CHAPTER-V

A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF BERKELEY

Problems of Berkeley:

Berkeley lived in an age in which materialism and atheism were slowly making themselves established. These tendencies were very much strengthened by the sciences of the time. Against them Berkeley holds that the reality of the physical world is essentially spiritual for it manifests the activity of spirit and the goodness of God’s will. Towards the end of his life in Siris he maintains: “All things are made for the supreme Good, all things tend to that end; and we may be said to account for a thing when we show that it is so best” (Siris.III-247). This spiritualism appeared so obvious to him that he hardly cared to defend it. The main philosophical ingenuity he, therefore, showed in the refutation of materialism. This negative task itself should be based on some philosophy and the philosophy which Berkeley inherited was mainly that of Locke. However, Locke had tacitly assumed the existence of matter, abstract ideas etc. These Berkeley holds to be inconsistent with Lockean empiricism and, therefore, he tried to be a more consistent Locke.¹

Main tenets of his empirical philosophy were:²

1. We always begin with the exclusively particular and distinct sense qualities of heat, colour, smell etc.

   (a) These sense qualities are either directly presented to us, or,

   (b) They may be at once represented to us by way of images.

2. The same positive thesis may be expressed negatively by saying “nihil est in intellect quod non prius fuerit in sensu”. Thus there is no knowledge that cannot be reduced to sensation.
3. The things like tables or chairs are collections of ideas which often go together and are marked by their specific names.

4. Apart from the ideas, there are spirits that perceive the ideas.

5. Things cannot exist without some mind to perceive them. When there are no human minds, things are sustained by the divine mind.

Finally, then, the reality consists of spirits and their ideas only. This is known as Berkeley’s spiritualism. The main tenets of Berkeley’s philosophy can be stated in his own language (Fraser, A. C., ‘Selections from Berkeley’, Rationale of the principles Sec. 1-7).^3

The objects of human knowledge are either

(a) "ideas actually imprinted on the senses; or else

(b) ideas perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or lastly

(c) ideas formed by help of memory and imagination, either compounding, dividing, or barely representing those originally perceived in the aforesaid ways.........

"And as several of those are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so to be reputed as one THING. Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple; other collections of idea constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things.........

"But besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is likewise something which knows or perceives them, and exercises diverse operations, — as willing, imagining, remembering, — about them. This perceiving,
active being is what I call Mind, spirit, soul, or myself.

"That neither our thoughts nor passions, nor ideas formed by the imagination, exist without the mind, is what everybody will allow........

"And to me it is no less evident that the various sensations, or ideas imprinted in the sense, however blended or combined together (that is, whatever, objects they compose), cannot exist otherwise than in and perceiving them........

"Some truths there are so near obvious to the mind that a man need only open his eyes to see them. Such I take this important one to be, Viz. that all the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies which compose the mighty frame of the world, have not any subsistence without a mind — that their being is to be perceived or known; that consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit".4

"Philosophers, according to Berkeley, had the distinction of making simple things complicated. Unfortunately scientist joined hands with philosophers and duped the common man by telling him that what he saw and heard was not reality but appearance and that the true way to reality was not through perception which is the common man’s royal road to knowledge, but through universal concepts. This led to a doubt regarding certainty of knowledge and gave rise to scepticism. Rationalistic philosophers and scientist alike believed in ghosts under the name of abstract ideas and this defiled philosophical thought. The materialism of the scientists was the basis of atheism and this the good Bishop considered as a target of his attack. He was great defender of morals and religion.5

Berkeley never appreciated the mechanistic view of the universe. Locke
would say that anything was explained if its inner mechanism was described exhaustively. This was obviously the scientific view, the view which described the structure and working of a machine. ‘Berkeley, on the contrary, found the notions of mechanism repulsive. He violently rejected the idea that they could explain anything, but further, he was oppressed by, and hostile to, the whole conception of nature as an enormous machine. He thought it ugly, “stupid”, false to the true character of our experience, mindless or antipathetic to the human spirit. Thus he not only criticized but profoundly hated Locke’s philosophy: the whole cast of mind which could embrace it was to him disagreeable’ (G.J.Warnock ed.), *Principles of Human Knowledge*, Introduction, pp. 19-20). Materialism, scepticism and atheism were his enemies. A firm believer in God, like a real Bishop, he thought a belief in matter to be inconsistent with a belief in Divinity. God is spirit, man is spirit and the whole universe is spiritual in nature.⁶

The current insistence of science on the rationalistic approach to reality and the Lockean conception of the unknown substance invited a revolt from him. In the Cartesian fashion science broadcasts that senses are not to be believed, they give not the scientific laws. It is reason, it is mathematics, with the help of which we arrive at truth. But Berkeley totally disagreed with the materialistic conception of science as also with their condemnation of senses. Moreover, he believed that scientists themselves used the empirical method though they discredited it.⁷ Starting from his awareness of *visibilia and tangibilia*, he (the scientist) proceeds to the discovery of certain alleged *invisibilia and intangibilia*, underlying the world of sense. Eventually, he takes up the paradoxical position of asserting the real existence of the *invisibilia and intangibilia* and denying reality to *visibilia and tangibilia*, from awareness of which he started’ (C.R.Morris, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, p.68). Berkeley could not
contribute to this view, for according to him senses play a great part in knowledge of the physical world as no fresh knowledge can ever be had without the use of them. Without observation, where is physical science? And with observation how can you pose to discard the evidence of senses? Berkeley thought that he could remedy some harm done to religion and morals by scepticism and atheism by showing that the scientist’s belief in abstract ideas as well as matter was baseless.⁸

**Minds and Ideas**

The problem S.A. Grave raises in his essay *The Mind and Its Ideas* is based largely on two fundamental principles in Berkeley’s philosophy. These are (1) the Identity Principle, which maintains that the things we see and feel are “but so many sensations, notions, ideas or impressions on the sense”; and (2) the Distinction Principle, which states that the mind and its ideas are entirely distinct. The consequences and implications of these two principles seem hard to reconcile, for while (1) bases the existence of things on their-perception by an individual perceiver, (2) leads to the view that things depend on God for their existence but are independent of any human perceiver. Like the status of things, the status of the perceiving mind varies according to which principle we use to interpret the *esse est percipere* doctrine. For either the mind is nothing apart from its mental operations (the Identity Principle or the mind is something apart from its thinking but is as a matter of course always engaged in some mental operation (the Distinctive Principle).⁹

Grave believes that Berkeley is arguing against the doctrine that the self is a system of floating ideas and that he is therefore putting forward a substantialist account of mind. C.M. Turbayne, on the other hand, in his article “Berkeley’s Two Concepts of Mind”, agrees that this substantialist account is indeed one
theory of mind in the “Principles” but argues that there is another, non-substantialist, account at least latent in Berkeley’s writings. The support for this thesis is based largely on Turbayne’s unconventional interpretation of the “Principles”. Turbayne suggests that Berkeley uses his destructive analyses of the common philosophical sources of error – category mistakes, subtract ideas, proper names, and especially metaphors – to make credible his hinted non-substantialist theory of mind.¹⁰

Berkeley thought that the source of error in some doctrines, such as materialism and representationalism, was a theory of meaning which led to the doctrine of abstract ideas. There is, according to him, a necessary connection between materialism and abstract ideas, and, conversely, there is a necessary connection between the theory that there are no such ideas and his own doctrine of immaterialism. Monrae C. Beardsley, in “Berkeley on Abstract Ideas”. Questions the justification of Berkeley’s claim that his attack on abstraction is an essential basis for his positive doctrine. He concludes (1) that when Berkeley invokes the attack on abstract ideas in order to support his immaterialism, his argument sometimes depends on the Identity Principle and has nothing to do with abstraction; and (2) that where the abstract idea argument is apparently legitimately used to refute Realism, Berkeley runs into inconsistencies elsewhere.¹¹

**Denial of Abstract Ideas**

The origin of the denial of abstract ideas is surely the (individualism) to which Berkeley sticks. If the world contains nothing but individuals or particulars, an abstract term which represents a general concept and does not refer to an individual cannot be accepted. On this hypothesis knowledge is always about a particular, for the particular alone exists. But it is a universally received
maxim, that everything which exists is particular (Berkeley, Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, Dialogue 1). Knowledge again is a bundle of sensations. Somehow particularism pervades the whole of Berkeley’s philosophy of the earlier years. For him any whole is only a bundle of bits. But is it really so? It gets no support from psychology.\textsuperscript{12}

The sense of our meaning is an entirely peculiar element of the thought. It is one of those evanescent and “transitive” facts of mind which introspection cannot turn round upon, said isolate and hold up for examination, as an entomologist passes round an insect on a pin. In the (somewhat clumsy) terminology I have used, it pertains to the “fringe” of the subjective state, and is a “feeling of tendency”, whose neural counterpart is undoubtedly a lot of dawning; and dying processes too faint and complex to be traced (William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, p. 472)\textsuperscript{13}

It is therefore ‘sophistry and illusions to say that a thought always refers only to a particular thing. The ground of Berkeley’s criticism of abstract is thus lost. There is no knowledge which is made of particular sensations about a particular object in a mind of a particular thinker with the universal element absent. There is no inference from particular to particular (In this theory of Mill, Berkeley’s particularism was later reflected) without an intervention of a universal proposition. We have already seen that particular sensations are only end terms of analysis and not the beginning of a process. In conceiving knowledge to be consisting of bits of sensations Berkeley, like Locke, starts from a point that does not exist.\textsuperscript{14}

We may occur with William James (1842-1910) that a pure sensation is a psychological myth. It is not there but is posited for the sake of explaining the
relation between the "body and the outside world. It is a working hypothesis
and not a description of facts. To say that the stage of perception is compli-
cated and may be analysed into simple elements like sensations is a logical
way of treating facts and not an ontological one. It is providing a link between
the subject and the object. In spite of all the work done by physics, physiology,
psychology or psychophysics, the sensation still defies full explanation. It is a
naive way of explaining the behavior of an organism in the presence of an
external reality to say that it receives a stimulus from without and responds to
it. But nothing so simple happens; what takes place is an experience and it is
the post-mortem analysis of that experience that brings in explanatory con-
cepts like sensations. The concept of sensation is only a logical precondition of
perception. It is used for the sake of understanding only.15

Unlike Samkara who starts from the whole, namely Brahman, many other
philosophers have started from parts. The ontological fact (Being) is divided
into parts and they think that an epistemological procedure of going from parts
to the whole gives us the correct picture of experience. Similarly, the mistake
of Berkeley, which he had inherited from Locke, was to take the knowledge
process as additive. What is the relation of the whole and parts? A whole is
analysed into parts whereas the parts put together never make the whole. An
experienced whole is one single unit; if it is divided into parts, the parts may be
distinguishable but not separable. If one starts from parts and tries to recon-
struct a whole it is not a real integrated whole, it is only a linguistic whole.
From points put together you can never factually get a line, but one may call
such a linear representation of points a line. This line which is constructed
out of bits is one whole not in fact but in language. The parts are logical
constructions, results of analysis and not constituents of a real whole. Sensa-
tions are necessary for perception, they are prior to perceptions, not factually
but logically. The analysis of perception would compel us to accept the link of sensation but there is nothing like a pure sensation. The procedure of starting from sensations seems to be innocent but it is not so. Psychologists, says James, have no right to start from sensations. For factually they are not the starting-point of experience. To start with them is to abandon the empirical method of investigation. Synthesising and constructing higher stages from those below is a reserve procedure. ‘Consciousness, from our natal day, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations, and what we call simple sensations are results of discriminative attention, pushed often to a very high degree’ (William James, The Principles of Psychology, Vol. I, p.224).16

Berkeley’s way of looking on knowledge as a conglomeration of atomic sensations was only a legacy from Locke. The psychological atomism which started from Locke and went up to Hume needs correction. Experience is a gestalt, not a summation. Simple atomistic bits cannot stick together – for here the adhesive element will always stand as external to the bits whereas it is never so in experience. The lines drawn between parts at the time of analysis are conceptual, and we talk of parts as if the dividing lines really existed. As Locke’s claim is that his results are arrived at on the basis of a plain historical method, i.e., on empirical observation of psychological facts, a graphic description of experience from the pen of a psychologist would refute Locke (and Berkeley) more effectively.17

Berkeley’s insistence on particular sensations as the source of knowledge, no less than his criticism of abstract ideas originated in his individualism. In later years, however, he corrected his opinion. In the “Principles” and more so in the “Commonplace Book” he propounds a theory of particularism. ‘Almost every philosophical term which connotes a tendency to particularism may be
predicated of the Berkeley of this early period: sensationalist, atomist, empiricist, singularist, phenomenalist, solipsist, occasionalist. But suggestions of a more adequate view are to be found even in the "Commonplace Book". The development of his philosophy was to involve a gradually deepening realisation of the importance of the universal, both in knowledge and in reality (G. A. Johnston, The Development of Berkeley's philosophy, p. 93.). In "Alciphron" and "Siris", however, he realises the importance of the general; 'To trace things from their original, it seems that the human mind, naturally furnished with the ideas of things particular and concrete, and being designed, not for the bare intuition of ideas, but for action and operation about them, and pursuing her own happiness therein, stands in need of certain general rules of theorems to direct her operations in this pursuit; the supplying which want is the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences' (Berkeley, Alciphron, Seventh Dialogue, Sec. 11.). Berkeley admits that signs or symbols are the means to obtain these rules. What other evidence is required to testify to his belief in abstractions? His belief in symbols is enough for that. He further clarifies this stand. 'Hence it natural to assist the intellect by imagination, imagination by sense.......Hence figures, metaphors and types ......we substitute sounds for thoughts, and written letters for sounds; emblems, symbols, and hieroglyphics, for things too obscure to strike, and too various or too fleeting to be retained' (Berkeley, Alciphron, Seventh Dialogue, Sec. 13.). He goes on describing the uses of diagrams and allegories taking the example of Plato's myth in the "Phaedrus". All this, however, does not mean that Berkeley accepted theories of science as truths about facts. They were useful but not true. They must be accepted in virtue of their serviceability and not in virtue of their factuality. The reason is simple. There is nothing of which these theories will be true; for matter, in which a scientist believes, does not really exist.18
Though in the “Principles” he defends sensations, we come across suggestions of notional knowledge. In “Siris”, however, he derides sensations and seems to have understood the real value of the universal element in knowledge. Here he maintains that really understanding a thing does not mean merely perceiving it but interpreting it. Sense may even obstruct the work of reason. Intellect is said to be a better judge. ‘Strictly the sense knows nothing........

According to Socrates (469-399 B.C.), you and the cook may judge of a dish on the table equally well, but while the dish is making, the cook can better foretell what will ensure from this or that manner of composing it’ (Berkeley, Siris, Sec. 253.).

At one stage he is on the verge of admitting abstract ideas. He ‘seems to admit that the fundamental conceptions with which science deals are not of sensible origin....that they are dependent upon our awareness of our own mental activities.....’ (C.R.Morris, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, p. 96.). However, it is not in science but in spiritual experience that we get the true knowledge of reality. Or again, ‘in order to tame mankind, and introduce a sense of virtue, the best human means is to exercise their understanding, to give them a glimpse of another world, superior to the sensible....’(Siris,Sec. 330).

‘On the basis of such passages’, comments Luce, ‘it has been said that Berkeley has passed from “esse est percipi” to “esse est concipi” to the distress of empiricists and the delight of rationalist idealists’ (A.A.Luce(ed.), The works of Berkeley, Vol. V, Introduction, p. 15). However, Luce points out that it is not right to say that Berkeley gave up his earlier position. Berkeley now takes knowledge as apprehension of causes, which, from the beginning he had said to be a work of reason. The facts, of course, remains that sense now does not remain the only window of knowledge; and that the emphasis is shifted from the apprehension of a bare particular.
About the refutation of matter

With regard to of matter a problem has been posed. Was Berkeley a metaphysician or an idealist or an analytic philosopher? Prof. A.J. Ayer (1910-1989), maintained that Locke and Berkeley were not metaphysicians so much as they were analytic philosophers. Ayer said: "Nor is it fair to regard Berkeley as a metaphysician. For he did not in fact deny the reality of material things, as we are still too commonly told. What he denied was the adequacy of Locke’s analysis of the notion of a material thing." Against this observation of Prof. A.J. Ayer, we are holding that Berkeley was essentially a metaphysician. He did take the help of analysis but only in subservience to his idealistic vision. He was full of the vision of God and the finite spirits. He analysed away matter, because the existence of matter did not fit into his metaphysical vision. For this reason Berkeley did not carry his empiricism to its logical conclusion with regard to the reality of God and the knowledge of selves. Here both Russell and Ayer remark that Berkeley has committed error in accepting the reality of God and spirits. If Berkeley were primarily an empirical analyst, then his error in accepting God and spirits were indefensible. But a metaphysician takes the central things in his vision to be real and subordinates all cognitive propositions to that end.

Berkeley was in favour of using precise language, for he wanted us to ‘draw the curtain of words to behold the fairest tree of knowledge’ (Selections, p. 26). But he also knew that "..... the communicating of ideas marked by words is not the chief and only end of language, as is commonly supposed. There are other ends as the raising of some passion, the exciting to or deterring from an action, the putting the mind in some particular disposition — to which the former is in many cases subservient” (Supra 03(B)).
Hence, Berkeley has analytic method and cognitive statements as subservient to his vision of God. For him the whole of nature is the language of God. Hence, we think that Berkeley was a metaphysician and that he used ‘analysis’ in the service of his metaphysics.\textsuperscript{25}

**Theory of knowledge**

Berkeley tried to base his whole theory of knowledge on the basis of perception alone. Curiously enough Berkeley in the last resort always appeals to the uncorrupted commonsense and unprejudiced observation and yet the ordinary man always believes that his perception is not the thing but is representative of the thing. For example, we get the sensation, of sound on the ring of the bell but the sound itself is not the bell. His theory of direct perception is at the root of his difficulty. But his own important analysis of the perception of distance shows that perception need not be direct. He himself shows that he judge the tangible distance with the help of visible signs. The present-day thinkers are agreed that in perception at least there are two elements, namely the psychical process and the real object to which it refers.\textsuperscript{26}

In “Physical Objects as Permanent Possibilities of Sensation”, J.S.Mill defends a theory of the external world which is compatible with one possible interpretation of Berkeley’s doctrine —that what we call the external world is not made up of what we actually perceive but rather of the aggregate of possibilities of sensation. Mill thus proposes an analysis of physical – object statements in terms of counter-factuals: “If I were suddenly transported to the banks of the Hoogly, I should still have the sensations which, if now present, would lead me to affirm that Calcutta exists here and now”. Such a theory would, in Mill’s view, account for our concept of matter; for the aggregate of possible sensations is permanent, whereas actual sensations are fleeting.
Further, this aggregate is independent of individual perceivers, whereas particular sensations are observer-dependent. The belief that matter is something over and above permanent possibilities of sensation Mill traces back to the mistaken step from “any one sensation is different from any one physical object” to “the sum total of sensations is different from external world”. Thus the supposition that Berkeley shared Mill’s view depends to a large extent on one’s interpretation of Berkeley’s esse est percipi principle.27

Konrad Marc-Wogau, in “Berkeley’s Sensationalism and the Esse est Percipi - Principle”, makes a detailed examination of this principle and offers two formulations; (x) (x exists = x is perceived) and (x) (x exists ⊃ x is perceived). The second formula expresses Berkeley’s Idealism. It is weaker than the first, which is the conjunction of the second formula with (x) (x is perceived ⊃ x is exists), which in turn expresses the thesis that the object of sense-perception is undoubtedly real, or exists. (x) (x exists ≡ x is perceived) therefore implies both Berkeley’s Idealism and what might be called his thesis of the infallibility of sense-perception. Two points are of importance in connection with Marc-Wogau’s formulations: (1) Neither formulation gives us precise information as to the relation between esse and percipi; they leave it open, for example, whether it is analytically (and if so, definitionally) true that to exists is to be perceived, or merely contingently true; (2) There are occasions when the validity of Berkeley’s arguments depends on an oscillation between the two formulations.28

The formulation (x) (x exists ⊃ x is perceived) is clearly of crucial importance to Berkeley, and Marc-Wogau examines several interpretations of one central argument designed to establish this position. The argument refers to the peculiar situation of being able to imagine, for example, oranges on a tree and nobody to perceive them; but the one who does the imagining must perceive
them or think of them all the time: "Although nobody is imagined to perceive the ideas, they are nevertheless perceived". Berkeley, however, holds that it is contradictory to imagine or to perceive ideas as not perceived. Marc - Wogau finds logical faults in all the interpretations of this argument, but favours the fifth, which follows from these premises:29

1. A proposition P must be considered as certain or proved if the supposition of its negation ("I suppose that P is false") is a contradiction.

2. To suppose something about x implies to perceived x.

3. The proposition "I suppose that x is unperceived." implies that x is unperceived.

Marc - Wogau does, however, state two important objections to this more probable interpretation.

The criticism of 'esse est percipi'

According to G.E. Moore, the theory of esse est percipi is based on an insufficient analysis. Thus Moore observes that the term 'perception' includes two things, namely (i) the act of perceiving and (ii) the object perceived or perception. For instance, the sensation of blue includes the sensing blue and the sensed blue. The sensing act is no doubt mental but the senses blue exists in its own rights and is non-mental. Similarly, the perceiving of a table is mental; but the table perceived is non-mental. As the term 'perception' refers to both, so Berkeley one-sidedly concludes that perception is mental.30

We have to come this far; if we are to know anything of the world external to ourselves, we must use our senses to perceive that world. The relation which we have through our senses to their immediate objects of perception, no matter what sense or what sort of object is involved, is the relation of immediate or
direct apprehension. When we see, we see something and in the first instance that thing is a sensible or a sense datum. But how do we know that the thing that we perceive directly is not utterly dependent upon our senses having perceived it, an object with no existence apart from our sensing of it, a creature of our own mind? How do we know that there is anything outside of ourselves? How, in a word, do we know that Berkeley may not have been correct? 31

It is clear that Moore thinks that he does know that there is an external material world and that Berkeley was wrong. In addition, he gives arguments to show that sensations must be distinct from the objects of which they are sensations, that our perception of a coloured body is distinct from the body itself, that our experience is one thing, and that of which we have experience is another. For him sense data are related to our minds, but not dependent upon them. He wishes to hold that at least those sense data which we generally perceive under normal or abnormal conditions. 32

At one time G.E. Moore held that a good reason to believe that sense data exist separately and apart from our perceiving them was just that we have a strong propensity to believes that they do ("The Status of Sense-Data", PS 181). This is in itself scarcely conclusive proof. But put in Moore’s characteristically strong language and buttressed by arguments designed to show that the usual arguments designed to prove that sense data do not exist apart from our perceiving them are inconclusive, it carries a good deal of force. In "The Refutation of Idealism" (PS.1-30) he uses many arguments to show that it cannot be proven that the statement ‘to be is to be perceived’, esse est percipii, is true in any important sense. He thinks that this proposition is necessary to prove that Idealism – the view that all reality is spiritual or mental – in any form is correct. Therefore he thinks that if he can show this proposition to be
false, while Idealism is not refuted, it is rendered unprovable. If he can show this, then he thinks he will have shown that there is a good reason to think that there is a distinction between an object and our experiencing of it. But the object of our experience is a sense datum. Hence he will have shown that there is a good reason to suppose that sense data are not mind-dependent.33

The argument showing that esse est percipi cannot be proven may be outlined basically in our four parts. Three of these concern possible ways of interpreting the statement itself, ‘to be is to be perceived’.34

I. The ‘is’ of ‘to be is to perceived’ denotes equivalence. ‘To be’ means just ‘to be perceived’. The expressions are synonymous. Moore holds this to be obviously incorrect. What is meant by the words ‘to be’ is not what is meant by the words ‘to be perceived’.35

II. ‘To be’ is in some way necessarily connected with ‘to be perceived’. That is, .... ‘the object of experience is inconceivable apart from the subject’. ‘But Moore argues that this is false. If it were the case, then to deny the statement ‘to be is to perceived’ would be to make a contradiction. If any statement, if its subject is necessarily connected with its predicate, then its denial is a contradiction. If you try to deny such statements as ‘all bodies are extended’, or ‘all bachelors are unmarried males’, or ‘triangles have three interior angles’ you will contradict yourself. You will be asserting something and then denying the thing you asserted. But it is not at all obvious that to deny the statement ‘to be is to perceived’ is to make a contradiction. Indeed, Moore holds that if this were true then there could be no distinction between the object and the experiencing of it. But we all do make such a distinction without ever feeling that we contradict ourselves and a strong part of his argument consists in his developing this distinction, as we will see shortly. Hence, ‘to be’ is not necessarily connected to ‘to be perceived’.36
III. The statement ‘to be is to be perceived’ may be synthetically necessary. That is, to deny it may not cause a contradiction, but that in some unspecified way ‘to be’ is inseparably connected with ‘to be perceived’. But if this were so, there would be no way to prove that it was so. For statements of this kind there is no handy test as there is for analytic statements like ‘all bodies are extended’. Why, then, should we believe it? \(^{37}\)

IV. This is Moore’s major argument and to spell it out in detail will give a notion of what Moore considers a sound and detailed argument. There is a distinction, he says, between an object and a sensation, which is a sensation of the object. An experience is one thing and that of which it is an experience is another. The argument proceeds in the following way: \(^{38}\)

1. The sensation of blue differs from the sensation of green.

2. But they are both sensations and therefore must have something in common.

3. What they have in common is called ‘consciousness’.

4. There are, then, two distinct terms, in every sensation:

   a) what they both have in common-consciousness;

   b) whatever it is that makes one sensation differ from another. This is to be called the ‘object of sensation’.

5. Blue is one object of sensation, green another.

6. Consciousness, which sensations of blue and sensations of green have in common, is different from either blue or green.

7. At times the sensation of blue exists in my mind and at times it does not.

8. But if the sensation of blue includes both consciousness and blue, then when the sensation of blue exists in my mind either
a) consciousness exists alone;

b) blue exists alone;

c) consciousness and blue exists.

9. a), b), and c) are different alternatives.

10. Therefore to say b) is to say something different from saying c). To say they are the same is to contradict oneself.

11. To say that the sensation of "blue exists and the sensation of green exists is to say that consciousness also exists, for it is consciousness which is common to both sensations. It is consciousness in virtue of which both are sensations.

12. Since consciousness is a necessary element in sensation, b) cannot be the case.

13. Then either a) or c) is the case.

14. Therefore the existence of blue, b), cannot be the same thing as the existence of the sensation of blue. We are left with either a) or c), but not both together.

15. Therefore the object of sensation must be different from the sensation itself. For to claim that blue is the same as consciousness plus blue is to claim that a part is the same as a whole of which it is only part, or else to identify it with something which it is not: namely the other part.

Moore moves to another tack designed to explicate step 15.39

16. Steps 11-13 show that when we have a sensation either a) consciousness exists alone or c) consciousness and blue exists together. Which is the case, and if c) is the case, in what sense do consciousness and its object exist together? 40
Those philosophers to whom Moore is opposed hold that when we have a
sensation, c) is the case; that is, both consciousness and its object exist to-
gether as an inseparable whole, for they hold that what Moore calls the object
of the sensation is really something which they call its content. In order to
show that this is not true, Moore's next step is to continue the argument by
asking what it means to say that one thing is the content of another. He argues
that in no relevant sense can blue [he called, the content of a sensation. The
argument proceeds by reductio and absurdum. Moore assumes what he wishes
to deny -- that blue can be called the content of a blue sensation -- and then
draws from that assumption an absurd consequence. Consider a blue flower or
bead, but it cannot in the same sense be said to be part of the content of
consciousness.41

17. To say that 'blue' is part of the content of the sensation of blue is then
to say that it has the same relation to the other parts of the sensation of
blue as it has to the other parts of the blue flower or bead.

18. But consciousness is the other part of the sensation of blue.

19. Therefore blue has the same relation to consciousness in the sensation
of blue as it has to the rest of the flower in a blue flower or to the rest
of the bead in a blue bead.

20. The relation between blue and a blue flower or bead is the same as the
relation between a thing and its qualities: to say the thing exists is just
to say that its qualities exist as well.42

21. On this view, if you argue that blue is a part of the content of the
sensation of blue, then you are saying that a sensation of blue differs
from a blue bead in that a blue bead is made of glass and a sensation of
blue is made of consciousness.43
Although the argument takes some complicated digressions here, the point Moore is driving at is that if all this were true, then just as a bead is blue because it is made of blue glass, so consciousness would be blue when we had a sensation of blue. But Moore concludes that although for all he knows consciousness may actually be blue, there is no reason to think so, for that fact is never revealed in introspection or in any other way. Although c) is the case – consciousness and its object do exists together – they do not do so as an inseparable whole.\textsuperscript{44}

He concludes by saying that consciousness is "the simple and unique relation the existence of which alone justifies us in distinguishing knowledge of a thing from the thing known, indeed, in distinguishing mind from matter. And, this result I may express by saying that what is called the 'content' of a sensation is in very truth what I originally called, it – the sensation's object". In having a sensation we are outside the circle of our own ideas and thus reach out to something which is independent of our experience of it. There is no reason to think the proposition 'esse est perci' is true and no reason to think all objects depend for their existence upon a mind to think them.\textsuperscript{45}

Later on, the theory of 'esse est perci' was subjected to a great deal of criticism by the realist amongst whom the name of Prof. R.B. Perry (1876-1957) deserves special mention. First, according to Perry, the theory of 'esse est perci' is open to the charge of 'exclusive particularity'. This fallaciously means that a thing is said to belong to one relationship only. Because it is related to mind as an idea, therefore, it is falsely supposed that it cannot stand in any other relationship. However, a thing stands in 'multiple' relationship. For example, Ram is the husband of Sita and a son of Dasaratha, and a killer of Ravana. Hence, a table becomes an idea when it stands in relation to a knowing mind. But it is a thing amongst other things in relation to a chair or a desk.
Viewed in this light instead of an idea being the essence of a thing may be just an accident which may happen to a thing.⁴⁶

No doubt Berkeley sought to prove ‘esse est percipi’ by throwing a challenge: ‘Show me anything which exists and which at the same time is not an idea’. Now at the first glance it becomes very difficult to meet the challenge. As soon as one says that a miser’s treasure exists hidden in a field, he does not succeed in showing that the treasure exists without being an idea. Obviously it is not hidden or unperceived for the objector. It is there in his mind as an idea. It appears that Berkeley’s contention is irrefutable.⁴⁷

“No thinker to whom one may appeal is able to mention a thing that is not an idea, for the obvious and simple reason that in mentioning it be makes it an idea” (R.B. Perry, Present Philosophical Tendencies, p. 129).⁴⁸

However, this is only a predicament for any thinker to show that a thing exists unknown. But from the fact that a thing when known cannot be exist as unknown. All that can be established from the fact of egocentric predicament is that a known thing is known. This is simply tautology and from this tautology no factual statement can be proved.⁴⁹

However, from the nature of the challenge, with regard to egocentric predicament one gets the impression that ‘esse est percipi’ is as inductive conclusion. In that case it would be only probably and then Berkeley could not have held it with so much dogmatism. Even if it were an inductive conclusion, it could be arrived at only by the method of agreement for ‘exhypothesi’ there could be no negative instance of it. However, the conclusion of the method of agreement is extremely precarious and no idealistic system could be reared up on this shaky foundation.⁵⁰
Is Berkeley's Idealism Subjective?

The term 'subjective' is rather vague. Most probably it means that only 'subjects' are real and 'objects' as independent of the mind are not real. Hence, nature, which is considered to be 'the other' of mind, according to subjective idealism is not real. Therefore, subjective idealism holds that Nature is merely the projection of some minds and has no existence of its own. In this sense, Berkeley's idealism is subjective, since according to it nothing exists of consciousness, then this interpretation would reduce subjective idealism to solipsism, according to which theory all things and other spirits are so many states of consciousness of a single individual thinker. But, although not always justly, as there is much in Berkeley which is not subjectivist at all. As Mabbutt and others have pointed out, the viewpoint expressed in his later works is definitely objectivist. Nor can the later-day charge of solipsism be correctly levelled against even the Berkeley of the 'Principles', for it is evident that he is enough of a scholastic to take as his starting point a common world in which there is a plurality of finite beings or spirits. Berkeley's main purpose throughout is theological. He wants to combat atheism, and he thinks that the belief that our perceptions come about through the efficacy of matter will lead the ordinary man to believe in the self-sufficiency of nature, a belief which is contrary to the theist's conviction that all depends on God. To say, moreover, as Locke did, that substance existed although it was a 'something we know not what' was to invite scepticism, and this too is contrary to the Divine intention that we should have confidence in our God-given faculties. Whatever subjectivism there be in Berkeley is different in temper from that of Descartes, for, in the case of the latter, resort is made to subjectivity subsequent on the methodological doubt of the 'poële'. In Berkeley's mind there is not the least element of doubt whatsoever. The subjective idealist part of Berkeley's philosophy is
the direct and logical working out of the view put forward by both Descartes and Locke, that the immediate objects of knowledge are ideas. If the Lockean thesis be correct, and Berkeley does not doubt for a moment that it is, we have no ground for inferring to the existence of unobserved entities. As good Occamists we should not multiply entities unnecessarily, and, as contemporaries of Sir Isaac Newton, we should not fall a victim to the fascination of unverifiable hypothesis. Bearing in mind, then, that some of Berkeley’s theological presuppositions protect him in some degree from some of the strongest objections against subjectivism we can proceed to see what exactly his theory of perception amounts to.52

Berkeley points out the inherent contradiction in representationalism. How can we speak of X as representing Y when all we have is X? And here what Berkeley has to say is surely incontrovertible. Unfortunately, however, he inherits the Cartesian vocabulary of ideas, so that the conclusion inevitably follows that things are immediately perceived by us as ‘states of our own consciousness’. Ideas cannot be anywhere else but in minds. They cannot exist unperceived. Since the objects of our knowledge are ideas it is evident that these objects have a relative to minds. To speak without meaning, for an idea can only be like another idea. As for Locke’s distinction between primary and secondary qualities, this ignores the fact that the former are as relative to our position and state as the latter. The concept of material substance in Locke has become so tenuous (what does ‘support’ mean, for example?) that it can well be left out. There is evidence for material substance neither from reason nor from sense. There is certainty, however, a causal question to be answered, for our ideas of sense come to us involuntarily and therefore they must have been caused by some power other than ourselves. In ourselves we are aware of the causal agency of spirit in contrast to the passivity of sense and so we have
good reason to believe that some spirit other than ourselves is responsible for causing ideas in us. When we look around us and see the wise disposition of all phenomena, their order and utility, we are led to the conclusion that the cause of our ideas can be none other than God.53

The details of the arguments Berkeley uses to come to this conclusion and the way in which he defends himself against anticipated objections are to be found in his *Principles of Human Knowledge*. The issues that are at stake between the ‘minute philosophers’ and the theologian on the nature of explanation are laid bare in that work. Whether there be need of matter in natural philosophy is as pertinent a question in our own day as it was in Berkeley’s. The idealist part of Berkeley’s thesis associates it definitely with idealist theories of somewhat different brands, namely, his view that to make of knowledge a relation between mind and something foreign to mind is to make the knowledge relation ‘unintelligible’. There can be no compromise possible between the philosopher who thinks that the immediate object of knowledge must be something mental and the philosopher who thinks that this is precisely the negation of knowledge. Existence is always relative to thought – this is the typical idealist position. Any philosopher who speaks of existence out of the context of reference to actual and possible experience must be prepared to say what he means. In speaking of the existence of God are we using the word ‘exist’ in a different tone of voice? On Berkeley’s own terms are we entitled to speak of the absolute existence even of God? Once more, only an understanding of Berkeley’s reliance on scholastic procedures of analogy can enable his meaning to become clear. Whether on his view of the univocal meaning of the concept of existence he is entitled to speak of Infinite Spirit as he does is an interesting question, but not one which is immediately tied up with the treatment of subjective idealism.54
The subjectivist theory of perception has not been slow in sparking off a varied barrage of criticism. Indeed, stated in an extreme form and shorn of the many presuppositions which, as we have tried to show, attended it in the works of Berkeley, it is easy to criticise it. For all that Berkeley thought that his view of the existence of things did in fact square better with actual scientific procedure than the "residual" view of substance ('something we know not what') retained by Locke, one many wonder whether in fact the subjectivist can ever do justice to the concept of 'thinghood'. Can the concept of 'thing' be cashed completely into that of a congeries of ideas, even if, with modern phenomenalism, we give up the old-fashioned vocabulary of ideas is favour of the more neutral language of sense data? By a thing we normally mean a seat of active and passive powers such as impenetrability (seen wisely by Locke), inertia and the like. Moreover there seems to be a significant difference between the various data themselves. Sounds, smells and tastes seem to emanate from, and visual and tactual data seem to be a part of an object. Can the word 'idea' reflect this difference?55

Four other (historically most important) lines of criticism were made by Perry, Moore, Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947) and Kant. These are not in chronological order, but the Kantian criticism is the most far reaching and its pertinency will appeal most after the other objections have been mentioned. Perry maintained that the slogan of 'Nothing exists but my ideas' involved what he styled the 'egocentric predicament', and he held that Berkeley could be accused of advocating what in fact counted to solipsism. How could a "common" world be 'constructed' out of the helter-skelter world of private data? That some such dilemma did beset the empiricist can be seen in Russell's book 'Our knowledge of the external world'. 'Idea' language, and even sense-datum language, does seen suspiciously private, in the case of Berkeley Perry's
criticism is probably not too damaging, for, as has been indicated earlier, Berkeley does begin with the ontological assumption of a plurality of finite spirits. He does, moreover, say in Section 48 of the *Principles* that ‘whenever bodies are said to have no existence without the mind, I would not be understood to mean this or that particular mind, but all minds whatever’.56

Moore’s criticism centres on the ambiguity of the word ‘idea’ (Moore’s later viewpoint on this question differed considerably from his original “refutation”. Vide Preface to his Philosophical Studies pp.vii-viii.). He agrees with Berkeley, against Locke, that knowledge is a two-termed relation and not a three-termed relation. Berkeley is right in having abolished the ‘outer circle’ (unperceived substantial entities) but the term “idea” hardly does justice to the difference between the subject and object, a difference without, which the very nature of knowledge is destroyed. We need, Moore thought, to make a clear distinction between the act and the object of knowledge. Now as to the ‘act’ of knowing, Moore, no less than Berkeley, is vague. ‘Transparency’ and ‘diaphaneity’ are not too unlike Berkeley’s ‘immediacy’. In saying that there is no intermediary between the mind and its object Berkeley is in agreement with the realists. Berkeley does realise that an experience has to be an experience to someone. But an adequate theory of perception requires an analysis not only of the perceptual object but also of the perceiver, and in this respect both Moore and Berkeley have far less to say than Kant.57

Whitehead’s criticism, in which he is joined by Thomas Reid, Berkley’s contemporary, takes its starting point in our experience of action. Now without looking on the will as in some mysterious ontological sense a centre of agency, a view which Hume sought to show was untenable at least on experiential grounds, we do in action come up against an experience of resistance on the part of objects. For example, in opening a recalcitrant Locke I have just such
an experience. Often the experience is the opposite of that of resistance as when I press a soft and resilient surface. Such experiences surely constitute direct evidence, Whitehead says, of the externality and 'otherness' of the physical world. One might even wonder how it was that Berkeley did not reach some such conclusion himself in view of his fresh analysis of tactual experience in his work on vision.58

None of these criticisms, however, are as damaging to Berkeley's position as the critique given by Kant in his 'Refutation of Idealism' in the Critique of Pure Reason. The basis of idealism, Kant says, is the assumption of the primacy of inner experience. Now if we examine the character of our inner experience, that is to say, the character of the data of inner sense, we find that the very essence of these data is their temporal nature. But if we proceed, in the transcendental manner, to ask how the perception of a temporal series be possible, we find that the presupposition of perceiving a temporal series is the awareness of something permanent, for change can only be perceived in contrast with something that is not changing. Now we know, following Hume, that there is nothing permanent to be found in the subjective succession of our experiences. Berkeley is the precursor of Mill who maintained that material objects are the "permanent possibility of sensations." It follows, then, that the 'perception of this permanent is possible only through a thing outside me and not throughout the mere representation of a thing outside me; and consequently the determination of my existence in time is possible only through the existence of actual things which I perceive outside me'. In this way Kant turns the tables against idealism in a most skilful manner, for, so far from the inner being the condition of the outer, it is the outer which is the condition of the inner. There are two things that are of interest in this connection. The first is that it was not until the work of Hume that the attention of philosophers was
drawn to the temporal character of our experience, and Kant’s whole argument is based on what must be presupposed by the temporal character of that experience. The second thing to note is the way in which Kant apparently abandons his own ‘critical’ standpoint in maintaining in his *Refutation*, that we have an "immediate consciousness of the existence of outer things".  

Berkeley was a more thoroughgoing empiricist than Locke. He started from the data of experience and strictly observed them as the touchstone of the meaningful, although his account of the point is sketchy and unclear.