

THE EARLY RECEPTION OF
BERKELEY'S IMMATERIALISM

1710-1733

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HARRY M. BRACKEN

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REVISED EDITION



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To A. A. LUCE and T. E. JESSOP

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface to the first edition	IX
Preface to the revised edition	XI
I. The Early Reception of Berkeley's Immaterialism	I
The London Wits. – <i>Acta Eruditorum</i> . – <i>Bibliothèque Italique</i> . – Jean Pierre de Crousaz. – Pierre Desfontaines. – Voltaire. – <i>Journal des Sçavans</i> . – <i>Journal Littéraire</i> . – Michael de la Roche and <i>Memoirs of Literature</i> . – Malebranche, the Jesuits and the <i>Mémoires de Trévoux</i> . – Egomism. – Christian Wolff. – Christoph Pfaff. – Arthur Collier.	
II. A Continuation	25
Fénelon. – Tournemine and the Jesuits again. – <i>L'Europe Savante</i> . – Chevalier Ramsay. – David Hume. – The Rankenian Club. – Samuel Johnson of Connecticut. – Ephraim Chambers. – Andrew Baxter.	
III. The <i>Journal Littéraire</i> Review of Berkeley's <i>Three Dialogues</i>	39
Thémiseul de Saint-Hyacinthe. – Justus van Effen.	
IV. Berkeley and Chambers	51
Chambers' <i>Cyclopaedia</i> . – Abstract Ideas. – <i>L'Encyclopédie</i> .	
V. Andrew Baxter: Critic of Berkeley	59
Pyrrhonism. – Pierre Bayle. – Ephraim Chambers.	
Conclusion	82
Appendix A: <i>Berkeley's Realisms</i> (1958)	85
Appendix B: <i>Journal des Sçavans</i> (1711)	97
Appendix C: <i>Journal Littéraire</i> (1713)	101
Appendix D: <i>Mémoires de Trévoux</i> (May 1713)	107
Appendix E: <i>Mémoires de Trévoux</i> (December 1713)	108
Appendix F: Tournemine's <i>Sur l'Athéisme des Immatérialistes</i> (1718)	109
Appendix G: Selections from Chambers' <i>Cyclopaedia</i> (1728)	111
Bibliography	121
Index	129

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

By the time of Immanuel Kant, Berkeley had been called, among other things, a sceptic, an atheist, a solipsist, and an idealist. In our own day, however, the suggestion has been advanced that Berkeley is better understood if interpreted as a realist and man of common sense. Regardless of whether in the end one decides to treat him as a subjective idealist or as a realist, I think it has become appropriate to inquire how Berkeley's own contemporaries viewed his philosophy. Heretofore the generally accepted account has been that they ignored him, roughly from the time he published the *Principles of Human Knowledge* until 1733 when Andrew Baxter's criticism appeared. The aim of the present study is to correct that account as well as to give some indication not only of the extent, but more importantly, the role and character of several of the earliest discussions. Secondly, I have tried to give some clues as to the influence this early material may have had in forming the image of the "good" Bishop that emerged in the second half of the eighteenth century. For it is my hope that such clues may prove helpful in freeing us from the more severe strictures of the traditional interpretive dogmas. To these ends, the first two chapters survey such material as I have been able to uncover from the two supposedly "doldrum decades," while the final three chapters deal in detail with discussions which seemed to warrant specific attention. The text of several of the early criticisms have, because of their relative inaccessibility, been reproduced in the Appendices.

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge some of the help I have received while preparing this book. First of all, my thanks to my colleagues in the Department of Philosophy at the State University of Iowa for frequent assistance and constant encouragement. I am especially indebted to Professor Richard H. Popkin, whose willingness to discuss issues both in and around the material of this study has been

most sincerely appreciated. Mrs. Margaret J. Corcoran, Mr. Richard A. Watson, and Professor Henry G. Van Leeuwen, now of Hanover College, have also helped me in preparing the text.

My debt to the State University of Iowa Library is considerable. Thanks are especially due Mrs. Julia Bartling, Head of Reference Services, Miss Lillie Cilley, Miss Ada Stoffet, Mrs. Mary Lee Tsuffis, as well as to Mrs. Moira Buhse and Mrs. Carol Frey. Other librarians who have made my task easier include Miss Margaret Hackett of the Library of the Boston Athenaeum, Mr. Henry J. Dubester of the Library of Congress, M. P. Jossierand of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Dr. W. Douglas Simpson of the University of Aberdeen, and the staffs at both the University of Chicago and the Newberry Libraries.

Part of the material in Chapters Four and Five has appeared as articles in the *Journal of the History of Ideas* in 1956 and 1957 and is reprinted here with the kind permission of the Editors.

I am especially grateful to the Graduate College of the State University of Iowa and to the Publications Committee of the American Philosophical Association for the financial assistance that has made publication of this book possible.

Finally, my thanks to Nancy Hunt Ryden and to my wife for preparing the original typescript, to my wife for helping with the burdensome task of reading proofs, and to Christopher for letting her.

H.M.B.

Iowa City

July 27, 1958

PREFACE TO THE REVISED EDITION

The first edition of this study having been out of print for several years, I am grateful for the opportunity to present this new edition. A large number of small changes have been made in the text and a substantial number of references added. These are primarily references to secondary sources since I have come upon little in the way of new material for the 1710–1733 period. This is in spite of the fact that during the summer of 1964 I examined a quantity of English tract literature of the early eighteenth century as well as many of the more philosophical books of that era. Accordingly, I believe that my account of the early reception of Berkeley's immaterialism and its influence on Berkeley's subsequent reputation as a philosopher remains sound.

I have, however, included in the present edition my paper, "Berkeley's Realisms." The text is substantially that which appeared in the *Philosophical Quarterly* in 1958 and is reprinted in Appendix A with the kind permission of the Editor. My reasons for including this paper are twofold. *First*, because it contains a statement of those philosophical difficulties in Berkeley which, at the time that I prepared the first edition of this study, seemed to me the most serious. I called attention to them from time to time in my text and I referred on occasion to the article. *Second*, because in an article in *Hermathena* in 1960, Professor Luce made both the first edition and the article the joint object of a critical discussion.

My opinion now, as then, is that the broad strokes of the Luce-Jessop interpretation of Berkeley are correct. I remain uneasy with their accounts of Berkeley's ideas of sense. And I am much more inclined to believe that Berkeley would himself have accepted what I suggested at the end of "Berkeley's Realisms" as an unsought and undesired consequence for the Luce-Jessop interpretation, i.e. that all our knowledge might be notional. But however that may be, it was

Luce and Jessop who alerted me to a "realist" reading of Berkeley, and thereby made me share their concern with the extent of Berkeley's interest in a realist ontology and philosophy of mind. It was, after all, precisely to the realism in Malebranche's theory of Ideas that Luce first called attention. And it is my own belief that eventually the theory of notions will also be seen to be an appropriate part of Berkeley's involvement with the realist tradition.

The contemporary student of Berkeley can certainly take pleasure in the fact that thirty years after the appearance of Luce's *Berkeley and Malebranche*, not only is a new edition of Berkeley available, but the half-way mark has been reached in producing a new edition of Malebranche. Thirty years ago Luce spoke of Locke, Malebranche, and Bayle as the major influences on Berkeley. Now, for the first time, a wealth of material is also becoming available on Bayle. Elisabeth Labrousse has made three major contributions to our appreciation of Bayle: a labor of love, an *Inventaire Critique* of his correspondence; plus one volume dedicated to his intellectual biography and another (both in the *International Archives of the History of Ideas*) to a study of his ideas – philosophical, religious, historical. Paul Dibon has edited a collection of essays, *Pierre Bayle: Le Philosophe de Rotterdam*. A selection of *Dictionnaire* articles, edited and translated by Richard H. Popkin is about to appear. There has of course been a great deal of new material on the Cartesian background including Henri Gouhier's *La pensée métaphysique de Descartes*, Popkin's *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, as well as R. A. Watson's *The Downfall of Cartesianism 1673–1712*, and the extremely helpful *Bibliographia Cartesiana* by Gregor Sebba (these last two items are also in the *International Archives*).

The only disappointing feature of all this is that histories of philosophy, and hence, all too often, courses in philosophy, continue to reflect nineteenth century attitudes. Despite the surprisingly large number of history texts that have appeared in the last two decades, I know of only two: one by George Boas, the other by James Collins, in which sustained efforts are made to rethink the history of philosophy in the light of the scholarly research of the past half-century. "Higher criticism," whether practiced by a Bayle, a Lovejoy, or a Gouhier, has often received such a cool reception in philosophy that one is tempted to think that it is the philosophers who are the true defenders of revelation!

In conclusion, I wish to acknowledge the help that I have received from a wide variety of sources. During the summer of 1964 I was the

recipient of a research grant from the American Philosophical Society which enabled me to use the libraries of the Los Angeles area. While my research project was not directly concerned with the material in this text, it did concern a Berkeleian theme and it required my use of the literature of the period. As a result I was able to examine some new material relevant to the present study. I am indeed grateful to the Society for this unanticipated by-product of its support.

I am also grateful to several librarians for the assistance, encouragement, and thoughtfulness that they accorded me. I wish to thank Miss Mary Isabel Fry, Miss Constance Lodge, and the staff of the Henry E. Huntington Library; Mr. Wallace Nethery of the Hoose (Philosophy) Library, University of Southern California; Mr. Leo Linder and the other members of the staff of the Special Collections Library at the University of California, Los Angeles; and Mr. William E. Conway, Mrs. Edna C. Davis, and the staff at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library.

The task of revising the text has been made much easier by the help of friends who have made many valuable suggestions. I wish especially to thank Dr. T. E. Jessop, former Professor of Philosophy at the University of Hull, and Professor Richard A. Watson of the Department of Philosophy, Washington University. Their wise counsel on textual questions, their assistance on research problems, and the generous contributions of time and effort that these entailed, have been greatly appreciated. Mr. David Norton, Department of Philosophy, University of California, San Diego, has helped me considerably, both by examining the text and by responding to my urgent and all-too-frequent pleas for reference data when I no longer had ready access to good library facilities. Professor Phillip Cummins, Department of Philosophy, University of Iowa, has also helped provide me with reference material.

I wish also to thank the directors of the *International Archives of the History of Ideas*, Paul Dibon, Professor of Philosophy at Nijmegen, and Richard H. Popkin, Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, for including my text in their series. I am pleased to have this revised edition appear under their auspices not only because of the intrinsic merits of the series, but also because much of the material which went into the first edition had been assembled earlier in a dissertation at the University of Iowa under Professor Popkin's direction. Both Professors Dibon and Popkin have helped me in many ways in preparing this edition for the press.

Finally, I wish to thank my wife for assuming the difficult, and at times seemingly endless, task of reading proof. Christopher, in consultation with Timothy, assisted in the preparation of the index. Mrs. Ruth A. Bardrick helped prepare copy for the printer.

H.M.B.

Tempe, Arizona

September 30, 1964