DESCARTES, BERKELEY AND THE EXTERNAL WORLD

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Having established his own existence as a thinking being, Descartes considers the question of the nature and existence of the external, physical world. He attacks the problem from two angles : (1) what is a material object? and (2) what do we know about its existence?

1. What is a material object ?

This is the problem about the relation between a substance and its attributes. In a famous passage in *Meditation II* [1], Descartes says that though we may think that this piece of wax is its sweetness, odour, colour, shape, size, hardness etc., yet, if heated, all these attributes change (some even disappear). Nevertheless, we say this is the same piece of wax. So none of the attributes which it had before nor any of the others it might acquire under different conditions is really this piece of wax. It is simply 'something extended, flexible, and movable', something that 'admits of an infinity of similar changes' which one is 'unable to compass... by imagination'. What is true of this particular piece of wax is 'still more evident' about wax in general. (230-31)

In spite of syaing that a substance is not any of its attributes (secondary or primary), Descartes maintains, in *The Principles of Philosophy* (published some years later)[2], that there is 'one principal property of every substance, which constitutes its nature or essence, and upon which all the others depend'. Extension (lehgth, breath, depth)' constitues the nature of corporeal substance'. (321)(I,1ii)[3] But this refers to substance in general. If neither the particular colour, smell, shape nor size of this particular piece or wax is essential to it, how can it be distinguished from substance in general, from other substances or other pieces of wax? How are different kinds of substance to be distinguished from each other? Bernard Williams describes Descartes's argument as 'patently invalid'. He writes,

> From the fact that a certain quality of a thing changes in certain circumstances, it by no means follows that no reference to that quality can figure in a statement of the thing's essence.... It could

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> be of the essence of wax, as wax, that it changed in colour, texture etc. when heated... A statement of essence will indeed be a timeless and necessary statement, which cannot be falsified by changing circumstances, but it is quite a different thing, and a mistake, to suppose that such a statement itself cannot *refer* to changes in changing circumstances.[4]

The essences of different kinds of substances and the descriptions of particular substances must refer to qualities under different circumstances in a series of hypothetical propositions even though *all* the changes cannot be compassed by the imagination (by which Descartes means the having of images).

It is clear that Descartes believes that physical bodies do exist, but 'bodies themselves are not properly perceived by the senses nor by the faculty of imagination', he syas in *Meditation II,* but 'by the intellect alone'; 'they are understood'; their perception 'is simply an intuition'. (233, 231)

Intuition, for Descartes, is not some direct, immediate acquaintance, but an inference from the attributes which are sensed. When looking out of his window, syas Descartes, he is inclined to say that he sees human beings in the street below, but he really sees only hats and cloaks and *judges* he sees human beings, so (he implies) when he is inclined to say he sees hats and cloaks, he really has only hat-like and cloak-like sensations (or sensa, as I shall henceforth call them) and *judges* that he sees hats and cloaks. 'I comprehend, by the faculty of judgment alone... what I believed I saw with my eyes' (232).

So our immediate experience is limited to our own sensa. Treating the sensa of primary and secondary qualities on a par, he writes in *Meditation VI,*

> Besides the extension, figure, and motion of bodies, I likewise perceived in them hardness, heat, ...colors, odors, tastes, and sounds, the variety of which gave me the means of distinguishing the sky, the earth, the sea, and generally all other bodies from one another. And certainly, considering the ideas of all these qualities, ...which alone I properly and immediately perceived, it was not without reason that I thought I perceived certain objects wholly different from my thought, namely, bodies from which those ideas proceeded; for I was conscious that the ideas were presented to me without my consent being required, so that I could not perceive

> any object.... unless it were present to the organ of sense.... And because the ideas I perceived by the senses were much more lively and clear... that any of those I could of myself frame, ...it seemed that they... must therefore have been caused in me by some other object (267).

But sense-perception is often deceptive. Towers which, from a distance, seem round, appear square from close; and even in the case of the 'internal senses', pain has been felt to arise from a limb which has actually been amputated. In dreams one believes one perceives real objects. From all of which Descartes concludes :

> I saw nothing to prevent my having been so constituted by nature as that I should be deceived even in matters that appeared to me to possess the greatest truth(269),

and he proceeds to suggest that there might perhaps be some faculty in himself which produced those perceptions which he had believed were produced by external objects. At such times, he syas in *Meditation III,* it is not 'from a certain and deliberate judgment, but only from a sort of blind impulse' that he believed in external objects(238).

Nevertheless, he cannot simply rest at that. In spite of all this about perceptual illusions and dream ojbects, we still do distinguish between what we believe to be real physical objects and the figments of dreams and imagination. He has a 'very strong inclination to believe that' the ideas of sensible things 'arise from corporeal objects'.

2. What do we know about physical objects ?

Believing that the causal principle is self-evident and realising that he himself cannot be the cause of his sensa because they come and go without his volition, he considers two possible causes. There must be, he says in *Meditation VI,*

> some substance different from me, in which all the objective reality of the ideas that are produced, ...is contained formally and eminently, ...and this substance is either a body, that is to say, a corporeal nature, ...or it is God himself, or some other creature of a rank superior to body(271),

He goes on,

> But as God is no deceiver, it is manifest that he does not of himself and immediately communicate those ideas to me, nor even

> by the intervention of any creature... I do not see how he could be vindicated from the charge of deceit, if in truth they proceeded from any other source... than corporeal things *(ibid.)*.

In the *Principles* Descartes is more emphatic (II, ii) :

> But since God cannot deceive us, for this is repugnant to his nature, ...we must unhesitatingly conclude that there exists a certain object extended in length, breath, and thickness.... And this extended substance is what we call body or matter(334).

Descartes claims to have proved the existence of a perfect being or God by means of the Ontological Argument. Whether this argument, even granting its validity, proves the existence of a Christian God capable of giving the kind of assurance Descartes requires, is a question I do not inquire into here.

In any case, Descartes's troubles are not over. Two problems remain : (i) do the sensa that are produced in us resemble the actual attributes of physical objects? and (ii) how can a physical object cause sensa in a mind or mental substance?

i. Do sensa resemble the attributes of bodies?

'It is very reasonable to suppose that this object impresses me with its own likeness', writes Descartes in *Meditation III,* 'but I must consider whether these reasons are sufficiently strong and convincing' (237). In *Meditation VI,* he has come to hold that corporeal things 'are not perhaps exactly such as we perceive by the senses' (271). All that he is prepared to 'safely conclude' is that 'there are in the bodies from which the diverse perceptions of the senses proceed, certain varieties corresponding to them, although, perhaps, not in reality like them'(272).

Whether sensa resemble the real qualities in the material objects or not is a matter of judgment. Sensa, as such, are neither true nor false; they simply are. Meaing by 'ideas', sensa, Descartes writes in *Meditation II,*

> With respect to ideas, if these are considered solely in respect of themselves, and are not referred to any object beyond them, they cannot, properly speaking, be false (236).

'It is only in judgments that.... falsity properly so called, can be met

with' (241), for it is, he says in *Meditation* VI, 'the office of the mind alone.... to discover the truth in those matters', matters regarding the 'diverse perceptions of the senses' (273).

The 'perceptions of the senses' or sensa need to be interpreted, and in doing so, the mind makes use of 'innate' ideas, which are not sensa but intellectual concepts and which, according to Descartes, because they are 'clear and distinct', are used by the mind to interpret sensa. These innate ideas or common notions 'equip the mind for passing judgment on the images'[5] If we consider 'the ideas in themselves as certain modes of thought', says Descartes in *Meditation III,* 'they would hardly afford any occasion for error'(236), and we may even be said to have 'a clear knowldege' of them, he adds in the *Principles,* 'if we take care to comprehend in the judgments we form of them only that which is precisely contained in our perception of them, and of which we are immediately consicious' (I, xlvi,327)[6]. 'There is however great difficulty in observing this', he goes on, 'because we have all, without exception, from our youth judged that all things we perceived by our senses and an existence beyond our thought' (beyond our experiencing, he of course means). From sheer habit we seem to see this 'so clearly and distinctly', that we take it as 'indubitable' *(ibid.).* But in this we are mistatken, and, therefore, Descartes calls it (the sensing along with the judgment upon it) a 'confused perception'.

So, then, we must ask what the correct interpretation of sensa would be.

ii. How can a physical object cause sensa in a mind or mental substance?

'We can easily conceive how the motion of one body may be caused by that of another, and diversified by the size, figure, and situation of its parts', says Descartes in the *Principles,* 'but we are wholly unable to conceive how these same things... can produce something else of a nature entirely different from themselves'. Perceptions arise due to the mind-body union, but since these are opposites according to Descartes's own philosophy, 'every attempt to *image* their union', writes N. Kemp Smith, is 'unavailing'.[7] So also, he continues, 'is any attempt to comprehend in any genuine *intellectual* manner how they unite and interact'.[7] But somehow, according to Descartes, 'we know, from the nature of our soul, that the diverse motions of the body are sufficient to produce in it all the sensations which it has' (IV,

cxcviii, 354). As Kemp Smith puts it, 'we are in no position to question the testimony of immediate experience', and

> consequently have no option save to accept the testimony of the passions and sentiments, as witnessing to the *quasi-substantial* unity of mind and body, and our sensations and images (i.e., the pineal imprints) as yielding a sensuous awareness of the primary qualities.[7]

This is even more so regarding the secondary qualities; we cannot 'apprehend' what these are in external objects except 'the various dispositions of these objects which have the power of moving our nerves in various ways (IV, cxcviii,354).

Nevertheless, Descartes does have a theory of perception. In his *Notes Against a Programme,* he says that external objects transmitted through the sense-organ 'something which gave the mind occasion to form these ideas, by means of an innate faculty',[8] and so he concludes that *all* ideas are, in this sense, innate:

> Nothing reaches our mind from external objects through the organs of sense beyond certain corporeal movements.... But even these movements, and the figures which arise from them, are not conceived by us in the shape they assume in the organs of sense.... Hence it follows that the ideas of the movements and figures are themselves innate in us. So much the more must the ideas of pain, color, sound and the like be innate.[9]

A succinct statement of our sense-perception is given by S. V. Keeling :

> Descartes's account of sense-perception divides into three consecutive stages: (i) that series of causally connected events comprising both those occurrent in the 'exciting' body and those stimulating the nerve-endings and sense-organs of the percipient's own body; (ii).... the series of movements propagated from the affected sense-organ, along the nerves and terminating in the pineal gland located in the centre of the brain, on which gland (iii) an impression is produced... on the occasion of which physical impress a conscious act (awareness) occurs.[10]

Such, Descartes thinks, are the 'bare facts'. But quite apart from the question as to whether these are the bare facts, Descartes cannot explain how a purely physical series can produce effects which are purely

mental. How can the mind be directly aware of physical patterns in the pineal gland? However numerous may be the physical or mental intermediaries, the transition cannot be performed. At best, there would be a sort of God-established harmony between the two different series (which Descartes is somehow able to discover), so that, in Copleston's words, 'one must draw the conclusion that God is the only direct causal agent'.[11] It is a kind of representative theory, where sensa are not *caused* by external objects but occur along with changes in those objects, and where the whole show is managed by God or has been set going by Him.

If we think otherwise, that is, if we think that sensa are really caused by external objects, whereas they only exist through the work of the body-mind complex, then our grasp of the situation is 'confused'. Descartes, however, sometimes writes as if sensa are inherently 'confused'. A sensation (of a secondary quality) 'impresses upon our imagination a confused image of itself, affording our understanding no distinct knowledge of what it is', he writes in the *Principles* (IV, cc,355). But in keeping with his own view that sensa have, as such, no truth-value, they cannot be either ture or false, clear or confused. It is our interpretation of them, 'failing to distinguish the experiential factor from our interpretation'[12], that is confused and not the sensa themselves. Confusion lies in a false objective reference; sensa do not deceive, judgments do.

In Descartes's sophisticated version of the scheme of things it is not correct to regard sensa as being the real attributes of things or substances. Descartes, nevertheless, holds that sensa are *signs* by which Nature helps us to meet the requirements of daily life. This is the theory of 'natural belief'. 'Nature teaches me that my body exists as one among other bodies, some of which are to be sought after and others shunned' (*Med.*VI). All the judgments of common sense that we form 'regarding the objects of sense' are, according to Descartes, the 'dictates of nature', unreflective and instinctive, because we have no 'leisure to weigh and consider the reasons'. These 'natural' beliefs arise even before our reasoning powers have matured (*Med.*VI,268). So, from a purely pragmatic consideration, we must go on believing that objects do have the qualities that we normally take them to have. It is a biological and utilitarian necessity.

We may summarise our account by saying that Descartes believes

that an external physical world does exist independently of our individual, private, immediate experience; that this world of objects causes impressions on our minds (by way of sense-organs, the nervous system and, finally, the pineal gland) that, alternatively, the impressions and the patterns on the pineal gland run in parallel but not interacting series; that, naively, we interpret the impressions as the attributes, primary and secondary, of physical objects; that actually our belief in physical objects is an inference from our immediate experience; that we are assured of this physical world by God (whose existence has been proved by an independent argument) and that, for the mundane needs of our daily life. Nature lets us believe that we are directly in touch with physical ojbects and their qualities.

Descartes and Berkeley

'That the things we see and touch', writes A. Campbell Fraser, 'are neither more nor less than appearances in the five senses, presented in a continuous natural order by the power of God' and that 'the material world... is dependent for its reality on living mind... this was the new conception of the universe presented by Berkeley'.[13] According to Fraser, Berkeley may be put 'in the centre of Modern Philosophy of which Descartes was the father'. We have, therefore, to consider, briefly, how close Berkeley's metaphysics is to that of Descartes.

In his *Principles of Human Knowledge*[14], Berkeley is certain that 'SENSATIONS, or *ideas impressed on the senses*.... cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them' and that 'an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this by anyone that shall attend to *waht* is meant by the term EXIST when applied to sensible things'. On the other hand, that whereby or wherein they are perceived he calls 'MIND, SPIRIT, SOUL or MYSELF', a 'thing entirely distinct from them'. To say 'This table I write on exists' means, for Berkeley, simply that, while he writes on it, he sees and feels it, and if he were not in his study, he would see or touch it if he returned, or 'that some other spirit actually does perceive it'. The *'esse'* of ideas of things is *'percipi'* and their existence out of any mind is 'perfectly unintelligible'. (Secs. 2/3, pp. 33-4).

Is *'Esse* is *percipi'*, for Berkeley, an analytic proposition? It appears so. He says that to say that houses, mountains, rivers exist outside of a percipient is 'a manifest contradiction' and 'plainly repugnant',

for 'what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations?' (Sec. 4,35) 'Hence it is clear there can be no unthinking substance or *substratum* of those ideas' (Sec,7,37-8). (By 'unthinking' Berkeley, of course, means unthought-of.)

Even if we accept (analytically or by some kind of mental experiment) that the *'esse'* of sensations is *'percipi'*, it does not follow analytically that objects are nothing more than sensations 'blended or combined together' and therefore even *their 'esse'* is *'percipi'*. This is where Descartes would part company with Berkeley.

Descartes, as we saw, does believe in an objective world which originally he thought of as being the cause of our sensations, but, faced with the problem of how there could be intercourse between two such opposed substances as mind and matter, he held that the two substances were 'perpetually dependent and harmonized by God'. Descartes inclines to the view that the primary qualities are as dependent on the percipient as the secondary ones, though, at some places, he sems to hold that they belong to, or in fact, make up, the physical objects. Berkeley is, however, quite certain that 'extension, figure, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind' just like 'colours, sounds, tastes' (Sec. 9,38-9).

We have seen that Descartes often points out that sensa do not resemble the attributes of physical objects, but only correspond to them in a systematic and regular way. Berkeley rejects both a Copy Theory as well as a Representative Theory. A sensation or, as he usually calls it, an idea 'can be nothing but an idea', he says, and this we may readily grant; but from this he at once goes on to say that 'a colour, or figure can be like nothing but another colour or figure', and adds, 'if we look but never so little into our own thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas' (Sec. 8,38). But from 'A can only be A' you cannot jump to 'A cannot be like B'. A portrait can only be a portrait, but a portrait can certainly be like its original, which itself, need not be another protrait. Perhaps, sensing the weakness of his contention, Berkeley proceeds,

> Again, I ask whether those supposed originals or extended things... be themselves perceivable or not? If they are, then they are ideas and we have gained our point; but if you say they are not,

> I appeal to anyone whether it be sense to assert a colour is like something which is invisible... (Sec. 8,38).

Descartes holds that our sensations probably do not resemble physical objects or their attributes, but that these latter either cause the sensations or give occasion to the mind to have them. For Berkeley, sensations are neither caused by physical objects nor resemble physical attributes. There *are* no physical ojbects; there are only sensations.

Berkeley has to face an obvious question. How do sensations arise? 'When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether I shall see or not', writes Berkeley, in an argument similar to that of Descartes, 'there is therefore some other Will or Spirit that produces them' (Sec. 29,54), because it has already been shown that there is no such thing as a corporeal substance and because all ideas or sensations are 'visibly inactive— there is nothing of Power or Agency including in them'; indeed, 'there is nothing in them but what is perceived'. (Sec. 25/26, 50-51) Nor are they 'generated from within by the mind itself' (Sec. 90,95), because we can distinguish between sensations and images of fancy which the mind can generate from within itself. Therefore there must be 'some other Spirit that causes them; since it is repugnat that they should subsist by themselves' (Sec.146,109).

At this point a further difference between Descartes and Berkeley should be noticed. Descartes claims to have proved the existence of God by his Ontological Argument and appeals to God's existence to vindicate his belief in an external world of extended objects which cause sensa or provide occasion for sensa to arise in minds. Berkeley proceeds from the existence of sensations in individual minds to God's existence as a cause of these sensations, and then he uses God's existence to *explain* our common-sense but mistaken belief in the existence of external objects.

Let me turn aside for a while to deal with an argument Berkeley puts forward to prove the non-exsitence of external objects. I give here an abbridged version of a conversation between Alciphron, a 'minute philosopher', and Euphranor in *Divine Visual Language*[15];

> Euphranor. Tell me, is not the visible appearance alone the proper object of thought?

Alciphron. It is.

Euph. What think you now of the visible appearance of yonder planet? Is it not round luminous flat, no bigger than a sixpence?[16]

Alci. What then?

Euph. Tell me then, what think you of the planet itself. Do you not conceive it to be a vast opaque globe?

Alci. I do.

Euph. Is it not plain, therefore, that neither the planet, nor the cloud, which you see are the real ones which you suppose exist at a distance?

Alci. Do we see anything at all, or is it altogether fancy and illusion?

Euph. Upon the whole, it seems the proper objects of sight are light and colours; all which do form a language wonderfully adapted to suggest distances, figures, situations, dimensions, and various qualities of tangible objects by the arbitrary imposition of Providence, just as words suggest the things signified by them. (Secs.9-10)

Euphranor's rather ambiguous wording must be taken to mean that though light and colours *suggest* the distances, figures etc. of tangible objects, there actually are no such objects. Alciphron might have pointed out that Euphranor's analogy does not support his case, because, while the things suggested by most words do actually exist, Euphranor is trying to make out that the tangible objects suggested by the language of Providence do not in reality exist, and hence the suggestion is false. But Alciphron lets the opportunity pass.

Let us also pass on and return to the *Principles of Human Knowledge.* The question inevitably arises: if our fleeting sensa are not caused in us by relatively permanent external objects, but are caused directly by God, then, if and when nobody is performing an act of perception (which is not logically impossible), does it mean that 'all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth', like Macavity the mystery cat, just isn't there? That would be going too far, Berkeley realises. Of course it all exists all the time, because it all 'subsists in the mind of' the Eternal Spirit or God (Sec. 6,36-7).

It should be noticed that this function of God differs from the one already considered. Earlier, God *causes* sensa to appear in our minds; now, God is a sustainer of the world even if no human or other minds were perceiving it. Even before finite minds were created, the world always 'subsisted' in God's mind,

Awkward questions arise. Does the world of objects look to God as it looks to us? Does it have primary and secondary qualities such we think we perceive but which are only our own sensa? Does God have sensa like us? If the world for God is a world without sensible qualities, then it is not the kind of world which we perceive at all, and so *our* world does really collapse into nothingness if no finite mind perceives it. What would it mean to say that God created the world before He created finite minds? Or did He? For Descartes, believing in a world of external objects, such questions do not arise, though, of course, he has his own awkward questions too.

Not only does Berkeley's God produce sensa in us, producing, at the same time, the illusion that we are perceiving an external world, He also produces the sensa in a certain order. In his *Principles* Berkeley writes, 'Such and such ideas are attended by such and such other ideas, in the ordinary course of things'. These we call 'the *laws of nature*'; these ideas are excited in us 'by the Mind we depend on' and are learned by us through experience. They 'give us a sort of foresight which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life'. Without them 'we could not know how to act' in order to 'procure the least pleasure, or remove the least pain of sense' and we would 'be all in uncertainty and confusion'. (Sec.31,54-5) But there is no *necessity* in the connexion of idea to idea. For example, my sensation of having slipped on banana skin need not have been followed, though it actually did, by my sensation of landing on the pavement, except that God, at that very moment, willed it so. He could just as well have willed that I received the sensation of flying into the air. In 'the ordinary course of things', we find that slipping on a banana skin, along with certain other sensations, is usually followed by certain painful sensations. This happens, we say, according to the laws of nature, but this is only an incorrect way of saying that this is what God generally wills. He 'sustains and rules the ordinary course of things'. Can God vary the settled laws of nature of act contrary to them? 'If He were minded', says Berkeley, He could 'produce

a miracle', or what, to us, would be a miracle, for, in truth, there can, properly speaking, be no miracles since God always does what He does and everything that happens is a miracle. However, 'there is a great and conspicuous *use* in these regular constant methods' of God's working. 'He will act agreeably to the rules of mechanism' in order to help us attain our goals or avoid mishaps. God could, if He wished, make all the proper motions on the dial of a watch even if no watchmaker did anything to produce them, yet, for our sakes,

> it is necessary that those actions of the watchmaker, whereby he makes the movements and rightly adjusts them, precede the production of the aforesaid motions; as also that any disorder in them be attended with the perception of some corresponding disorder in the movements, which being once corrected all is right again. (Sec.63,78).

Again, 'The fire which I see is not the *cause* of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the *mark* that forewarns me of it' (Sec.64,79). The mark is produced directly by God just as it is the signalman, and not the approaching train, that operates the semaphore to warn us of the danger. It works like this: I feel the sensum of pain, which I don't relish; I know from experience that if I go close to the red sensa (the fire), I will receive a more painful sensum; therefore, I initiate a movement (whatever that might mean) in the opposite direction and God removes the painful sensum and substitutes it with a pleasant one. A similar, though a more complicated, analysis can be given about the watch and the watchmaker. (Secs. 62-3/65, 77.9)

Why does God use such elaborate and tortuous methods when He could produce His results more directly? Because He

> seems to choose the convincing our reason of His attributes by the works of nature, which discover so much harmony and contrivance, ...and are such plain indications of wisdom and beneficence in their Author, rather than to astonish us into a belief of His Being by anomalous and surprising events (Sec.63,78).

It seems, therefore, that God's main purpose in fabricating this vast and complex system was to give us a sense of security, stability and comfort. He could have produced the same results by sometimes making fire burn and cause pain (to speak in our common-sense language)

so as to make us turn away from it, and at other times making it give us pleasant sensations without any ill consequences, so that we need not turn away from it. One can imagine infinite such possibilities. But this would have surprised and confused us, unless, of course, even in the face of an utterly unreliable and erratic sequence of sensa, God decided to produce a sense of stability and claim in us, which He could very well have done. God's essential strategy seems to have been to create a consistent and orderly system, even if the connexions between its parts might have been quite otherwise than obtain at present. Fire might have soothed and water burned, so long as they did this always consistently— this seems to have been God's plan.

Several points may be noticed. The intricate mechanism of Nature, with its well-adapted system of parts, is not primarily appealed to by Berkeley to prove God's existence (which he has already 'proved' by a causal agrument), but to answer the objection that, if sensa are produced by God's arbitrary fiat, why did He have to set up the system? But there is also something of the Argument from Design in Berkeley's mind:

> If we attentively consider the constant regularity, order and concatenation of natural things; the surprising magnificence, beauty and perfection of the larger, and the exquisite contrivance of the smaller parts of the creation, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole, ...we should clearly perceive that they belong to the aforesaid Spirit (Sec.146,109-10).

Descartes holds a Deistic theory. God has created the universe having two substances, Thought and Extension, and set it going once and for all, so that it proceeds by its own nature and established laws. God has also made it possible for the two substances either to interact or function by a kind of pre-established parallelism, without needing His constant and continuous intervention. Descartes, therefore, does not need the kind of theory that Berkeley, who denies Extension altogether, needs to explain the order of nature. Berkeley holds a Theistic theory, where God is not only a Creator but also a Sustainer. In *Divine Visual Language,* Berkeley writes,

> Some philosophers, being convinced of the wisdom and power of the Creator, ...did nevertheless imagine that he left this system with all its parts and contents well adjusted and put in motion... to go thenceforth of itself for a certain period (Sec.14,246),

but he claims that his own philosophy

> proves, not a Creator merely, but a provident Governor... attentive to all our interests and motions, ...and takes care of our minutest actions and designs throughout the whole course of our lives, informing, admonishing, and directing incessantly (Sec.14,246-7).

In *Divine Visual Language,* Berkeley explicitly elaborates what he had suggested earlier (Sec.65 of his *Principles*) that ideas or sensa are not causes but signs. Here, he says that God communicates with us through sensa. Alciphron raises an objection. He says he is convinced of the existence of another person, because the person *speaks to him;* but surely God does not 'speak to man in the same clear... manner as one man doth to another' (Sec.6,231), and he enlarges on the nature of language by pointing out that it makes 'arbitrary use of sensible signs, which have no similitude or necessary connexion with the things signified' (Sec. 7.231). Euphranor pounces on this and says that plainly God

> speaks to man by the intervention and use of arbitrary, outward, sensible signs, having no resemblance or necessary connexion with the things they stand for and suggest

and,

> by innumerable combinations of these signs, an endless variety of things is discovered and made known to us; and... we are taught and admonished what to shun, and what to pursue (Sec.7,232).

By ignoring the distinction between sign and symbol, Euphranor is here guilty of (intentional?) sophistry. Pain is a sign of fire and may make us turn away (unless, for some reason, we wish to get burnt), but pain does not *mean* fire. But 'fire' may or may not indicate, as a sign, the presence of fire or make us avoid it (it depends on how it is uttered). We are, for example, not avoiding it right now. But 'fire' *means* or stands for fire, whether there is any fire there or not. That neither sign nor symbol may resemble what they suggest is not the essential point of difference.

Descartes would admit that sensa are signs of something other than themselves, namely, external objects, and we also learn by experience that such and such sensa generally follow such and such other sensa. We do not learn a language in this way. To say that God teaches

us this language through repeated experiences, is not only to confuse symboles with signs, but also to commit a *petitio principii.* Interpreting sensa as symbols, Berkeley holds that God uses them as His language, and because He uses them as His language, they are to be interpreted as symbols.

Berkeley, speaking through the mouth of Philonous, says :

> I do nor pretend to be a setter-up of new notions. My endeavours tend only to unite and place in clearer light that truth which was before shared between the vulgar and the philosophers.

Hylas admits that he thought that Philonous, setting out on Cartesian principles, was advancing the philosophical Scepticism of the Cartesians; 'but, in the end, your conclusions are directly opposite to theirs', says Hylas, rather surprised. Berkeley, alias Philonous, replies,

> You see, Hylas, the water of yonder fountain, how it is forced upwards... to a certain height; at which it breaks, and falls back into the basin from whence it rose; its ascent as well as descent proceeding from the same uniform law of gravitation. Just so, the same Principles which, at first view, lead to Scepticism, bring men back to Common Sense.[17]

It seems, however, that granting the existence of an external, physical world, Descartes's fountian falls more completely into the basin of Common Sense than does Berkeley's.

NOTES

1. *Meditations* (1641). Page references, given in brackets after the quotations, are to *The Philosophy of Descartes* (Tr. J. Veitch, Tudor Pub. Co., N. York)
2. *The Principles of Philosophy* (1644). Hereinafter called *Principles.*
3. Part and Section references gives, in brackets, after the quotations, as well as the page references are to *The Philosophy of Descartes* above mentioned.

4. *Descartes : The Project of Pure Inquiry* (Penguin, 1978), p. 217.
5. N. Kemp Smith, *New Studies in the Philosophy of Descartes* (Macmillan, 1963), p.237.
6. This is akin to the view that basic statements are incorrigible.
7. N. Kemp Smith, *Op.Cit.*, p. 234. The reference here is to Descartes' Letter to Princess Elizabeth.
8. Quoted by F. Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* (Image Books, 1963), Vol.4, p.132.
9. Quoted by A. Kenny, *Descartes* (Ed. W. Doney, Macmillan, 1968), p. 233.
10. S. V. Keeling, *Descartes* (Oxford, 2nd Ed., 1968, pp. 161-2.
11. *Op.Cit.*, p. 132.
12. S. V. Keeling *Op.Cit.*, p.137.
13. *Selections from Berkeley* (Oxford, 6th Ed., 1911), pp. xii-xiii.
14. The sections and pages, given in brackets, after the quotations refer to *Selections from Berkeley* by A. Campbell Fraser (as above)
15. Sections and pages, given in brackets after the quotations, refer to A. C. Fraser's *Selections.*
16. Surely, he means the moon!
17. *A Dialogue Concerning the Principles.* p.166 of Fraser's *Selections.*

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