

## THE LINK BETWEEN BERKELEY'S REFUTATION OF ABSTRACTION AND HIS REFUTATION OF MATERIALISM\*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper engages the controversy as to whether there is a link between Berkeley's refutation of abstraction and his refutation of materialism. I argue that there is a strong link. In the opening paragraph I show that materialism being true requires and is required by the possibility of abstraction, and that the obviousness of this fact suggests that the real controversy is whether there is a link between Berkeley's refutation of materialism and his refutation of the possibility of framing abstract incomplete ideas and abstract general ideas. Although Berkeley can still defeat materialism without relying on his arguments that directly refute the possibility of framing abstract incomplete ideas and abstract general ideas, I contend that there is still a strong link between his refutation of materialism and his refutation of the possibility of framing these ideas. First, I show that the truth of the canonic version of materialism, according to which primary qualities are mind-independent and inhere in material substances, requires the possibility of the mind framing both of these ideas. Second, I show that there is a sense in which the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either of these ideas.

*Keywords:* Berkeley, materialism, abstraction, abstract ideas, George Pappas.

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo se ocupa de la controversia acerca de si hay o no una conexión entre la refutación de Berkeley de la abstracción y su refutación del materialismo. En este contexto, sostendré que sí existe una fuerte conexión. En la sección introductoria muestro que si el materialismo es correcto, requiere y es requerido para la posibilidad de la

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abstracción, y que la obviedad de este hecho sugiere que la real controversia es si hay o no una conexión entre su refutación del materialismo y su refutación de la posibilidad de elaborar ideas abstractas incompletas e ideas abstractas generales. A pesar de que Berkeley es capaz de refutar el materialismo aún sin hacer referencia a su argumento que refuta de manera directa la posibilidad de formar ideas abstractas incompletas y generales, sostendré que hay una conexión fuerte entre su refutación del materialismo y su refutación de la posibilidad de formar tales ideas. Primero mostraré que la verdad de la versión canónica del materialismo, a saber, que las cualidades primarias son independientes de la mente e inhiere en las sustancias materiales, requiere que la mente pueda formar ambos tipos de ideas. Luego mostraré que hay un sentido en el que la aceptación del materialismo es necesaria para la posibilidad de cada uno de estos tipos de ideas.

*Palabras clave:* Berkeley, materialismo, abstracción, ideas abstractas, George Pappas.

### INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

IS THERE A LINK between Berkeley's refutation of the possibility of abstraction, the process of mentally separating things truly inseparable<sup>1</sup>, and his refutation of materialism, the doctrine that there are mind-independent objects that the mind can know? When I put the question like this, clearly the answer is yes. This can be shown in two steps. First, materialism being true, which would mean there *are* mind-independent objects that the mind can know, clearly requires and is required by the possibility of the mental process ( $\alpha$ ) of separating the existences of objects from their standing before the mind. It *requires* the possibility of this  $\alpha$ -process because in order for there to be a mind-independent object that the mind can know, it must be possible for the mind to separate the object as it stands before the mind (its standing before the mind of course being a possibility on the hypothesis that the mind *can know* it) from that object as it stands independent of the mind (its standing independent of the mind of course being a possibility on the hypothesis that it is *mind-independent*). Materialism is true, in other words, *only if*  $\alpha$  can occur. Now, materialism being true *is required* by the possibility of this  $\alpha$ -process because if the mind can separate the existence of the object from its standing before the mind, that is, if the mind can peel away the object as it stands independent of the mind

<sup>1</sup> See Berkeley's *De Motu* in *The Works of George Berkeley*, p. 44.

from that object as it stands before the mind, then that object indeed is a mind-independent object that the mind can know. *If it is possible for  $\alpha$  to occur*, in other words, *then* materialism is true. Second, clearly step one means that for Berkeley materialism being true requires and is required by the possibility of *abstraction*, because for him, we all know, the existences of objects are inseparable from their standing before some mind –inseparable in the way that, for example, extension is inseparable from color. A necessary and sufficient condition of materialism's truth, in other words, is the possibility of an «instance»<sup>2</sup> or, as Berkeley says, «strain»<sup>3</sup> of abstraction– the strain that is the mental process ( $\alpha$ ) of separating the existences of objects from their standing before the mind. For him to deny materialism's truth, then, is for him to deny the possibility of this strain of abstraction ( $\alpha$ ), and vice versa<sup>4</sup>. The link is clear and substantial.

Why, then, are there intense debates concerning whether Berkeley's refutation of the possibility of abstraction connects to his refutation of materialism? Well, it is most likely (and not to mention most courteous on my part to assume) that debating scholars, especially those who deny the connection between Berkeley's refutation of the possibility of abstraction and his refutation of materialism, do not have in mind the above strain of abstraction. In *Principles* §5, the chief passage in this debate, Berkeley says that an interrogation of the belief that materialism is true might show it to depend on the belief that the mind can frame *abstract ideas*, which are ideas of things separated from that from which they are inseparable<sup>5</sup>. True, this belief that the mind can frame abstract ideas is but the belief in abstraction, in which case the above strain of abstraction that is necessary and sufficient for materialism's truth –namely,  $\alpha$  (the mental process of separating the existence of an object from its standing before the mind)– is itself a framing of

<sup>2</sup> «To separate the existence of a sensible thing from the fact of its being perceived seemed to him to be just an extreme instance of erroneous abstraction» (Hicks, p. 80).

<sup>3</sup> «Can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived?» (*Principles*, §5).

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Atherton might have recognized this too (p. 299).

<sup>5</sup> «If we thoroughly examine this tenet [(that materialism is true)] it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*» (*Principles* §5).

a specific abstract idea: an idea of the existence of an object separated from that object's standing before the mind –an idea I will call an «abstract materialist idea» (AMI). But Berkeley may not be claiming here, in *Principles* §5, the obvious truth that the belief that materialism is true depends on the belief that the mind can frame AMIs, that is, the obvious truth that the belief that there are mind-independent objects that the mind can know depends on the belief that the mind can frame ideas of objects separated from those objects as they stand before the mind. Rather, he may be claiming that the belief that materialism is true might depend on the belief that the mind can frame the two kinds of abstract idea that the Introduction to the *Principles* showed to be impossible (and that seem to be the only kinds that Berkeley explicitly acknowledges): *abstract incomplete ideas* (AIIIs) –ideas of qualities separated from other qualities from which they are inseparable– and *abstract general ideas* (AGIs) –ideas of kinds separated from all that is of those kinds<sup>6</sup>. The assumption of this paper is that this is in fact what Berkeley is claiming here, and thus that the controversy in question really concerns whether there is a link between Berkeley's refutation of materialism and his refutation of the possibility of AIIIs and AGIs. If for some reason this assumption is not true, then I maintain that this controversy concerning the link between Berkeley's refutation of materialism and his refutation of the possibility of abstraction has been put to rest by the previous paragraph.

So it seems that Berkeley's diagnostic suggestion that the belief that materialism is true might depend on the belief that the mind can frame AIIIs and AGIs has somehow incited the debate as to whether there is a link between Berkeley's refutation of the possibility of framing AIIIs and AGIs and his refutation of materialism. One side thinks

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<sup>6</sup> «Berkeley, then, recognizes at least three kinds of abstraction that he opposes: [(i)] the alleged abstraction of ideas from the condition of their being perceived [that is, the framing of AMIs]...; (ii) the alleged abstraction of certain ideas, as of extension from color, which are always co-present [that is, the framing of AIIIs]...; (iii) the alleged abstraction of ideas of what is common to particular qualities or particular things [that is, the framing of AGIs]» (Margolis, pp. 218-219). As Winkler describes and labels (ii) and (iii), there are «ideas of qualities separated from qualities of other kinds with which they must occur (or 'incomplete ideas', as I shall call them)», and there are «ideas of general entities, whether qualities or things ('abstract general ideas')» (Winkler, p. 255).

that the link is merely «supposed» or, at best, more «thin»<sup>7</sup>, «more tenuous[,] than [Berkeley] thought»<sup>8</sup> –either way, an overstatement<sup>9</sup> that «hardly deserves to be mentioned»<sup>10</sup>. The other side thinks that Berkeley's campaign against the possibility of framing AII's and AGI's has «direct relevance to [his] immaterialism»<sup>11</sup>– «the central role that he claims for it»<sup>12</sup>. So is there a link?

In this paper, I will show there to be a strong link between the refutation of materialism and the Introduction's refutation of the possibility of these two kinds of abstract idea. Now, as I will explain in section one, because Berkeley can defeat materialism –as he himself admits– without relying on his refutation of the possibility of these two kinds of abstract idea, this link is not as strong as some may hope. I will spend the rest of the paper, however, showing that the link is substantial nevertheless. In section two, I will show that the truth of the canonic version of materialism, according to which primary qualities (unlike secondary qualities) are mind-independent and inhere in material substances, depends on (meaning *requires*) the possibility of the mind framing AII's and AGI's, in which case the refutation of the possibility of AII's and AGI's is a refutation of what is necessary for this version of materialism to be true<sup>13</sup>. Finally, in section three I will establish that there is a sense which the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AII's or AGI's.

<sup>7</sup> Bennett, p. 45.

<sup>8</sup> Tipton, p. 157.

<sup>9</sup> See Armstrong, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> Bennett, p. 45. And Tipton continues, «but certainly the language he uses when elaborating on the absurdity of abstracting *esse* from *percipi* is remarkably similar to that he uses in the introduction to the *Principles* and again in PR. 10» (p. 157). By the end of my paper, it will be evident why the language is so similar: the abstraction to which Berkeley is referring in the Introduction and in *Principles* §10, the framing of AGI's and AII's, is the abstracting of *esse* from *percipi*.

<sup>11</sup> Bolton, p. 308.

<sup>12</sup> Atherton, 292.

<sup>13</sup> So notice I am not showing that the belief that materialism is true depends on the belief that the mind can frame AII's and AGI's, which is what Berkeley claims (in *Principles* §5) might turn out to be true after thorough examination of the belief that materialism is true. Rather, I am claiming that *materialism (of a certain sort) being true* depends on the possibility of the mind actually framing (not simply the belief that the mind can frame) AII's and AGI's.

# I HOW BERKELEY SHOWS THAT MATERIALISM IS FALSE WITHOUT RELYING ON HIS ARGUMENTS THAT DIRECTLY REFUTE THE POSSIBILITY OF AIIs AND AGIs

In this section, I will first show (in 1.1) how the first six sections of the *Principles* proves that the materialist's candidate mind-independent sensible object only exists as perceived and thus is not in fact mind-independent. Then I will show how Berkeley responds to the main objection to, and thus bolsters, this Beginning Argument (BA) with his Comparison Argument (CA). Afterwards (in 1.2), I will briefly express Berkeley's famous Master Argument (MA) for the impossibility of materialism. By the end, it will be evident, I think, that Berkeley can show materialism to be false without relying upon the Introduction's denial of the possibility of AIIs and AGIs.

## 1.1 How Berkeley's BA and CA together show that materialism is false

Berkeley begins his BA by stating what to him seem to be three obvious facts from which follows materialism's falsity. First, we perceive sensible objects such as tables. Second, our perceiving such objects is our having various sense impressions, that is, our perceiving bundles of sense data, «collections of ideas»<sup>14</sup>. For example, when I see this table, I perceive the idea of brown; when I touch the table, I perceive the idea of solid; and so on. The reason why I take these various ideas to constitute one object, an object I call «table», is because each time I walk into the room I find that they regularly accompany each other<sup>15</sup>. Third, ideas cannot exist without that «which knows or perceives them»: the mind, the active subject of experience<sup>16</sup>. For example, *the chord heard*, that is, *the idea (of) the chord*, cannot exist without *the hearing (of) the chord*, that is, the *spirit* qua (the) intending (of) the chord.

<sup>14</sup> *Principles* §1.

<sup>15</sup> «[A]s several [ideas] are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name, and so be reputed as one thing. Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, figure and consistency having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple» (*Principles* §1).

<sup>16</sup> *Principles* §2. «The various sensations or ideas imprinted on the sense... cannot exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving them. I think an intuitive knowledge may be obtained of this» (*Principles* §3).

How does materialism's falsity follow from these facts? Surely we perceive objects (fact 1); and, as everyone will allow, we only ever perceive ideas (fact 2); and, as everyone will also allow, ideas only exist for a mind that intends them since they are but the endogenous contents of intending psychical acts (fact 3). Therefore, the being of objects such as tables consists in their being perceived; their *esse* is *percipi*<sup>17</sup>. To affirm the table's independence from the mind, then, is to affirm a «manifest contradiction»: that what we perceive –*the brown seen, the solidity felt*, and so on– exists independent of our perceiving it –independent of our *seeing brown, feeling solidity*, and so on. How ever could something *we perceive* exist *without* the activity of perceiving?<sup>18</sup>

While pointing out this contradiction should be enough, Berkeley suggests, to cure us of the belief that materialism is true<sup>19</sup>, he anticipates our resisting this cure by denying fact 2: that we only ever perceive ideas. «When I look at the table», Berkeley imagines the materialist arguing, «I do not just perceive the idea of brown. I also perceive, *through the mediation of that idea*, the mind-independent quality of brown of which the idea is a copy. So when by 'the brown seen' I am referring to the *quality* brown as opposed to the *idea* brown that is a copy of that quality, it is *not* a contradiction to say that what I perceive, the brown seen, exists independent of my perceiving it»<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>17</sup> *Principles* §3.

<sup>18</sup> «[T]hat... sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived... involve[s] a manifest contradiction. For what are the forementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense, and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations; and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?» (*Principles* §4).

<sup>19</sup> *Principles* §5. Pointing out this contradiction should be enough to cure us, in other words, of our belief in one particular strain of abstraction, in one particular instance of the mental process of separating the impossible: the mental process of separating «the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived»; to wit, it should be enough to cure us of the belief that we can frame AMIs.

<sup>20</sup> As Hylas, in the *Dialogues*, puts this objection to the second premise, «[T] here are two kinds of objects, the one perceived immediately, which are likewise called *ideas*; the other are real things or external objects perceived by the mediation of ideas, which are their images... Now I admit, ideas do not exist without the mind; but the latter sort of objects do» (p. 152). Or Hylas offers another wording of this objection. He says that while we

In response to the view that we perceive mind-independent qualities via the ideas that are copies of them, Berkeley formulates the CA. He asks, «How do we know there is resemblance between ideas and qualities?» He answers, «By comparing them of course». To compare the quality with the idea in order to see if they resemble, we have to compare the idea *qua idea* with the quality *qua quality*. The thing is, while we of course can consider the idea *qua idea*, we can never consider the quality *qua quality*, only *qua idea*. Why? Well, as the materialist admits, we only know, have access to, the quality through the «filter» of the idea of which it is supposedly a copy. The necessary comparison is thus impossible. This can be re-shown in two steps. First, comparing the quality with the idea that is supposedly a copy of it, which we must do in order to know that the idea is indeed a copy of it, clearly requires having access to *both* the idea and the quality. It would make no sense, you see, to say that an idea of brown to which one (who has this idea) has access can be compared with an un-accessed, and thus invisible, quality of brown. But, second, to have access to, so as to compare, them requires their both being ideas; to compare, in other words, an experience, an idea, with a non-experience, a quality, one has to make that non-experience an idea, that is, one has to experience it. In the end, since it is impossible for one to compare the idea and the quality because the quality *qua quality* can never be at one's disposal, and since nevertheless to know that the idea is a copy of the quality one must have compared, the materialist is not entitled to say that ideas are copies of qualities<sup>21</sup>.

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may perceive nothing but ideas, that just means that mind-independent things are known mediately through ideas; they are the insensible sources of ideas of which our ideas are copies. «Properly and immediately nothing can be perceived but ideas. All material things therefore are in themselves insensible, and to be perceived only by their ideas» (p. 155). As Philonous sums this objection up: «It is your opinion, the ideas we perceive by our sense are not real things, but images, or copies of them. Our knowledge therefore is no farther real, than as our ideas are the true representations of those originals» (p. 192). As Berkeley sums up the objection in the *Principles*: «But say you, though the ideas themselves do not exist without the mind, yet there may be things like them whereof they are copies or resemblances, which things exist without the mind, in an unthinking substance» (§8).

<sup>21</sup> «If we look but ever so little into our thoughts, we shall find it impossible for us to conceive a likeness except only between our ideas. Again, I ask



## 1.2 How Berkeley's MA shows that materialism is false

In addition to this argument, we can add the MA, which Berkeley actually claims to be the only argument needed to disprove materialism<sup>22</sup>, which again is the doctrine that there are mind-independent objects that the mind can know. The MA states that the very conception of, the very knowing of, a mind-independent object is contradictory: mind-independent objects must be *unconceived*, *unknown*, in order to be mind-independent –otherwise they would be related to the mind and thus be mind-dependent. Given that mind-independent objects are thus unconceived, unknown, by definition, if someone claims, for example, that he knows of or is conceiving of some mind-independent star, he is speaking falsely<sup>23</sup>. At best, he knows of, is conceiving of, a star in his mind<sup>24</sup>. What matters here is that because

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whether those supposed originals or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, be themselves perceivable or no? 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; hard or soft, like something which is intangible; and so of the rest» (*Principles* §8).

<sup>22</sup> *Dialogues*, 149; *Principles* §23. Since, as with the CA, the MA does not rely on the denial of the possibility of AIs and AGIs, Berkeley thus believes that the critique of them is not needed to disprove materialism. That, remember, is the important point of this section.

<sup>23</sup> See *Dialogues*, 149. «To make out [that the objects of your thought exist without the mind], it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind taking no notice of itself, is deluded to think it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of or without the mind; though at the same time they are apprehended by or exist in itself. A little attention will discover to anyone the truth and evidence of what is here said, and make it *unnecessary to insist on any other proofs* against the existence of material substance» (my emphases, *Principles* §23). Note that while Berkeley says «material substance» here, what he says applies to materialism in general, as is clear upon consideration of the entire section.

<sup>24</sup> Here is a good way to point out the strength of the MA. With Berkeley's criticism of, say, abstract general ideas –that one cannot frame an idea that is all triangles and yet none, one could just point out that while one surely cannot have a picture or image of the identity that all triangles have in common, one can have an understanding, a notion of that identity. But one

mind-independent objects are unknown by definition, the doctrine that there are mind-independent sensible objects that the mind can know, materialism, is false.

## 2 WHY THE TRUTH OF THE CANONIC VERSION OF MATERIALISM REQUIRES THE POSSIBILITY OF AIIs AND AGIs

In section one, I showed that Berkeley (on his own terms) can defeat materialism, the doctrine that there exists mind-independent objects that the mind can know, without relying on his Introduction's assault on AIIs and AGIs. In this section, I will explain why the truth of the canonic version of materialism, according to which primary qualities (unlike secondary qualities) are mind-independent and inhere in material substances, requires the possibility of the mind framing AIIs and AGIs. Doing so will establish one of the links between the Introduction's refutation of the possibility of framing these two types of idea and the refutation of materialism.

### 2.1 *Why the truth of the canonic version of materialism requires the possibility of AIIs*

Let me begin by explaining why the truth of the canonic version of materialism requires the possibility of the mind framing AIIs. First, what are AIIs? As the Introduction describes, they are ideas of qualities in isolation from other qualities apart from which they cannot truly exist. Since brown cannot exist apart from extension, an example of an AII, then, is an idea of brown exclusive of extension, an idea that the mind supposedly forms by stripping away the idea of extension. To use another example, since a given creeping motion never exists apart from an extension that creeps, the idea of a given creeping motion all by itself is an AII<sup>25</sup>.

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cannot make a similar move to parry to MA. For even if the object that one is conceiving and that one says is mind independent is not being imaged in this conceiving, it is still being conceived. It is still being conceived even if one just has a notion of it as mind-independent. Hence one does not conceive of a mind-independent object if one is *conceiving* of such an object.

<sup>25</sup> «[W]e are told, the mind being able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united, does by that means frame to itself abstract ideas. For example, there is perceived by sight an object extended, coloured, and moved: this mixed or compound

What is the problem with AII's? According to Berkeley, the problem is that it is impossible to frame ideas of qualities divorced from other qualities from which they are necessarily inseparable. That it is impossible to frame AII's he contends is rather easy to apprehend. Try to think of one quality exclusive of another quality from which it is inseparable. Try to think of color exclusive of extension, for example. You will see that no such AII can stand before the mind<sup>26</sup>.

That established, how might it be that the truth of the canonic version of materialism depends on the possibility of AII's? Since this version of materialism holds that secondary qualities are mind-dependent, «inhering» in mind, whereas primary qualities are mind-independent, inhering in material substratum, it must be possible, it seems Berkeley would say, for at least some (if only possible) mind to conceive of these two sorts of qualities as separate from, independent of, each other. For how could something be true, such as that primary qualities are exclusive of secondary qualities, if it is impossible for any mind, even for the mind that is God, to conceive of it? Since primary qualities cannot in fact be mind-independent whereas secondary qualities are mind-dependent, if it is impossible even for any merely possible mind to conceive of a separation between these two sorts of qualities, in order for this version of materialism to be true it must be possible, for example, for some (at least possible) mind to frame an idea of a color, a secondary quality, exclusive of extension,

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idea the mind resolving into its simple, constituent parts, and viewing each by itself, exclusive of the rest, does frame the abstract ideas of extension, colour, and motion. Not that it is possible for colour or motion to exist without extension [these folks admit]: but only that the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of color exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both colour and extension» (*Principles*, Intro §7).

<sup>26</sup> «I deny that I can abstract one from another, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated» (*Principles*, Intro §10). «I desire anyone to reflect and try, whether he can by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body, without all other sensible qualities. For my own part, I see evidently that it is not in my power to frame an idea of a body extended and moved, but I must also give it colour or other sensible quality which is acknowledged to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are unconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are there must these be also, that is, in the mind and nowhere else» (*Principles* §10).

a primary quality. To be sure, and even the materialists in question would agree, a color always has some extension or other<sup>27</sup>. But in this case, the possibility of framing such an idea of a color exclusive of extension, a possibility that the truth of this version of materialism requires, is the possibility of framing an AII, an idea of a quality separated from other qualities from which it is inseparable<sup>28</sup>.

## 2.2 *Why the truth of the canonic version of materialism requires the possibility of AGIs*

Now let us see why the truth of the canonic version of materialism depends on the possibility of AGIs. First, what are AGIs? As the Introduction describes, AGIs are ideas of general entities, kinds, in isolation from all of their embodying instances, from all that is of those kinds. Since triangularity, the kind to which all triangles belong, cannot exist apart from determinate triangles, an example of an AGI is an idea of triangle that the mind forms by peeling away the many different isosceles, equilateral, and scalene instantiations of triangle identity and thereby focusing only on the kind itself<sup>29</sup>. To use another example, since coloredness, what all colors share, cannot exist apart from particular colors, the idea of color in general is an AGI of what all colors share and thus is of no color in particular<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>27</sup> *Principles* Intro §7.

<sup>28</sup> It is thus clear how the Introduction's illustration of the impossibility of framing AIIs undermines the truth of this version of materialism. Since there cannot be, say, an AII of uncolored extension, it is absurd to claim that secondary qualities are mind-dependent whereas primary qualities are mind-independent. Berkeley in fact used to regard this argument against AIIs that separated primary and secondary qualities as «the great argument» against materialism, as he notes in entry 288a of his notebooks (*Philosophical Commentaries*, p. 92).

<sup>29</sup> *Principles*, Intro §13.

<sup>30</sup> As Berkeley explains in *Alciphron* VII §5, «[T]he mind, excluding out of its idea all these particular properties and distinctions, frameth the general abstract idea of triangle, which is neither equilateral, equicrural nor scalenum, neither obtusangular, acutangular nor rectangular, but all and none of these at once. The same may be said of the general abstract idea of colour, which is something distinct from and exclusive of blue, red, green, yellow and every other particular colour, including only that general essence in which they all agree» (*The Works of George Berkeley* III, p. 332). «[T]he mind by leaving out of the particular colours

What is the problem with AGIs? According to Berkeley, the problem is that it is impossible to frame ideas of kinds divorced from all that is of those kinds. That it is impossible to frame AGIs he contends is rather easy to apprehend. Try to think of a kind exclusive of all its embodying instances. Try to think only of motion in general, rather than of any particular motion (fast or slow motion, creeping or hopping motion, curvilinear or rectilinear motion, or so on), for example. You will see that no such AGI can stand before the mind<sup>31</sup>.

That established, how might it be that the truth of the canonic version of materialism requires the possibility of AGIs? Since this version of materialism holds that there is material substance in which qualities inhere, it must be possible, it seems Berkeley would say, for at least some (if only possible) mind to conceive of material substance<sup>32</sup>. For how could something be true, such as that there is this unthinking stuff fully devoid of qualities, if it is impossible for any mind, even for the mind that is God, to conceive of it? To be sure, and even the materialists in question would agree, material substance itself is mere matter, that which all particular material things have in

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perceived by sense, that which distinguishes them one from another, and yet retaining that only which is common to all, makes an idea of colour in abstract which is neither red, not blue, nor white, nor any other determinate colour» (*Principles*, Intro §8).

<sup>31</sup> «I deny... that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars» (*Principles*, Intro §10).

<sup>32</sup> Of course, Berkeley having shown that there are no mind-independent qualities with his MA and with his BA together with his CA means that material substance is no way and that it no longer has the purpose that defines it—the purpose of supporting qualities. These are two strong reasons to stop believing in it and to think it to be no-thing (*Principles* §74). Why is the fact that there are no mind-independent qualities a substantial reason to believe that material substance is no-thing and to stop believing in it? Well, this means that material substance is in no way sensible. Of course, the materialist can just affirm that while it is not sensible, it is nevertheless some-thing, which is exactly what Hylas does (*Dialogues*, p. 146). Instead of by the senses, it is by *reason* that one obtains an idea of it. The reason is that there must be something supporting qualities. The thing is, surely this reason for material substratum's existence no longer remains once there are no longer mind-independent qualities in need of support. Without the reason for supposing its existence, we are motivated to believe that material substance is nothing.

common<sup>33</sup>. That it is in other words matter in general, and not any particular matter (such as the particular matter that is this cup), is clear in that it is devoid of any qualities and yet it is still matter. But in this case, the possibility of framing such an idea of material substance, a possibility that the truth of this version of materialism requires, is the possibility of framing an AGI, an idea of a kind (in this case, matter) separated from all that is of that kind (material things)<sup>34</sup>.

### 3 COULD THE TRUTH OF MATERIALISM BE REQUIRED BY THE POSSIBILITY OF AIIs AND AGIs?

Being that I have shown at least that the truth of a certain version of materialism requires the possibility of the mind framing AIIs and AGIs, one might wonder whether the truth of materialism, whether just materialism in general or some specific version of it again, is required by the possibility of the mind framing AIIs and AGIs. So does Berkeley hold, in other words, that the possibility of framing these two types of

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, Locke—the most famous proponent of the canonic view of materialism in question—even goes further than this, calling it being in general (*Principles* §17).

<sup>34</sup> It is thus clear how the Introduction's illustration of the impossibility of framing AGIs, which shows that there can be no idea of matter in general any more than there can be an idea of triangle in general, undermines the truth of this version of materialism. One may wonder, though, «Does not Berkeley's spiritual substance fall victim to the same attack he uses against material substance?» The answer is no because he does not even claim that we have an idea of spiritual substance. Rather, we have a *notion* of it. One may thus wonder, «Well, what if materialists agree that while they have no idea of material substance, they have a notion of it?» In response, he would say that there is no notion. For (1) we do not feel this material substance as we feel the substance that we are through our having ideas: spirit. Whenever we have an idea we immediately and infallibly recognize, more or less thematically, that we are that which intends it. «I know or am conscious of my own being, and that I myself am not my idea, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills and operates about ideas» (*Dialogues*, p. 181). And (2) there is no reason anymore to suppose material substance since, again, there are no mind-independent qualities in need of support. Since there is nothing for the material substance to support, I cannot really know what I mean by it. But since there are many things that exist that require spiritual substance in which to inhere, which indicates that there is spiritual substance, «I know what I mean when I affirm that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas» (*Ibid.*).

abstract idea entails materialism's truth? Well, Pappas seems to think so<sup>35</sup>. He says that materialism being true is required by (the possibility of the) mind framing abstract ideas<sup>36</sup>. If Pappas means to say that materialism being true is required by the possibility of abstraction (as opposed to that materialism being true is required by the possibility of abstract ideas, which he literally does say), then he would clearly be right, as I have shown at the outset of this paper. But being that Pappas does distinguish between abstract ideas and the process that is abstraction<sup>37</sup>, and being that he would agree that AII's and AGI's exhaust the range of abstract ideas to which Berkeley refers<sup>38</sup>, he should be read as stating instead that for Berkeley materialism being true is required by (the possibility of the) mind framing AII's and that it is required by (the possibility of the) the mind framing AGI's.

Pappas's main evidence for this claim is *Principles* §5, where Berkeley says that the belief that materialism is true perhaps will be shown to depend on the belief that the mind can frame abstract ideas. As I will now explain in section 3.1, there are several reasons why we should not follow Pappas in thinking that this passage asserts this. Nevertheless, in section 3.2 I will argue, in line with Pappas, that there is a sense in which the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AII's or AGI's.

### 3.1 Why *Principles* §5 does not assert that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AII's or AGI's

*Principles* §5 reads: «If we thoroughly examine th[e] tenet [(that materialism is true)] it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*». There are three main reasons why I think that this passage does not assert that the truth of materialism is

<sup>35</sup> Pappas, p. 36ff.

<sup>36</sup> Pappas, p. 36.

<sup>37</sup> Pappas, p. 38.

<sup>38</sup> It is true that Pappas says that Berkeley has *four* sorts of abstract ideas. But this does not undermine my claim that Pappas would agree that AII's and AGI's exhaust the range of abstract ideas that Berkeley refers to. First of all, three of the four sorts of abstract ideas that Pappas says that Berkeley refers to (which Pappas calls «Type 2», «Type 3», and «Type 4» abstract ideas) are sorts of AGI's (pp. 42-44). Second of all, the remaining sort of abstract idea is what I have been calling an incomplete abstract idea (p. 41).

required by the possibility of either AIs or AGIs. Here is the first. In this passage Berkeley is saying that *perhaps* the belief that materialism is true will be found to depend on the belief that the mind can frame abstract ideas. This passage cannot be made to say, as Pappas thinks it should, that if there are abstract ideas, then materialism is true. Such a rendering of the passage ignores Berkeley's inclusion of the term «perhaps» here, a term that indicates that he is not entirely sure.

Here is the second reason why I think that *Principles* §5 does not assert that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AIs or AGIs. While Pappas reads the «depends on» of this passage as indicating a «sufficient condition», and explicitly affirms that this is the «natural way» to read it<sup>39</sup>, this «depends on» actually indicates a *necessary* condition. First of all, it is plain that the usual way of reading such claims as x depends on y is not as x *is required by* y, but rather as x *requires* y. Second, as Lex Newman points out, and which I have found to be true myself, «Berkeley [himself] uses such claims [of the form 'x depends on y'] in the usual way: 'depends on' means *requires*, but not *is required by*»<sup>40</sup>. This means, in other words, that for Berkeley (as is the case for most people) to say that x depends on y is for him to say that y is a necessary condition for x<sup>41</sup>.

Here is the third reason I think that *Principles* §5 does not assert that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AIs or AGIs. In this passage Berkeley seems to be saying that (i) *the belief* («tenet») that materialism is true perhaps depends on (ii) *the belief* («doctrine») that the mind can frame AIs and AGIs. This is clearly not the same thing as saying that (iii) *materialism being true* depends on (iv) *the possibility of the mind framing* AIs and AGIs. After all, people hold the belief that materialism is true even though it is impossible (according to Berkeley) to frame abstract ideas.

### 3.2 Why Berkeley would not deny that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of either AIs or AGIs

In spite of what I have pointed out about Pappas's reading of *Principles* §5, it seems that Berkeley would not deny that the truth of mate-

<sup>39</sup> Pappas, p. 36.

<sup>40</sup> Newman, p. 314.

<sup>41</sup> Note that Avrum Stroll made this point against Pappas before Newman (p. 286).



rialism is required by the possibility of either AII's or AGI's. Here is an argument that he might make to show that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of AII's. The essence of the argument is that to frame an AII is to frame an idea of something unconceivable and thus (for Berkeley) mind-independent, in which case materialism is true: there is a mind-independent object of which the mind can know.

- (1) The assumption that it is possible to frame AII's means, for example, that the mind can frame an idea solely of the red quality possessed by this apple, an idea exclusive of any other quality such as extension. It means, in other words, that the mind is able to attend only to the red of this apple.
- (2) The sensible thing to which the mind attends in this case—the red of the apple by itself, exclusive of any other quality—is unperceivable and indeed unconceivable (by Berkeley's critique of AII's).
- (3) A sensible thing that is unconceivable and unperceivable is mind-independent; it exists without any mind knowing it.
- (4) From 2 and 3 it follows that the sensible thing to which the mind attends in this case is mind-independent.
- (5) This entails that materialism, the doctrine affirming the existence of mind-independent objects of which the mind can know, is true.
- (6) Therefore, the possibility of AII's entails the truth of materialism.

There is an oddity about this argument, but it is one that I do not think makes the argument false. Premise 2, which says that the lone red quality to which the mind attends is unconceivable, is of course a paradox. That to which the mind attends in this case is (a) unconceivable according to Berkeley's critique of AII's, and yet it is (b) conceivable according to the very fact that it is attended to by the mind. Only if one picks the former option in the paradox (namely, a) would it be the case that the possibility of AII's entails the truth of materialism. After all, if we picked the other option (namely, b), premise 2 would read as follows: The sensible thing to which the mind attends in this case—the red of the apple by itself, exclusive of any other quality—is perceivable or conceivable (by the assumption that the mind is attending to it). In this case, the mind would be knowing not a mind-independent thing, but a mind-dependent thing, which

does not entail that materialism, the doctrine affirming the existence of mind-independent objects of which the mind can know, is true. Nevertheless, because it is still open for us to pick the option that says that the thing to which the mind attends is unconceivable, it is still open for this argument to follow through. There is a sense, then, in which the possibility of AIs entails the truth of materialism.

Here now is an argument that Berkeley might make to show that the truth of materialism is required by the possibility of AGIs. The essence of the argument is that to frame an AGI is to frame an idea of something unconceivable and thus (for Berkeley) mind-independent, in which case materialism is true: there is a mind-independent object of which the mind can know.

- (1) The assumption that it is possible to frame AGIs means, for example, that the mind can frame an idea of man exclusive of any particular man. It means, in other words, that the mind is able to attend only to man in general.
- (2) That to which the mind attends in this case—man in general, exclusive of any particular man—is unperceivable and indeed unconceivable (by Berkeley's critique of AGIs).
- (3) That which is unconceivable and unperceivable is mind-independent; it exists without any mind knowing it.
- (4) From 2 and 3 it follows that the man in general to which the mind attends in this case is mind-independent.
- (5) This entails that materialism, the doctrine affirming the existence of mind-independent objects of which the mind can know, is true.
- (6) Therefore, the possibility of AGIs entails the truth of materialism.

The same oddity about the previous argument is present in this one: The man in general to which the mind attends is (a) unconceivable according to Berkeley's critique of AGIs, and yet it is (b) conceivable according to the very fact that it is attended to by the mind. For the same reason I offered above, though, this does not mean that this argument is wrong: Even though it would be the case that the possibility of AGIs entails the truth of materialism only if one picks the former option in the paradox (namely, a), one is still open of course to pick this option.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I opened this paper by showing that the truth of materialism, the doctrine that there are mind-independent objects that the mind can know, both requires and is required by the possibility of abstraction, the process of mentally separating things truly inseparable. While this thus shows that there is a substantial link between Berkeley's refutation of abstraction and his refutation of materialism, I pointed out that the real debate most likely is whether there is a link between Berkeley's refutation of materialism and his refutation of the possibility of framing both AII's (ideas of qualities separated from other qualities from which they are inseparable) and AGI's (ideas of kinds separated from all that is of those kinds). I contended that there is such a link, but that it is not as strong as some may think or as weak as others may think. To the end of weakening the link, I argued that Berkeley can defeat materialism without relying on the arguments against the possibility of AII's and AGI's that he gives in the Introduction to the *Principles*. To the end of strengthening the link I argued two things. First, I argued that the truth of the canonic version of materialism, according to which only primary qualities inhere in mind-independent material substances, requires the possibility of the mind framing both AII's and AGI's. Second, I argued that there is a sense in which the truth of materialism is indeed required by the possibility of either sort of abstract ideas.

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