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MUST A CLASSICAL THEIST BE AN IMMATERIALIST?

I

Berkeley's system, whatever may be the right textbook label to apply to it, was plainly a piece of religious apologetics, the outline of a constructive natural theology, of a theistic metaphysic. From the Principles onwards he was fashioning a reasoned case for the existence of God, of a certain kind of God with a certain kind of relation to the world.[1]

Berkeley's introductory remarks to several of his treatises verify Jessop's evaluation. Berkeley saw his task to be the defence of the central tenets of classical theism, achieved through 'a plain demonstration of the immediate Providence of an all-seeing God, and the natural immortality of the soul… '.[2] At the foundation of this defence, as is well known, lies the metaphysic commonly called 'immaterialism', which holds that, contrary to popular belief, physical objects are not enduring material substances, but rather ideas inhering in finite and infinite spirit.

The response to this counter-intuitive means of defending the Christian faith was, not surprisingly, a mixture of incredulity and hostility.[3] Although Berkeley undoubtedly offered his metaphysic as being the only one truly compatible with Christian theism, it was its *prima facie in*compatibility with Church teaching which in part motivated the criticism directed toward it. Lady Percival's inquiry concerning the doctrine of creation serves as a good example, one which evidently disturbed Berkeley so deeply that he included a discussion of the problem in the *Three Dialogues*.[4] The main point of the objection is that the Genesis account of creation seems clearly to imply the creation of material physical objects. (Indeed, it was only on the strength of scriptural testimony that Malebranche, an occasionalist, felt he could argue for 'the existence of the material world'.)[5] The immaterialist's response to this particular challenge will occupy us shortly. What I wish to do here by

[1] T. E. Jessop, 'Berkeley as Religious Apologist', in *New Studies in Berkeley's Philosophy*, ed. W. E. Steinkraus (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1966), p. 98.

[2] George Berkeley, *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 vols., ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1949), Vol. I, p. 167. All references to Berkeley's work will be to this edition by volume and page number.

[3] Harry M. Bracken, *The Early Reception of Berkeley's Immaterialism, 1710–1733*, revised edition (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), pp. 13f.

[4] Berkeley, VIII, 37–38; II, 250–256. See A. A. Luce, *The Doctrine of Immaterialism* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), pp. 140ff. for an evaluation of the importance of this inquiry to the development of Berkeley's thought.

[5] Bracken, p. 15.

way of introduction is to emphasize the general character of such challenges – that they focus on the perceived incompatibility between Berkeley's metaphysic and Christian doctrine – and to suggest that in response the immaterialist can argue either defensively or offensively. He can, of course, remain on the defensive and simply refute the objection by demonstrating the compatibility between his metaphysic and Christian dogma. He can also, however, take the offensive, turn the tables on his opponents, and proceed to demonstrate the incompatibility of the physical realist position with classical theism.

My goal here is to examine two papers which argue just this, that the classical theist must be an immaterialist. Though it so happens that one author, P. A. Byrne,[6] is a physical (or, as he designates it, a scientific) realist, who therefore rejects classical theism, while the other, R. A. Oakes,[7] is in fact a classical theist and immaterialist, both argue in a similar way. That is, both argue that a central tenet of classical theism is the notion that creation is 'metaphysically dependent' upon God (Oakes), or, what amounts to the same thing, that God created and preserves the universe *ex nihilo* (Byrne).[8] They then argue that the only metaphysical theory compatible with this conception of God and God's relation to the world is Berkeley's immaterialism. In the following I will review and assess their arguments, demonstrating in particular how they founder on a problem to which Berkeley himself devotes almost no attention, the relationship between finite and infinite spirit, and then examining the implications of this problem for the immaterialist.

II

In his paper, Oakes promises to demonstrate that the truth of the proposition, *God exists*, entails the immaterialist understanding of the world, i.e. entails that no physical objects exist which are not 'mental or spiritual in character' (p. 16). To this understanding of the nature of physical objects Oakes opposes that of the 'theistic physical realist', who holds that physical objects are 'in no sense mental or mind dependent' (p. 17), or, to put it another way, that finite or infinite spirit is not 'in any way constitutive of physical objects' (p. 18). It is this position which Oakes argues is incompatible with theism. His argument, consisting of three stages, runs as follows.

Oakes (pp. 18–20) interprets Berkeley's contention that physical objects have no existence outside of the 'mind of spirits' to mean that mind and physical objects are related 'internally', which is to say that physical objects

[6] P. A. Byrne, 'Berkeley, Scientific Realism, and Creation', *Religious Studies* **20** (1978): pp. 16–29.

[7] R. A. Oakes, 'God and Physical Objects', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* **9** (1978): pp. 16–29.

[8] When I refer to 'classical theism' in this paper, I refer primarily to the doctrines that God created *ex nihilo* all contingent beings and continuously upholds their existence. It will later become important to note that this applies to all contingent beings, be they material or spiritual.

are 'constituted' by Infinite Spirit's 'conscious awareness' of them. (Though Oakes occasionally leaves the subject of this awareness unspecified, context makes clear that he is referring to the consciousness of Infinite Spirit, or God.) In other words, he argues that physical objects would not exist but for God's conscious awareness of them, a fact which he then encapsulates in the following proposition:

For any *x*, if *x* is a physical object, one of *x*'s essential properties is *existing-in-a-mind-or-spirit*.

(The context reveals that Oakes is referring to Infinite Spirit.) It is by means of this proposition that Oakes interprets his contention that for the physical realist, physical objects are not 'in any way mind dependent'. According to Oakes, the realist holds to the following three propositions, and indeed holds that they mutually imply one another:

(1) For any *x*, if *x* is a physical object, it is a contingent property of *x* that it exist in a mind or spirit.
(2) Physical objects have an 'absolute external existence', i.e. an existence otherwise than in mind or spirit.
(3) Physical objects are not 'in the final analysis' mental entities.

The second stage of the argument (pp. 21–4) consists of Oakes's contention that an essential doctrine of classical theism is that God conserves the existence of contingent things. He believes that James Ross's concept of 'metaphysical dependence' admirably formalizes this doctrine. Being *b* is said to be metaphysically dependent upon being *a* if the latter is 'of a higher level of reality' than being *b* and produces, conserves, and determines the properties of being *b*. Thus, according to classical theism, Oakes argues, the world is metaphysically dependent upon God. And this, he adds, entails that '*being-conserved-in-existence-by-God* is an essential property of all contingent things…'. He then concludes the second stage of his argument by pointing out that the God–world relation is therefore 'more like' the 'thinker–thought' or 'dreamer–dream' relation than, say, the 'sea–ship' relation, where the sea merely physically supports the ship and makes it functional, rather than conserves its very existence.

The final stage of Oakes's argument (p. 25) depends upon another doctrine which he holds is essential to classical theism, namely, that incorporeality is one of God's essential properties. For Oakes, this is the most crucial factor to consider in a determination of the metaphysical character of physical objects, for on the basis of this doctrine he concludes:

For any *x*, if *x* is a physical object, it is an essential property of *x* that its existence constantly be conserved 'by an *exclusively* spiritual and infinite being'. (My emphasis.)

He therefore argues the classical theist must conclude:

'[P]hysical objects are not mind-independent entities', and are thus 'in the final analysis … mental or spiritual in character.'

I find the above argument quite inadequate, for at least one key step appears to be missing, which I believe Byrne attempts to supply, that linking the 'mind-dependence' of physical objects with their being 'spiritual in character'. (Oakes, by the way, never cites Byrne, and appears to have been ignorant of the latter's work.) But I will delay my critique of the argument until having concluded my review of both papers.

According to Oakes (pp. 25–6), a challenge to his argument exists which is paradigmatic of all possible challenges, one which seeks to establish that physical objects can have an 'absolute external existence', i.e. an existence apart from their being perceived by Infinite Spirit, and yet still be continually conserved by that 'exclusively spiritual' being. The content of this challenge is simple: God's 'conserving activity' does not consist in 'perceptual activity', and therefore the existence of physical objects is not constituted by Infinite Spirit's conscious awareness of them. 'After all, what is there to *conserve* if physical objects are just *constituted* by the thought-content of Infinite Spirit, i.e. if they have no "absolute external existence"?'

Oakes's response (pp. 26–7) is succinctly put: there is in fact no distinction between Divine perception and conservation, for they are two different names for the same activity. 'For no classical theist could abide the claim that God *perceives* the world in any way which is other than extraordinarily Pickwickian'. This is so because no classical theist could assert that the world exists over and against God as an independent object of perception. Therefore God's consciousness of physical objects is constitutive of them, and 'it follows necessarily that such objects have no "absolute external existence" and are thereby mental entities in *precisely* the sense insisted upon by the [immaterialist].' Oakes therefore concludes that the theistic physical realist has two options available to him, either to abandon theism or to give up his notion that physical objects are something other than mental in character.

III

Byrne's goal is identical to Oakes's, to show that '[i]mmaterialism … is the only philosophy of nature compatible with the Christian doctrines of creation and providence' (p. 453). As will be seen, his argument follows the same line as Oakes's, though it is more carefully constructed.

Like Oakes, Byrne contrasts immaterialism with the position against which it is pitted (pp. 453–455). Immaterialism, he says, is Berkeley's response to the popular contemporary conception of the universe as an intricately designed clock. According to this view, the operation of the universe can be fully explained without referring to 'powers beyond nature' because the explanation can be couched solely in terms of the 'innate powers' of the 'enduring

stuffs' of which the universe is composed. Thus, just as the clock maker is to the clock, 'God is irrelevant to the continuing workings of nature'. Immaterialism responds to this conception by eliminating 'enduring stuffs' with their 'innate powers'; in the Berkelian universe, God is the only causal power. Nature is seen to consist of ideas only, that is, of purely passive entities, which allows God to be a 'direct' cause of natural things. Thus, according to Berkeley's conception of the God–world relation, God's control over nature is 'universal and complete'.[9]

Of course, what Byrne describes here are two competing conceptions of the God–world relationship: deism and Berkeley's immaterialism. He recognizes that a third option can be conceived somewhere in the middle ground between deism and immaterialism, one which holds both to a classical notion of creation and providence, as well as to the existence of 'independently existing, enduring things'. (For Byrne, this is equivalent to affirming the existence of 'genuine secondary causes' (p. 456).) However, in a move similar to the one Oakes makes via the conception of metaphysical dependence, Byrne argues that the doctrines of the creation and preservation of the universe *ex nihilo* prevent the classical theist from taking a stand on this middle ground (pp. 455–460).

If we consider side by side Byrne's arguments based upon each of these two doctrines, it becomes obvious that they are variations based upon the same theme. With regard to the doctrine of creation, he argues that creation *ex nihilo* is inconceivable if physical objects are 'independently existing, enduring things'. Why is this? The 'mere will of a spiritual being' can create out of nothing only an immaterial world. Byrne appropriates Berkeley's reflection that human beings create 'in some wise' whenever they imagine,[10] and elevates it to the level of a metaphysical principle: the 'deliberate thought of mind' can bring into existence *ex nihilo* only something mental. Hence, he argues that Berkeley is correct when, in order to explicate the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, he conceives creation to be either the production of ideas in the minds of finite spirits, or the confrontation of finite spirits with 'divine resolutions'.[11] In either case, physical objects are mental or spiritual entities. In the same way, with respect to God's continuous preservation of all things, Byrne argues that the radical dependence of the world upon God, its radical contingency upon the divine will, can only be explicated within an imma-

[9] Strictly speaking, Berkeley here speaks only of 'nature' in the sense of all that is not Spirit or spirit. That is, strictly speaking, Berkeley is not an occasionalist because he does grant to finite spirit real causal efficacy, a move that sets his metaphysic apart from that of Malebranche. This, as will be seen, presents enormous difficulties to Byrne's argument as well as to the coherence of Berkeley's metaphysics. Byrne himself deftly seeks to avoid the problem in a footnote (p. 455, n. 9): 'In the above remarks, as elsewhere in this paper, I have ignored some of the complications in Berkeley's scheme provided by the limited powers granted to finite spirits'. I will argue these complications prove fatal to Byrne's argument.

[10] Berkeley, I, 99.

[11] See J. D. Mabbott, 'The Place of God in Berkeley's Philosophy', in *Locke and Berkeley*, ed., C. B. Martin and D. M. Armstrong (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press), pp. 364–379 for a discussion of the relative merits of each conception.

terialist metaphysic. That is, according to classical theism, that the world is 'radically contingent' means that it would 'inevitably collapse into nothingness at each and every moment' without the continuous determination to the contrary of the divine mind or will (a doctrine Byrne calls 'preservation *ex nihilo*'). Physical objects, therefore, are not 'substances in their own right'; they are, as Byrne puts it, 'adjectival upon God's will'. He argues, however, that no entities bear such a relation to mind or will except mental entities. Therefore, Byrne concludes that the doctrine of 'preservation *ex nihilo*' also entails that physical objects are mental entities. Like Oakes, he concludes that the classical theist must be an immaterialist.

IV

From the material in both papers, the following argument can be constructed.

(1) Classical theism holds that God created the universe *ex nihilo* and continuously keeps creation from 'collapsing back into nothingness'. Thus the universe is 'radically contingent' upon its creator and does not exist but for the determination of the creator's will.

(2) Classical theism also holds that God is a spiritual or mental being, meaning that, within the confines of a dualist metaphysic, God is to be characterized as 'mind', not 'body'.

(3) A metaphysic compatible with classical theism must therefore satisfy a twofold requirement. Physical objects must be conceived as wholly dependent upon God, and thus as incapable of any kind of independent existence. Furthermore, the existence physical objects do possess must be compatible with the fact that their creator is a spiritual being.

(4) The relationship between ideas, or 'mental entities', and the mind which creates and sustains them, exactly parallels the relationship that classical theism claims exists between God, who is a spiritual being, and creation. A metaphysic wherein physical objects are conceived to be ideas, or mental entities, therefore satisfies the twofold requirement given in (3).

(5) Any other conception of physical objects both lends them some degree of independence from God and makes their relationship to a spiritual being who is their creator and sustainer impossible to understand. Therefore no other metaphysic can satisfy the requirement given in (3).

(6) Therefore immaterialism is the only metaphysic compatible with classical theism.

I will now proceed to give a three-stage response to this argument. In the first I will argue that Oakes and Byrne have directed their attack against a version of physical realism which no physical realist who is also a classical theist would defend. In the second and third stages I will then argue that the version such a theist would defend is not in fact dealt a knock-out blow by

the twofold requirement given in (3) above. I will assess first the contention that the classical conception of God's relationship to the world can only be explicated, or conceived, within an immaterialist metaphysic. Then, as promised above, I will consider the grave difficulties faced by the immaterialist in conceiving the relationship between infinite and finite spirit, difficulties which not only serve to refute the above argument against the theistic physical realist, but which also, in a 'table-turning' move, make it incumbent upon the immaterialist himself to take the defensive and address the question, 'How can a classical theist be an *im*materialist?'

V

Is it true that the physical realist who claims to be a classical theist holds that 'physical objects are in *no* sense mental or mind-dependent?' (Oakes, p. 17; my emphasis.) Does such a physical realist argue that 'the constant awareness of physical objects by Infinite Spirit is one of those "contingent" relational properties which it is logically possible for such objects to lose and remain precisely the things that they are'? (*ibid.*, p. 21.) Finally, does such a physical realist feel obligated to deny that God 'perceives' or is 'conscious of' the world 'in any way which is other than extraordinarily Pickwickian'? (*Ibid.*, p. 26.) I believe the answer to all three of these questions is 'no', meaning that Oakes has badly misrepresented here the position of the physical realist who claims to be a classical theist. In fact, such a physical realist, insofar as he is a classical theist, must agree with the immaterialist when the latter claims that physical objects are 'constituted' by God's conscious awareness, for to put the matter this way is simply another way of saying that God is the creator and sustainer of such objects, not a passive observer of what exists independently of the determination of his will. In short, for classical theists, God's knowledge, perception, or consciousness of physical objects is essential to them, without this entailing that physical objects are mental entities. It is time now to respond to the immaterialist's charge that such a position is logically incoherent.

VI

In order to link classical theism to immaterialism, both Oakes (with the qualification noted below) and Byrne argue in something like the following way (Oakes, p. 25; Byrne, pp. 456–457, 458–460): it is inconceivable that an exclusively spiritual being (one which is purely 'mind', as opposed to some composite of mind and body) by sheer act of will could cause the existence of anything other than mental entities (where 'cause of existence' refers both to creation and conservation). Actually, only Byrne attempts explicitly to link God's incorporeality to the 'mental character' of physical objects via an

observation about the causal power of the will of a purely spiritual being. Oakes himself, though he may implicitly be using this argument, explicitly simply argues that because physical objects are dependent upon a being who is pure 'mind', they are 'mind-dependent' and therefore mental entities. This argument is quite inadequate. Oakes seems to imply here that if God were a composite being, then physical objects could 'subsist' in the corporeal component of God's nature. Would this render physical objects 'mind-independent'? If by 'depend on' Oakes means 'subsist in', as he sometimes does, then the answer would have to be 'yes'; physical objects would subsist in God's body, not in God's mind. But elsewhere Oakes has stated that mind-independence entails that God's conscious awareness be a contingent property of physical objects (p. 20). Therefore, to put it somewhat crudely, the only manner in which a God who is a composite being could cause the existence of mind-independent entities would be somehow to 'secrete' them mindlessly, i.e. to create and sustain them without *necessarily* being consciously aware of them. (Such awareness may come about as a result of creation and conservation, but would not be essential to these activities.) Such a conception somewhat resembles the neoplatonic emanation scheme, but can find no place in classical theism, which sees creation as an act of will. (Note that I assume that God cannot will the existence of a contingent thing, x, without being consciously aware of x.) This being the case, it is insufficient merely to consider the fact that God is an 'exclusively spiritual' rather than a composite being. The crucial question is whether it is logically incoherent to believe that by sheer act of will such a being can create and conserve anything other than a mental entity. It is this question which Byrne answers affirmatively, a response which I will now attempt to show is unwarranted.

We have already seen how Byrne's answer depends on the relationship between God and the world as conceived in the doctrines of creation and 'preservation' *ex nihilo*, and on how this relationship appears to parallel closely that obtaining between a mind and its thoughts. The problem with his argument is that he shifts from calling the mind–thought relationship an 'appropriate analogy' to the God–world relationship (p. 458), one which 'suggests' that physical objects are mental entities (p. 460), immediately to the conclusion that 'the contents of the universe… *are* thoughts or volitions in the mind of God' (*ibid*; my emphasis). This move, however, is analogous to the following reasoning in mathematics:

> If $a/b = c/d$, then $b = d$ (where a, b, c, and d represent God, the world, mind, and thoughts or volitions, respectively).

The conclusion is false, of course, unless $a = c$, which, in the context of our non-mathematical discussion, requires that God and human minds (the only minds of which we have direct experience) have similar powers and be subject to the same limitations with regard to creating and preserving entities

ex nihilo. If this similarity exists, then the argument goes through, and God's relation to the world would become 'explicable' or 'conceivable', according to Byrne and Oakes. However, is there any justification for thinking that there is such a similarity between the powers of God and of the human mind?

In fact, the classical theist has little justification for believing this. Byrne, following Berkeley, implies that my thinking a thought or forming a resolve is an instance of creation and preservation *ex nihilo*. But of course this is not so. Human thinking and willing occur in response to an external world which is presented to the human mind, a world for which, as Berkeley himself admits, that mind is not responsible. Therefore, even on Berkeley's account of it, sensation provides, so to speak, pre-existing 'material' on the basis of which my thoughts and resolutions are formed. Consider also that I cannot cause others to perceive directly the contents of my own mind, nor can I confront other minds with resolutions of my will so as to induce in them the experience of perceptual ideas – alternate ways in which the immaterialist envisions creation (Byrne, p. 457; see my note 11 and my discussion in the next section). Therefore, according to our experience of mind, it is not the case that mind displays the powers that the immaterialist wishes to ascribe to God. If then, even with respect to Berkeley's metaphysic, God does not share the limitations of finite spirit with respect to creating mental entities, why then should we dismiss as inconceivable the possibility that God can create material substances? This particular line of argument, which claims that only the immaterialist can explicate or conceive classical theism's account of God's relationship to the world, therefore fails.

VII

At this point, it would appear that physical realism and immaterialism stand on equal footing, neither one giving us the ability to conceive, on the basis of our experience of mind, God's relation to the world according to classical theism. However, Byrne in particular, by making 'conceivability' the criterion by which to choose a metaphysic compatible with classical theism, has steered the discussion off its proper course, for what he and Oakes must show (and indeed at times admit they are trying to show; Byrne, p. 460 and Oakes, p. 25) is that immaterialism is the only metaphysic *logically* consistent with classical theism. I now wish to show that with regard to logical consistency, it is the immaterialist metaphysic which is incompatible with classical theism, and indeed, which threatens to be internally incoherent.

According to classical theism, every existing thing that is not God is contingent, that is, metaphysically dependent upon God. As we have seen, Oakes and Byrne conclude from this that all contingent things are mental entities, i.e., ideas in God's mind which are perceived by finite spirits, or divine resolutions with which finite spirits are confronted. Byrne himself

emphasizes what Berkeley accomplished by means of this metaphysic: causal power is removed from the physical world and reserved for God only, mental entities being entirely passive. As I have just stated the immaterialist position, however, it is slightly inaccurate, for causal power is reserved not just for God in particular but for *spirit* in general, both infinite and finite. That is, Berkeley's metaphysic populates the world with passive 'ideas', or mental entities, as we are calling them here, and active 'spirits', the latter including human beings and angels, as well as God. This means that for the immaterialist, human beings and other finite spirits, such as angels, are not classifiable as mental entities. Certainly, however, they are classified as contingent beings according to classical theism. Clearly, therefore, immaterialism stands in conflict with classical theism here, for according to the arguments of Byrne and Oakes presented above, all contingent things are mental entities.

Here then is a *logical* inconsistency between immaterialism and classical theism. Yet also note that in trying to conceive the creation of finite spirit, the immaterialist seemingly must attempt to conceive precisely what he sought to escape conceiving: the creation *ex nihilo* of 'independently existing, enduring things', 'powerful particulars' which are *not* 'a part of the furniture of the mind which does the creating' (Byrne, pp. 456–457). The immaterialist is, therefore, faced with a severe problem, that of understanding the relationship between infinite and finite spirit without violating the principles of classical theism (by holding, for example, that finite spirits are not contingent beings), or contradicting a principle of his own metaphysic (by suggesting that by a sheer act of will infinite spirit can bring into being independent, enduring substances).

The problem of how infinite and finite spirit relate to each other is therefore a glaring one for the immaterialist, but one which has received almost no attention, or even recognition, aside from attempts to understand precisely what status Berkeley gives minds in his metaphysic, e.g., whether they are substances or not.[12] Berkeley himself in his discussion of creation seems unaware of the problem, as illustrated by his treatment of the difficulty raised by Lady Percival alluded to above (see references in note 4). Let us consider that response here as it is elaborated in the *Three Dialogues*.

> Hylas states the difficulty succinctly: The Scripture account of the Creation is what appears to me utterly irreconcilable with your notion. Moses tells us of a Creation: a Creation of what? of ideas? No certainly, but of things, of real things, solid corporeal substances. (II, p. 250.)

In reply, Philonous argues that as long as the Genesis account can be explicated by means of his (Berkeley's) principles as 'consistently' as by any

[12] The only clear reference I could find in the literature occurs in G. D. Hicks, *Berkeley* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1968), p. 155. On Berkeley's concept of mind, see the essays in Part 2 of Walter E. Creery, ed., *George Berkeley: Critical Assessments* (London: Routledge, 1991).

others, then there is no 'peculiar repugnancy' between that account and immaterialism (*ibid.*, p. 251). He then proceeds to explain that according to his principles, creation refers to the 'relative existence' objects eternally known by God begin to have, by God's decree, in the minds of finite spirits, either angelic or human:

> When things are said to begin or end their existence, we do not mean this with regard to God, but His creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or which is the same thing, have an eternal existence in his mind: but when things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them; then are they said to begin a relative existence, with respect to *created minds*. (Ibid., pp. 251–252; my emphasis.)

The final two words of this passage, which I have emphasized, are the source of the difficulty for Berkeley. How are we to understand the creation of minds? Not only does Berkeley fail to consider the creation of one of the two sorts of objects with which his metaphysic populates the universe (finite spirit and ideas), but that aspect of creation which he does address actually presupposes the aspect of creation for which he gives no account.

If Berkeley's metaphysic, therefore, is to be compatible with classical theism, it must at least attempt to explain how finite spirit, how created intelligence, is in fact a contingent thing. Is it possible to accomplish this while at the same time retaining the principle components of the account of creation given in the *Three Dialogues*? According to one interpretation of that account, no such explanation is possible. I am referring to the interpretation which assumes that Berkeley is employing here the concept of divine ideas, so that when he refers to the 'two-fold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal and eternal' (*ibid.*, p. 254), he is seen to refer to archetypal *ideas*, of which ideas inhering in finite spirit are ectypes. Thus, God's idea of an individual tree is the eternal archetype for the idea of that tree which inheres in the mind of every finite spirit when God decrees that the tree be perceived. Are there then archetypal ideas corresponding to every finite spirit? There apparently cannot be, for God cannot have an idea of finite spirit because, according to Berkeley's most basic principles, it is logically impossible to have such an idea. Ideas, which are 'inactive objects', can only resemble other ideas, and therefore cannot represent spirits, which are active beings. Hence in *The Principles*, section 242, Berkeley writes:

> *Spirits* and *ideas* are things so wholly different, that when we say, *they exist*, *they are known*, these words must not be thought to signify any thing common to both natures. There is nothing alike or common in them.... We may not I think strictly be said to have an idea of an active being, or of an action, although we may be said to have a notion of them. (Ibid., p. 106; emphasis in text.)

Could God then be said to create finite spirits on the basis of 'notions' he has of them? Perhaps. Perhaps also some account might be developed using the alternative interpretation of Berkeley's treatment of creation, an interpret-

ation which denies that he employs the concept of divine ideas.[13] However, no such account would seem to solve the basic problem of explaining how something which is not God and yet which is also not an idea inhering in mind can be contingent, since to inhere in a mind as an idea is the only account of contingency Berkeley gives us, or at very least, the only account for which Oakes and Byrne give him credit. Berkeley himself could simply make the relationship of metaphysical dependence between God and finite spirit an ontological primitive. This, however, would create a metaphysical position no longer of service to Oakes or Byrne, for if spirit can be metaphysically dependent on God and yet not be a purely passive idea inhering in mind, then the argument that by a sheer act of will God cannot create *ex nihilo* anything other than 'a series of volitions of mind' loses its force.[14]

VIII

Oakes's and Byrne's effort to 'take the offensive' and demonstrate that immaterialism alone is compatible with classical theism therefore fails. There is an important implication here for the debate over the viability of a middle position between denying that God makes a continuous causal contribution to natural processes and denying the existence of true secondary causes. As I noted above, Byrne argues that one of the reasons why no such 'median position' is tenable is that it is impossible to 'conceive of a substantial nature of independently existing, enduring things being created out of nothing by the mere will of a spiritual being' (Byrne p. 456). In overturning Byrne on this latter point therefore, I have removed one obstacle lying in the way of developing a middle, or 'compatibilist' position.

I have also shown that not only do Oakes and Byrne fail to demonstrate the incompatibility of physical realism with classical theism, but also, ironically, that their line of argument reveals a grave inconsistency between the latter and immaterialism. For as they expound Berkeley's metaphysic, it seems incapable of explicating the metaphysical dependency of finite spirit (mind) on God. Indeed, because this inconsistency lies at the very heart of Berkeley's metaphysic (at least as presented by Oakes and Byrne), it is incumbent upon the immaterialist to demonstrate with regard to this problem the very coherency of the metaphysic itself.

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[13] For an argument that Berkeley does accept the notion of divine ideas, *contra* Mabbot, see P. S. Wenz, 'Berkeley's Christian Neo-Platonism', *Journal of the History of Ideas* **37** (1976), pp. 537–546.

[14] Byrne, pp. 456–457. For a brief discussion of God's relationship to finite spirit – one that does not, however, resolve the difficulties raised here – see F. T. Kingston, *The Metaphysics of George Berkeley, 1685–1753* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1992), pp. 61–64. The manner in which Berkeley might proceed depends on details of his theory of mind, specifically, on the manner in which (if at all) he conceives the mind to be a substance. See note 12.