255.

[12] Berman 1994, p.140.

[13] Cited by Olscamp 1970, p.212.

[14] *Alciphron* IV.17.

[15] Pittion, Berman & Luce 1969, p.389.

[16] *Alciphron* IV.18.

[17] *Alciphron* IV.16.

[18] See, for example, *Principles* §80.

[19] *Alciphron* IV.22.

[20] *Alciphron* IV.18.

[21] *Alciphron* IV.17.

[22] *Principles* §140.

[23] MacIntyre & Ricoeur 1969, pp.33-35.

[24] Berkeley holds that God is free, and nature is 'a series of free actions' on his part (*Passive Obedience* §14). I say more about God's freedom in Chapter Three.

[25] *Passive Obedience* §55.

[26] *Notes*, p.7.

[27] *Alciphron* II.6.

[28] This sort of argument is cogently presented in Hare 1981.

[29] If the diachronic accumulation of tradition gives some reason to respect its advice, the variation of environmental circumstance creates ample room for distrust.

[30] The type of theory I attribute to Berkeley closely resembles that of Adams: 'the statement that something is ethically wrong ... says something about the will or commands of God, but not about His love. Every such statement, however, presupposes that certain conditions for the applicability of the believer's concepts of ethical right and wrong are satisfied. ... Among these conditions is that ... God loves his human creatures' (Adams 1981, p.87). This means that if 'God were really to command us to make cruelty our goal, then He would not have that character of loving us, and I would not say it would be wrong to disobey Him' (p.86). In my opinion Samuel Clark also opts for this theoretical structure, although in his case God is the moral model not because of Adams' lovingness or Berkeley's goodness and wisdom but the ability to perceive the real 'fitness' of certain relations with absolute perspicuity. Our own powers of rational discernment are dim and faulty. The 'original obligation of all ... is the eternal reason of things: that reason, which God himself, who has no superior to direct him ... yet constantly obliges himself to govern the world by.' This obligation is 'antecedent even to this consideration, of its being the positive will or command of God.' And 'since the natural attributes of God, his infinite knowledge, wisdom and power, set him infinitely above all possibility of being deceived by error, or of being influenced by any wrong affection; it is now manifest His divine will cannot but always and necessarily determine itself to choose to do what in the whole is absolutely fittest and best to be done' (Clark 1969).

[31] Rachels, in Helm 1981, p.44.

[32] Rachels, in Helm 1981, p.45

[33] Robinson 1964, p.151.

[34] Warnock 1990, p.50.

[35] Warnock 1990, p.50.

[36] Beck 1960, p.279.

[37] *Dialogues*, p.205. The aspects of God are here illcitly inflated, perhaps, beyond the bounds of the comprhensibility constraint (PTCC). We can understand him to mean that their magnitude cannot be adequately represented by human minds, though their import otherwise can be.

[38] *Principles*, §146.

[39] See Olscamp 1970, p.106.

[40] The main difficulty, not to be resolved here, is the ostensible incompatibility of omniscience and human free will. Berkeley insists upon the latter; but on the present thesis God knows what would happen given any action, including how other people will respond, and how can people be free to do what God knows they will do? If foreknowledge and free will are incompatible, if God ceased knowing everything the moment he created free agents, Berkeley may have to retreat to the claim that God has probable knowledge of responses that tremendously outstrips our own. I will not investigate this topic.

[41] Or what he says, since the ingenious proof of God's existence in the *Alciphron* depends on a structural comparison of the natural world to a language, which concludes that the world must have a mental source as (or if) a language must. For Berkeley, phenomenal experience is literally God's means of directly communicating with us. Unfortunately I am unable to give a hearing to the linguistic proof , but I urge readers to refer to discussions collected in Berman (ed.) 1993,and Olscamp 1970.

[42] *Alciphron* IV,14.

[43] *Principles* §154.

[44] *Principles* §72.

[45] *Principles* §30.

[46] *Principles* §31.

[47] Broad 1953, pp.75-6 contains a neat discussion of Berkeley's argument to God's impartiality. For its source in Berkeley, see *Passive Obedience* §11, and *Sermon* X, cited in Chapter Four.

[48] *Alciphron* IV.15, which continues with an example: 'informing us more distinctly of those objects whose nearness and magnitude qualify them to be of greatest detriment or benefit to our bodies, and less exactly in proportion as their littleness or distance makes them of less concern to us.'

[49] *Principles* §65 (my emphasis). Throughout the *Principles* Berkeley refers to the linguistic quality of visual experience, which signals the tactile sensations we can expect to be subject to. For example, §44: 'the ideas of sight and touch make two species, entirely distinct and heterogenous. The former are marks and prognostics of the latter ... the ideas of sight, when we apprehend by them distance and things placed at a distance, do not suggest or mark out to us things actually existing at a distance, but only admonish us that ideas of touch will be imprinted in our minds at such and such distances of time, and in consequence of such and such actions ... visible ideas are the language whereby the governing spirit, on whom we depend, informs us what tangible ideas he is about to

imprint on us, in case we excite this or that motion in our own bodies.' These remarks, which refer us to an amplified argument in Berkeley's earlier *Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision*, are by way of a defense of the proof of God in the *Principles* against the misguided objection that we directly experience the distance of objects from us (§42). His realisation that the linguistic quality of ideas of sight, as it presupposes a linguist, furnishes a constructive argument for God's existence in its own right does not receive careful argumentation until *Alciphron* IV.

[50] A secondary feature of phenomenal experience is adduced in support of the claim that it vindicates the hypothesis that God is good, though Berkeley accords it much less weight: 'while it informs, it amuses and entertains the mind with such singular pleasure and delight' (*Alciphron* IV.14). This refers, I presume, to God's generous and gratuitous endowment of faculties that respond joyously to certain perceptions (eg. of beauty), and his provision of numberless occasions for the provocation of such responses. God need not have taken pains to provide such bounties; that he has done so speaks of his concern with human happiness, which Berkeley says shows him to be good.

[51] Olscamp 1970, p.110.

[52] I'd be inclined to say that there are possible worlds where God's existence is not necessary, of which the actual world may be a member, and if there are possible worlds where God necessarily exists, there may also be some where he necessarily doesn't. It's hard to know how we could tell which of these worlds we inhabit. Could the legitimacy of Berkeley's empirical method be challenged from a theistic perspective? Hartshorne (echoing the complaint of Browne) 'maintains that any kind of strictly empirical theism would make God a contingent being, different in degree perhaps from other contingent beings, but not different in kind. Any purely contingent being, by its very nature would not be God and the worship of such a being would be idolatry' (Platt 1971, p.28). The critique assumes God's necessity; if the creator is not necessary, it would be idolatrous to worship a non-existing being that is. On the other hand, may not one come to know God empirically and remain free to indulge a hunch that what has been discovered had to be there? Platt sums up the necessitist's displeasure: 'no matter how much our experience of C [his placeholder for whatever Goddish entity experience reveals] may be qualified by laudatory value predicates, we have at best encountered another item of furniture in the world' (p.31). But nothing but furniture is amenable to encounter, and we are entitled to count 'necessity' as but a laudatory value predicate. As Platt puts the other side of the argument, 'unless the belief in God rests at some point on the basis of direct experience, then all talk of God is only an ingenious philosophical exercise' (p.30).

[53] Surely wisely avoided, in my opinion. Auspiciously, Kant also 'did not believe that any other attribute of a necessary being could be deduced from its necessity' (Wood 1987, p.27).

[54] Draper argues that 'religious experiences ... are ambiguous with respect to the moral attributes of the creator. While ... theists typically do feel inclined in certain circumstances ... to think that the

82

creator is morally good, sensitive theists also feel inclined in other circumstances – namely, when they experience poignant evil – to believe that the creator is indifferent to their good or to the good of others. And many atheists have powerful experiences in which they seem to be aware of the ultimate indifference of nature' (Draper 1996, p.26). This is a fair point, although a given religious experience is likely to be decidedly unambiguous. The real problem is whether it is trustworthy.

[55] He dedicates the sixth dialogue of *Alciphron* to vindicating the reasonableness of belief in the testimony of Scripture.

[56] *Alciphron* VI.27.

[57] In TV drama *OZ*, an inmate asks where God was when his son died, and the chaplain answers, 'the same place he was when His son died.' Berkeley lost his own son, William.

[58] There are aspects of the world which are not exclusively summoned into existence by God. He is the immediate cause of phenomenal experience, apart from those aspects which result from the activity of free creaturely will (though he does translate them from will to observable effect, and sustains them). The proviso should be taken as read where relevant. The doctrine raises new difficulties. The moral status of God's contribution to evil deeds becomes murky. Taylor argues that if we resist God's being '(absurdly) reduced to the status of an instrument ... we are not literally the agents of our crimes, and God is the ruffian who carries out the wicked designs we are helpless to execute' (Taylor 1985, p.224). The difficulty is nicely elicited by Johnson in his letters to Berkeley (Correspondence), and the interested reader should start there.

[59] Hume 1893, p.36.

[60] Olscamp 1970, p.66-67.

[61] For an engagingly polemical affirmative, see Stove 1986.

[62] *Alciphron* VI.31. Berkeley's announcement that 'this optic language hath a necessary connection with knowledge, wisdom and goodness' is sloppy on my analysis, or rhetorically overblown. The connection is subject to God's free will. 'I do not say demonstrate; for all deductions of that kind depend on a supposition that the Author of Nature always operates uniformly, and in a constant observance of those rules we take for principles; which we cannot evidently know' (*Principles* §107). As things stands, the optic language makes probable an interpretation of God's proclivities (allegedly, that he is good), but any amount of encouraging evidence is still compatible with the darkest possibilities.

[63] *Principles* §63. So Berkeley, like Kant, would be impatient with the abuse of theism manifested by the invocation of divine intervention to explain particular events. The course of nature follows the course of laws established as for the best overall, Berkeley thinks. He nevertheless allows the theistic hypothesis some heuristic value (a combination that sits better with him than with Kant, who denies that God is the subject of empirical confirmation or disconfirmation, well covered in Wood

1978, pp.141-145). Survival of, say, a plan crash is not down to such intervention. The thought that it is perversely ignores the organisation of nature and imperils investigation into the cause that is part of this, as well as being rather presumptuous regarding non-survivors. But that nature is regular, permitting the building of planes and the ironing out of crash-causing defects, is a divine dispensation. As to fruitful avenues for scientific reasoning, Berkeley has an Aristotelian attitude. '[C]onsidering the whole of creation is the workmanship of a wise and good agent, it should seem to become philosophers, to employ their thoughts ... about the final causes of things: and I must confess, I see no reason, why pointing out the various ends, to which natural things are adapted, and for which they were originally with unspeakable [!] wisdom contrived, should not be thought one good way of accounting for them.' (*Principles* §107. That such experiments 'are of use to mankind, and enable us to draw any general conclusions, is not the result of any immutable habitudes in the things themselves, but only of God's goodness and kindness to men in the administration of the world').

[64] Hume 1985, p.97.

[65] See Hume 1985.

[66] Hume 1985, p.97. Draper's Humean argument from evil makes the same kind of claim. God 'could create goal-directed organic systems (including humans) without biologically useful pain and pleasure' (Draper 1996, p.17).

[67] Hume 1985, p.101.

[68] A Johnsonian objection: 'is in an habitual sinner, every object and motion be but an idea, and every wicked appetite the effect of such a set of ideas, and these ideas, the immediate effect of the Almighty upon his mind; it seems to follow, that the immediate cause of such ideas must be the cause of those immoral appetites and affections; because he is borne down before them seemingly, even in spite of himself ... When therefore a person is under the power of a vicious habit, and it can't but be foreseen that the suggestion of such and such ideas will unavoidably produce those immoralities, how can it consist with the holiness of God to suggest them?' (*Correspondence*, p.417).

[69] Mill's preferred option perhaps, see Mill 1874, p.65: 'Whatsoever, in nature, gives indication of beneficent design, proves this beneficence to be armed with only limited power; and the duty of man is to co-operate with the beneficent powers.' See also pp.116-117 on siding with God as 'fellow-combatants' against intractable matter.

[70] Hume 1985, p.103; a view he derives from Bayle.

[71] Suppose that temporal reality is animated, in part or in sum, not by a monolithic intelligence with a unified agenda, but by some number of distinct intelligences with correspondingly diverse agendas which they vie to see triumphant. In that case, how do we go about deciding which moral qualities to ascribe to them, and what kind of thing would we be doing in ascribing such qualities? There are as many answers as there are theories of moral value, minus one. The pure divine command theory of

moral value has no application in this scenario. This is not to its immediate detriment: the purist can say that the scenario is necessarily counterfactual, so that if he is right to locate moral value where he does, then he is necessarily right. If however the scenario describes a possible world, the purist is forced to say that none of its denizens would ever be justified in making judgements of moral value. If we imagine the denizens of such a world calling some of the entities good and others bad, we are doing something illogical, for they couldn't do any such thing. With the appropriate Berkeleian modifications, on the other hand, they could, naturally, perpetrate evaluations based on the propensity of the entities to help them in their lives. This is encouraging, for whatever world we inhabit there is an urgent need to evaluate 'morally'. PCCT also has far-reaching implications for value-theory. Transcendent entities have to answer to the evaluations of actual evaluators, and not vice versa, at least from the perspective of actual evaluators. The point is that whatever we are doing in evaluating, it is us who are doing it. A similar thought experiment leaves realism about moral evaluating in questionable shape also. Whatever fact about the world the realist proposes as making moral belief true can be supposed absent without forcing one to perceive as erroneous or specious all evaluating in the supposed world. Like the purist, the realist (who might also but need not be a purist) would have to be an error theorist about evaluations in the possible worlds under consideration, as if there were more, critically speaking, to evaluation than what evaluators want to achieve by it; whatever more there is, intuitively speaking, can effortlessly be thought away while leaving the critical point of evaluative exercises unscathed. Finally, I omitted one possibility, that there is more than one transcendent agent, with not a diverse but a single agenda, which they pursue so 'single-mindedly' that to all appearances one agent's will is expressed - a perfect committee. Such a divine corporation, since equally as provable as the monodivinity by ontological arguments, tells against the viability of these.

[72] Hume 1985, p.104.

[73] *Sermon X*, p.133

[74] Hume 1985, p.88.

[75] '[R]eligious beliefs ... are positively irrational ... the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another ' (Mackie 1990, p.25).

[76] Hume 1985, p.103.

[77] Hick propounds a 'soul-making' theodicy along these lines (Hick 1977). Central to it is the concept of an epistemic distance between God and free creatures, which is necessary to let them enjoy the good of freely chosen faith. This solution has the dramatic result of converting evil from a problem for theists into a confirmation of God's goodness – sorrow and adversity are exactly what Hick's hypothesis would lead us to predict. Likewise, much of the evidence thought to render theism explanatorily otiose supports the hypothesis of a God who would so design the world that it is easy

and tempting to disbelieve in his existence. Followers of the irenean line would not therefore be dismayed or surprised if science provided a coherent materialist account of all phenomena, including such biological phenomena as religious belief. Note here how one objection to the soul-making theodicy misses the mark. According to Smith (1991), the natural disasters that befall people suffice to create doubt and ambiguity about God and his nature, and the arrangement whereby animals must prey on one another for food is a gratuitously evil natural law. But if Smith were able critically to allow that natural disasters could serve a soul-making purpose, then they are no longer sufficiently inscrutable in the sense that institutes epistemic distance.

[78] See Plantinga 1990.

[79] 'It will I doubt not be objected, that ... monsters, untimely births, fruits blasted in the blossom, rains falling in desert places, miseries incident to human life, are so many arguments that the whole frame of Nature is not immediately actuated and superintended by a spirit of infinite wisdom and goodness. But the answer to this objection is in good measure plain ... it being visible, that the aforesaid methods of Nature are absolutely necessary ... it is clear from what we have elsewhere observed, that the operating according to general and stated laws, is so necessary for our guidance in the affairs of life, and letting us into the secret of Nature, that without it, all reach and compass of thought, all human sagacity and design could serve to no manner or purpose: it were even impossible that there should be any such faculties or powers in the mind. Which one consideration abundantly outbalances whatever particular inconveniences may thence arise' (*Principles* §151). The particular inconveniences - such as the secrecy, which Hume decries as needless - are accidental, their general possibility foreseen but not intended, and the goodness of the general scheme prevents God from sporadically interfering, e.g. to stop a great ruler falling down a precipice or tip a tyrant over. There (logically) must be some limit to any interference, a point well made by van Inwagen (1996, p.172-73, note 11).

[80] Berkeley has a similar argument to counter the symmetrical objection, not that the quantity of evil could be smaller but that the quantity of good could be greater – that goods (the example discussed is the appearance of Christ to preach the path to happiness) could have been more broadly disseminated: 'who but a minute philosopher would, upon a gratuitous distribution of favours, inquire, why at this time, and not before? Why to these persons, and not to others?' (*Alciphron* VI.15). This 'gift horse in the mouth' defense follows on a distinction between matters of debt and matters of favour. In human intercourse, he says, 'acts of mere benevolence are never insisted on, or examined and measured with the same accurate line as matters of justice.' Surely acts of benevolence are properly insisted on from a perfectly benevolent being? Not if the being has more important reasons that limit the goods he can disburse, which possibility we have allowed. The good that God wishes perfectly to accomplish with creation overall imposes logical limitations upon the good that can be

accomplished at each point in it, so perhaps we can think of him as having a sort of duty (a 'hypothetical' one) to bite the bullet of the limitations, but as being prepared on the rare, miraculous occasion to provide special help, such as the visit of Jesus.

[81] Penelhum 1990, p.70.

[82] *Alciphron* VI.16. Otherwise one is like a 'conceited spectator ... who, from a transient glimpse of a part only of some one scene, would take it upon him to censure the plot of a play.' See also *Essay* VII, comparing the worldly comprehension of free-thinkers to a fly's comprehension of St. Paul's, much as the Persian fable of the bug in the carpet pities the bug's inability to see that its 'problems' are necessary elements in the pattern of the world's most beautiful rug: 'which hath the nobler sentiments, which the greater views; he whose notions are stinted to a few miserable inlets of sense, or he whose sentiments are raised above the common taste by the anticipation of those delights which will satiate the soul ...' A less happy expression of the idea is given in *Alciphron* IV.23: 'for aught we know, this spot, with the few sinners on it, bears no greater proportion to the universe of intelligences than a dungeon doth to a kingdom. It seems we are led not only by revelation, but by common sense, observing and inferring from the analogy of visible things, to conclude there are innumerable orders of intelligent beings more happy and more perfect than man, whose life is but a span, and whose place, this earthly globe, is but a point, in respect of the whole system of God's creation.'

[83] *Principles* §153. Berkeley also uses a 'contrast' defence: 'the very blemishes and defects of Nature are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable sort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of creation, as shades in a picture serve to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts' (*Principles* §152; see also *Alciphron* IV.23). For more about Berkeley's response to the problem of evil see Herschbell 1970.

[84] Pike 1990, p.52.

[85] *Principles* §72.

[86] Leibniz 1966, II.120.

[87] *Alciphron* V.5.

[88] Hume 1985, p.93. Mill says that 'he who comes out with the least moral damage from this embarrassment, is probably the one who never attempts to reconcile the two standards with one another, but confesses to himself that the purposes of Providence are mysterious, that its ways are not our ways, that its justice and goodness are not the justice and goodness which we can conceive and which it befits us to practice' (Mill 1874, p.113). Not Berkeley, then.

[89] *Sermon* X, p.131. See note 55.

[90] Natural law, as a revelation of God's will which is an alternative to traditional revelation, may offer hope; a possibility I can't now investigate.

87

[91] *Sermon* X, p.130.

[92] *Sermon* X, p.130.

[93] *Essay* XII.

[94] Berkeley admits anomalies in terms of moral emotion. In *Essay* XII he refers to 'that diffusive sense of humanity so unaccountable to the selfish man who is untouched with it, and is, indeed, a sort of monster or anomalous production.' This doesn't seem very just, on his scheme. At any rate since there are souls bereft of conscience or with twisted consciences, one cannot be sure that one's own transmits God's will without first knowing what that is, to check against.

[95] A popular solution to the problem of evil refers to this endowment; see Plantinga, in Adams & Adams 1990, pp.107-8.

[96] *Sermon* X, p.131.

[97] For instance the relatively weak abhorrence of political rebellion is not an accurate guide to its viciousness, which ranks with that of crimes which generally impinge as more monstrous. See *Passive Obedience* §21: 'to make all the inward horrors of soul pass for infallible marks of sin were the way to establish error and superstition in the world ... For [virtue and morality] pertaining to us as men, we must not be directed in respect of them by any emotion in our blood and spirits, but by the dictates of sober and impartial reason.'

[98] *Sermon* X, p.131.

[99] *Passive Obedience* §11.

[100] Orange 1890, p.517.

[101] *Commentaries* 542: 'I'd never blame a man for acting on interest. He's a fool that acts on any other principle. The not considering these things has been of ill consequence in morality.'

[102] *Alciphron* I.9.

[103] *Alciphron* I.16. 'Every wise man looks upon himself, or his own bodily existence in this world, as the centre and ultimate end of all his actions and regards' (*Alciphron* I.9). Berkeley's talent for stating his opponents' case illustrates his grasp of the force of it, and worried contemporary theologians who thought he put it somewhat too well!

[104] Mandeville 1953, p.49.

[105] *Alciphron* VI.31. Berkeley respects agnostic reserve, at least compared to the recklessness of enthusiastic atheism: 'we ought to distinguish the serious, modest, ingenuous man of sense, who hath scruples about religion, and behaves like a prudent man in doubt, from the minute philosophers, those profane and conceited men, who must needs proselyte others to their own doubts' (*Alciphron* VII.30).

[106] *Alciphron* VI.31 (my emphasis).

[107] *Alciphron* VII.1. The ambiguity of the evidence allows M, as I say in Chapter Four.

[108] *Alciphron* IV.23.

[109] Rescher 1985, p.66.

[110] Robinson 1964, p.117.

[111] Robinson 1964, p.151.

[112] James 1948, pp.86-109.

[113] *Alciphron* I.16.

[114] *Alciphron* I.15.

[115] *Alciphron* I.16.

[116] *Discourse*, p.211.

[117] *Alciphron* V.4.

[118] *Alciphron* I.10.

[119] *Essay* IX.

[120] Robinson 1964, pp.114-15.

[121] Robinson 1964, p.117.

[122] *Essay* IX.

[123] *Commentaries* 769.

[124] *Essay* VIII

[125] *Commentaries* 541.

[126] Conroy 1961, p.211: 'the goodness of an act ... is a matter of present or future pleasure felt or to be felt.' He finds 'the rationalist doctrine of *Passive Obedience*' irreconcilable with this doctrine, and attributes the 'change of direction' to the political goals of *Passive Obedience*, which is 'not an attempt to work out an ethical system in whole or in brief.' Such ambiguities of purpose have beset the attempt to produce a definitive understanding of what Berkeley ultimately intended.

[127] *Notes* 21. See also *Alciphron* II.14.

[128] *Notes* 19.

[129] *Alciphron* II.13.

[130] *Alciphron* II.16. In addition 'sense perceiveth only things present ... Future pleasure, therefore, and pleasures of the understanding are not to be judged of by sense ... Those therefore who judge of pleasure by sense may find themselves mistaken at the foot of the account' (*Alciphron* II.18).

[131] *Essay* IV. There are 'two sorts of goods, the one in itself desirable, the other is to be desired, not on account of its own excellency, but for the sake of some other thing which it is instrumental to obtain. We are prompted by nature to desire the former, but that we have any appetite for the latter is owing to choice and deliberation' (*Essay* VIII).

[132] *Essay* VIII.

[133] *Essay* IV. Also *Alciphron* II.7, 'doth not the good or happiness of a man consist in having both soul and body sound and in good condition?'

[134] Robinson 1964, p.31.

[135] *Alciphron* II.14.

[136] See *Alciphron* II.15: 'is there not a real difference between good and bad writing? ... there must be a maturity and improvement of understanding to discern this difference, which does not make it therefore less real.'

[137] Gauthier 1986, p.34

[138] Gauthier 1986, p.37.

[139] Gauthier 1986, p.32.

[140] Mandeville 1989, p.369.

[141] Mandeville 1989, p.346.

[142] *Principles* §100.

[143] *Alciphron* II.18.

[144] Taylor 1995, p.36.

[145] *Commentaries* 143.

[146] 'Sensual pleasure qua pleasure is good and desirable by a wise man. But if it be contemptible, it is not qua pleasure but qua pain or cause of pain. Or ... loss of greater pleasure' (*Commentaries* 769).

[147] 'Such are all those whimsical notions of conscience, duty, principle, and the like, which fill a man's head with scruples, awe him with fears, and make him a more thorough slave than the horse he rides. A man had better a thousand times be hunted by bailiffs or messengers than haunted by these spectres, which embarrass and embitter all his pleasures, creating the most real and sore servitude upon earth.' (Berkeley speaking for the Mandevillean in *Alciphron* I.9.)

[148] *Essay* V.

[149] *Essay* V, my emphasis.

[150] It is worth noting one other objection to the self-styled freethinking pleasure seeker which Berkeley posits; in so far as, in thrall to newly developing physicalism, they rejected the freedom of the will, the desires which they are so keen to realise are not freely adopted by them but determined by 'blind unthinking principle'. They are pushed around and enslaved by forces alien to themselves, in other words, just as they would accuse Berkeley of being enslaved by the extraneous demands of his religious commitments. Berkeley reckons he can freely choose his ends, and manage his desires so as to achieve, and that his religious commitments are freely chosen with this in mind. See *Alciphron* II.

[151] *Commentaries* 839. This human tendency is presumably just the sort of thing a good God would not have implanted, in the Humean argument discussed in Chapter Four.

[152] Frank 1988, p.51.

[153] Frank 1988, p.5.

[154] *Essay* V, p.200.

[155] *Discourse*, pp.207-9.

[156] *Essay* V, p.199.

[157] See Frank, Chapter Three, for sources that suggest this is the case. There are also 'good reasons why it might prove very costly for an agent to subject all expression of emotion to conscious control' (p.110), but we have not the space to go into them. Interested readers should refer to Franks commendable account.

[158] Mill 1848, p.89.

[159] *Sermon* X.

[160] *Essay* IV.

[161] See Clark 1985, p.223. This is not Clark's view, and obviously not mine – I find Berkeley to be concerned above all else with how people can best improve their material conditions.

[162] *Alciphron* V.5.

[163] *Alciphron* VI.24.

[164] '[T]wo very distinct species of "reason" are at issue in Pascal - the *evidential* that seeks to establish facts (and is in his view entirely inadequate to the demands of apologetics) and the *practical* that seeks to legitimate actions (and can indeed justify us in "betting on God" via the practical step of *accepting* that he exists).' Rescher 1985, p.44.

[165] 'With argumentation of the Pascal's Wager type everything is going to turn on just exactly how we envision God. And this, of course, is an issue which the argument itself does not address. It proceeds *ad hominem* under the presupposition that its audience is emplaced within a religious tradition that delineates the sort of God that can be contemplated as a real possibility in traditional Christian terms. And of course if this is indeed our stance, then the fact that others take a different view of the matter is simply beside the point for us.' Rescher 1985, p.93.

[166] Berkeley also uses the narrower Pascalesque argument to induce belief in a future state. See *Sermon* I.

[167] Whatever costs there are, besides being vastly outweighed, also diminish with the gradual adoption of the full, comfortable spectrum of religious attitude that follows the initial prudential decision to immerse oneself in it. Pascal, for example, 'insists that one must also reckon with the consideration that once faith is secured, then *ex post facto* the value of the "sacrifice" we make for

the religious life comes to be reduced or annihilated: those worldly pleasures then come to be seen as hollow and devoid of real value' (Rescher 1985, p.20).

[168] Rescher 1985, p.118

[169] Cited in Hick 1964, p.138.

[170] Cited in Hick 1964, p.138.

[171] Hick 1970, p.56.

[172] Wood 1970, p.252.

[173] Wood 1970, p.186.

[174] Wood 1970, p.17. As in the Berkeleian system, once his empirical speculations have been left behind, it is our personal interest in a certain kind of God that prompts us to accord him certain characteristics, which the empirical project failed to detect. Kant had no time for the empirical project in the case of the nature of God, of course. 'Kant strongly suggests that if it were not for our moral interest in the concept of God, there would be no legitimate reason to form anything but a 'deistic' concept of the supreme being - no reason, that is, for us to include such 'cosmological' predicates as understanding and volition among its attributes. For only a 'living' God, he said, can make a suitable moral impression on us.' (Wood 1978, p.22-23.)

[175] 'Berkeley does not, as Kant does, attempt to base a practical proof of God's existence on his indispensability for morality' (Johnston, p.427). This only *happens* to be correct in Berkeley's case because we do have an argument for God's existence but for belief in God's existence – but this, importantly, is true of Kant also! Johnston has misunderstood both.

[176] Mavrodes is the culprit: 'I take it to be an important feature of the actual world that human beings exist in it and that in it their actions fall, at least sometimes, within the sphere of morality - that is, they have moral obligations to act (or to refrain from acting) in certain ways. And if they do not act in those ways, then they are properly subject to a special and peculiar sort of adverse judgement ... they are morally reprehensible' (1986, p.216).

[177] Wood 1978, p.93.

[178] *Alciphron* V.2

[179] *Alciphron* VI.1

[180] *Discourse*, p.202.

[181] *Sermon* X, p.136.

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