Berkeley's "Notion" of Spiritual Substance

by Robert Merrihew Adams (University of Michigan)

In the third of Berkeley's *Three Dialogues*, Hylas taxes Philonous with an apparent inconsistency.

> You admit nevertheless that there is spiritual substance, although you have no idea of it; while you deny there can be such a thing as material substance, because you have no notion or idea of it. Is this fair dealing? To act consistently, you must either admit matter or reject spirit. What say you to this? (*Works*, II, 232)[1].

Philonous had a good deal to say to this, but evidently he has not succeeded in convincing all of Berkeley's critics. For this objection, so clearly articulated by Berkeley himself, and discussed by him, is still being raised[2]. I believe that Berkeley's reply to the objection, while it may not be convincing at every point, is interesting, and has commonly not been well understood. My purpose in this essay is to make some contribution to a more adequate understanding of Berkeley's defense of his doctrine of spiritual substance.

The central point in his defense is that although, in his opinion, we do not have "ideas", strictly speaking, of the mind, self, or spirit and its acts, we do have experience of them. This experience enables us to have "notions" of spiritual substance and its acts in a way in which we cannot have a notion of material substance.

> For you neither perceive matter objectively, as you do an inactive being or idea, nor know it, as you do your self by a reflex act: neither do you mediately apprehend it by similitude of the one or the other: nor yet collect it by reasoning from that which you know immediately. (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 232).

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[1] *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols., Edinburgh 1948—57. All quotations from Berkeley are from this edition. I cite it by the section numbers of individual works, wherever possible, and by volume and page only where numbered sections are long or lacking. "*Princ.*" is Part I of *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge;* "*Dial.*" is *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous;* and "*PC*" is *Philosophical Commentaries.* I have consulted Luce's annotated *editio diplomatica* of the *Philosophical Commentaries* (Edinburgh 1944), but I quote from the text in vol. I of the *Works. De Motu* is quoted in Luce's translation.

[2] For instance, by C. Turbayne, "Berkeley's Two Concepts of Mind", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 20 (1959—60) 85. For references to other works in which this charge of inconsistency is made, see W. Steinkraus, "Berkeley and His Modern Critics", in W. Steinkraus, ed., *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, New York 1966, 150—153.

The problem with the conception of material substance is not just that we have no *idea* of it, but that we have neither an idea of it nor any other experience from which we might derive a notion of it.

Berkeley's answer involves the claim that there is another basic way of being aware of something, besides awareness by way of ideas. In the first section of this essay I will discuss his attempt to distinguish these two modes of awareness. The second section of the essay is about Berkeley's concept of a "notion", and the thesis that we have notions, with empirical content, of things of which we have no ideas. The third and final section takes up some problems connected with the doctrine that the self is a substance. The essay is devoted to Berkeley's theories of self-awareness and the nature of the mind. I shall have very little to say about his attack on the conception of matter. I shall sometimes try to explain why it seems to me that one or another of his contentions is right or wrong, or has or lacks plausibility; but I shall not attempt a complete or thorough evaluation of his position.

1. Two Modes of Awareness

Berkeley claims that we are aware of two very different kinds of thing, spirits and ideas. These two kinds of thing are so different that we can be aware of them only in very different ways[3].

> After what hath been said, it is I suppose plain, that our souls are not to be known in the same manner as senseless inactive objects, or by way of *idea*. *Spirits* and *ideas* are things so wholly different, that when we say, *they exist, they are known*, or the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures. There is nothing alike or common in them: and to expect that by any multiplication or enlargement of our faculties, we may be enabled to know a spirit as we do a triangle, seems as absurd as if we should hope to *see a sound* (*Princ.* 142).

The self is not known "by way of *idea*". But Berkeley insists that it is nonetheless known, and known immediately.

> Farther, I know what I mean by the terms *I* and *myself*; and I know this immediately, or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 231).

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[3] I speak of "modes of awareness", meaning ways in which we are aware of something. This terminology is mine, not Berkeley's; but I think it is amply justified by what he says about the "manner" in which we know our souls, in *Princ.* 142, which I am about to quote. I have already quoted a passage in which he distinguishes between perceiving "objectively" and knowing "by a reflex act" (*Works*, II, 232), and I will have more to say, below, about this way of describing the difference.

In *De Motu* Berkeley writes that "the sentient, percipient, thinking thing we know by a certain internal consciousness" (21), and that "a thinking, active thing is given which we experience as the principle of motion in ourselves. This we call *soul, mind,* and *spirit*" (30). In a passage added to *Principles,* 89, in the second edition, Berkeley tells us that "we comprehend our own existence by inward feeling or reflexion".

These claims are made about the mind or self. Similar claims are made about *acts* of the mind or self. Specifically, Berkeley holds that we know by *experience* that we act, though he denies (*Princ.* 142) that we have any *idea* of an action. In *Principles,* 28, he argues that we have knowledge, "certain, and grounded on experience," that we accomplish things by willing, whereas we have no such empirical background for talk about non-mental agency. And in *Alciphron,* VII, 19, Euphranor declares that his "own experience assures" him that he is not an inactive being; "I know I act", he insists (*Works,* III, 315). Berkeley claims also that we have notions, though not ideas, not only of the mind or self but also of its acts (*Princ.* 142).

One serious problem about Berkeley's destinction between two modes of awareness is that it is difficult to determine precisely where and on what basis he believed that the line ought to be drawn between ideas and those mental states or acts of which we are aware but which are not ideas. How are we to know what sort of mental event counts as the occurrence of an idea, and what does not?

We might try to specify one class or the other by enumeration. Besides the mind, soul, or spirit itself, there are several things which Berkeley mentions in such a way as to imply that they are not ideas although we have some notion of them. Among these are thought, volition, perception (*Princ.* 138), memory (*Alciphron,* VII, 5: *Works,* III, 292), desire (*PC* 854), loving, hating, and operations of the mind in general (*Princ.* 27). This is a composite list, and Berkeley might not have regarded it as exhaustive. We can see pretty clearly from this enumeration that he did not think we have ideas of any cognitive state or act of will. It is less clear what he thought about emotions; loving and hating are possibly counted as non-ideas because of what Berkeley regarded as their volitional aspect. In one entry (653) in the *Philosophical Commentaries* he says that uneasiness is an idea; in another (854) he says, "Will, Understanding, desire, Hatred etc. so far forth as they are

acts or active differ not at all, their difference consists in their objects, circumstances etc.". This suggests that Berkeley thought there is only one sort of action (of which volition is doubtless the chief paradigm), which by its objects and circumstances may be distinguished as loving or hating — and possibly as other emotions. To complete our enumeration, we may note that in *Principles*, 142, in the second edition, Berkeley says that we have a notion but not an idea of *relations*, because the include "an act of the mind"; but we need not worry here about his views on relations.

A second way of trying to understand the distinction we are working on is by considering how Berkeley describes the manner in which we are aware of the two kinds of thing. He says more than once that his knowledge of the mind and its acts is by "reflexion". Ideas are perceived "objectively", but the self is known "by a reflex act" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 232). Perhaps in his use of these terms Berkeley is attempting a description or characterization of the felt difference between the two kinds of awareness which he has in mind. He may be taken as suggesting that we are aware of ideas as of objects distinct from us, over against us; whereas in our awareness of the mind and its acts that which is known is not experienced as distinct from that which knows[4]. Perhaps he means that in the latter cases the act of knowing is experienced as a reflex act in the sense that it is experienced as identical with the activity that is known. Such a characterization has some plausibility. If I have a mental image (idea) of a scene that I remember, I am aware of the image as of an object that is somehow over against me; the image is experienced as something that is distinct from me, even though I do not suppose that it exists independently of my mind. The image seems to be there for me to inspect, perhaps with a certain detachment. But if I am aware of an intention that I have, there seems to be no such distance — perhaps even no such distinction — between subject and object. I do not experience the intention as something over against me, but as *myself* intending to do such and such.

What I have said in the previous paragraph is said, I realize, rather impressionistically, but I believe that even an impressionistic description, if it rings true enough, might help us to distinguish two basic modes of awareness. I am afraid, however, that the im-

[4] Certainly Berkeley distinguishes sharply between the mind and its ideas (*Princ.* 1-2). And I shall point out in section 3, below, that Berkeley is concerned not to distinguish too sharply the mind from its acts, or one of its acts from another simultaneous with it.

pressionistic characterization suggested by Berkeley's terminology of "objective" perception and "reflex act" is not successful as a characterization of precisely that distinction which Berkeley wished to draw. It does seem to provide an apt characterization of one difference that obtains between the way in which I am normally aware of a mental image and the way in which I am normally aware of an intention. But it is not at all clear that the same difference regularly obtains (as on Berkeley's views it ought to) between the way in which one is aware of a mental image and the way in which one is aware of a *desire*. Many people apparently do experience some of their own desires as alien forces over against them, rather than as themselves choosing or acting in a certain way.

There is much in Berkeley's works to suggest that the distinction which we are trying to understand ought to be construed (1) as a distinction between passive and active occurrences in the mind, or (2) as a distinction between real or imagined sensation (including remembered sensation) and other modes of awareness. Let us consider these suggestions; I believe they indicate the most nearly adequate general description of the distinction which Berkeley has to offer.

(1) The difference between spirit and ideas which is most frequently remarked by Berkeley is that spirit is active and ideas are passive (e. g., *Princ.* 27, 137—138). It is clearly an important doctrine of Berkeley's philosophy that all ideas are purely passive, and that mind or spirit as such is active. If we can add that only ideas are purely passive (that there are not, for instance, other purely passive states or occurrences in the mind), we will have a clear-cut distinction between ideas and other objects of awareness: ideas are purely passive and all other objects of awareness have some action or agency in them. I believe that this is Berkeley's position. "Idea" seems to be mentioned as interchangeable with "inactive being" in the *Three Dialogues* (III: *Works*, II, 232), and as interchangeable with "passive object" in *Siris*, 308.

I am not ascribing to Berkeley the view that only ideas are passive at all. For he admits that there is passivity in the soul itself. "That the soul of man is passive as well as active, I make no doubt", he writes to Johnson (*Works*, II, 293). Indeed, if the human mind is dependent on God to the extent that Berkeley claims that it is, it obviously must be passive in many ways. The position I think Berkeley holds is not that only ideas are passive, but that only ideas are purely passive.

It might be objected that Berkeley cannot consistently maintain that only ideas are purely passive, since he says both that we are "altogether passive" in sense perception (*Dial.* I: *Works*, II, 197; cf. *PC* 301), and that no degree of the power of perceiving can "be represented in an idea" (*Princ.* 138). A hint of the reply that Berkeley might offer to this objection may be found in the *Philosophical Commentaries:* "Perception is passive but this not distinct from Idea" (*PC* 756). We may conjecture that Berkeley uses "perceive" and "perception" in two somewhat different senses. In one sense the perception of an idea is simply the occurrence or existence of the idea; as such there is nothing active in it, according to Berkeley. In another sense the mind perceives an idea by reacting to it, making judgments about it, relating it to other ideas, and thus taking it up into the unity of consciousness; in doing this the mind is active[5]. As we shall see (in section 3 below), Berkeley believes that whatever is perceived in either of these senses must be perceived in the other too; and this might lead him to be less than careful about distinguishing them.

(2) Another point that is quite clear is that *all* immediate objects of real and imagined sensation are ideas for Berkeley. He sometimes speaks as if he counts *only* the immediate objects of real and imagined sensation as ideas. In *PC* 775 he says, "By Idea I mean any sensible or imaginable thing"[6]. It would seem to follow that if we are aware of anything otherwise than by way of real or imagined sensation, we are aware of it otherwise than by way of ideas; and I think that is normally Berkeley's view. On this interpretation, Berkeley, having rejected the Lockean scheme of ideas of sense and ideas of reflexion, held that only ideas of sense are properly called "ideas" and there are no ideas of reflexion.

At least one recalcitrant passage resists this interpretation, however. In section 25 of the *Principles* Berkeley says, "But whoever shall attend to his ideas, whether of sense or reflexion, will not perceive in them any power or activity; there is therefore no such thing contained in them". Here he evidently presupposes that there are ideas of reflexion that are not ideas of sense, and asserts that they are purely passive. He does not say which mental occurrences

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[5] On Berkeley's views on activity and passivity in sense perception, cf. W. Doney, "Two Questions about Berkeley", *The Philosophical Review* 61 (1952) 382—391; A. A. Luce, "Berkeleian Action and Passion", *Revue internationale de philosophie* 7 (1953) 3—18; and W. Steinkraus, op. cit. 159—162.

[6] Cf. Berkeley, *Siris*, 308.

are to be classed as ideas of reflexion. Perhaps they are those ideas which are said in *Principles*, 1, to be "perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind" (if, indeed, the reference in this passage is to ideas at all[7]).

It may be that Berkeley carelessly slipped back into a Lockean way of speaking in these passages, or that he really vacillated on the question whether there are ideas other than those given in real and imagined sensation. In any case, the concept of an idea of reflexion does not play an important role in Berkeley's epistemology and philosophy of mind. And I think that the thesis that we have two very different modes of awareness is likely to seem more plausible if we think of it as making a distinction between real and imagined sensation and some other mode of awareness.

With some reservations, therefore, I am ascribing to Berkeley the position that all ideas and only ideas are immediate objects of real or imagined sensation, as well as the thesis that all ideas and only ideas are purely passive. If Berkeley holds both of these positions, of course, it follows that he is committed to the view that all purely passive things, and only purely passive things, are immediate objects of real or imagined sensation. This consequence might be the occasion of some objections. For example, some might believe that there are states of mind which are purely passive but quite non-sensory, or it might seem to some that a sensation of muscular strain is not an awareness of anything purely passive. I find it difficult to assess the value of such objections — principally because it is not at all clear to me how I am to distinguish between objects of awareness that are purely passive and those that have some activity in them. I am usually not in doubt about whether a given state of consciousness is to be assigned to sensory or to non-sensory awareness; but I think we are not entitled to assume that the application of even this distinction is clear in all cases. For these reasons it is not only difficult to assess the value of possible objections, as suggested above; it also seems possible that the dis-

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[7] Berkeley says "such as are perceived by attending". It has been suggested (first by G. A. Johnston, also by T. E. Jessop in a note ad loc., *Works*, II, 41) that Berkeley did not mean "such ideas" but "such objects". E. J. Furlong, "An Ambiguity in Berkeley's *Principles*", *Hermathena* 94 (1960) 84—102, argues very persuasively that the reading "such objects", though it fits Berkeley's philosophy better, does not fit the syntax of the context — but that this is due to oversight on Berkeley's part in the correction of an earlier, more Lockean draft. See Furlong's article for further references.

tinctions between passive and active and between sensory and non-sensory awareness will not enable Berkeley to draw a sharp boundary between two basic modes of awareness.

A distinction may be useful, however, even if there are some cases in which it cannot be applied with precision. There are certainly many objects of awareness about which it is clear enough whether Berkeley regarded them, or would have regarded them, as ideas or not. Even though there appear to be unresolved problems about applying the distinction, I think it will be worth while to go on to consider Berkeley's reasons for drawing a distinction between two modes of awareness.

It is likely that Berkeley arrived at the distinction by a path of introspection which led him through a period when he doubted that we are aware of any such thing as the mind or its acts. In a number of entries in the *Philosophical Commentaries* Berkeley says such things as the following. "Consult, ransack y^{r} Understanding w^{t} find you there besides several perceptions or thoughts." You do not perceive anything that you mean "by the word mind" (*PC* 579)[8]. There is no justification for speaking of "a thinking substance" because that would be using "a word without an idea" (*PC* 637—639). He declares that the will is not "an object of thought" (*PC* 643) or of "the Understanding" (*PC* 665). Most emphatically, he says, "The Will is purus actus or rather pure Spirit not imaginable, not sensible, not intelligible, in no wise the object of y^{e} Understanding, no wise perceivable" (*PC* 828).

In his published works Berkeley still agrees that introspection discloses no *idea* of the self or its acts; but he maintains that we are conscious of them in a different way. If anyone has searched, introspectively, for that which he calls his *self*, and failing to find it has concluded that there is no such thing, or that he is not aware of it, he is mistaken, according to Berkeley. And the cause of his mistake is that he was looking for the wrong sort of thing: he was looking for an idea, or for something that could "be known after the manner of an idea or sensation" (*Princ.* 137).

[8] With some trepidation, I venture here to disagree with Luce's interpretation of the *Commentaries*. (See his note ad loc. in the *editio diplomatica*, pp. 426—427.) According to Luce, by "mind" and "soul" in *PC* 576—582 Berkeley means "the passive contents of thought and will"; he already held, and never abandoned, belief in the active being he later called "mind" and "soul", but which he then called "person". No doubt there is a change in the use of "person" in the *Commentaries;* but it seems to me that the statements made in *PC* 579—581 really do not leave room for any mental entities at all besides perceptions.

We can hardly doubt that Berkeley took the immediate objects of real and imagined sensation as at least his paradigms in conceiving what an idea is. So in looking for an idea of the mind, or of a volition, he was looking for something rather like a sound or a color or a feeling of warmth; he was looking for something as "tangible", as easy to put your mental finger on, so to speak, as a pain or a mental image of a red triangle. And of course he did not find what he was looking for, because the mind, and volition, are nothing like that. In fact they are so different from sensations and mental images that to think we could in any way "be enabled to know a spirit as we do a triangle, seems as absurd as if we should hope to *see a sound*" (*Princ.* 142). But that does not show that there is no such thing as mind or volition, or that we are not aware of them.

I believe that Berkeley is right on this point — at least to the extent that there are things in us of which we are aware, but of which we might be tempted to think we had no awareness at all if we supposed that all awareness must be, or closely resemble, sensation. I think that is commonly true of intentions, for instance. Suppose that I am beginning to lift a very heavy box, and that I am aware, as I do so, that I intend to put the box on a certain shelf which I see in front of me. The intention of which I am aware is not at all like the sensation of muscular strain which I feel in my arms and legs, nor like the visual image which I have of the shelf. And it does not seem to be by virtue of any *sensory* feature of my state of consciousness that I know that I mean to put the box on that shelf rather than on the equally empty shelf which I see above or below it. Nonetheless I do know that I have that intention; that is a datum of my experience.

I am suggesting that we take such experienced difference between real and imagined sensation, on the one hand, and the way in which we are aware of certain other things, on the other hand, as a clue in trying to understand the genesis of Berkeley's distinction between two modes of awareness, and the reasons he may have had for drawing such a distinction. I am not maintaining that the distinction can be drawn as sharply or precisely as might be desired, nor that there are (as Berkeley may have supposed) only two basic modes of awareness to be distinguished. Perhaps there is reason to distinguish three or more. But the distinction does seem to me to have some basis in experience.

One point about the distinction remains to be discussed. Berkeley intends to make a distinction between two modes of *immediate*

awareness. He maintains that we have "an immediate knowledge" of the mind or spirit as well as of ideas (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 231—232)[9]. This is a point of some importance. Berkeley assumes that if I am aware of anything otherwise than immediately it can only be by virtue of some other, immediate awareness that I have; and this assumption plays a part in at least one of his immaterialist arguments (*Dial.* II: *Works*, II, 221). It follows that unless I have some non-sensory *immediate* awareness, all of my awareness is directly or indirectly sensory, since all my awareness must depend in one way or another on whatever immediate awareness I have. Therefore if Berkeley is to maintain that there is a mode of awareness which is not sensory at all, not even indirectly, he must claim, as he does, that there is non-sensory immediate awareness.

What does Berkeley mean by "immediate knowledge"? He says very little to explain himself on this point, and what he does say is said with reference to sense perception. Any interpretation of what Berkeley means by "immediate knowledge" in general will have to be extrapolated from what he says about immediate perception of sensible things.

I think the most important characteristic of immediate perception, as Berkeley conceives of it, is that it is infallible. A man cannot be mistaken "in what he perceives immediately and at present (it being a manifest contradiction to suppose he should err in respect of that)" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 238). Berkeley also implies that anything which is perceived otherwise than immediately can be perceived only by making "inferences" (*Dial.* I: *Works*, II, 174—

[9] There is one important passage in which Berkeley appears to deny that we have immediate knowledge of spirit. "Such is the nature of *spirit* or that which acts, that it cannot be of it self perceived, but only by the effects which it produceth" (*Princ.* 27). I can see three possible interpretations of this statement. (1) It may indeed be meant as a denial that we have immediate awareness of spirit, in which case it is an expression of an earlier stage in Berkeley's thinking, which he neglected to correct in this passage. (2) "Perceived" here may mean "perceived by way of ideas". In the previous sentence Berkeley has denied that we can have any idea of spirit; he may intend now to say that the closest we can come to having an idea of it is to have an idea of its effects. This would not involve him in any denial that we have immediate *non*-ideational knowledge of spirit. (3) Perhaps the expression "the effects which it produceth" is used loosely here, to refer to the operations of the mind rather than their results. Then the meaning would be that we are aware of our minds only *in* their operations. Jessop interprets the passage along these lines (in a note ad loc., *Works*, II, 52). On this interpretation the passage would agree fairly well with what I take to be Berkeley's developed theory.

175) — that is, transitions from one idea to another. Berkeley probably supposed that what is perceived immediately is perceived without making any inferences at all — not even any logically necessary, deductive inferences. But the inferences which he seems principally to have in mind are inductive or customary transitions, depending on experience which causes us to associate the ideas involved (*Dial.* I: *Works*, II, 204). Where there is such a transition there is a possibility of error. It is at least consistently conceivable that I should have the ideas that I have and yet not be (veridically) perceiving what I take myself to be mediately perceiving. But when I perceive something immediately there is no possibility of error, because there is no logical gap (and therefore no inductive or customary transition) between the ideas that I have and the object that I perceive. Berkeley concludes, of course, that the only things of which we can have immediate awareness in a sensory way are our own ideas.

It seems to me likely, on the basis of what he says about the immediacy of sense perception, that Berkeley conceives of immediate knowledge in general, non-sensory as well as sensory, as non-inferential and, above all, infallible. If you have immediate knowledge of X, your state of mind is such that you cannot possibly be mistaken in believing, as you do, that you are (veridically) aware of X.

It is still a controversial question in philosophy whether there is any such immediate or infallible knowledge of empirical matters of fact. But I think a plausible case could be made (though I shall not try to make it here) for saying that at any rate if there is any such immediate knowledge, some of it comes in a mode of awraeness very different from real or imagined sensation. It would not be nearly so plausible to maintain that one has immediate knowledge of *everything* that Berkeley regards as an operation of the mind. For instance, one is not normally thought to have infallible knowledge of whom one does and does not love. But Berkeley probably does not need or intend to make such a sweeping claim to immediate knowledge[10]. He has a basis for distinguishing fundamentally different modes of awareness if he can find some things of which we are immediately aware in a non-sensory way, as well as some things of which we are immediately aware in a sensory way. If there is at least some immediate awareness which is quite different from real or imagined sensation, it may provide a foundation for other non-sensory awareness which is not immediate.

2. *Notions*

At an early stage in the development of his thought Berkeley believed that a word has no meaning, or at any rate no meaning by virtue of which it can be used to assert anything about reality, if it does not signify an idea. (See, e. g., *PC* 638.) This doctrine he later abandoned, and in his published works he maintains that words may signify real things without standing for ideas.

> But it will be objected, that if there is no idea signified by the terms *soul*, *spirit*, and *substance*, they are wholly insignificant, or have no meaning in them. I answer, those words do mean or signify a real thing, which is neither an idea nor like an idea, but that which perceives ideas, and wills, and reasons about them (*Princ.* 139).

But if a word signifies a real thing, must we not in some sense have an idea of what it means? No doubt we must in some sense have such an idea, Berkeley agrees, but only "in a large sense indeed" (*Princ.* 140). In the first editions of the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* Berkeley countenanced two senses of the word "idea": a narrow sense, which I have tried to explain in section 1 above; and a broader sense, in which it can be used to refer at least to any concept or representation of something which is or could be real. It is only in the broader sense that we have an idea of the mind or of an act of the mind.

In the 1734 editions of the *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* Berkeley suggested that the word "notion" be employed instead of "idea" to express this larger sense, and that "idea" be used only in the stricter sense. This innovation appears to be purely terminological, and not to mark any substantive change in Berkeley's theory of meaning. The claim that the terms "soul", "spirit", and "substance" signify a real thing, although they do not signify any idea, occurs already in the first edition of the *Principles*. Even at

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[10] Indeed, so far as I know, the only thing of which Berkeley explicitly claims we have *immediate* non-sensory awareness is the mind itself. I am inclined to ascribe to him the view that we do have immediate awareness of at least some mental acts as well, although I have not found him asserting that we do. For it is clearly *as* an active being, "which thinks, acts, and perceives" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 231), that he thinks the mind is immediately known. And I do not see how that could be unless at least some mental acts are immediately known. Any alleged immediate awareness of one's mind as active which did not involve immediate awareness of the mind as acting in some particular way, Berkeley would surely regard as an impossible abstraction. (Cf. also the last part of note 9 above.) And if the account of Berkeleyan notions to be given in section 2 of the present paper is correct, it is also hard to see how we could have notions, with empirical content, but no ideas, of mental acts (as Berkeley does believe we have) unless we have immediate awareness of some mental acts.

the terminological level there is manuscript evidence that in preparing the first edition of the *Principles* Berkeley considered a use of "notion" similar to that which he eventually adopted[11]. For convenience I follow the terminology of the 1734 editions, using "idea" only in the narrow sense, and employing "notion" as Berkeley suggested. I shall now try to give an account of what Berkeley thought it is to have a *notion* of a mind or mental act of which, strictly speaking, one has no idea.

One point that is clear in Berkeley's conception of a "notion" is that having the notion of spirit or mind or will is closely connected with knowing the meaning of the word "spirit" or "mind" or "will". Berkeley says that "we have some notion of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, hating, in as much as we know or understand the meaning of those words" (*Princ.* 27, second edition). The same thought appears in at least two other places in the second edition of the *Principles* (140, 142), and in the third edition of *Alciphron*, VII, 4 (*Works*, III, 292). Perhaps we can ascribe to Berkeley the view that to have a notion of X is (at least normally, and in part) to understand the meaning of a word that signifies X.

If so, we still need to know what Berkeley thinks is involved in knowing the meaning of a word which does not signify an idea. Certainly one thing that is involved is the ability to use the word correctly in making statements. More specifically, I think it would be fair to assume that part of what Berkeley means when he says that he has notions (though not ideas) of mind and will, is that without having ideas of mind or will, he knows when he would speak truly in saying, "I will my arm to rise", or "My mind is occupied in thinking about what I am saying".

But this is surely only part of what is involved in having notions of spirit and its acts — and probably only part of what Berkeley means when he says that we "understand the meaning of" the words "mind", "will", etc. One aspect of Berkeley's thought which indicates that he must have something more in mind is the fact that he holds that things of which we have notions but not ideas can serve us as "images" for the conceiving of other things. Our notion of ourselves enables us to conceive of other spirits, including God. Berkeley says that "we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is the agime or idea of them" (*Princ.* 140).

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[11] See Jessop's textual note ad loc. (*Works*, II, 105).

"I have therefore, though not an inactive idea, yet in my self some sort of an active thinking image of the Deity" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 232). It seems unlikely that Berkeley would have spoken in that way if he had thought that having a notion of the self and its acts meant no more than being able to use certain words correctly. Having such a notion seems to involve having a concrete mental content, derived from one's own experience, which can be used in a way analogous to that in which an image can be used in conceiving of other things. We might say that to have the notion of a mental state or act of which we have no idea is in part to know what it is like, or to be able to represent to ourselves what it is like, to do that act or experience that state. To have the notion of remorse, for instance, might be in part to be able to represent to oneself what it would be like to be remorseful about something, even though one is not in fact remorseful at the moment. And representing to oneself what it would be like to be remorseful is not just a matter of imagining sinkings in the stomach and other *sensations* one might have when one is remorseful.

Perhaps there are people who for one reason or another can neither remember nor imagine very well what it is like to be remorseful, but who can use the word "remorse" correctly in many contexts — and we probably would not want to say that they do not have any notion of remorse. But I think Berkeley would want to say that there is something lacking in such a person's notion of remorse; a normal or complete Berkeleyan psychological notion involves the ability to use some experience as a sort of image of that of which one has the notion.

This has importance in relation to Berkeley's theory of meaning. Berkeley had abandoned the doctrine that any word which signifies something which is or could be real must stand for an idea. But we can hardly make sense of some of his immaterialist arguments unless we suppose that he still believed that any word which signifies to us something which is or could be real must have for us some empirical content. That is, the significance, to us, of such a word depends on our sometimes having, or being able to represent to ourselves, some experience of what it would be like for the thing signified, or something similar to it, to be real. And according to Berkeley the two basic modes of awareness are both, and both equally, sources of empirical content. Our notions of the mind and its acts derive empirical content from our non-sensory self-awareness. That seems to me to be involved in Berkeley's claim that

self-awareness provides us with a sort of image for conceiving of other spirits.

3. The Substantiality of the Self

In the first two sections of this essay I have tried to show how it is that Berkeley believed that we have awareness, experience (and hence notions, with empirical content) of the mind or self and its acts. But nothing I have said so far explains why Berkeley claimed not only to be aware of his mind or self, but to be aware of it as a substance. Nor have I discussed what Berkeley meant in calling the self a substance. It is to these questions that we must turn in this concluding section. Our principal business will be to come to an understanding of Berkeley's rejection of the view that (as Hume was later to claim) the mind is a mere collection. But Berkeley also rejected the Lockean conception of mental substance as an unknown substratum, and that is the point with which we will begin.

A theory is presented in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, xxiii, according to which the mind is a substance because it is, or includes, a *substratum* which is the common subject of its operations and properties. We do not know what the substratum is, except that it is something distinct from and additional to the operations and properties, which underlies and supports them[12]. If we assume that Berkeley, as a successor of Locke, is endorsing this theory when he calls the mind a substance, we may be inclined to charge him with inconsistency or unfairness. For he ridicules in the case of matter (e. g., in *Princ.* 16—17) the conception of substance as unknown substratum which we would take him to be accepting in the case of mind[13].

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[12] Indeed there may *be* nothing else to know about it. If all properties are had by their inhering in a substratum, and if there is, as Locke seems to suppose, an ultimate substratum "which inheres not in anything else" (*An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, II, xxiii, 6), then the ultimate substratum must be something distinct from, and additional to, all properties. But a thing cannot be characterized except in terms of its properties. When we have said all there is to say about the properties of a thing (if that were possible) there is nothing left to say about its ultimate substratum, except that it supports the properties. This point is not made by Locke, but Leibniz at least comes close to it in *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, II, xxiii, 2. (Cf. Jonathan Bennett, "Substance, Reality, and Primary Qualities", *American Philosophical Quarterly* 2 (1965) 1—2. Berkeley may have caught a glimpse of the point (see *PC* 672).

[13] There would still be this difference: that Berkeley does not understand any sense in which material substratum could be said to "support" sensible qualities, but

There is no ground for the charge, however; for Berkeley is not committed to the theory of an unknown substratum. He does not think of mental substance as something-I-know-not-what. He claims to tell us in what its reality consists. He maintains that the existence of a mind or spirit consists in its perceiving, thinking, and willing (*PC* 429, 429a, 646; *Princ.* 139; cf. *Princ.* 98 ad fin.). This is surely one of the central claims of Berkeley's metaphysics. No provision is made in his ontology for any entity whose existence does not consist entirely either in being perceived (ideas) or in perceiving, thinking, and willing (spirits). Berkeley's statements on this point are inconsistent with the theory that the mind is, or includes, a substratum whose existence is distinct from and additional to the operation, the perceiving, thinking, and willing, of the mind.

I believe that I can account for any passages which might seem to tell against my interpretation on this point. One apparent reference to a spiritual substance (God) as "an unknown substratum" comes in a very early entry (80) in the *Philosophical Commentaries*, and I think it expresses a viewpoint later abandoned[14]. It is true that even in the *Three Dialogues* Berkeley is prepared to speak of spirit as a "substratum" of sensible qualities.

> It is therefore evident there can be no *substratum* of those qualities but spirit, in which they exist, not by way of mode or property, but as a thing perceived in that which perceives it. I deny therefore that there is any unthinking *substratum* of the objects of sense, and in that acceptation that there is any material substance (*Works*, II, 237).

But Berkeley's use of the term "substratum" here does not commit him to the Lockean theory. His implied claim that spirit is the substratum of sensible qualities can be taken as just another way of putting his familiar thesis that sensible qualities cannot exist except in a spirit because they are ideas and the existence of ideas consists in their being perceived by a spirit or spirits. This thesis does not entail that the existence of a spirit consists in anything

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does claim that minds can be said to support sensible qualities, meaning that minds perceive them (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 234). But Berkeley's strictures against the supposed notion of "being in general" or a mere "something" to which we ascribe no positive, non-relational properties, would seem to have as much force against a doctrine of unknown mental substratum as against a doctrine of unknown material substratum.

[14] On *PC* 80, and Berkeley's abandonment of the conception of bodies as "combinations of powers in an unknown substratum", see A. A. Luce, *The Dialectic of Immaterialism*, London 1963, 133—156.

other than its perceiving, thinking, and willing. And nothing that is said in this passage implies that spirit, as the substratum of sensible qualities, is unknown.

One of the most interesting passages in relation to this topic is a late entry (829) in the *Philosophical Commentaries*.

> Substance of a Spirit is that it acts, causes, wills, operates, or if you please (to avoid the quibble y^{v} may be made on y^{e} word it) to act, cause, will, operate its' substance is not knowable not being an Idea.

The claim that the substance of a spirit consists in its operation is made most forcefully here. The quibble which might be made on the word "it" and which Berkeley wants to avoid, is presumably the objection that the substance of a spirit must be a substratum which is something additional to its operations. On the other hand, Berkeley also says here that the substance of a spirit is not knowable. The reason which is given for its unknowability, however, is not that the substance of a spirit is something additional to its operations and properties (quite the contrary), but rather that it is not an idea. Berkeley had not yet abandoned the doctrine that only ideas (in the narrow sense) are knowable.

In an even later entry (*PC* 848) Berkeley says, "I must not say that the Understanding differs not from the particular Ideas, or the Will from particular Volitions". One recent interpreter finds in this entry the doctrine that the mind has "a being not constituted by its willing and perceiving"[15]. But I do not think it is necessary to take this view of the passage. Berkeley does not make an affirmative statement of doctrine here; he says he must not say certain things. There is evidence that he had in fact been planning to say them (*PC*, 587, 614, 615). Why will he now not say them? I believe the reason is that they might suggest the doctrine that the mind is a mere collection of its particular ideas and acts. This is a doctrine which he seems to have held at one time, but later rejected, as I shall explain below. The statements made in *PC* 587, 614, and 615 were apparently intended as expressions of this doctrine; it is not surprising that Berkeley should wish to retract them. But this explanation of *PC* 848 brings us face to face with our next problem, our principal problem in this section.

Let us take it as established that Berkeley does not accept the Lockean conception of mental substance as an unknown substratum,

[15] S. Grave, "The Mind and Its Ideas: Some Problems in the Interpretation of Berkeley", in C. Martin and D. Armstrong, eds., *Locke and Berkeley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Garden City 1968, 310.

but holds that the existence of a mind or spirit consists in its perceiving, thinking, and willing. This may seem only to increase the difficulty of understanding why Berkeley holds that the mind is a substance, rather than a mere collection of particular mental operations or events. Hume, not finding that he was aware of anything in himself that was distinct from and additional to his perceptions, concluded that the self is "nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions"[16]. In a passage of the *Philosophical Commentaries* which has often been compared with Hume, Berkeley stated a very similar view: "Mind is a congeries of perceptions" (*PC* 580). He rejects this theory in his later writings, insisting that the mind is one single thing, "one individual principle" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 234), "one simple, undivided, active being" (*Princ.* 27). But why does he reject the congeries theory? Or how, indeed, can his position consistently differ from Hume's, if he does not believe that there is in the mind a substratum in addition to its operation?

One reason why Berkeley might object to the proposition that the mind is a collection of *perceptions* is that he might take "perceptions" to refer solely or partly to ideas. In his developed philosophy Berkeley wants to distinguish sharply between two types of entity, active (spirits) and passive (ideas). Berkeley's mind, spirit, soul, or self is "a thing entirely distinct from" his ideas (*Princ.* 2). But the operations and actions of the mind are not ideas, according to Berkeley, and the question must arise why the mind is not to be regarded as a congeries or collection of operations and actions[17]. Indeed, how can the mind differ from a congeries or collection of mental operations, if its existence consists in perceiving, thinking, and willing?

I shall try to show two ways in which Berkeley's position differs from the theory that the self is a mere collection of mental operations. The first has to do with whether the operations are regarded as capable or incapable of independent existence. Hume's denial of the substantiality of the self is closely related to his doctrine of the radical separability of perceptions. Hume held that each perception could conceivably exist without being perceived by a mind

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[16] *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Selby-Bigge edition, Oxford 1888, 252.

[17] Substantially this question is raised by G. Warnock, *Berkeley*, London 1953, 206: if Berkeley did not accept the Lockean substratum doctrine, "should he not have concluded that the mind is a 'collection of acts', just as an object is a 'collection of ideas'?"

(without being part of a mind), without any other perception — I take it, indeed, without there existing anything else at all. He says that "all our perceptions . . . may be consider'd as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence". Each perception may therefore be considered a substance in its own right, if by "substance" we mean "something which may exist by itself"[18]. Since the self is composed of perceptions which could exist, and be what they are, without being part of any self at all, the self is not a basic unit of reality. It is merely a collection. It is no more a substance than any one of its perceptions is. Indeed it is even less a substance than its perceptions are, if substances must be things which not only are capable of independent existence but also are in some sort fundamental units of reality.

Berkeley did not hold a doctrine of the radical separability of perceptions. He did not believe that either ideas or mental operations could conceivably exist indepnndently. It would be pointless to cite passages in which Berkeley claims that *ideas* cannot be conceived to exist except in a mind that perceives them, because such passages are so numerous and familiar. The claim figures prominently and often in his arguments for immaterialism. It is associated in Berkeley's mind with the thesis that spirit is substance, and indeed the only kind of substance there is (*Princ.* 7). "I know what I mean, when I affirm that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas, that is, that a spirit knows and perceives ideas" (*Dial.* III: *Works*, II, 234). Berkeley appears to regard it as a reason for calling the mind a substance that it is a support of ideas. And presumably it is because being perceived is a necessary condition for the existence of an idea, that perceiving counts as supporting.

Berkeley believed that mental acts and operations also are incapable of independent existence. His position is that neither ideas nor mental acts can be conceived to exist in isolation; they can be conceived to exist only in a mind which both is active and has ideas. It is only in the *Philosophical Commentaries* that this is asserted about mental acts (specifically about volitions); but it is asserted in some of the latest entries, and I see no reason to suppose that Berkeley abandoned the position.

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[18] Hume, *Treatise*, 233.

The *Commentaries* record some development of Berkeley's thought on the inseparability of perception and volition from each other. He is constant in support of the thesis that ideas are necessary for volition or any sort of thought or consciousness at all (*PC* 478, 547, 674, 812, 842). The only hint of any wavering (*PC* 645) is quite noncommittal. Berkeley did, however, say at one point, "There can be perception wthout volition" (*PC* 645). That claim is later rejected (*PC* 833, 841). *PC* 841 contains the culmination of the development of Berkeley's views on this subject: "It seems to me that Will & understanding Volitions & ideas cannot be severed, that either cannot be possibly without the other".

No doubt certain particular ideas or mental acts can be conceived to occur without certain others which in fact accompany them, but then they must be conceived to have new neighbors in place of the old[19]. Perception without any will, or will without any perception, we can no more conceive than we can conceive of something colored which has no visible extension. Perception and volition are so related to each other that they can be conceived to occur only in an integrated consciousness in which there is perception *and* will.

This doctrine seems to me to have more plausibility than the opposite doctrine of Hume. Questions might be raised about the perceptions of lower animals, or the thoughts and volitions of God. But Berkeley needs only to argue that it is true of the perceptions and volitions that *we* actually have, that none of *them* could be conceived to exist except in a consciousness which is sufficiently complex that they may be said to exist in a mind.

The ascription of this doctrine to Berkeley would perhaps be enough to account for his denial that the mind is a congeries. Even if the mind is entirely composed of its operations, it is not a mere collection of them, if they could not conceivably exist except in a mind. It may be a system of them, but not just a collection. And the mind, rather than the mental operation, is the fundamental unit of reality. A spirit might conceivably exist without anything else to support it, but the operations of which it is composed could not. The spirit or self may therefore be regarded as a substance, but its operations are not substances.

A mind, however, according to the conception of it suggested in the previous paragraph, is still a system, though not a collection.

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[19] Cf. PC 842: "Some Ideas or other I must have so long as I exist or Will. But no one Idea or sort of Ideas is essential".

I do not believe that conception would be acceptable to Berkeley. He says that "a spirit is one simple, undivided, active being" (*Princ.* 27); it is "an active, simple, uncompounded substance" (*Princ.* 141). Such language is hardly congruous with the supposition that a spirit is a system composed of distinct (though not independent) operations[20]. Here we come to the second way in which Berkeley's conception of the mind differs from the congeries conception.

Berkeley did not in his published works say, and I do not think he believed, that the mind is *composed of* its acts or operations. This was not because he regarded it as composed of something else, such as an unknown substratum, but because he did not regard it as composed of parts at all. He thought it was a mistake, an illegitimate abstraction, to treat the relation of mental operations to the mind as a part-whole relation. The existence of the mind consists entirely in its perceiving, thinking, and willing. The mind is not composed of these operations, however, for they are not properly regarded as parts or components, but as the-mind-operating-in-a-certain-way.

This conception of the mind is reflected in the initial sentence of section 27 of the *Principles:*

> A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being: as it perceives ideas, it is called the *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the *will*.

I think this statement expresses the view that the will and understanding are not *parts* of a spirit, although we can use the words „will" and "understanding" to make some distinctions about a spirit. We can use different words to refer to a spirit, in order to indicate different ways in which it is similar to other actual or possible spirits. But we ought not to imagine that there are distinct parts of the spirit corresponding to these words.

Similar views are even more explicitly stated in two of the latest entries in the *Philosophical Commentaries:*

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[20] Perhaps it will be suggested that in what he says about the simplicity of the mind, Berkeley means only to deny that the mind has *spatial* parts. He does say in *Dial.* III (*Works*, II, 231) that the mind is indivisible because it is unextended. But I do not think the denial of spatial properties to the mind is enough to account for Berkeley's claim that the mind is uncompounded. Nor does it account for the passages which I shall cite below in which he denies that will and understanding are parts of the mind. Berkeley also makes very strong statements on the unity of the mind in *Siris*, 346—347, 356—358.

I must not Mention the Understanding as a faculty or part of the Mind, I must include Understanding & Will etc in the word Spirit by w^ch^ I mean all that is active (*PC* 848).

I must not say the Will & Understanding are all one but that they are both Abstract Ideas i.e. none at all. they not being even ratione different from the Spirit, Qua faculties, or Active (*PC* 871).

And in *Alciphron*, VII, 18 (*Works*, III, 314)[21], he claims that pernicious errors, such as the denial of free will, may result from attempting to discern distinct entities in the mind.

. . . I observe that you very nicely abstract and distinguish the actions of the mind, judgment, and will: that you make use of such terms as power, faculty, act, determination, indifference, freedom, necessity, and the like, as if they stood for distinct abstract ideas: and that this supposition seems to ensnare the mind into the same perplexities and errors which, in all other instances, are observed to attend the doctrine of abstraction. . . . But if I cannot abstract and distinguish so many beings in the soul of man so accurately as you do, I do not find it necessary; since it is evident to me, in the gross and concrete, that I am a free agent. Nor will it avail to say, the will is governed by the judgment, or determined by the object, while, in every sudden common cause, I cannot discern nor abstract the decree of the judgment from the command of the will.

I think that as this passage may suggest, Berkeley believed that his position on the unity of the self was grounded on experience. In his opinion, mental operations, such as a judgment and a volition, are not experienced as so distinct from each other that they may be regarded as different units of reality. They are not so much distinct acts as different aspects of the same act. That he makes a certain judgment, and that he has a certain volition, are doubtless different facts about a person; but they are facts about a single, indivisible unit of reality, or of activity. It is only by a quite illegitimate abstraction that they could be regarded as distinct parts of which the self was composed.

In sum, Berkeley's conception of the self differs from the congeries theory, first, in that Berkeley thinks that neither ideas, nor perceptions, thoughts, and volitions, could conceivably exist except in a mind which both perceives and wills; and second, in that he does not think of perceptions, thoughts, and volitions (and certainly not of ideas) as *parts* of which the mind is composed. The fact that he calls the mind or self a substance is to be understood in the light of these disagreements with the congeries theory.

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[1] The subject is continued in *Alciphron*, VII, 20 (*Works*, III, 316). Similar views are stated, but much less fully, in *Princ.* 143.

I do not claim to have presented here a defense or a thorough evaluation of Berkeley's theory of the self. In doing that, one would have to discuss problems I have not touched on, such as how Berkeley can give an account of personal identity through time. But I believe that if his conception of the mind or self as a substance is understood along the lines which I have proposed here, it will at least be seen to be more consistent with the rest of his philosophy, and perhaps more interesting[22], than has sometimes been supposed[23].

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[22] For the view that Berkeley's theory of spirit does not deserve much attention see G. Warnock, *Berkeley*, 204.

[23] I am indebted to Jonathan Bennett, David Sachs, Marilyn McCord Adams, and two referees for the *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, for reading drafts of this paper and offering useful suggestions and criticisms. I am also indebted, for helpful discussion, to members of groups that heard versions of the paper, at the University of Michigan and at Duke and Harvard Universities.