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BERKELEY'S SOCIAL THEORY: CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

BY DAVID E. LEARY*

I. Berkeley's Social Theory and its Intellectual Background

George Berkeley's social thought has been overlooked. The reason seems obvious. Berkeley has been regarded principally as a link between John Locke and David Hume. Consequently, his works relating to the British empirical tradition and to his immaterialism have received primary attention while his works dealing with ethical and public issues have been regarded as secondary. This has led to a distortion of Berkeley's own scale of priorities. He repeatedly stressed that he was primarily concerned with the condition of the real and concrete world which surrounded him. That this real and concrete world is immaterial and is constituted in our ideas of it were indeed important propositions for Berkeley, but they were only steps toward a consistent philosophy that was intended to convince his readers of the essential relation of man to his world, society, religion, and God. Berkeley's goal was always to educate the public to "a Zeal for Religion and Love of their Country."¹ He was concerned primarily with how people lived their lives, how they related to one another and to their God; he was concerned with their metaphysical beliefs largely to the extent that they bore on these issues.

This paper is an investigation of Berkeley's social thought, particularly as it is grounded upon Berkeley's quite explicit, but neglected, social theory, which is revealed in an essay written by Berkeley in 1713 for Steele's short-lived *Guardian*. Originally untitled, this short essay has been labeled "The Bond of Society" in Luce and Jessop's critical edition of Berkeley's works. Its significance was noted by Harry Elmer Barnes in 1948, but Barnes's comment has not brought the essay the recognition it deserves. This is all the more unfortunate since, as Barnes says, Berkeley's essay is "one of the most suggestive essays in the whole history of social philosophy."²

* The author would like to thank Keith Michael Baker of the University of Chicago for his helpful comments on the first draft of this article.

¹ Berkeley, "A Proposal for the better supplying of Churches in our foreign Plantations" (1725), *Works*, VII, 348. All references to Berkeley's works are to the critical edition of his collected works: A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, eds., *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, 9 Vols. (New York, 1948-57). In the notes this source will be referred to simply as *Works*.

² H. E. Barnes, ed., *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* (Chicago, 1966), 52.

"The Bond of Society" is a good title for this essay in which Berkeley's major concern is to comprehend the nature of social phenomena as an integral part of "the whole scope of creation."³ The essence of Berkeley's argument is that there is "a certain correspondence" or "similitude of operation" between the natural world and the world of man. Just as natural philosophers now agree that natural bodies exert "a mutual attraction upon each other," so too, says Berkeley, can we observe "a like principle of attraction" in the moral world of man. In fact, the "social appetite in human souls is the greatest spring and source of moral actions"; it is the very bond of society.

In this very brief summary the intellectual context of Berkeley's social theory is clearly manifest. The natural philosopher to whom Berkeley alludes is, of course, Sir Isaac Newton, and it is against the background of Newtonian mechanics that Berkeley analyzes social dynamics. The key concept in Berkeley's analysis is the "principle of attraction" whereby men "are drawn together in communities, clubs, families, friendships, and all the various species of society." Based on this fundamental analogy of social attraction (or "appetite") with natural gravity,⁴ Berkeley sketches a model of society which can account for both the common sociability of man and the unique individual differences in the attraction among men. For instance: "As in bodies, where the quantity is the same, the attraction is strongest between those which are placed nearest to each other, so it is likewise in the minds of men, *caeteris paribus*, between those which are most nearly related." Thus does Berkeley account for the fact that those who habitually live closer together are more tightly bound together in the various social relations which we observe in the human world.

Beyond this, Berkeley offers a further explanation of individual differences in the behavior of men. Individual idiosyncrasies (including anti-social and asocial behaviors) are explained by Berkeley as the results of the "private passions and motions of the soul" which "obstruct the operation of that benevolent uniting instinct implanted in human nature." These passions are analogous to the "rectilinear motions" in the natural world which in cooperation with "the general laws of gravitation" account for the orbits of the "several great bodies which compose the solar system." Just as the tendency to rectilinear (centrifugal)

³ Berkeley, "The Bond of Society" (1713), *Works*, VII, 225-28. As is true of all of Berkeley's writings, this essay is a superb example of concise expression. Unquestionably it speaks for itself better than any exposition can, and so the reader is encouraged to consult it directly. Since the essay is very short, quotations in the following discussion will not be cited.

⁴ Since Berkeley thinks of man's sociability as analogous to Newton's "mutual attraction" or gravity, it is interesting to note that Newton originally thought of gravity or attraction (especially in his alchemical experiments) as "sociability." Cf. Frank E. Manuel, *A Portrait of Isaac Newton* (Cambridge, 1968), 68.

motion counteracts the pull of gravity, which by itself would draw these great bodies "all into one mass," so too the passions of men serve to balance the influence of the "social appetite in human souls." Social dynamics, like natural mechanics, are the result of the interaction of individual and common tendencies.

This social theory is remarkable for several reasons. It is not only the first attempt to apply Newtonian mechanics to the analysis of social phenomena, but it is very possibly the first self-consciously "scientific" theory of social behavior. That is, it is based upon, and fulfills, the criteria of Berkeley's philosophy of science. It proposes "uniform laws of nature" which describe the "ordinary course of things"⁵; or, in Berkeley's favorite metaphor for science, it provides "a grammar for the understanding of nature."⁶ The intellectual context of Berkeley's philosophy of science is again Newtonian science. It was through his critique of Newtonian science in the *Philosophical Commentaries* (1708-09) that Berkeley developed a consistent understanding of what science is and what it offers.⁷ While it is not necessary to give the details of Berkeley's philosophy of science, two points from that analysis will be useful here.

First, according to Berkeley, science does not preclude freedom, i.e., the freedom of the Spirit. The Spirit of God is radically free; the Spirit of Man is relatively free. God can will a change in the uniformity of the natural world at any time; man cannot do so, but he is free to will a change in the human world.⁸ This fact, the freedom of man's spirit, is another factor which influences the social behavior of man. Although Berkeley does not specify the influence in "The Bond of Society," it is clearly the cause of the ultimate dysanalogy between the natural and human worlds. Man can, as he says, become "a sort of [moral] monster or anomalous production" despite the "reciprocal attrac-

⁵ Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), *Works*, II, 54.

⁶ Berkeley, *Siris* (1744), *Works*, V, 120.

⁷ Berkeley's *Philosophical Commentaries* (1708-09), *Works*, I, 7-106, are the notebooks in which Berkeley laid the foundation for his later philosophical works. In his *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), *De Motu* (1721), his letters to Samuel Johnson (1729-30), and *Siris* (1744), he continued to develop the critique of Newtonian science which he set forth in these notebooks, but his basic philosophy of science was clearly delineated well before he wrote "The Bonds of Society" in 1713. Regarding Berkeley's philosophy of science, cf. Richard J. Brook, *Berkeley's Philosophy of Science* (The Hague, 1973) and Geoffrey James Warnock, "Science and Mathematics," in his *Berkeley* (Harmondsworth, 1953), 198-212.

⁸ Cf. Berkeley, *Philosophical Commentaries*, *op. cit.*, 77 (#626), 101 (#850); *Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), *Works*, II, 69-70; and Berkeley's letter to Johnson (1729), *Works*, II, 280. Berkeley planned to present a detailed discussion of man's freedom in Part II of *Principles of Human Knowledge*, but he apparently lost the manuscript of that part and never rewrote it.

tion in the minds of man" which is "originally engrafted in the very first foundation of the soul" as "the great spring and source of moral actions."

Secondly, according to Berkeley, science is not concerned merely with understanding reality. In fact, he did not think that science could give descriptions that are true in any absolute sense; rather, he felt that science gives descriptions which are useful, which give us "a sort of foresight, which enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life."⁹ Thus Berkeley's philosophy of science was explicitly pragmatic and aimed at the *application* of science. This helps explain Berkeley's conclusions at the end of "The Bonds of Society." When he says that his thoughts about the nature of social dynamics "do naturally suggest" several particular conclusions, he is not merely tagging on some extraneous considerations. Rather the three social concerns he reveals in his conclusions reflect the pragmatic motives he had in developing his social theory. Upon these concerns he hoped to shed light and have a practical effect. His first conclusion is that, "as social inclinations are absolutely necessary to the well-being of the world, it is the duty and interest of each individual to cherish and improve them to the benefit of mankind." Secondly, he concludes that "it makes a signal proof of the divinity of the Christian religion, that the main duty which it inculcates above all other is charity," which is the virtue which contributes most to man's sociability, which in turn is the root of man's moral goodness. And therefore, his third conclusion is that "our modern Free-thinkers" who "insinuate the Christian morals to be defective" are gravely in error. Just as the essay as a whole gives the basic premises of Berkeley's social theory, his three conclusions give a pithy indication of his three major social concerns—the disruption of society, the crisis of Christian faith and virtue, and the rise of modern free-thinking. We shall investigate the background of these concerns in the next section.

II. Berkeley's Social Concerns

Berkeley's threefold concern about society, religion, and modern free-thinking did not develop by chance. Berkeley lived in a world alive with changes which were rending the very fabric of the political, religious, and spiritual order, and these changes were more than evident within the "cloistered" confines of his own life.¹⁰ The very halls of Trinity College, Dublin, which he entered in 1700 and at which he sub-

⁹ Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, 54. Also cf. *Siris*, *op. cit.*, 112.

¹⁰ The biographical facts in this paper are generally available and commonly known and therefore will not be footnoted. My sources are A. A. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley* (New York, 1968); T. E. Jessop, *George Berkeley* (London, 1959); John Wild, *George Berkeley: A Study of His Life and Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1936); Luce and Jessop's editorial comments throughout

sequently became a tutor and lecturer, still bore the marks left by the soldiers who had used them as a barracks. Despite the Act of Settlement in 1701, the political unrest in Ireland, England, and Scotland was still very real. The new Hanoverian line was not dearly beloved by the Tories, and Jacobite sympathies and hopes were still strong. At the same time the political turmoils of many years—and Marlborough's wars over a few years—had contributed to a very sizeable national debt and economic instability. And this political and economic disorder was accompanied by various signs of "moral decay." In short, social order was tentative at best.

Berkeley's concern about the state of society is reflected in a number of his writings before 1713. His notebooks (*Philosophical Commentaries*, 1708-09) show a preoccupation with the working out of a motivational-ethical theory upon which social order could be based.¹¹ In 1709, in a letter to Sir John Percival, he reveals his knowledge of, and his own ruminations about, political theory.¹² These same interests are further developed in his three sermons on "Passive Obedience," published in 1712 to quiet the suspicions that he had been preaching in favor of the Jacobite cause.¹³ However, the publication of the actual, rather than rumored, words of his sermons did little to win him friends among the Whigs.¹⁴ Rather than quieting public controversy over his political affiliations, his published sermons made him politically visible and earned him the pains of political discrimination. Specifically, his implicit critique of the new Lockean theory of limited obedience to government made him suspect to the Whigs who subsequently kept him for many years from receiving any clerical preferment. But he did not on that account moderate his views, and he bore his situation and consequent poverty as best he could. Berkeley's political involvement, therefore, was more than simply theoretical.

Meanwhile, the political tensions in early eighteenth-century British society were supplemented by religious tensions. Though not as violent

Works; and Colin Murray Turbayne, "Introduction," in George Berkeley's *Principles, Dialogues, and Philosophical Correspondence*, ed. by C. M. Turbayne (Indianapolis, 1965), vii-xxxiv.

¹¹ These notes in *Philosophical Commentaries* were to be the basis of the lost Part II of *Principles of Human Knowledge*, regarding Moral Philosophy. Berkeley's *Alciphron* (1732) can be viewed as a substitution for the lost manuscript.

¹² Berkeley, "Letters," *Works*, VIII, 21-23.

¹³ Berkeley, "Passive Obedience," *Works*, VI, 15-46. This work is relevant to our interests, particularly regarding the development of Berkeley's ethical and motivational ideas.

¹⁴ Ironically, since Berkeley preached obedience to civil authority, he was actually arguing *for* the Hanoverian-Whig cause, as opposed to the Jacobite-Tory cause. However, he argued on very non-Whiggish grounds, and that did not agree well with the Whigs. Such were the insecurities of the time.

and bitter as before, Catholic and Protestant rivalries still existed and were still a factor in the continuance of political unrest. But more important and dreadful to Berkeley than this inter-Christian conflict was the new phenomenon, as he perceived it, of the disaffection of a significant number of people from traditional Catholic and Protestant beliefs and practices and the development of new forms of religion. From Berkeley's viewpoint, this rise of atheism and deism added further strains to the traditional cultural order.

It was within this context that Berkeley was ordained an Anglican deacon in 1709 and a priest in 1710. Given his religious convictions, his attitude toward the rise of religious infidelity and atheism is not surprising. Yet it has not always been sufficiently recognized that Berkeley's concern about the rise of "irreligion" was a major motive behind the development of his philosophical system. This is clearly seen in the numerous notations in his *Philosophical Commentaries* which are concerned with the proof of an *immediately present and sustaining God*,¹⁵ and it is made quite explicit in the subtitle of his major work, *A Treatise Concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710). The subtitle reads: "Wherein the chief causes of error and difficulty in the Sciences, with the grounds of Scepticism, Atheism, and Irreligion, are inquired into."¹⁶ The final paragraphs of *The Principles of Human Knowledge* conclude that God's existence is capable of proof and that "after all, what deserves the first place in our studies, is the consideration of *God*, and our *duty*; which to promote . . . was the main drift and design of my labours. . . ." Therefore, "having shewn the falseness or vanity of those barren speculations, which make the chief employment of learned men," Berkeley hopes he has been able to "dispose them to reverence and embrace the salutary truths of the Gospel, which to know and to practice is the highest perfection of human nature."¹⁷ This was not just the standard pious conclusion intended for the edification of the public. Berkeley had tried his best to develop a philosophy which would help restore and heal religious belief. He had done so on a level of philosophical discourse which omitted specific references to the doctrines and the proponents of doctrines which he was combatting, but it is nonetheless clear that, besides outright atheism, the "barren speculations" which he opposed were those of the deistic "free-thinkers." In particular, he must have had in mind Toland's *Christianity not Myste-ri-ous* (1696) which had brought great attention and controversy to the topic of rationalistic religion. Berkeley closed his *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713) with similar antideistic and anti-

¹⁵ Berkeley's stress on a God who continues to sustain and be involved with his creation is obviously presented in opposition to the deistic conception of a removed God who watches over a mechanically self-operating universe.

¹⁶ Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge*, *op. cit.*, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

skeptical conclusions, and he directed a number of his essays in the *Guardian* against free-thinkers and skeptics.¹⁸ Berkeley voiced his opposition to such "irreligion" in even more specific terms in his later "popular" works.

From this brief review it should be apparent that Berkeley's conclusions (about the disruption of society, the crisis of Christian faith and virtue, and the rise of modern free-thinking) at the end of "The Bonds of Society" were not simply a spelling-out of the logic of that essay. We shall now see how the changing social context of eighteenth-century life prompted Berkeley to further elaborate his social theory in a number of writings and projects which can be viewed as theoretical and practical extensions of "The Bond of Society."

III. *The Elaboration of Berkeley's Social Theory*

In October 1713, just two months after he published "The Bond of Society," Berkeley left London for a year's stay on the Continent as the chaplain of the Earl of Petersborough. When he returned in 1714, he hoped to receive a clerical appointment, but the memory of his "Passive Obedience" was still alive, and the Whigs, who had just come into power, blocked Berkeley's attempts to procure a living. Despite this discrimination, Berkeley wrote an anonymous article in 1715 which in effect supported the Whig ascendancy, not in order to win the favor of the Whigs but in order to secure social order, which was extremely fragile. With Jacobite rebellion an immanent threat, this article, "Advice to the Tories who have taken the Oaths," appeals to the Tories to fulfill their moral duty to respect their oaths of allegiance and their responsibility to preserve public and religious order. It demonstrates Berkeley's continuing concern about the state of society and religion.¹⁹

It also develops some of the ideas set forth in "Passive Obedience" and "The Bond of Society." Specifically, it presents a further development of the argument for passive obedience to the sovereign, and it describes the role of "passion" and religion in, respectively, destroying and preserving the public order. Even more clearly than in Berkeley's 1713 essay, "passion" is associated with anti-social behavior; religion, with the fundamental social virtues. The symbiosis of social order and religion, a theme which is implicit in "Passive Obedience" and "The

¹⁸ In fact, Berkeley's general purpose in the essays as a whole was to oppose the free-thinkers. Cf. esp. "Minute Philosophers," "Shortsightedness," "The Christian Idea of God," and "Immortality," all written in 1713, *Works*, VII, 206-09, 210-21, 222-24. Berkeley's *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), written in an attempt to introduce his philosophical doctrines to a wider audience, is found in *Works*, II, 163-263.

¹⁹ "Advice to the Tories who have taken the Oaths" (1715), *Works*, VI, 53-58. A Jacobite rebellion did break out and was suppressed in Scotland, Sept. 1715.

Bond of Society,” is more clearly elaborated here. In fact, the argument turns on itself when Berkeley pleads that social order must be preserved in order that Christianity be saved; and Christianity must be saved not just because of its “truth,” but also because of its “usefulness”—its usefulness in preserving the social order! Despite this circularity in argument, Berkeley’s theme is worth noting since it underlines a conviction which received fuller treatment in many of his later works: the state of society and the state of religion are intimately and directly related. Religion, in essence, fosters the “social appetite” and also aids the control of “private passions” which are inimical to social welfare. Social order, in turn, provides a setting in which the “private passions” are less likely to be aroused and “social appetite” is more likely to be fulfilled.

Before Berkeley could develop this theme, however, he needed to find a means to a living. After two years of fruitless search for an appointment, he left London again and began a second Continental tour, this time for four years as the tutor of the son of the Bishop of Clogher. When he returned to London in 1720, he found London once again in great social, political, and economic disorder. In fact, London seemed on the verge of collapse. The immediate cause was the bursting of the South Sea Bubble, the final event of a financial speculation scheme which led to the economic ruin of many. But Berkeley, in “An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain” (1721), maintained that this particular event was only the result of a long decline in the country’s morals and religion. Wanton licentiousness, rather than true liberty, had become the accustomed *modus operandi*; material gain had become the goal of all endeavor; and the simple, religious virtues upon which the English nation had risen were disappearing more and more each day. The problem was that “the passions of men” were being “violently” aroused by the hope of personal gain, leading to all sorts of private and public vices, while “public spirit, that glorious principle of all that is great and good,” was being lost.²⁰

This analysis is readily identifiable as an application of Berkeley’s social theory. “Passion” is the father of individualism, and individualism, the father of public disorder. “Social appetite” or “public spirit” is the source of good. Therefore, since religion fosters the “public spirit,” the reintroduction of “a true sense of religion” is the first step that should be taken to reestablish the public weal. Up to this point in his argument, Berkeley has extended his prior discussion but added nothing new. However, this essay of 1721 is significant because it goes further. Berkeley proceeds to list a number of concrete, practical suggestions regarding how the doom of England can be avoided. The significance of these measures is that they are designed to accomplish two simultaneous

²⁰ “An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain” (1721). *Works*, VI, 71, 79.

goals—to foster “public spirit” (and allay “private passions”) while at the same time restoring economic feasibility. The specific suggestions are beyond our scope here, but they are well worth perusal for the insight they give into Berkeley’s economic and psychological acuity. Economic improvement, Berkeley implicitly realizes, depends to a great extent on psychological factors. For example, whereas cynicism and egoism, as well as the love of luxury and public vulgarities, reduce the sense of social cohesion and the desire to work for the common weal, “simplicity of manners” and attitudes contributes to the “public spirit” which motivates “every man’s interest to support that of the public.”²¹ One must be conscious of such factors and foster them while developing economic strategies. Strategies alone are not enough. Berkeley returns to this implicit theme in later writings, making it much more explicit.

This general analysis of the public ills and his concrete suggestions were not merely theoretical for Berkeley. As he continued to seek some kind of ecclesiastical appointment, at first in London and then in Dublin, where he became involved in administration and teaching at Trinity College, Berkeley collected his ideas into a practical scheme which he felt would greatly benefit the public good. Based upon his conviction that Christianity fosters the natural social virtues which form the basis of “public spirit,” and that “public spirit” is the basis of a healthy society, Berkeley turned his thoughts to religious education. If young children were properly introduced to the fullness of Christianity, Berkeley reasoned, society would soon be grounded again on solid virtues. Berkeley grew increasingly enthusiastic about the possible pragmatic results of religious education. However, he also became increasingly depressed about the “moral decay” of Great Britain. Consequently, under the influence of several missionary societies, he turned his sight to the New World as the place to realize his plan for religious education. In 1722 he began communicating his ideas to friends; in 1725 he published a fully developed “Proposal for the better supplying of Churches in our foreign Plantations, &c.”²²

His plan was to found an ideal Christian settlement in Bermuda which would include a College for the education of both natives and settlers from the American mainland. The proposal caught the public imagination, was popularly discussed, and, through much effort on Berkeley’s part, received the approval of all the necessary authorities, including the King and Parliament, and a pledge of £20,000 from the national Treasury. After several years of preparation, enlisting people interested in his scheme, Berkeley set sail to America in September 1728.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

²² “Proposal,” *op. cit.*

His plan was never realized. After a two-and-a-half-year wait in Rhode Island, Berkeley learned in 1731 that the necessary grant of money was never to be paid. Returning disappointed to London, he passed two more years seeking ecclesiastical preferment. While doing so, in 1732, he published a work he had written in America. This work, written in dialogue form and entitled *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher*, was his longest work since *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713).²³ It tied together the various strands of thought which he had developed since "The Bond of Society," and thus it represents the most important theoretical extension of his social philosophy since that essay. In it we can see the mature form of his critique of free-thinking and its relation to the ills of society; and his mature theory of social action can be culled from its pages.

Berkeley criticizes free-thinking in *Alciphron* through the dialogues of two fictional characters who represent the third Earl of Shaftesbury and Bernard Mandeville. Shaftesbury, in his *Characters* (1711), had proposed a "high" version of free-thinking ethical doctrine; Mandeville, in *The Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices Public Benefits* (1714), had proposed a "low" version. Berkeley wanted to contrast the deficiencies of both types of free-thinking approaches with the genuine "utility" of traditional Christianity. As in his "Advice to the Tories" (1715), Berkeley divides his defense of Christianity into considerations of its "truth" and considerations of its "usefulness," and he puts greater emphasis in his argument on the latter, again reflecting his primarily pragmatic concern.²⁴ In fact, the central issue of the book is whether Shaftes-

²³ *Alciphron, or the Minute Philosopher* (1732), *Works*, III, 21-330. The term "Minute Philosopher" was coined by Berkeley earlier. In 1713 he wrote an essay on "Minute Philosophers," *op. cit.*, in which he referred to the narrowness of mind of free-thinkers who busy themselves about the "minute particularities of religion" while missing the benefit of the whole of it. The context of Berkeley's concern about free-thinking, whether atheistic or deistic in form, was basically the same in 1732 as in 1713, except that in the meantime free-thinking had become even more popular. In fact, it was at the height of its influence after the publication of Tindal's *Christianity as Old as the Creation, or the Gospel a Republication of the Religion of Nature* (1730). Berkeley received Tindal's book too late to incorporate its doctrines into his text in any specific manner, but his critique was thorough enough to include Tindal's work within its scope. The timeliness of his critique in *Alciphron* is attested to by the fact that this was Berkeley's first work to provoke an immediate public reaction from its opponents.

²⁴ In fact, Berkeley points out that the objects of faith are mysterious *per se* (just as the objects of science—"force" being no less mysterious than "grace"). But though the "truth" of a particular religious "idea" cannot be known or demonstrated, that "idea" can be shown to be "useful." E.g., take any given man and "do but produce in him a sincere belief of a Future State [i.e., heaven or hell], although it be a mystery, although it be what eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, he shall, nevertheless, by virtue of such belief, be withheld from executing his wicked project" (*Alci-*

bury's system, Mandeville's system, or traditional Christianity promotes best the public good.²⁵ Berkeley, of course, proceeds to demonstrate that Christianity does. First, he disposes of Mandeville's ethics with little difficulty by uncovering the absurdity in Mandeville's contention that public good results when everyone seeks his own private pleasure (in other words, that public good comes from private vice). Both facts and logic oppose such an idea. He also points out the lack of appreciation for reason and freedom in Mandeville's ethics. Contrary to Mandeville, he maintains that the use of reason is as natural and satisfying as the pleasure of sense.

Berkeley's critique of Shaftesbury is more significant because it provides an amplification of the social theory Berkeley presented in 1713. At that time Berkeley had asserted that men have an inborn "social appetite" which is "the great spring and source of moral actions." Confronted with Shaftesbury, Berkeley must clarify that statement in order to differentiate his approach from Shaftesbury's, which speaks of a natural "moral sense" in man which can lead him to a virtuous life. If virtue is "natural," what can religion add to man's moral life? Why is Shaftesbury's ethics insufficient? Because, Berkeley indicates, it is not in fact likely to motivate men to proper behavior. Men may have a natural "social appetite," but they also have "private passions," and these latter need to be kept under control while the former is somehow motivated. Mere altruism is not equal to the task; one needs the encouragement, beliefs, and training of religion. Thus, Christianity is more "useful" in promoting the good of mankind.

This argument from "utility" is only half of Berkeley's critique of the deists and only a part of *Alciphron*, but it is enough to indicate that the dialogues of *Alciphron* presuppose a more complex theory of social action than presented in 1713 and that this new motivational scheme is an elaboration, rather than a contradiction, of the earlier theory. "Social appetite" is still seen as natural, but the experiences in Berkeley's life have made him more realistic, or pessimistic. He now sees "social appetite" as fragile, needing the maintenance and strengthening of the religious outlook and motives. This development, however, fits within the structure of the 1713 social theory. It expands the details and not the terms of the discussion.²⁶

phron, *op. cit.*, 303). This does not mean, of course, that he did not believe that Christianity was the "true" religion and could be proven so.

²⁵ For Berkeley, the "public good" constituted the goal of morals. This idea is developed extensively in other works too; cf. *ibid.*, 63-64.

²⁶ The discussion of the development of Berkeley's motivation scheme has been simplified here. The full story must look at the complexities already implicit in his 1713 essays "Pleasures" and "Happiness," *Works*, VII, 193-97, 214-17, where Berkeley distinguishes "natural" from "phantastical" pleasures and clari-

As for *Alciphron* as a whole, it indicates that by 1732 Berkeley had developed his critique of free-thinking to such a point that it helped him clarify an old theme, the role of religion in preserving social order. Religious training in social virtues and religious beliefs in God's Providence, in an afterlife, and in punishment—these were now clearly seen as the specific facets of religion which contribute to the effective maintenance of public order.²⁷

The publication of *Alciphron* stimulated a good amount of public controversy. As this controversy diminished in 1734, Berkeley finally received the appointment he had sought for so long. At the age of forty-nine, he was made Bishop of Cloyne in Ireland. At this age and in this position we might expect him to retire to a comfortable country life, but in fact it was from this time on that the activities of Berkeley proved conclusively that social concerns were the central concerns in his life. In a position of some social power at last, Berkeley busied himself with his episcopal duties, began writing a series of tracts on public issues concerning the welfare of Ireland and the state of her economic development, made appearances before Parliament, and inaugurated a series of concrete reforms in the lands under his jurisdiction. These practical reforms included agricultural improvements, the founding of a spinning-school, and the creation of jobs for vagrants. The theoretical developments, which led him to plead with Parliament for certain national reforms, such as the creation of a National Bank, were contained in *The Querist* (1735-37) and "A Letter on the Project of a National Bank" (1737).²⁸

The Querist in particular is a gem of economic insight. In it Berkeley uncovers the psychology of poverty even further than he had in "An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain" (1721). Again, as in *Alciphron*, the issue is motivation. How can the poor be motivated to work? And again it is the inculcation of the simple virtues of "honesty and industry" that makes the difference. Healthy material advancement is seen as dependent upon moral growth. Through the proper moral incentive and a judicious division of labor, Berkeley hoped to fulfill the goals of total employment and equitable distribution of products. The experiments on his own lands justified his plans and hopes

ties the goal of man as the happiness of mankind rather than that of any individual.

²⁷ These are not new ideas for Berkeley, but they are newly integrated into the discussion of social action.

²⁸ *The Querist* (1735-37) and "A Letter on the Project of a National Bank" (1737), *Works*, VI, 105-53, 185-88. It is important to stress that Berkeley's social activism was not simply a function of his new role as Bishop. The social "experiments" he tried on his own lands, the jobs he provided, and his door-to-door solicitude for his people were far beyond the line of duty.

for reform, but he was unable to effect as great a change on the national scene as he wished.

Berkeley remained busy with these and other practical social concerns, and his pen continued to move, until his death in 1753.²⁹ In fact, as bishop and member of Parliament, Berkeley took particular care to comment and give advice regarding a variety of issues. "A Discourse addressed to Magistrates and Men in Authority" (1738) was directed to magistrates and members of Parliament; letters were sent to the Anglican and Roman Catholic clergy counselling civil obedience during the Jacobite rebellion in 1745; a further "Word to the Wise" was addressed to the Roman Catholic clergy in 1749; and "Maxims concerning Patriotism" appeared in 1750.³⁰ In addition to these writings, Berkeley's sermons contain significant material related to the explication of his social philosophy.³¹ However, it is unnecessary for us to investigate in detail any of these writings now. We have reviewed them quite enough to document our contention that Berkeley's life and work were dominated by his social concerns and that his understanding of social reality, as originally set forth in "The Bond of Society," was theoretically elaborated and practically applied in subsequent years.

IV. Conclusion

In 1713, when Berkeley first presented his social theory in "The Bond of Society," he was concerned about the disruption of society, the crisis of Christian faith and virtue, and the rise of modern free-thinking. Berkeley presented these concerns as only loosely related. Christianity was to be commended—in fact, considered "divine"—for encouraging sociability, and free-thinkers were to be considered wrong for accusing Christianity of opposing friendship. Christianity was good; free-thinking, bad. This much was clear, but there was no systematic explication of the various relationships between society, religion, and free-thinking. In the years following 1713 Berkeley analyzed and described these relationships

²⁹ For example, in response to the epidemics of 1739 and 1740, Berkeley began several years of experimentation which resulted in his infamous, but very sincere, advocacy of tar-water as a medicinal cure—all that could be readily available to the public. Vol. 5 of *Works* contains Berkeley's numerous writings which attempted to popularize this remedy; cf. esp. *Siris* (1744), 27-164. Another practical project Berkeley undertook was to raise his own militia in 1745 to oppose renewed Jacobite rebellion. Cf. Luce, *The Life of George Berkeley*, *op. cit.*, 177.

³⁰ All of the writings referred to can be found in *Works*, VI. It was rare for an Anglican Bishop to address Roman Catholics, and even rarer to get a positive response as Berkeley did.

³¹ Cf. esp. "On the Will of God" (1751), *Works*, VIII, 129-138.

much more completely, continuing to use the basic conceptual dichotomy between “social appetite” and “private passions” and developing a more refined understanding of the role of learning and motivation in social life. Through this analysis, Berkeley came to define in much greater detail the factors involved in the positive relation between Christianity and social order, and he expanded his critique of free-thinking to the point where he could explain to his own satisfaction the factors involved in the negative relation between free-thinking and social order. In both cases, the crucial factor was motivation; and in both cases, the common concern was social order.

This concern with social order was more than purely intellectual. Having used the conceptual tools of his social theory to analyze the different kinds of social dynamics motivated by Christianity and free-thinking, Berkeley tried to put his theoretical understanding to practical use. First he suggested a program of moral-economic reforms, and then he worked diligently to implement his scheme of religious education. But it was not until he had a position of social power that he could fully translate his theory into practice. And this he did, to the best of his ability.

The major purpose of this paper has been to show that Berkeley had a social theory, that this social theory arose within a definable social and intellectual context, and that it provided the basis for theoretical and practical elaboration in a number of later writings and projects in Berkeley’s life. In particular, we have seen that the social context of Berkeley’s own life provided the pragmatic motivation to develop, and to continue to develop, his model of society and social dynamics while his critique of Newtonian science provided the intellectual context in which that model was articulated.

However compelling the demonstration of these theses has or has not been to the individual reader, this paper should at least have made it possible to view Berkeley’s works from a perspective different from the traditional one. Specifically, it has suggested that there is a unity among what are usually considered Berkeley’s “minor” and “occasional” pieces, and it has implied that Berkeley was much more consistently concerned with social theory (and the *application* of social theory) than has generally been acknowledged. Berkeley was not an idle, solitary, dreaming philosopher, a stereotype which still seems extant though it has been attacked in the literature. Nor was he simply a link between Locke and Hume. He was an open-eyed observer of, and participant in, the world in which he lived, and his response to that world motivated his philosophical concerns. Even his *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), which we did not discuss in the text and which may seem to be purely theoretical, served also to establish a foundation for his applied philosophy, i.e., his Christian apologetics and his social

theory.³² And his most famous work, *A Treatise concerning The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), served the same purpose. Indeed, after perusing his entire collected works, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion—which Berkeley himself voiced on several occasions—that his central concern was always to educate his fellow countrymen to be “good Christians and loyal subjects.”³³ In this endeavor, his analysis of social dynamics played an essential role.

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³² *New Theory of Vision* (1709), *Works*, I, 161-236, established the basis of Berkeley's radically empirical philosophy upon which he based his philosophy of science, his proof of the existence of God, and his social theory. The purpose of Berkeley's theory of vision is made quite explicit in his later “popularization,” *The Theory of Vision Vindicated*, the full title of which is *The Theory of Vision or Visual Language shewing the immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity Vindicated and Explained* (1733), *Works*, I, 249-76.

³³ “Passive Obedience,” *op. cit.*, 15.