

THE NEO-BERKELEYAN WHITEHEAD

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Abstract. The thesis of this paper is that, in his first metaphysical work, Whitehead took Berkeley as his model. He stopped perceiving him as a subjective idealist and he leaned to consider him an objective/absolute idealist. He became appreciative of some positive contributions of the Irish philosopher. While continuing to appreciate Berkeley's critique of the seventeenth century scheme of ideas, Whitehead found in Berkeley's suggestions for a new philosophy of nature and of perception, in line with Berkeley's immaterialism. The creative appropriation of these suggestions derived from Berkeley was at the same time an addition aimed to improve the neorealistic philosophy of perception Whitehead had adopted and restated, in his works on natural philosophy, with the help of the concepts of event, object, and ingression. My conclusion is that Whitehead's philosophy of organism, in its earliest configuration, in *SMW*, rests on a recast of Berkeley's immaterialism.

Keywords: Whitehead, Berkeley, Idealism, Immaterialism, Neorealism, Philosophy of Perception.

J.F. Ferrier, an early British proponent of absolute idealism, countered claims that he imported German philosophy to Scotland by asserting his ideas were "Scottish to the very core" (Ferrier 12). While he acknowledged reading Hegel, Ferrier admitted difficulty in understanding him. Ferrier exemplifies a philosopher influenced by German idealism but claiming a British philosophical lineage. Whitehead's case is similar: although not deeply immersed in Hegel, he was influenced by German idealism while seeking his philosophical roots in Britain.

Whitehead's debt to 19th-century idealism is evident. In *SMW*, he values this idealism's rejection of mechanistic materialism and its alignment with the philosophy of organism. He critiques 19th-century idealism for its disconnection from contemporary science, noting that it "has swallowed the scientific scheme in its entirety" and then explained it as an idea in ultimate mentality (*SMW* 63). Whitehead's main objection stresses idealism's divorce from science, though he admires its poetic sensibility to value and purpose. This reaction, however, was

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prefigured by George Berkeley, whom Whitehead regards as a suitable philosophical ancestor (*SMW* 88, 94).

Victor Lowe observed that “it is neither Hegel nor Leibniz nor Descartes nor Locke, but Berkeley” who was most relevant to Whitehead’s formative ideas (Lowe 256–57). J.S. Fulton also noted Berkeley’s ongoing relevance to Whitehead’s developed philosophy (Fulton 13). Indeed, Berkeley’s influence peaks in *SMW*, where Whitehead not only appreciates Berkeley’s critique of nature’s bifurcation but also creatively recasts some of his positive doctrines. The phrase “transformation of some main doctrines of absolute idealism onto a realistic basis” (*PR* xiii) gains new significance when considering Whitehead’s relation to Berkeley.

1. IDEALISM AND REALISM

My concern in this section is to give the term ‘idealism’ a meaning that Whitehead would accept. Therefore I will have a look at how the term was used in Whitehead’s time and space, i.e. in Britain at the turn of the 20th century. A cursory glance shows that there were at least three ways of defining idealism and, accordingly, at least three kinds of ‘idealism’.

First, there is ‘ontological idealism’. Bradley ended his great metaphysical treatise with the phrases “Reality is spiritual [...] Outside of spirit there is not, and there cannot be, any reality, and, the more that anything is spiritual, so much more is it veritably real” (Bradley 552). McTaggart, in his turn, said: “Ontologically I am an idealist, since I believe that all that exists is spiritual” (McTaggart 273). And Russell, to quote one more philosopher Whitehead knew personally, understood by idealism “the doctrine that whatever exists, or at any rate whatever can be known to exist, must be in some sense mental” (Russell 19). So ontological idealism can be understood as a doctrine about the ontological nature of ultimate reality. As such, idealism remains a broad and equivocal notion, allowing of many variants and subvariants.

Ontological idealism was distinguished from epistemological idealism. McTaggart, for that matter, defined himself as an ontological idealist but an epistemological realist because he adhered to a correspondence theory of truth (McTaggart 273). For McTaggart, epistemological idealism connected with a coherence theory of truth, while epistemological realism was committed to a correspondence theory of truth. Yet, epistemological idealism was more frequently identified not with a theory of the nature of truth, but with a theory of the nature of knowledge. It was defined, in opposition to realism, in terms of mediacy/immediacy. Several definitions of this kind are to be found in Moore. The thesis that our knowledge of physical world is direct, or immediate, lies at the heart of epistemological realism. Idealism, in exchange, was identified with the thesis of the intrinsically mediate character of knowledge. Put differently, epistemological

idealism is the thesis that knowledge modifies, affects, i.e. at least partly constitutes, the thing known. The opposite doctrine is that “knowing makes no difference to what is known” (Cook Wilson qtd. in Collingwood 44).

Yet another type of idealism was considered in Whitehead’s time. Idealism of this sort is not a doctrine about the nature of reality, nor about the nature of knowledge, it bears on the nature of value. Value is considered fundamental, and existence itself is defined in terms of value: to be, is to have value. Therefore value cannot be emergent, since this would entail the primacy of being over value, and thereby the possibility of worthless being. This kind of idealism was usually opposed not to realism, but to naturalism. This is how Norman Kemp Smith used the term, in a book Whitehead read: “as covering all those philosophies which agree in maintaining that spiritual values have a determining voice in the ordering of the universe” (Kemp Smith 1), “that spiritual values can be credited as operating on a more than planetary, that is, on a *cosmic* scale” (4). Naturalism is the doctrine “that these values emerge, and begin to vindicate their reality, only at some late stage in a process of evolution” (1). The paradigmatic modern naturalist is, obviously, Samuel Alexander.

So far I have distinguished three kinds of idealism, ontological, epistemological and axiological. This panorama is probably incomplete and certainly insufficiently precise. However, it helps us see the diversity of the senses in which somebody could be said to be an idealist back in Whitehead’s time. The varieties of idealism (of three main kinds), offer multiple possibilities of combination with realism (of two main kinds) and, thus, help us figure the legitimate array of meanings for the phrase “transformation of idealism onto a realistic basis”, which suggests the compatibility of idealism, in one of its meanings (ontological, epistemological, or axiological), and realism, in one of its meanings (ontological or epistemological).

What about Whitehead’s use of the terms? Can we relate it to the famous phrase in the preface of *PR*? First of all, what do we have to understand by “absolute idealism”?

In one place Whitehead characterizes the “philosophic idealism” of the 19th century as the view “which finds the ultimate meaning of reality in mentality that is fully cognitive” (*SMW* 63). It seems reasonably clear that Whitehead has in view a variant, deriving from Hegel, of what I called earlier ontological idealism. The fully cognitive mentality corresponds to the usual concept of spirit. Whitehead distinguishes two species of idealism, absolute and pluralistic. This clearly suggests that he identified absolute idealism with spiritualistic monism. While pluralistic idealism involves “monadic mentalities”, absolute idealism acknowledges only one “ultimate mentality”. In addition to absolute and pluralistic idealism, Whitehead speaks occasionally of subjective and objective idealism. He only characterizes objective idealism, in respect to its treatment of nature: “the objective idealist, when he comes to analyse what the reality of the world involves, finds that cognitive mentality is in some way inextricably concerned in every detail. This position the realist denies.” (90)

Plainly, Whitehead ranged under the heading “idealism” all ontological doctrines stating that spirit is wholly constitutive of the ultimate reality. Likewise, realism is envisaged, in *SMW*, as an ontological doctrine. The “provisional realism” Whitehead adopts concerns mainly nature, and not ultimate reality. It is the doctrine that “cognitive mentality” is not constitutive of the world observed in sense-perception. The provisional realism rejoins the principle, stated in *CN*, that nature is “closed to mind”, and that it is possible to think “homogeneously” about nature and, consequently, neither science nor natural philosophy should include heterogeneous discourses about nature.

If these meanings are kept, then the phrase “transformation of some main doctrine of Absolute Idealism onto a realistic basis” becomes unintelligible. For how could an ontological doctrine be transformed on the basis of a doctrine which contradicts it? I believe, then, that Whitehead used the term “realism” in another sense, a sense disclosed in a passage from *S*: “There are no components of experience which are only symbols or only meanings. [...] This statement is the foundation of a thoroughgoing realism. It does away with any mysterious element in our experience which is merely meant, and thereby behind the veil of direct perception” (10). Realism, as here defined, opposes indirect or representative realism. It is a form of direct realism, that is, an epistemological doctrine. I think, then, that the famous phrase from the Preface of *PR* should be interpreted in the following way: the philosophy of organism results from the transformation of some doctrines of ontological idealism in the framework of some realistic epistemology.

2. WHITEHEAD’S INTERPRETATION OF BERKELEY IN *SMW*

The interpretation of Berkeley from *SMW*, quite different from the previous interpretation, from *PNK* and “Philosophical Principles”, clears the good bishop of the accusation of subjective idealism. In *SMW* Whitehead said that subjective idealism “has been derived from him” (67), without attributing it to Berkeley. Subjective idealism may have been derived from Berkeley just like Marxism was derived from Marx, i.e. against Marx himself. Its development followed two distinct lines, through Hume, and through Kant. Whitehead drops the interpretation of Berkeley’s “ideas” as “personal”, i.e., subjective, private, and mental. He does not directly discuss their nature, but the quotations he gives and the emphases he adds suggest that he had come to interpret “ideas” as subjective-objective, mental-physical, private-public entities, moving away from the Cantabrigian interpretation.

Whitehead now interprets Berkeley’s philosophy, in accordance with Berkeley’s own claims and in line with the realistic interpretations of his time, as a form of epistemological realism, thoroughly opposed to the prevalent representative theory of perception, shared by Locke and Hume. Berkeley “made all the right criticisms” (66), he “laid his finger exactly on the weak spots” (67) of the Newton-Locke

scheme of ideas. And his most important criticism, according to Whitehead, concerns the concept of simple location (67). Berkeley criticized this concept, and thus avoided the fallacies of misplaced concreteness his contemporaries committed. We will see later the full sweep of this denial of simple location for the theory of perception. Berkeley, then, is the first modern example of a philosopher developing objective/absolute idealism onto a realistic basis, or ontological idealism in the framework of a realistic epistemology. As such, he can be considered a model for Whitehead.

Berkeley not only criticized scientific materialism, he also asked the metaphysical question “What do we mean by things being realised in the world of nature?” (67). This, according to Whitehead, is one of Berkeley’s positive contributions to philosophy. Whitehead himself will address the question, drawing on Berkeley, but in order to reach a different answer, as we will see in the next section. For now, I would like to comment on Whitehead’s interpretation of Berkeley’s answer.

The first exegetical question Whitehead asks, is where is Berkeley’s answer to be found. The answer is first to be looked for in sections 23–24 of *Principles*. This is the place where Berkeley first formulates his famous “master argument”. The conclusion of the argument is that “the absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves, or without the mind” is impossible, because its conception is self-contradictory. It is not possible to imagine a thing having no relation to any mind, i.e., being in no mind, for whatever you imagine is in your mind. Obviously, you cannot imagine a thing which you don’t imagine. You cannot have the idea of a thing of which you don’t have the idea. Whenever you think you have imagined a thing nobody perceives, you forget yourself. Berkeley suggests that we are habituated to omit our own minds, and to focus only of their ideas. Whitehead emphasises these words: “the mind *taking no notice of itself*, is deluded to think that it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind” (*Principles* §23 qtd. in *SMW* 67). I will come back later to the words in italic characters.

Based on this *locus*, Whitehead attributes to Berkeley “an extreme idealist interpretation”, according to which “mind is the one absolute reality, and the unity of nature is the unity of ideas in the mind of God” (68). Or else: “an idealism with its objectivity grounded in the mind of God” (67). He thus attributes to Berkeley a variety of ontological idealism, admitting of the substantial reality of the individual minds, and grounded on a version of philosophical theism, making everything ultimately dependent on God’s infinite mind. God and the finite minds are the only “substances” Berkeley recognizes (*RM* 107), but in addition to these substances, ultimate reality also contains “ideas”. Thus ultimate *contingent* reality consists exclusively of finite minds and “ideas”. This conception has important affinity with objective/absolute idealism as understood by Whitehead. I therefore suspect that he ranged some Berkeleyan doctrines among the “main doctrines of absolute idealism” which needed transformation along realistic lines.

Whitehead's interpretation of Berkeley rests entirely on the latter's master argument. However, the quotation from *PHK* is immediately followed by a quotation from *Alciphron*, which Whitehead had already used in *PNK*. The passage is considered "very remarkable". It is extracted from §9 (not 10) of the Fourth dialogue. Since Whitehead's interpretation of Berkeley as an extreme idealist does not rest on this pretty long excerpt, one may wonder what is the reason of its being quoted in this context. In the Fourth dialogue, Berkeley offers an argument for the existence of God, the famous "divine language argument". In §9, Euphranor perplexes Alciphron with a series of considerations which are ordinarily used in order to defend representative realism, or phenomenalism. For example:

Euphranor. Tell me, Alciphron, can you discern the doors, window and battlements of that same castle?

Alciphron. I cannot. At this distance it seems only a small round tower.

Euphranor. But I, who have been at it, know that it is no small round tower, but a large square building with battlements and turrets, which it seems you do not see.

Alciphron. What will you infer from thence?

Euphranor. I would infer that the very object which you strictly and properly perceive by sight is not that thing which is several miles distant.

Alciphron. Why so?

Euphranor. Because a little round object is one thing, and a great square object is another." (*Alciphron* IV §9 qtd. in *SMW*, 68)

From considerations of this order, one could infer that we never perceive anything but our own sense-data. And this appears to be Berkeley's own conclusion: that the proper objects of sight are sense-data. Another Berkeleyan conclusion is that the things which we immediately perceive do not exist at distance (argument from the treatise on vision). But, in this context, Berkeley wants to prompt another conclusion: that the things perceived are *signs*, functioning just like words, hence composing a language, the divine language through which God communicates with the finite minds.

Upon the whole, says Euphranor, it seems the proper objects of sight are light and colours, with their several shades and degrees; all which, being infinitely diversified and combined, do form a language wonderfully adapted to suggest and exhibit to us distances, figures, situations, dimensions, and various qualities of tangible objects: not by similitude, nor yet by inference or necessary connexion, but by the arbitrary imposition of Providence, just as words suggest the things signified by them. (*Alciphron* IV §10)

Sense-data are indeed signs, but they do not signify things beyond the veil of experience, they signify other sensible things. The "small round tower" perceived at this spot is a sign for "a large square building with battlements and turrets"

existing at a distance from the perceiver. On a new reading, this theory of experience as symbolism caught Whitehead's attention. There are traces of his thinking over the idea in his Harvard lectures between *SMW* and *S*. But in order to understand the reason of Whitehead's quoting *Alciphron* in *SMW*, let us recall the conclusion of §10, as Whitehead reproduces it:

Euphranor. Is it not plain, therefore, that neither the castle, the planet, nor the cloud, *which you see here*, are those real ones which you suppose exist at a distance? (*Alciphron* IV §9 qtd. in *SMW* 68, the emphasis is Whitehead's).

The key to the answer is in the words Whitehead italicized. You see *here* what exists *there*. The "real" thing existing there presents itself here. I will delve into the significance of this insight in the next section. For now, I merely say that Whitehead quoted from *Alciphron* not in order to prove Berkeley's extreme idealism, but in order to prepare his subsequent creative appropriation of Berkeley's philosophy of perception.

3. WHITEHEAD'S NEOREALISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF IMMATERIALISM

I have argued so far that Whitehead, in his metaphysical period, did not classify Berkeley as a subjective idealist, nor as an epistemological idealist. He may have leaned toward such an interpretation in his natural philosophy period, but eventually he discarded the received interpretation. In *SMW* he classifies Berkeley as an objective/absolute idealist, for he recognizes both the mental nature of ultimate contingent reality, and the objectivity of the Berkeleyan "ideas", even if he is displeased by its being grounded on God. Ideas of sense are not dependent on the perceiver's mental processes, they depend on God's will, who imprints them on the individual finite minds. Whitehead does not contend anymore that ideas are "personal", in the sense of being private, subjective entities existing "in the mind", and not "out of the mind". He quotes the same passage from *Alciphron* he quoted in *PNK* in order to support the interpretation of Berkeley as a subjective idealist, without reaching the same conclusion. In the meantime, Whitehead changed his mind about the status of "ideas" in Berkeley and, presumably, about Berkeley's doctrine of experience in general. He changed his mind because, in light of his own philosophical concerns, some phrases in Berkeley suddenly suggested new meanings. In *PNK* he read Berkeley as a Cantabrigian new realist, in *SMW* he read Berkeley as a neorealist. He read Berkeley at each time with a different philosophy of perception in mind and with a different interest. My personal speculation is that Whitehead was re-reading Berkeley in order to criticize him one more time, when the phrases italicized in the previous section suddenly had a new ring. Together with Berkeley's rejection of scientific materialism, these phrases suggested to

Whitehead a new philosophy of perception, not committed to idealism, nor to realism, but compatible with the provisional realism he assumed throughout the book (and, presumably, with the metaphysical position to be reached when a final interpretation is attempted). At this point, the development of Whitehead's philosophy of perception became a significant episode in the development of neorealism, which was essentially a philosophy of perception. Whitehead's passage from the theory of sense-data in *PNK*, *CN*, and *R* to the theory of sense-data initiated in *SMW* and developed in *S* and in *PR* was the passage of neorealism from its mature phase to its final phase.

3.1. NEOREALISM AND BERKELEYANISM

Neorealism espoused, before Whitehead entered the scene, a radically objectivist doctrine of experience. The neorealists accepted an act-object analysis of mental states, and rejected the existence of mental contents. They were opposed to the act-content-object analysis, which Stout was the first to propose in the British context. Furthermore, they excluded objects from the realm of the mental: no object is mental. The only mental things are, according to this analysis, acts. Alexander, the most thoroughgoing of all realists, inspired by Stout, defended a reductive conational psychological monism. According to him, all mental acts are reducible to conations. Nothing else is mental, not even pleasure-pain. Feeling pain is having a specific mental act, the object of which is a pain-object, an objective quality qualifying the bodily life of the perceiver's organism. On this view, there is no place for any sense-data in the mind. Sensible qualities belong to the realm of the Objective, being mind-independent. They may very well be epistemically private, but they are not psychologically subjective, they are not the ideas of the Lockean tradition. They do not qualify non-physical entities, as sense-data were supposed to be, but they are features of actual physical things (more precisely, parts of their surfaces).

The neorealists opposed indirect realism and the representative theory of perception. They (especially T. P. Nunn) wanted to defend the plain man's view and to vindicate the direct realism it is supposed to conceal. They did it by turning sensible qualities into constituents of the physical thing. In a way, they accomplished the Berkeleyan program of turning ideas into things instead of the other way around. And this is one of the factors explaining their sympathetic reading of Berkeley. But claiming such a thing is not without difficulties. For example, it is common knowledge that the same thing appears differently to different subjects perceiving them simultaneously. A coin laying on a table may appear almost circular to a subject, elliptic to another, narrow and rectangular to the one perceiving its edge. If sensible qualities were constitutive parts of the coin, then it would be necessary to admit that there are three coins on the table, and not just one. In order to answer this kind of difficulties while preserving direct realism, the

neorealists drastically modified the common sense concept of a physical thing. We could say that their concept of a physical thing resulted from a specialization of Berkeley's concept of a physical thing *qua* collection of sense-data.

When I approach the coin on the table, its appearance modifies: it passes successively from being thin and rectangular, to being elliptic, the ellipse grows wider, and finally becomes a circle. From such a description, Euphranor concluded that what we see is not what there is, because the appearances change, whereas we know that the coin doesn't change. In order to avoid such a conclusion, the neorealists held that the coin is not located only on the table, at the place where it can present a circular appearance. The coin is located everywhere in the room, nay, everywhere in the Universe, and the appearances it presents from different angles and at various distances are parts of it. A physical thing is, actually, a structured field of *sensibilia* (as we may call these unsensed sensible qualities), waiting to be apprehended in different regions of space. Thus, the coin is really elliptic at one region of space, and circular at another region. Perception only converts a selection of *sensibilia* into "sense-data". To perceive, is to select. The theory is meant to oppose the idealistic doctrine of knowledge as a synthetic activity. The mind does not add anything to the data apprehended, the mind only eliminates from the complexity of the thing, according to the laws of perspective and in function of the perceiver's psychological and physiological condition, and the result is the "object" perceived. The object is a selection, indeed superficial, from the total thing.

3.2. WHITEHEAD'S DOCTRINE OF OBJECTS, EVENTS, AND INGRESSION

Whitehead contributed to this doctrine, in his works of natural philosophy, a most characteristic theory of "objects" and of their "ingression" into "events". According to this theory, the perception of a physical object involves the apprehension of some *events*, in which the object is located, and the *recognition* of the very object. There is no recognition without apprehension, nor vice-versa. "Recognition" and "apprehension" are not analysable terms; recognition is the mental act through which we grasp the permanent factors in the stream of our experience. These permanent factors are what Whitehead calls objects. The simplest objects which we can recognize in perception are sense-objects. Whitehead writes:

The sense-object is the simplest permanence which we trace as self-identical in external events. It is some definite [sensum], such as the colour red of a definite shade. We see redness here and the same redness there, redness then and the same redness now. In other words, we perceive redness in the same relation to various definite events, and it is the same redness which we

perceive. Tastes, colours, sounds, and every variety of sensation are objects of this sort. (PNK 83)

Now Whitehead is quite clear that sense-objects are objective factors in nature: “for us, the red glow of the sunset should be as much part of nature as are the molecules and electric waves by which men of science would explain the phenomenon” (CN 29). *Sensa*, i.e. sensible qualities, are not in the mind or contributed by the mind, they are parts of nature, of what we perceive in perception through the senses. They are external to the mind, they are not mind-dependent, they are merely recognized as being involved in the passage of nature.

Sense-objects are said to have events as their “situations”. The definition goes as follows: an event *e* is the situation of a sense-object F when a perceiver is aware of F as of a quality of *e*. But since sense-objects can have multiple situations, a distinction must be introduced between what is “seen” and what is “really seen” when a sense-object is recognized in a particular situation. For example, an astronomer *sees* through the telescope “redness situated in some event which is happening now”, but *really sees* “a new red star burst into existence” (PNK 85) two hundred years ago. Or, to keep in line with Berkeley, Alciphron sees a small round tower, but really sees a large square building, with battlements and turrets. This difference accounts for the possibility of delusive perceptual experiences.

Perceptual objects are defined as recognized “association[s] of sense-objects in the same situation” (PNK 88). But the recognition of perceptual objects is more complex than the recognition of sense-objects. Whitehead calls it “complete recognition” and says that it involves *judgment*. He does not say that the recognition of a sense-object doesn’t ever involve judgment, but he suggests pretty clearly that the simple recognition of a sense-object can be pre-judgmental. In the case of perceptual objects, judgments “form an important ingredient of what may be termed «completed recognition»” (89). The judgments entering the completed recognition are called “perceptual judgments”. Since completed recognition involves judgments, completed recognition can be erroneous. According to Whitehead, the completed recognition of a perceptual object involves the judgment that the shared situation of the sense-object simply recognized is the “active condition for these recognitions” (89). In other words, that the respective event is the cause of inherence of the sense-objects where they are perceived to inhere. Now this judgment can be false in the case of delusive perceptual objects. In the case of a delusive experience, the cause or the active condition is an event which is actually the situation of the “percipient object”. Simply said, the cause lies in what is perceived. The drunkard perceiving pink rats sees pink located out there, but the ingression of pink out there is not caused by any event taking place out there; it is caused by events happening in his brain. So while he *sees* pink rats, he doesn’t

really see anything. Non-delusive perceptual objects are what Whitehead calls “physical objects” – and they are supposed to correspond to the ordinary perceived things (in common parlance).

Whitehead introduces the notion of “conveyance” to conceptualize a familiar idea, often expressed by him: when I see the redness of the rose, I thereby see the rose as being red (conversely: I cannot see the red rose without seeing its redness). Whitehead says that a sense-object conveys a perceptual object (in translation: a sensible quality conveys a sense-datum). He further says that “[t]he conveyance of a perceptual object by a sense-object is not primarily a judgment” (88–89). There is transition from redness to the rose, but it doesn’t involve judgment. What does it involve? Whitehead is less than clear. He writes: “It is a sensuous perception of sense-objects, definite as to situation but not very determinate as to exact character” (89). In *CN* Whitehead retains the term, but speaks of one sense-object’s conveying another sense-object. Conveyance stands here for a sort of “correlation” of the sense-objects co-ingressing in the same event. Whitehead further implies that the grounds for conveyance are to be looked for in the habits of the perceiver. Thus, a sense-object conveys another sense-object not by virtue of their common situation, but by virtue of the perceiver’s habits of associating the sense-objects. If “conveyance” is used with the same meaning in *PNK*, then we understand that a perceiver passes from one or some sense-objects to the perceptual object they are constitutive of by virtue of some association habits. So the relation of conveyance is at least triadic: a sense-object *F* conveys a perceptual-object *x* by virtue of some event *e* (which is a part of a percipient event). Perceptual judgments supervene on such habitual associations: judgment, we may say, follows instinct. Thus it can happen that we take the perceptual object conveyed by the sense-objects we simply or primarily recognize to be a physical object, and then judge that the perceptual object has a situation which in fact it does not have. This seems to be the essential of Whitehead’s psychological explanation of delusive perceptions.

But the main interest of Whitehead’s doctrine of ingression is that it aims to explain the “delusiveness” constitutive of most, if not all our perceptual experiences. We almost never see the geometrical shape of the perceived objects, but usually a shape deformed according to the laws of perspective. Also, the colour and other sensible qualities vary according to specifiable conditions (physical, physiological and psychological). Our perceptual experience is rarely completely faithful to the “true” characteristics of the physical objects. Delusiveness is constitutive to it, but it is also *aufgehoben* in the process. That means that, at the same time, we perceive the object as it is, and we don’t perceive it as it is, and this is the normal functioning of the perception. From this contradiction, an ancient sceptic could conclude that we must withhold every judgment grounded in sense-perception. Whitehead’s doctrine of ingression allows a defence of the non-contradictoriness of the perceptual experience.

3.3. SIMPLE LOCATION

One of Berkeley's merits was, according to Whitehead's interpretation, that he criticized simple location. Simple location is the concept Whitehead uses to define matter or, broadly, "material" as assumed by modern mathematical physics. Something is material if and only if it possesses simple location. "What I mean by matter, or material, is anything which has this property of *simple location*" (SMW 49). An entity has simple location if it "can be said to be *here* in time, or *here* in time, or *here* in space-time, in a perfectly definite sense which does not require for its explanation any reference to other regions of space-time" (49). This idea is, in Whitehead's analysis, a crucial component of the seventeenth century concept of nature. Nature is the instantaneous distribution of bits of matter simply located through space. It makes no difference whether space and time are absolute or relative. According to Whitehead, "among the primary elements of nature as apprehended in our immediate experience there is no element whatever which possesses the character of simple location" (58). The concept of a bit of material having the property of simple location is formed by "a process of constructive abstraction" (58), starting from the concrete entities disclosed in sense-perception. They are considered ontologically basic only because a "fallacy of misplaced concreteness" is committed.

The critique of simple location is a central part of Whitehead's critique of the seventeenth century concept of nature. It is equivalent to a critique of the scientific concept of material (matter, ether). Material, as conceived by science, is the product of fallacious reasoning. Nature, as a basis of abstraction for science, is not adequately conceptualized in terms of matter or ether, which is another way of saying that nature is not material. From this perspective, Whitehead is a full-fledged immaterialist, just like Berkeley. Immaterialism consists in affirming that there is a physical world, objectively real, independent of our minds, but it is not material, in the sense science gives to this term: it is not composed of bits of matter simply located in space-time.

According to Whitehead, Berkeley did not misplace concreteness, because Berkeley criticized the notion of simple location. If matter is equivalent to whatever has simple location, then the critique of matter is implicitly a critique of simple location, just like the critique of simple location is implicitly a critique of matter. The question is, did Berkeley explicitly criticize the concept of simple location? The answer must be negative. He explicitly criticized the concept of matter, in its Aristotelian and modern versions. However, according to Whitehead's hermeneutics there is an implicit critique of simple location in Berkeley's *Alciphron*. Remember that Euphranor makes the perplexed Alciphron admit that what he sees *here* is not what is supposed to exist *there*. Here, in this region of space, Alciphron perceives a thing which refers to another region of space. The thing perceived is not, therefore, simply located *here*, just as it is not simply located *there*. Given the

seventeenth century concept of matter, it follows that the thing perceived (the sense-datum) is not material (not made of any material stuff). No sense-datum is material. That means that what is observed in perception through the senses, i.e. nature, as defined by Whitehead, is not material.

3.4. THE CONCEPT OF PREHENSION

Whitehead's generous hermeneutics is at the same time the vindication of a Berkeleyan descent of his own critique of scientific materialism. Berkeley was one of the philosophers who looked at nature without the spectacles modern science imposed to European thinking. Another such philosopher was Francis Bacon, one of the founders of modern philosophy. The phrase Whitehead emphasized in the excerpt from Berkeley's *Principles*, "the mind *taking no notice of itself*" reveals its importance when connected to Whitehead's previous interpretation of an excerpt from Bacon. The entire excerpt is worthy of attention, but I will reproduce here only a few relevant phrases:

It is certain that all bodies whatsoever, though they have no sense, yet they have perception; for when one body is applied to another, there is a kind of election to embrace that which is agreeable, and to exclude or expel that which is ingrate; [...] And sometimes this perception, in some kind of bodies, is far more subtile than sense; [...] And this perception is sometimes at a distance, as well as upon the touch." (SMW 41–42)

This excerpt suggested to Whitehead the general definition of perception as "taking account of" (42). In this broad sense, there is perception which is not sense-perception, which is more "subtile" than sense-perception. Percipience, in this broad sense, is not limited to bodies possessed of a sensitive soul, i.e., animated. Furthermore, an inert body can take account of things happening at a distance, not only of things directly touching it. According to Aristotle, the animals of the lowest grade have only the sense of touch, so they cannot take account of anything not touching them. One would not expect inert things to be superior to lower animals. Animals, however, have at the same time sense-perceptions and this other kind of perception. Now Whitehead interprets "sense", in Bacon's text, somewhat unnaturally, as standing for "cognitive experience". It follows that the capacity of non-cognitively taking account of other bodies is a universal characteristic of all bodies. Whitehead will call this non-cognitive seizing of things "prehension" (69).

If we get back to the excerpt from *PHK*, it becomes clear that Whitehead emphasized the phrase "taking no notice of itself" with the idea of prehension in mind: the "mind" does not *prehend* itself, it only prehends "ideas". This is not only coherent with Berkeley's claim that there are no ideas of minds, it is especially in

line with Alexander's distinction between contemplation and enjoyment: the mind, Alexander held, contemplates its object, and enjoys itself (*Space, Time, and Deity* I, 12). There is, of course, another connotation of the emphasized phrase: the object observed is thought by means of an abstraction from the observer (which is, in Berkeley's case, the mind). The object, which is a term in a relation involving among its other terms the observer, is thus an abstraction from a wider, more concrete fact (the most concrete fact being a duration). This connotation is important and is developed by Whitehead elsewhere, but in the present context it is not relevant. What matters, is that the mind prehends objects without prehending itself at the same time.

The phrase emphasized in the excerpt from *Alciphron* connects to the phrase from *Principles* within the same doctrine of prehensions: "there is a prehension, *here* in this place, of things which have a reference to *other* places" (*SMW* 69). The object is there, but is prehended here, which means that the object ingresses in one mode there, and that it also ingresses, in a different mode, here. And if the perceiver changes position, the same object ingresses at all the regions which the perceiver occupies in his displacement. The reading of *Alciphron* suggested to Whitehead the doctrine which will be known as the doctrine of "multiple location" (Price) or of "multiple inherence" (Broad).

Before briefly discussing this doctrine, I would like to comment on the difference between the concept of prehension from *SMW* and the later concept. In *SMW* Whitehead does not have yet a theory of feelings. The concept of prehension is not initially designed to express the contribution of different entities to the experience of an actual entity, but to express the peculiar kind of *unity* belonging to space and time (or to space-time). Things are together in space-time in a particular way, which Whitehead attempts to conceptualize by speaking of the "prehensive character" of space-time. Any volume of space (or any four-dimensional region, if we speak of space-time), exhibits a "prehensive unity" (64), which is "not the unity of a mere logical aggregate of parts" (65). A volume of space is not a mereological sum of the smaller volumes in which it is divisible without rest. Any volume of space is characterized by an order, which can be generally described by saying that "every volume mirrors in itself every other volume in space" (65). Space-time has, in addition to the prehensive character, a "separative character" and a "modal character". The separative character refers to the fact that things are separated in space-time, even if they are also together. The modal character is more important. Here is how Whitehead describes it:

Everything which is in space receives a definite limitation of some sort, so that in a sense it has just that shape which it does and no other, also in some sense it is just in this place and in no other. Analogously for time, a thing endures during a certain period, and through no other period. (64)

This is an abstract characterization, because it does not consider the modal character of space in conjunction with its separative and, more importantly, with its prehensive character. The mutual mirroring of space volumes into each other is expressible by saying that each volume has different aspects from the perspectives of the other volumes. The aspect a volume B has from the perspective of another volume A, is what Whitehead calls “the *mode* in which B enters into the composition of A” (65). Now the concept of modal character of space can be adequately explained: “the modal character of space [is] that the prehensive unity of A is the prehension into unity of the aspects of all other volumes from the standpoint of A” (65). This allows Whitehead to speak of the “modal presences in A of other regions” (65). This idiom is important. In a prehension, the prehended volume, let us say the spatial region occupied by the Moon, which is at over 384 000 Km away from Earth, is modally present in the region where it is observed from, say the Montmartre hill in Paris. By extrapolation, every observed characteristic of the Moon is modally present in the region which mirrors it. And that simply means that every observed characteristic of the Moon is modally present everywhere in space-time. In the sense-data language, this comes to say that every *sensibile* is modally present everywhere, and that all *sensibilia* are modally present in any one region of space-time. Some of them become temporarily sensed, hence sense-data. They become so if the region mirroring them is occupied by a percipient, provided that additional conditions are satisfied. But there is prehension indifferently of the presence or absence of a percipient, for there is modal presence of a *sensibile* in a region of space-time.

Thus we are entitled to distinguish between an objectivist sense of prehension, and an experiential sense. In the objectivist sense, a prehension is the relation whereby a space-time region is modally present in another space-time region, relation which is essential for the latter. In the experiential sense, prehension is the logical genus of feeling, any prehension being analysable into a subject, an objective datum, and a subjective form. This experiential concept will supersede the objectivist concept in Whitehead’s mature cosmology.

3.5. THE THEORY OF MULTIPLE LOCATION

Whitehead’s new theory of perception, developed in *SMW*, rests on the objectivist notion of prehension. The notion allows, as we have seen, to think of sense-data as being in many regions of space-time at the same time, but in different *modes*. In Whitehead’s terminology, sense-data ingress in different modes in different regions of space-time. When we speak of a sense-datum, we implicitly understand that it ingresses at least in one region occupied by a percipient, or observer. That region of space-time, i.e. that volume of space through a duration of time, considered “as one entity”, is actually “a unit of realised experience” (70). That means that, considered in its prehensive character, the region of space-time is a

drop of experience, as Whitehead will speak later of actual entities. Considered in its separative character, a region of space-time is just an expression of the mutual externality of things. In my opinion, this doctrine can be interpreted as follows: while I look at the Moon, some part of my visual cortex is at the same time *many* neurons, and *one* drop of experience. Generally, my entire brain is at the same time a bulk of neurons and a unit of realized experience, i.e., the place of a togetherness of modal aspects of many things in one unity. The mind is nothing else than the brain, considered in its prehensive unity.

Given the broad notion of prehension, perception can be defined as awareness of a prehensive unification of many modal aspects of many sense-data in a region of my brain through a duration of time (in the specious present). In other words, perception is the awareness of the modal coming together of many sense-data in an act of prehensive unification. The act of “prehensive unification” replaces the mental act in ordinary language. Whitehead replaces Berkeley’s “mind” by “prehensive unification” in order to integrate into his theory Berkeley’s answer to the metaphysical question “What do we mean by things being realized in the world of nature?”. In Whitehead’s interpretation, Berkeley’s answer is that “what constitutes the realisation of natural entities is the being perceived within the unity of mind” (69). Translated into Whiteheadian, Berkeley’s answer is that the realisation of natural entities is their modal togetherness with other natural entities in a process of prehensive unification. Thus, the *esse* of an entity is not its *percipi*, but its *prehendi*; to be, is not to be perceived, but to be prehended; that is, to be modally present somewhere; that is, to ingress in some event. More completely, *esse est prehendi aut prehendere*, to be is to be prehended or toprehend. Acts of prehensive unification have no modal presence in other regions of space-time.

Whitehead still takes percipience for granted, he does not want to explain philosophically how percipience is possible. Percipience may be defined as capacity for awareness. Awareness also is taken, if not for granted, at least as unexplainable. Given this capacity, some prehensive processes in the brains of percipients are accompanied by awareness. A prehensive process of which we are aware is a “cognitive perception” (70). Awareness is optional, the process of prehensive unification is not, for it is merely the mirroring of some regions of space-time into the region occupied by the percipient. When and why awareness triggers is left unexplained by Whitehead, but the explanation involves presumably the psychological doctrine of interest.

Whitehead is thus far a Berkeleyan because he is an immaterialist (in the explained sense of the word), and because he affirms that the being of a natural entity consists of its being prehended (or of prehendng). Both the negation of materialism, and the doctrine of the realisation of natural entities, rest upon the denial of simple location. The opposite doctrine, pervading Whitehead’s novel philosophy of nature and of perception, is the doctrine of multiple location (Price), or “multiple inherence” (Broad) of sense-data. Whitehead himself did not baptize

the doctrine in any way, and he didn't fully develop it. He stated the essential in the following lines:

A mode of a sense-object at A (as abstracted from the sense-object whose relationship to A the mode is conditioning) is the aspect from A of some other region B. Thus the sense-object is present in A with the mode of location in B. Thus if green be the sense-object in question, green is not simply at A where it is being perceived, nor is it simply at B where it is perceived as located; but it is present at A with the mode of location in B. There is no particular mystery about this. You have only got to look into a mirror and to see the image in it of some green leaves behind your back. For you at A there will be green; but not green simply at A where you are. The green at A will be green with the mode of having location at the image of the leaf behind the mirror. Then turn round and look at the leaf. You are now perceiving the green in the same way as you did before, except that now the green has the mode of being located in the actual leaf. I am merely describing what we do perceive: we are aware of green as being one element in a prehensive unification of sense-objects; each sense-object, and among them green, having its particular mode, which is expressible as location elsewhere. (*SMW* 70–71)

The theory quickly made its way into the treatises of philosophy of perception, where it was refined and discussed, if only to be rejected. It was seen as a tentative to reconcile naive realism with the sense-data theory (Robinson 44), and this, I believe, is true and consistent with Whitehead's general commonsensism, not unlike Berkeley's. Price's reconstruction of the theory is the best known, and sometimes the theory is discussed without even mentioning Whitehead (e.g. Robinson). C. D. Broad, who called it, perhaps more adequately, the theory of multiple inherence, discussed it before Price, in *The Mind and its Place in Nature*. His reconstruction of Whitehead's theory was criticized by Wolfe Mays as being to some extent simplifying and inadequate, but I believe its shortcomings, as emphasized by Mays, are not crucial. The objections Price, Broad, and others have brought to this theory remain valid. The theory of multiple location is the one positive contribution of Whitehead to the philosophy of perception of his time. It was also the swan song of neorealism. It is as if it was conceived uniquely to be criticized. But it elicited criticism from important people and thus contributed to the development of the philosophy of perception.

My concern is not, at present, with the philosophical merits or demerits of this theory. I am concerned with it as an element of a neorealist recast of immaterialism. The theory of multiple location explains the realisation of *objects* in nature, in particular of sense-objects, or sense-data. It is an essential part of Whitehead's own answer to Berkeley's metaphysical question, but the answer itself is faithful in spirit to Berkeley. Whitehead replaced Berkeley's mind with a process of prehensive unification, but the equivalence looks for extension to God's infinite mind also. The equivalent of God's mind is the universal process of prehensive

unification in and through which nature is real. Nature is “a manifold of prehensions”, i.e. of “prehensive occasions”, it is the “totality of prehensive unifications” (*SMW* 71), or “a complex of prehensive unifications” (72). There are many *loci* where Whitehead makes visible his apodictic belief in the unity of nature; so the terms manifold, totality, complex have to be understood as expressing the unity, which does not exclude plurality. Thus, all the prehensive unifications in nature are instances of one ultimate process of prehensive unification, running through the entire universe. This means there is a Whiteheadian equivalent for God’s mind, but this equivalent is not equivalent to Berkeley’s conception of God’s mind. For Whitehead, the universal process is nothing over and above the particular processes of prehensive unification; it does not possess higher reality and, obviously, it cannot be located in a precise region of space-time, like particular processes are. We know what is the name of this universal process: creativity. That means that the universal process of prehensive unification is *not* God’s mind, or, which is the same thing, that God’s mind is not the universal process of unification traversing the entire universe. This is why Whitehead’s Berkeleyan answer to Berkeley’s metaphysical question, while different from Berkeley’s own answer, is not the contradictory of the latter:

Berkeley [asked the] question as to the character of the reality to be assigned to nature. He states it to be the reality of ideas in mind. A complete metaphysic which has attained to some notion of mind, and to some notion of ideas, may perhaps ultimately adopt this view. (72)

4. CONCLUSION

Whitehead’s engagement with Berkeley evolved through two main phases. Initially, he viewed Berkeley as a subjective idealist who, while effectively criticizing materialism, must be rejected early on due to the disastrous implications of his philosophy for the concept of nature and science. Berkeley’s view turned nature into a logical construct from abstract ideas, and science into “a confident expectation that relevant thoughts will occasionally occur” (*PNK* 10).

In the second phase, Whitehead reinterpreted Berkeley as an objective theistic idealist, possibly even an absolute idealist. He also absolved Berkeley of epistemological idealism. Reading Berkeley as both an objective/absolute idealist and epistemological realist, Whitehead found in his work ideas for a new philosophy of experience and nature, opposing scientific materialism and continuing immaterialism. This recast of immaterialism improved upon the neorealism developed in Britain by T. P. Nunn, Samuel Alexander, John Laird, and others.

Whitehead’s immaterialism was developed from the metaphysical standpoint of what he called a provisional realism. However, his definition of idealism, as the doctrine affirming that reality is ultimately constituted of “cognitive mentality”, or

that cognition is an essential characteristic of ultimate reality, is quite peculiar and uncharacteristic. From this standpoint, a metaphysical doctrine stating that ultimate contingent reality is constituted by non-cognitive experiential processes, i.e., that it essentially involves conative and affective processes, could be called realistic. It suffices to hold that ultimate reality is a conative process, exclusive of all cognition. But this is exactly what Schopenhauer did, and Ward did a similar thing. It is difficult to see how replacing the universal mind by a complex of prehensive unifications issues in a realistic metaphysics. If cognition is essential to mind or to spirit, then, of course, the resulting conception cannot satisfy the definition of ontological idealism. But idealism is declined by a mere play of words.

The metaphysical doctrine in *SMW* invites comparison with James's metaphysics of pure experience, Lotze, and some of his British followers like Ward and Stout. None of these philosophers were realists, though they inquired in the spirit of realism, as Lotze put it. Whitehead's philosophy of perception, however, represents an extreme form of direct realism, aiming to defend the common-sense view against modern scientific critiques. In developing this philosophy, Whitehead was inspired by Berkeley, and thus, can be considered a neo-Berkeleyan. Like Berkeley, he crafted an idealistic metaphysics grounded in a realistic philosophy of perception.

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