Berkeley's Religion
Chapter 3: Mysteries*

Kenneth L. Pearce

October 2, 2024

Contents

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*This is a draft chapter circulated by the author for comment.

In the last chapter we saw that Berkeley, his chief allies, and his chief opponents all endorse some form of religious rationalism, the view that religious faith ought to be regulated by reason. This includes Berkeley's opponents on both the left and the right—religious radicals like Locke and Toland, as well as religious traditionalists like Peter Browne.

Religious rationalism, however, sets a philosophical problem for orthodox Christianity: it is extremely difficult to make rational sense of such central Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation. Traditionally, Christians have endorsed the view that, in cases such as these, we must 'believe where we do not understand.' Doctrines that must be believed in this way are called 'mysteries'.[1]

To reconcile the existence of mysteries with religious rationalism, many Christian thinkers adopted a distinction between propositions *contrary to reason* and propositions *above* (but not contrary to) *reason*. Reason, it was thought, requires us to reject propositions contrary to it. However, human reason is also capable of recognizing its own limits, seeing that some questions are beyond its reach, and accepting answers to these questions on faith.

In the previous chapter we saw how Locke, Toland, and other religious radicals worked to limit the range of propositions reason permitted us to accept on faith. In this chapter, we are concerned with an even more serious problem. The strongly individualistic epistemologies and philosophies of language endorsed by Locke and most other early modern philosophers directly entail that it is impossible to believe what one does not understand. A belief, according to this view, just is a complex of ideas, and a sentence is meaningful only if it corresponds to such a complex of ideas in the mind of the speaker. But to have an idea of something just is to understand it. We cannot, therefore believe anything we do not understand. This is the central argument of Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*.

Browne and Berkeley both respond to this argument by means of the same basic strategy: both argue that we can make some kind of cognitive contact with supernatural realities without having ideas of those realities. This kind of cognitive contact does not provide the sort of understanding provided by ideas, so that we still "see through a glass, darkly" (1 Corinthians 13:12), yet it is sufficient to permit genuine belief and to render religious utterances meaningful. However, despite this structural similarity, Browne accuses Berkeley of "giv[ing] up the whole cause of Revelation and Mystery" (Browne 1733, 508), and Berkeley in turn accuses Browne of "causing scandal to good men and triumph to atheists" (TVV, §6). The primary aim of this chapter will be to arrive at a con-

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1. As Toland, Stillingfleet, and other writers of diverse religious persuasions explicitly recognize, this is not the only use of the word 'mystery' in the Christian tradition, and it is not clear that the New Testament *ever* uses the word in this way (*Impartial Account of the Word Mystery* 1691, 4–13; CNM, 88–94; Stillingfleet 1697a, 264–266; Conybeare [1722] 1732, 5–6). In early Christian writings, the term 'mystery' (Greek 'μυστήριον'; Latin 'mysterium') often refers to the sacraments, to religious doctrines that were unknown before the time of Christ, or to symbolic/allegorical interpretations of Biblical narratives. In this chapter, however, we will be concerned solely with the use of 'mystery' for a doctrine that must be believed although it cannot be understood.

textual and philosophical understanding of the disagreement between Berkeley and Browne over the correct response to Toland's argument against mysteries.

It is characteristic of early 18th century latitudinarian defences of mysteries—such as those given by Edward Synge and Samuel Clarke—to focus on the role of the mysteries in the moral and spiritual formation of the laity, and to give wide latitude (hence the name) to what counts as a version of the orthodox doctrine.[2] This contrasts with high church writers—such as Browne—who are more inclined to regard the doctrines as important simply because our assent to them is demanded by legitimate religious authorities, whose authority of course ultimately derives from God. By placing Berkeley's thought on this topic in this context, and especially by a close examination of Berkeley's disagreement with Browne, I will show that in Berkeley's thought the pragmatist tendency of latitudinarianism reaches new extremes: on Berkeley's view, the positive role mysteries (allegedly) play in moral and spiritual formation is the ultimate source of their meaningfulness, truth, and epistemic justification. Yet, the mysteries are genuinely meaningful and true in the same way as non-religious propositions are. Hence, Berkeley does not endorse emotivism or any other form of non-cognitivism about religious utterances. Rather, in Berkeley's hands, the latitudinarian defence of religious mysteries becomes an argument for a pragmatist philosophy of mind and language.

1 Traditional Views

The doctrine of mysteries in Western Christianity has its roots primarily in two short passages of Scripture, Isaiah 7:9 and 1 Corinthians 13:12. The Old Latin text of Isaiah 7:9 reads "unless you believe, you will not understand."[3] In this form, the verse becomes a frequent slogan in the writings of Augustine (see, e.g., Augustine, *Tractates on John*, §36.7; *On the Trinity*, ch. 15.2), and also gives rise to the Anselmian variant, "I do not seek to understand in order to believe; I believe in order to understand" (Anselm, *Proslogion*, ch. 1; cf. Augustine, *Tractates on John*, §40.9).

The view of Augustine and Anselm that belief ought to *precede* understanding clearly implies the possibility of believing where we do not understand. Although both Augustine and Anselm clearly express hope for growth in un-

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2. According to Frederick Beiser (1996, 127–133), this pragmatist tendency already existed in quite a strong form within the proto-latitudinarian Great Tew circle in the early 17th century. For details of the historical background, see ch. **??**, above.

3. "Nisi credideritis nec intellegetis." The Old Latin was translated from the Greek Septuagint, whose translators had used the word 'συνῆτε', which can mean something like 'be established' (more literally 'be thrown together'), but more commonly means 'understand'. The translators of the Old Latin Bible opted for the latter interpretation (see Gryson 1988, 232). This is corrected in the Latin Vulgate (which was translated directly from the Hebrew) and the Latin word 'intellegetis' is replaced with 'permanebitis', to give the sense 'you will not endure'. Most English translations are similar. For instance, the King James Version reads, "If ye will not believe, surely ye shall not be established." That the Augustinian/Anselmian slogan originates in a mistranslation given in the Old Latin is pointed out by Thomas Williams in the notes on his translation of Anselm (see Anselm, *Proslogion*, 81n18).

derstanding, even in this present earthly life, such hope was limited not only by experienced difficulties in understanding such central Christian doctrines as the Trinity and the Incarnation, but also by our second Scripture verse, 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known." As this verse is standardly interpreted, 'now' refers to this present earthly life, and 'then' to the beatific vision received by the blessed souls in heaven. Augustine (*On the Trinity,* chs. 5.1, 15.8–11) and Aquinas (ST, II-IIq1a5) both explicitly connect these in-principle limitations on earthly human cognition with the doctrine of the Trinity.

In the introductory chapters of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas provides a clear statement of what may be regarded as the canonical account, within Western Christianity, of the reason why many of the truths about God are above human reason. Aquinas writes,

> Since, indeed, the principle of all knowledge that the reason perceives about some thing is the understanding of the very substance of that being (for according to Aristotle "what a thing is" is the principle of demonstration) [*Posterior Analytics* II, 3],[4] it is necessary that the way in which we understand the substance of a thing determines the way in which we know what belongs to it. Hence, if the human intellect comprehends the substance of some thing, for example, that of a stone or of a triangle, no intelligible characteristic belonging to that thing surpasses the grasp of the human reason. But this does not happen to us in the case of God. For the human intellect is not able to reach a comprehension of the divine substance through its natural power (SCG, §1.3.3).

Truths pertaining to the divine nature, including the Trinity (§1.3.2), can therefore be classified as 'above reason' since we cannot reach them "through [our] natural power." We can, however, attain such truths by the help of divine grace (SCG, §1.6.1; ST, II-IIq6a1). These truths above reason cannot contradict natural knowledge (SCG, ch. 1.7), but they can augment it. Further, it is to a certain degree both possible and appropriate "for the human reason to exercise itself" about truths that are above its reach. This is because:

> human reason is related to the knowledge of the truth of faith (a truth which can be most evident only to those who see the divine substance) in such a way that it can gather certain likenesses [Latin: 'verisimilitudines'] of it, which are yet not sufficient so that the truth of faith may be comprehended as being understood demonstratively or through itself (§1.8.1).

Aquinas does not explicitly apply his famous doctrine of analogy (see below, §??) to our limited knowledge of truths above reason, but the talk of 'likenesses' suggests an approach that is at least somewhat similar: what limited cognition

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4. Translator's insertion.

we can gain of truths above reason depends on comparisons to finite, sensible things. As long as we are unable to "see the divine substance," however, these likenesses will never allow us to do more than "see through a glass, darkly."

2 Transubstantiation and the Trinity: Tillotson and Stillingfleet

In the late 17th century, the Thomistic distinction between what is above reason and what is contrary to reason was a central theme in debates between Anglicans and Catholics,[5] and was given a great deal of emphasis by two prominent latitudinarian bishops whose writings were well known to Toland, Browne, and Berkeley. These are John Tillotson and Edward Stillingfleet.

In 1684, Tillotson published his anti-Catholic polemic *A Discourse against Transubstantiation*. The work was immediately popular: by the following year, it was already on its fourth edition (Tillotson 1685).[6] Tillotson argues that belief in transubstantiation is epistemically self-defeating. According to this doctrine, "what we see and handle and taste to be *Bread*" is really "the *Body of a man*" and "what we see and taste to be *Wine*" is in fact "*Bloud*" (2). The core of Tillotson's argument is that this doctrine "cannot be true unless our Senses and the Senses of all mankind be deceived about their proper objects; and if this be true and certain then nothing else can be so; for if we be not certain of what we see, we can be certain of nothing" (3).

In fact, according to Tillotson, transubstantiation is peculiarly incapable of being supported by any sort of evidence. Suppose, for instance, that the proponent of transubstantiation alleges that it should be believed because it is taught in the Bible. In that case, Tillotson asks,

> by what clearer evidence or stronger Argument could any man prove to me that such words were in the Bible than I can prove to him that bread and wine after consecration are bread and wine still? He could but appeal to my eyes to prove such words to be in the Bible, and with the same reason and justice might I appeal to several of his senses to prove to him that the bread and wine after consecration are bread and wine still. (38)

Suppose, on the other hand, that the proponent appeals to miracles. A miracle, according to Tillotson, is "*a supernatural effect evident to sense*" (31). However, "if a Miracle were wrought for the proof of [transubstantiation], the very same assurance which any man hath of the truth of the Miracle he hath of the falsehood of the Doctrine, that is, the clear evidence of his Senses" (39).

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5. For an illuminating account of the history of Anglican-Catholic debates in the Exclusion Crisis and the reign of James II, see Tumbleson 1996.

6. This is also the work Hume has in mind in the reference to "Dr. Tillotson's writings" at the beginning of his famous argument against belief in miracles (Hume [1748] 1999, §10). Hume, however, distorts the argument in his summary. See Levine 1988.

Transubstantiation purports to be supported by sensory evidence, yet it tells us to believe contrary to the clearest evidence sense can provide.

Tillotson's argument relies on a particular picture of the epistemology of revealed religion. According to this picture, divine revelation is provided by means of publicly available evidence, namely, certain miracles which bear witness to particular teachers, texts, institutions, and/or traditions. It is this assumption of public evidence that makes Tillotson's argument work: transubstantiation implies the unreliability of the senses even under ideal conditions (no matter how closely you examine the consecrated Host it still looks like bread), but the unreliability of the senses would mean that there is no publicly available evidence of anything, and hence would undermine all revealed religion. This argument could be resisted by someone who based faith on private religious experience, but Tillotson's Catholic opponents are unlikely to go this route since they frequently criticize Protestants for making religion too individualistic. It could also be resisted by fideism, but, as we saw in the last chapter, fideism was not a popular view in the late 17th century.

According to Tillotson, then, the fact that religious faith is arrived at by employing reason to process public evidence places constraints on what sorts of propositions can be believed by faith. In particular, one cannot believe by faith any proposition that would undermine the assumption that processing (what appears to be) public evidence by reason is a way of arriving at truth.

Opponents—Catholics as well as religious radicals—had a ready reply to this argument: it proves too much. As Tillotson notes, Catholic polemicists had already been arguing, prior to this time, that the mystery of transubstantiation stood on the same footing as the mystery of the Trinity (Tillotson 1685, 42–43).[7] Furthermore Tillotson's argument is easily adapted into an argument against the Trinity. Tillotson had pleaded with his Catholic opponents, "*Consider, and shew your selves men.*[8] Do not suffer your selves any longer to be led blindfold, and by an implicit Faith in your Priests, into the belief of non-sense and contradiction" (42). Perhaps with this text in mind, the unitarian Stephen Nye alleged that the doctrine of the Trinity is "*an Errour in counting* or numbring; which, when stood in, is of all others the most brutal, and inexcusable: and *not to discern it, is not to be a Man*" ([Nye] [1687] 1691, 9). According to these opponents— again, on both sides—to accept the doctrine of the Trinity is to accept that what appears to us to be a contradiction may nonetheless be true. If, however, we cannot correctly recognize contradictions, then reason is not a reliable faculty, and so processing (what appears to be) public evidence by reason is not a way of arriving at truth (cf. Leibniz 1710, pd22). Thus the principles Tillotson employs against transubstantiation undermine belief in the Trinity (*Dialogue between a*

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7. It is in fact shortly *after* Tillotson's sermon that this comparison becomes a frequent talking point of Catholic polemicists writing in English (Sirota 2013, 31–36). However, the comparison is a major theme of Antoine Arnauld's *The Perpetuity of the Faith* (Arnauld [1664] 1834). Arnauld is mentioned by Tillotson among the "greatest Wits" of the Catholic Church who have written in defense of transubstantiation (Tillotson 1685, 42).

8. The italicized phrase is a near-quotation from Isaiah 46:8, but the context of that verse has no obvious relevance to the matter at hand.

Catholic and a Protestant 1686; [Nye] [1687] 1691, 45; *Impartial Account of the Word Mystery* 1691, 17).

Tillotson responded to this allegation in a brief sermon (Tillotson 1693). His close friend Edward Stillingfleet responded at much greater length in a series of contributions to this controversy (Stillingfleet 1687, 1691, 1697a). For Stillingfleet, the key principle is that Protestants are willing to accept mysteries above but not contrary to reason, provided they are supported by divine revelation (Stillingfleet 1687, 1:5; 1691, 13).[9] However, the doctrine of transubstantiation is claimed to be contrary to reason. Stillingfleet draws this distinction as follows:

> we own our selves bound to submit in matters of Divine Revelation concerning an Infinite Being, though they be above our Capacity to comprehend them. But in matters of a *finite Nature*, which are far more easie for us to conceive, and which depend upon the Evidence of Sense, we may justly reject any Doctrine which overthrows that Evidence, and is not barely *above our Reason*, but *repugnant* to it (Stillingfleet 1687, 1:5; cf. [Sherlock] 1687, 12–14).

A mystery, as Stillingfleet understands it, is a revealed proposition which we do not conceive clearly enough either to understand *how* it could be true or to prove it false.[10] He sometimes expresses this by saying that we cannot "form a clear and distinct *idea*" of it, or that we lack "a clear, distinct positive Notion" of it (Stillingfleet 1691, 19). However, a mystery is supposed to be a *revealed* proposition, and if we didn't understand anything at all by it then nothing would have been revealed to us.[11] Thus, for Stillingfleet, as for Aquinas, there is a role for reason in making sense of what has been revealed (see 5–6).

In the case of the Trinity,[12] Stillingfleet glosses the revealed proposition as "*three persons being in one Individual Divine Nature*" (Stillingfleet 1687, 24). What Stillingfleet means by this is that, although there are three distinct persons who possess the divine nature, there is only one instance of the divine nature

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9. This was the standard line among Anglican polemicists, especially latitudinarians. See, e.g., Chillingworth 1638, 330, 376–377; Tillotson 1693, 16–19, 33; [Synge] (1693) 1737, Appendix §§7–17.

10. Similarly Chillingworth (1638, 330) says that we are bound to believe "the truth of many Articles of faith *the manner whereof* is obscure" (emphasis added). Also cf. Leibniz 1710, Preliminary Dissertation §56. Clarke ([1705] 1998, 8–9) extends this even to natural theology:

> in all questions concerning the nature and perfections of God (or concerning anything to which the idea of eternity or infinity is joined), though we can indeed demonstrate certain propositions to be true, yet it is impossible for us to comprehend or frame any adequate or complete ideas of the manner how the things so demonstrated can be.

11. According to Tillotson (1693, 17), the doctrine of the Trinity is "so imperfectly revealed as to be in a great measure incomprehensible by Human Reason," but he clearly does not mean that it is not comprehensible at all. This is rather an expression of the traditional view that we "see through a glass, darkly."

12. For an illuminating account of the historical context of Trinitarian disputes in the 1690s, see Sirota 2013.

for them to possess. Stillingfleet gives an explication of this proposition, likely based on Gregory of Nyssa,[13] that proceeds by analogy to the presence of human nature in many human individuals. Even in the case of human beings, according to Stillingfleet, we do not understand "what that is which discriminates the Humane Nature in *John*, from the same Humane Nature in *Peter* and *James*" (Stillingfleet 1687, 27). That is, we do not understand what individuates the particular instances of human nature, given that they are all instances of one and the same (universal) nature. Still, we know that there is some principle of individuation such that for each individual there is a separate instance of human nature. In the case of God, we know from natural theology that there can be only one instance of the divine nature (there is only one God and not many), but it is revealed to us that there are three divine persons. Thus, in the divine case, unlike the human case, the 'communication' of the nature to multiple persons does not involve the divine nature's being instantiated multiple times. We cannot see how this can be so, but we also cannot see how it could be otherwise. Since "the Divine Nature [is] infinite in its Perfection" and therefore not "capable of being bounded, as the common Nature of Man in Individuals is…it must diffuse it self into all the Persons in the same individual manner" (29). The many instances of the one human nature are individuated by their various limitations (e.g., of spatial location), but the divine nature cannot be limited in any way and therefore cannot be individuated as human natures are. Thus, the three persons must be understood to share one individual divine nature, in a manner that is incomprehensible to us yet agreeable to the infinite nature of God insofar as we can comprehend it (see Stillingfleet 1697a, 101–107 *et passim*).

This example is illustrative of Stillingfleet's general approach: revealed mysteries provide information about things human reason should not expect to understand, such as the infinite nature of God. In this, Stillingfleet follows Aquinas. Stillingfleet, however, emphasizes the negative side of this claim, which Aquinas leaves largely implicit: we should *not* endorse 'mysterious' claims about finite things we understand perfectly well. According to Stillingfleet, this includes the sensible bodies involved in the Eucharist. Stillingfleet's position is consistent with the view that the infinite divine nature is somehow present in the Eucharistic elements in a manner incomprehensible to us. However, it is not consistent with the doctrine of transubstantiation, which is explicitly a doctrine about *bodies*.

According to both Tillotson and Stillingfleet, God may reveal to us things that are 'above reason' in the sense that human reason can neither recognize their truth apart from revelation nor understand how they can be so. Such doctrines do not undermine our ordinary epistemic practices, for it is part of these ordinary practices to recognize our limitations. However, according to Tillotson and Stillingfleet, we are right to reject propositions contrary to reason. Tillotson and Stillingfleet argue that these broadly Thomistic principles permit

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13. See, e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *On "Not Three Gods."* For detailed discussion of Gregory's trinitarian theology, with primary focus on this text, see Ayres 2004, ch. 14.

belief in the Trinity but prohibit belief in transubstantiation.

3 Locke and Toland against Mysteries

Among the fundamental principles of Locke's philosophy are the claims that all ideas are derived from sensation and reflection (EHU, §§2.1.1–5) and that all meaningful words signify ideas in the mind of the speaker which, by a conventional association, are then excited in the hearer (§3.2.2).[14] In the section "Of Faith and Reason," Locke points out an obvious but important consequence of these principles for religious belief: since 'traditional' revelation is communicated in words, it must ultimately be reducible to ideas received by sensation and reflection (§4.18.3). For the Christian (and especially for the Protestant), "faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17),[15] but according to Locke one can believe what one hears only if one already has ideas corresponding to the words. Thus, it appears that Locke's basic commitments in epistemology and philosophy of language immediately rule out the possibility of belief in mysteries.

In the *Essay*, Locke does not draw any conclusions concerning specific religious doctrines. However, as we have seen, it was widely held that certain core Christian doctrines were 'mysterious' in precisely the sense Locke rules out.

Locke's next major work, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, generated controversy not so much because of what it said as because of what it omitted. Locke's stated purpose was to identify and defend the central principles that must be believed by every Christian. He identifies only one such principle, that Jesus is the Messiah (Locke [1695] 2002, 101–103, 166–169), making no mention of 'mysterious' doctrines such as the Trinity. Thus, the *Reasonableness* implicitly argues that belief in such doctrines is not necessary for Christians. Further, many readers suspected that the author himself did not believe these doctrines (see, e.g., Edwards 1695, 109–122; B. 1698, 8–9). For those who knew that Locke was the author of the (anonymous) *Reasonableness*,[16] this impression was reinforced by the extreme religious rationalism of Locke's *Essay* (see above, §??).[17] Locke's pointed rejection of Stillingfleet's demand that he express his

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14. Locke recognizes an exception to the latter principle for the case of 'particles' such as 'is' which "signify the *connexion* that the mind gives to *Ideas, or Propositions one with another*" (EHU, §3.7.1). In what follows, this exception can be harmlessly neglected, as Locke himself usually neglects it.

15. Toland uses this verse rhetorically in this connection (CNM, 129).

16. Edwards (1695, 113–115) indicates that (already in 1695) Locke was widely suspected of being the author. Edwards himself expresses doubt about the attribution, but these expressions smack of insincerity.

17. Within Locke's lifetime, John Milner (1700) brought all of Locke's published works— including anonymous writings like the *Reasonableness* and the *Letter concerning Toleration*— together with admirable thoroughness to provide a comprehensive picture of (as Milner's title has it), "Mr. Locke's religion, out of his own writings, and in his own words." Milner makes the case that Locke is, at the very least, a 'fellow traveller' of the Socinians and follows them in rejecting the mysteries. The author of the *Free but Modest Censure* (identified only by the initials 'F. B.') comes to a similar conclusion (B. 1698, 4–16). For a careful scholarly analysis of the complex and equivocal evidence regarding Locke's attitudes to Socinianism

support for "the doctrine of the Trinity, as it hath been received in the Christian church" could again have only strengthened these suspicions (Stillingfleet 1698, 4–5; Locke [1699] 1823, 195–202).

Locke himself carefully avoided drawing out these consequences explicitly. However, they were drawn for him, and given a vigorous defence, in John Toland's *Christianity Not Mysterious*.

Toland's stated aim in this work is to argue (as he puts it in the subtitle) "That there is nothing in the GOSPEL Contrary to REASON, Nor ABOVE it: And that no Christian Doctrine can be properly call'd A MYSTERY." As is hinted here, Toland takes mysteries to be of two kinds, those that are 'contrary to reason' and those that are 'above reason'. A mystery contrary to reason is a proposition made up of contradictory ideas. As Toland recognizes, no major Christian thinker had ever advocated for believing contradictions. However, Toland observes, there are "some who hold, that [Scripture and reason] *may seem directly to clash*; and that tho we cannot reconcile them together, yet that we are bound to acquiesce in the decisions of the former." This position, however, is unacceptable because when it comes to regulating our belief "A *seeming* Contradiction is to us as much as a *real* one" (CNM, 35). We can only rely on how things seem to us, hence to accept seeming contradictions is to abandon reason.[18]

In presenting this argument, Toland makes a clear allusion to Tillotson's argument against transubstantiation. Tillotson had argued that if transubstantiation were true, we would have to accept that our senses may deceive us even under ideal circumstances, and hence we could not trust our senses to inform us of, for instance, what is taught by the Bible or the church. According to Toland, if we cannot trust reason—meaning our own human faculty of reasoning, and not some Platonic ideal—when it tells us that a religious doctrine is a contradiction, then reason may deceive us even under ideal circumstances and we cannot trust it at all (32).

The second variety of 'mystery' is a doctrine that is "*ABOVE, tho not contrary to REASON.*" Toland defines such a mystery as "a thing of its own Nature inconceivable, and not to be judged of by our ordinary Faculties and Ideas" (66).[19] Because one cannot speak intelligibly of what neither the speaker nor the hearer can conceive, Toland often engages in 'semantic ascent' (see Quine 1960, §56) and switches to speaking of mysteries above reason as sentences containing words that purport to stand for inconceivable things, i.e., things of which we have no idea.[20] Thus, Toland asks rhetorically, "Could that Person justly value

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and Trinitarianism in the 1690s, see Marshall 2000.

18. This principle was widely accepted among latitudinarians. See, e.g, Chillingworth 1638, 215; [Synge] (1693) 1737, §1.33; Conybeare (1722) 1732, 27–28. It is also repeated, and enlarged upon, by Collins ([1707] 1709, 32–33).

19. In fact, Toland subdivides mysteries above reason into two classes, of which this is the second. A mystery above reason of the first class is "a thing intelligible of it self, but so cover'd by figurative Words, Types, and Ceremonies, that *Reason* cannot penetrate the Vail, nor see what is under it till it be remov'd" (CNM, 66). This type of mystery will not concern us here.

20. On the slide between mysteries as inconceivable things and mysteries as idea-less words

himself upon being wiser than his Neighbours, who having infallible assurance that something called *Blictri* had a Being in Nature, in the mean time knew not what this *Blictri* was?" (CNM, 128)

In fact, according to Toland, the difference between mysteries above reason and mysteries contrary to reason collapses: "To say, for instance, that *a Ball is white and black at once*, is to say just nothing; for these Colours are so incompatible in the same Subject, as to exclude all Possibility of a real Positive Idea or Conception" (29). If a sentence contains a word standing for no idea, or instructs us to put together incompatible ideas, we cannot conceive what it would be for that sentence to be true, and what we cannot conceive we cannot believe. Thus, according to Toland, knowledge—i.e., the possession of the relevant ideas—is a necessary ingredient of faith, and is needed not merely to make faith *rational* but to make faith *possible*. Mysteries, of either variety, by definition violate this condition and are therefore not possible objects of faith.[21]

In the conclusion of the book, Toland says that he has shown "that. . . nothing *contradictory* or *inconceivable*, however made an *Article of Faith*, can be contained in the *Gospel*, if it be really the Word of God" (170). Toland's position is that *if the Gospel contains mysteries, it is not the Word of God*. This follows from Toland's argument against belief in mysteries together with his doctrine (discussed in §??, above) that the only way to recognize a text as a divine revelation is to show that it follows from our rational conception of God that God would say such a thing. It follows from our rational conception of God that God would not 'reveal' meaningless sounds, but this is precisely what mysteries are.

Locke had made a straightforward application of his general epistemology and philosophy of language to religious matters. Toland had, as Stillingfleet remarked, "take[n] up [Locke's] new way of *Ideas*, as an effectual Battery. . . against the *Mysteries of the Christian Faith*" (Stillingfleet 1697b, 93). The question that remains is, what particular orthodox doctrines, if any, are actually ruled out by Toland's strictures on mysteries?

Toland, like Locke, shies away from framing his polemic as an explicit attack on any particular orthodox doctrines. However, the hints he gives were extremely inflammatory. In the Preface Toland says that he aims to give an intelligible explanation only of "*the Terms and Doctrines of the Gospel*." These terms "*are not the Articles of the East and West, Orthodox or Arian, Protestant or Papist, considered as such. . . but those of Jesus Christ and his Apostles*" (CNM, xiii). Note here that 'Orthodox' (i.e., Nicene, Trinitarian) Christianity is just another of the sectarian divisions that, according to Toland, have polluted the pure doctrine of the Gospel. This perspective is confirmed in the only passage of the book where Toland gives explicit examples of mysteries:

> This famous and admirable Doctrine [of mysteries in religion] is the undoubted Source of all the *Absurdities* that were seriously vented among *Christians*. Without the Pretence of it, we should never hear of *Transubstantiation*, and other ridiculous fables of the Church of

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in both Toland and Berkeley, see Jakapi 2007.

21. On Toland's account of faith and knowledge, see above, §??.

Rome; nor any of the *Eastern Ordures*, almost all receiv'd into this *Western Sink*: Nor should we ever be banter'd with the *Lutheran Impanation*, or the *Ubiquity* it has produced...And tho the *Socinians* disown the practice [of believing mysteries], I am mistaken if either they or the *Arians* can make their notion of a *dignifi'd and Creature-God, capable of Divine Worship*, appear more reasonable than the Extravagancies of other Sects touching the Article of the *Trinity*. (CNM, 26–27)

It is Toland's view that the various doctrines, both orthodox and heterodox, regarding the Eucharist, the divinity of Christ, and the Trinity are indeed mysteries. As such, they cannot be genuine objects of belief nor can they be part of any divine revelation.

If the traditional mysteries are not part of the authentic Christian revelation, then where did they come from? The final chapter of *Christianity Not Mysterious* raises the question, "*When, why, and by whom were MYSTERIES brought into Christianity*" (151). According to Toland, as Christianity became the religion of the dominant political powers in the late Roman Empire, it was increasingly blended with elements of Judaism, Pagan religion, and Greek philosophy, polluting the simplicity of the Gospel. The aim and effect of this was to secure the power of the clergy over the laity (166–169).[22]

Toland expands this argument about the tyrannical political role of mysteries in his 1720 biography of Hypatia of Alexandria (Toland 1720, 101–136).[23] Hypatia, the head of the Platonic philosophical school in Alexandria, was murdered by a rioting mob of Christians in 415 CE. One of the matters on which the ancient sources disagree is the degree of involvement of the archbishop Cyril, who is venerated as a saint in most Christian traditions. In Toland's hand, Cyril becomes the archetype of the tyrannical cleric, skilfully employing mysterious doctrines and ceremonies unknown in the time of Christ to whip up his followers even so far as the murder of a political opponent (see esp. 133–134). Further, the veneration of Cyril and others like him is, according to Toland, a continuing threat to liberty:

Tis no wonder then, that when the epithet *Saint*, which peculiarly belong'd to Piety and Innocence, was thus pompously bestow'd on Vice and Impiety, there shou'd prevail that deluge of Ignorance, Superstition, and Tyranny, which overwhelm'd almost the whole Christian world...By that Antichristian spirit fell Hypatia, to whom the Clergy of her time cou'd never forgive, that she was beautiful yet chaste; farr more learned than themselves, not to be endur'd in the Laity; and in greater credit with the civil Magistrate, whom the Clergy of that time wou'd needs drive or lead as their Pack-asse. (136)

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22. On the political aims and context of CNM, see Beiser 1996, 230–240; Brown 2012, ch. 1.
23. For an analysis of Toland's portrayal of Hypatia, with particular emphasis on gender issues, see Leask 2020.

According to Toland, "none were more remarkable sticklers for the *Homoousion* [i.e., the Nicene doctrine of the Trinity], than Cyril and his adherents" (Toland 1720, 134) and, among the proponents of corrupt and mysterious Christianity, orthodoxy will cover a multitude of sins: even a murderer can be a saint, provided he mouths the correct nonsense words. In Toland's view, this is the real purpose of mysteries: to secure for the keepers of the sacred nonsense absolute control over their followers and the ability to be revered as 'saintly' no matter what atrocities they might commit. As an anonymous author had earlier put it, "*Mystery* makes up the Premises, and *Persecution* the Consequence or Conclusion" (*Impartial Account of the Word Mystery* 1691, 3).

4 Browne's Analogical Theory

As we saw in the previous chapter (§**??**), Peter Browne was among the first Anglican polemicists to respond to Toland. Beginning from his *Letter* against Toland, the defense of religious mysteries was among Browne's most central concerns throughout his career.

The most prominent feature of Browne's writing about mysteries is his dissatisfaction (to put it mildly) with modern accounts of the problem. Browne alleges that "the design of [Toland's] Book is *To strike at the Root and Foundation of all reveal'd Religion*" (LCNM, 94) and openly calls for Toland to be prosecuted for blasphemy (174–175). He says that the universities have been "unhappily poysoned by an *Essay concerning Human Understanding*" whose "Beauties of Style, and Wit, and Language" were "calculated with no small Labour and Artifice for leading youthful and half learned Minds into. . . Infidelity" (Browne 1733, 127–128).[24] According to Browne, all of the evils of Socinianism, Deism, and Arianism can be traced to one root: the rejection of any middle path between literal and metaphorical talk about God (PEL, 22–29, 36–40, 114–115, 261–262; Browne 1733, 33, 98–99, 293–294). Conversely, then, Browne affirms that his own response to Toland is his theory of analogy, a mode of thought and speech in between the literal and the metaphorical (PEL, 2).

Analogy, according to Browne, involves 'substituting' the idea or conception of one thing for another thing of which we "can have no *Direct* and *Proper* Idea, or *Immediate* Conception or Notion at all" (PEL, 107; cf. 474–475; Browne 1733, 4–5, 11, 170–171). Browne's account of the primitive materials of human cognition is even sparser than Locke's: Browne rejects Locke's ideas of reflection (PEL, 64–69, 102–103, 412–414; Browne 1733, 23–29), holding that all ideas are

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24. Browne is no happier with contemporary debates on free will. Samuel Clarke, Browne says,

> had a celebrated Contest with a certain Foreign Antagonist of Name [Leibniz], concerning human Liberty and Freedom. . . And I leave any indifferent Person to judge from the Event, whether, if they had knocked those two learned Metaphysical Heads together, to try which was hardest; they had not struck out as much Light for the Information and Benefit of Mankind, as they have done by that Controversy? (Browne 1733, 314)

derived from the senses and endorsing at full strength the Scholastic maxim, "nihil est in intellectu quod non prius fuit in sensu" ("there is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses"; PEL, 55, 382). Browne does hold that we have a kind of immediate 'consciousness' of our mental operations (PEL, 66; Browne 1733, 242–245). However, this consciousness is not independent of sensory ideas, because we are conscious only of our mind's operation upon its sensory ideas (PEL, 67, 389–390). Thus, Browne insists, "Ideas of *Sensation* [are] the only *Materials* which the active and busie Mind of Man hath to work upon" (147). Although Locke had held that we gain ideas of reflection by observing the operation of the mind on its ideas (EHU, §2.6.1), Browne goes further, arguing that the human being "can have no *Direct* and immediate *Knowledge* of its own Mind but by *Complex Conceptions*, formed from a *Consciousness* of the Operations themselves, and Ideas of Sense taken together" (Browne 1733, 24). The key point here is that for Browne, unlike Locke, sensory ideas are necessary *ingredients* in the 'complex conceptions' whereby we think of our own spirit. For Browne, every 'conception' or 'notion' we have is ultimately built up out of sensory ideas (for further discussion, see Berman 2005, 94–96; Pearce 2020).

Browne further restricts the scope of our ideas by denying that abstraction can play the roles Locke wants it to play (PEL, ch. 2.4). According to Browne, abstraction serves only to *remove* content from an idea.[25] Since all of our ideas are sensory, if we remove the sensory content from them there will be nothing left. Since no sensory idea is a (direct and immediate) idea of an immaterial thing, it follows that abstraction cannot give us ideas of immaterial things (PEL, 196–199; Browne 1733, 106–108).

Browne accepts Locke's view that (subject to a few exceptions) meaningful words immediately signify ideas (EHU, §§3.1.2, 3.2.1–3; Browne 1733, 534–537). He further accepts Locke's view that assent (including religious faith) requires a mental proposition which must have simple ideas as its ultimate constituents (PEL, 419; Browne 1733, 509–512). A proposition is true when it joins or separates signs (i.e., words or ideas) "*as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another*" (EHU, §4.5.2). These mental propositions are also the materials on which reasoning operates (EHU, §4.17.4; Browne 1733, 511). On this basis, Browne accepts Locke's contention that we can have no knowledge (or assent of any kind) without ideas (EHU, §4.3.1; LCNM, 33–34).[26]

As Browne points out, Locke and his followers do not really distinguish between the principle that there is no knowledge *without* ideas and the principle that there is no knowledge *beyond* ideas (LCNM, 33–34; PEL, 407–411; Browne

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25. In other work, I have argued that Locke in fact accepts this view. See Pearce 2019, 82–84.

26. Browne does allow that what he sometimes calls "*Conceptions* and *Complex Notions*" (Browne 1733, 510–511) can fill the various roles of Locke's ideas. However, these conceptions and complex notions are themselves ultimately constructed out of sensory ideas (PEL, 176–179, 388–390, 419), and so appear to be (more or less) the same as what Locke calls 'complex ideas'. Browne uses the term 'idea' only to refer to what Locke calls 'simple ideas of sensation' (63–69).

[1733](), 140–142, 173–175). Locke, and numerous thinkers influenced by him,[27] had held the latter thesis. This, of course, is precisely the central premise of the Locke-Toland argument against religious mysteries: in order to assent to a proposition about a mystery, I have to have an idea of the mystery. But a mystery is (by definition) a thing of which I have no idea. Hence belief in mysteries is impossible.

The impossibility of knowledge beyond ideas follows from the impossibility of knowledge without ideas if—but only if—one endorses the principle Kenneth Winkler has dubbed 'the content assumption' (Winkler [1989](), 39).[28] According to this view, the content of one's thought is fully determined by the idea one has. If this is correct, then the only way to think of a thing is to have an idea that has that thing as (in Browne's terms) its 'direct' object. Browne holds that all ideas are sensory, and that all sensory ideas have material things as their direct objects. Hence, as Browne himself points out, this view will entail that we cannot conceive of any immaterial things ([PEL](), 402).

Browne's theory of analogy is designed to avoid the content assumption and allow us to conceive of things that "differ[]... totaly in Kind from all things whereof we have any direct Idea or immediate consciousness" (Browne [1733](), 247). When an idea is employed analogically, the idea is 'substituted' to stand for an object that is different in kind from the direct object of that idea. This is not the construction of a new idea, but rather a new *use* of the same idea (170–171). According to Browne, we conceive of mysteries by analogically substituting some sensible idea for the mysterious reality.[29] It is for this reason that Browne repeatedly insists that what is mysterious is a *thing*, and not a doctrine, sentence, or proposition (Browne [1733](), 168–170, 199–201, 208–222, 237–238; see Jakapi [2007](), 193–194).[30] According to Browne, there is nothing mysterious about the *doctrine* of the Trinity (for instance). The doctrine is perfectly clear as far as it goes, but neither this nor any other theological doctrine goes so far as to reveal what God is like in Godself since the infinite divine na-

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27. Browne evidently considers it impolite to mention living authors by name (on this practice, see Bricker [2014]()), and he violates this rule only with respect to Toland (Browne [1716](), 7). However, putatively orthodox writers Browne quotes as agreeing with Locke include John Leng (Browne [1733](), 140; quoting Leng [1719] [1730](), 296–297) and John Conybeare (Browne [1733](), 173; quoting Conybeare [1722] [1732](), 7).

28. Winkler argues that Locke does not endorse this assumption. However, Gideon Yaffe ([2004]()) has defended the attribution of the content assumption to Locke. Winkler's argument that Locke did not hold the content assumption depends on an interpretation of Locke's theory of abstraction which I have criticized elsewhere (Pearce [2019]()). The fact that Locke does not distinguish between the impossibility of knowledge without ideas and the impossibility of knowledge beyond ideas is further evidence that Locke endorses the content assumption: given this assumption, these two principles are equivalent.

29. As we will see in §**??**, thinking about God or any other purely spiritual reality, according to Browne, actually involves (at least) two analogical substitutions: first we use analogy to construct a 'complex conception' of some feature of our own minds or of human relations, then we substitute this complex conception for the unknown spiritual reality (see [PEL](), 78–86, 445–446; Browne [1733](), 11, 41–51, 280–285, 296–297, 307–320, 328–329). For further discussion, see Pearce [2020]().

30. As Jakapi ([2007]()) also notes, many of Browne's contemporaries—including Toland and Berkeley—use the term 'mystery' ambiguously in just this respect.

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ture is beyond the grasp of human capacities, even when aided by supernatural revelation (Browne 1733, 30–32).[31]

The introduction of analogy is a modest revision to Locke's account of the structure of the understanding, but one with wide-ranging consequences. In particular, it neatly solves the problem of religious mysteries. On this view, a sentence expressing a religious mystery gets to be meaningful, and becomes a possible object of assent, in precisely the same way as any other sentence: by signifying a mental proposition. Nevertheless, Browne can consistently maintain, we can have no direct ideas of the mysteries. The ideas that make up the mental proposition are being employed analogically (and hence the words in the sentence are also being employed analogically), and so the sentence is not about the direct objects of the ideas but rather about the unknown realities for which the ideas are analogically substituted. The Lockean account of truth is also preserved here: an analogical proposition is true if and only if it is a "*joining or separating of Signs, as the Things signified by them, do agree or disagree one with another*" (EHU, §4.5.2). The 'things signified' here are, however, not the known direct objects of the ideas but the unknown analogical objects.[32]

Browne explicitly applies this theory to Trinitarian theology. According to Browne, it is revealed to us in Scripture that God is one, but also that there are three divine Persons. However, to affirm "that the *Divinity* is *One* & *Three* in the same sence" would indeed be nonsense, as the unitarians allege. It must be, instead, "that the Godhead is *One* & *Three* in *different respects*" (LCNM, 76). Now this, according to Browne, is no contradiction, since we know of perfectly ordinary examples of a thing being one in one respect and three in another. For instance, "*there are three distinct things in a Man*, a *Body*, the *Animal Spirits*, and an *Immaterial Substance*, and yet these *three* are but *one*" (75). Browne understands the doctrine of the Trinity as, at the most basic level, the doctrine that God is three in one respect and one in another respect. As we have observed, this doctrine is, according to Browne, clear as far as it goes. The Trinity, however, remains a mystery precisely because the doctrine does not go very far: "we are not able to conceive, in what *respect* [God] is *one*, and in what respect he is *three*" (76). Thus, in Browne's view, when we speak, as the Thirty-Nine Articles do, of 'three persons' and 'one substance' (art. 1), we substitute our conceptions of *person* (originally referring to human persons) and *substance* (originally referring to material substance, i.e., body) analogically for the unknown respects in which God is, respectively, three and one.

Similarly, the titles of the three Persons ('Father', 'Son', and 'Holy Spirit') are to be understood analogically, as are the relations of 'generation' (or 'beget-

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31. In fact, Browne suspects that even in the afterlife we may be unable to know what God is like in Godself, since God will remain infinite and we will remain finite (Browne 1733, 36–40).

32. Note, however, that such analogical propositions will not satisfy Locke's definition of *knowledge* (EHU, §4.1.2), since examination of the ideas will not allow us to perceive the agreement or disagreement. The definition of *truth* only requires that the ideas are joined or separated as the things signified *in fact* agree or disagree (whether or not we can perceive this). Although Browne accepts Locke's definition of truth, he does not accept Locke's definition of knowledge. For Browne's views on knowledge and belief, see above, §**??**. (I thank Shelley Weinberg for pressing me to clarify this point.)

16

ting') and 'procession' that, according to orthodox theology, obtain among them (PEL, 26–29, 124, 129–130, 302–313; Browne 1733, 4, 33–36, 179–181, 223–228, 492–497).[33]

According to Browne, this does amount to "more than a meer *Nominal Distinction*" (LCNM, 71), as orthodoxy requires, because analogy (unlike metaphor) is rooted in a "*Real* tho' *Unknown* Correspondency and Proportion" (PEL, 142). Since we do not know what the signified object is like in itself, we do not know the precise nature of this 'correspondency', but we know that it exists. (In the case of mysteries, its existence is known only by divine revelation.)

Browne's account relies fundamentally on two claims. First, Browne relies on the claim that the mind has a power of 'analogical substitution', whereby it employs an idea to represent an object that has a "*Real* tho' *Unknown* Correspondency and Proportion" (142) with the direct object of the idea. Second, Browne relies on the claim that such 'correspondencies' exist between (as the title of Browne 1733 has it) 'things divine and supernatural' and 'things natural and human'. If we grant Browne these two claims, it seems that he can successfully solve both the general problem of mysteries and the particular problem of the Trinity, and he can do so while preserving broadly Lockean accounts of belief and truth: beliefs are joinings of ideas, and beliefs are true when the ideas are joined as the things signified are joined. From this perspective, Browne's position seems strong. On the other hand, the centrality Browne accords to analogy as a panacea for our cognitive and religious ills places him in a vulnerable position. By Browne's own admission, if we do not grant his two fundamental claims, not only will his defense of mysteries fail but his philosophy will collapse into Hobbesian materialism (PEL, 402).

5   Berkeley's Pragmatist Theory

At the beginning of the seventh dialogue of Berkeley's *Alciphron*, the freethinking title character presents a variant of the Locke-Toland argument for the impossibility of belief in mysteries. Alciphron promises to demonstrate that among the central doctrines of Christianity are "empty notions, or, to speak more properly,. . . mere forms of speech, which mean nothing, and are of no use to mankind" (Alc, §7.1). According to Alciphron, "Grace is the main point in the Christian dispensation," yet, Alciphron reports, "after all I had read or heard [about grace I] could make nothing of it, having always found whenever I laid aside the word *Grace*, and looked into my own mind, a perfect vacuity or privation of all ideas." He therefore concludes that 'grace' is "nothing. . . but an empty name" (Alc, §7.4; cf. EHU, §3.10.3).

Nevertheless, of course, people think they use the word 'grace' meaningfully. Alciphron diagnoses this error as follows:

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33. According to the standard English version of the Nicene Creed, the Son is "begotten of the Father before all worlds," a doctrine known as the 'eternal generation' of the Son. Similarly, "the Holy Ghost. . . proceedeth from the Father and the Son."

> Men speak of this holy principle [grace] as of something that acts, moves, and determines, *taking their ideas from corporeal things* [emphasis added], from motion and the force or *momentum* of bodies, which being of an obvious and sensible nature they *substitute* [emphasis added] for a thing spiritual and incomprehensible, which is a manifest delusion. (Alc, §7.4)

Alciphron here rejects the use of analogy for conceiving of divine grace as a "manifest delusion." The use of the language of 'substitution' of ideas—which was generally not employed by other proponents of analogy—likely indicates that the view Alciphron dismisses is derived from Browne's *Procedure*.[34]

Alciphron concludes:

> Thus it comes to pass, that a clear sensible idea of what is real produces, or rather is made a pretence for, an imaginary spiritual faith that terminates in no object; a thing impossible! For there can be no assent where there are no ideas: and where there is no assent there can be no faith: and what cannot be, that no man is obliged to. This is as clear as any thing in *Euclid*. (Alc, §7.4)

Alciphron's account of the (meaningless) use of the word 'grace' is in fact inconsistent: he first says that in the use of 'grace' there is "a perfect vacuity or privation of all ideas," then (later in the same paragraph) indicates that ideas of sensible corporeal things are associated with the word 'grace' (§7.4). As a result, when Alciphron concludes that "there can be no assent where there are no ideas," he commits precisely the conflation Browne is constantly criticizing: he fails to distinguish between the claim that assent is impossible where there is a total "privation of all ideas" and the claim that we cannot assent to propositions about things of which we have no (direct and proper) ideas. By means of this conflation, Alciphron concludes that assent to sentences (propositions) about grace is impossible, and therefore such assent cannot be obligatory. Thus, sentences containing 'grace' are "mere forms of speech, which mean nothing, and are of no use to mankind" (§7.1).

Berkeley's understanding of the nature of the freethinkers' argument is very similar to Browne's, but Berkeley does not attack that argument at the same place Browne does. Whereas Browne would want to take seriously Alciphron's claim that when we use the word 'grace' we have in mind ideas of sensible corporeal things which are 'substituted' for the missing idea of grace, Berkeley instead takes seriously Alciphron's claim that when the word 'grace' is laid aside "a perfect vacuity or privation of all ideas" is left behind. Alciphron argues that if there are no ideas there can be no assent, and if there can be no assent then the

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34. Browne certainly seems to have thought that his own theory was in view. See Browne 1733, 541–554. There is room for doubt about how much attention Berkeley paid to Browne's writings (see Fasko 2023), and in §**??**, below, I will argue that *Alciphron* 4 has King, not Browne, in view. However, Berkeley certainly knew about Browne's book, even if he didn't take it very seriously (CGB, 375), and here in *Alciphron* 7 Berkeley has Alciphron use language more characteristic of Browne than King.

form of words is empty and useless. Berkeley's strategy is to argue that, despite the absence of ideas, the word 'grace' *is* useful, hence some form of assent must be possible (and indeed actual). In his emphasis on the practical usefulness of religious language for the production of love and virtue, Berkeley is following previous latitudinarian writers, but he goes farther than these writers in arguing that this practical use is what makes religious language meaningful, regardless of whether the words signify any ideas at all. It is this aspect of Berkeley's view, even more than Berkeley's dismissal of Browne's analogical theory, that provoked Browne's ire.

5.1 Faith in Mysteries

The problem of belief in mysteries was one of the driving forces in Berkeley's philosophy almost from the beginning of his career (see Pearce 2017b, 11–12, *et passim*). Berkeley's earliest intellectual interests, as far as his surviving writings show, were in mathematics and the philosophy thereof. On 19 November 1707, Berkeley read a brief paper entitled "Of Infinites" to the Dublin Philosophical Society (BW, 4:235–239). The paper is concerned with infinitely large and infinitely small quantities in mathematics, and makes no explicit mention of religion. It is shortly after this that Berkeley begins to show interest in problems about religious mysteries. His first detailed discussion of the problem is found in the *Manuscript Introduction*, the first stratum of which was completed before November 1708 (Belfrage 1987a, 20–23).

Belfrage (1985, 116–120) and Berman (1994, 11–17) have hypothesized that Berkeley's concern about Toland's objections to religious mysteries originated in the discussion following his presentation of "Of Infinites" and caused Berkeley to undergo a 'semantic revolution'. Although no documentation of what was discussed at the meeting has so far come to light, this suggestion is circumstantially plausible. The central assumption of "Of Infinites" is that "we ought to use no sign without an idea answering it" (BW, 4:237). Browne was among the officers of the society. As we have seen, Browne holds that, unless this principle is qualified by the introduction of analogy, it becomes the fountainhead of every form of heresy and irreligion. Further, although Berkeley's intent was to apply this principle to mathematical uses of 'infinite' and 'infinity', the notion of God as infinite was central to many accounts of the justification for accepting religious mysteries. It seems likely, then, that Berkeley was apprised (perhaps in unfriendly terms[35]) of the alleged impiety of this Lockean semantic principle.

Berkeley responds, not by qualifying or modifying the principle as Browne

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35. Berman (1994, 18) speculates that Berkeley's notebook entry 465 may reflect his reception at the 1707 meeting:

> I am young, I am an upstart, I am a pretender, I am vain, very well. I shall Endeavour to bear up under the most lessening, vilifying appelations the pride & rage of man can devise. But one thing, I know, I am not guilty of. I do not pin my faith on the sleeve of any great man.

The final sentence quoted here (which is omitted by Berman) may suggest that Berkeley was accused of blindly adhering to Locke.

does, but by rejecting it entirely: words can be meaningful without standing for ideas.

Although Berkeley's earliest surviving sermon, dated some two months after the presentation of "Of Infinites," discusses religious mysteries and their connection to moral motivation, it is not clear that Berkeley has as yet arrived at his pragmatist theory. The sermon discusses St Paul's "empty tho emphatical description" of the joys of heaven as "wt eye hath not seen nor ear heard neither hath it enter'd into the heart of man to conceive" (BW, 7:13; quoting 1 Corinthians 2:9).[36] If there is an abstract idea of *reward* or *good thing* or *pleasure*, then it is fully consistent to hold both that each of the apostle's words stands for an idea and that "we have no *determin'd* idea of the pleasures of Heaven" (7:14, emphasis added). Such an abstract idea would be highly indeterminate, but would be sufficient, on the Lockean view, for the meaningfulness of the words.[37] Furthermore, the weak form of pragmatism found in the sermon (emphasizing the role of mysteries in moral motivation) does not yet provide a response to Toland, nor does it differentiate Berkeley from high church thinkers like Peter Browne and Mary Astell who also emphasized the (alleged) connection between mysteries and moral motivation (see LCNM, 54–55; TCR, §64).

A more radical form of pragmatism first appears in the *Manuscript Introduction*. By this time, Berkeley has firmly rejected abstract ideas (MI, §§6–29). He thus holds that the apostle's words are 'empty' in a stronger sense, conveying to us no idea at all. In fact, Berkeley here explicitly considers and rejects the Lockean analysis of the apostle's words. According to the *Manuscript Introduction*, these words do not "stand for and mark out to our Understandings any Ideas either general or particular," and yet they serve "to make [us] more chearfull and fervent in [our] Duty" (§36).

Berkeley consistently assumes that if words are *useful*, then they are meaningful. He therefore sets out to explain how "Words may be used to good purpose without bringing into the Mind determinate Ideas" (§36). In the particular case of the words 'good things' employed by the apostle, Berkeley argues that we have learned from childhood to exhibit cognitive, practical, and affective responses to these words. Because of this training, when an adult hears these or similar words "divers things do ordinarily ensue" which may include the having of "an Idea of [some] particular good thing" (§37). However, this particular idea is not necessary:

> What is it that Hinders why a Man may not be stirr'd up to diligence and zeal in his Duty by being told he shall have a good Thing for his Reward, tho' at the same time there be excited in his Mind no other Idea than barely those of Sounds or Characters? (§37)

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36. Belfrage (1985, 119; 1986a, 643; 1986b, 319–324) and Berman (1994, 12) both take this passage as evidence that Berkeley has already rejected his earlier Lockean philosophy of language by the time of the sermon.

37. In fact, Locke quotes the verse in question on at least four occasions (EHU, §§2.21.41, 4.18.3; LW, 9:227, 10:257) and doesn't seem to think it causes any special problems for his philosophy of language.

When a child hears that if she cleans her room she'll get a treat, she may well (visually) *picture* an ice cream cone, and be motivated by the associated pleasant anticipation. Such a mental picture would be an idea of a particular treat. This idea, however, is pleasant only because of its learned association with the pleasant *taste* of ice cream. But if this is right, then there is no reason why the mere sound of the words 'good thing' (or 'reward' or 'treat') should not themselves become pleasant, on account of the customary association they have with pleasant things. In this way it is possible for the mind to develop a "Customary Connexion" between a certain form of words "and being dispos'd to obey with chearfulness the Injunctions that accompany it" (MI, §37; cf. Belfrage 1986a, 645–646; 1987b, 46–47).

This, however, is not yet a response to the Toland problem. Toland's objection, recall, argues against the possibility of *belief* in mysteries. To argue that people may respond in a useful way to a form of words is not yet to argue that that form of words may express a belief. People may, after all, respond usefully to inarticulate screams.

According to Belfrage (1986a, 1987b), the *Manuscript Introduction* gets no further than this: it shows how mysterious utterances can be useful, but not how they can be meaningful, true, or expressive of beliefs. More recently, Belfrage (2007, 51) has suggested that Berkeley was dissatisfied with his earlier theory for this reason.

Belfrage is correct that the *Manuscript Introduction* does not provide a carefully worked out solution to the real problem raised by Toland, and dissatisfaction on this point may be part of Berkeley's reason for omitting almost all of the relevant material from the published version.[38] However, the *Manuscript Introduction* does contain the seed of the solution Berkeley advocates some 25 years later, in *Alciphron*. This seed is found in the discussion of propositions.

In Locke's philosophy of language, propositions are of two types, mental and verbal. The verbal proposition is the sentence, and the mental proposition is the mental state expressed by a sentence. Both mental and verbal propositions have subject-predicate structure, according to Locke: in the mental proposition, the subject and predicate are ideas, while in the verbal proposition they are words (EHU, §4.5.2–3).

In the *Manuscript Introduction*, Berkeley includes an analysis of the example sentence (verbal proposition) 'Melampus is an animal'. Now, this sentence could hardly be taken to be a *religious* mystery, yet Berkeley takes it to be a 'mystery' in one perfectly good sense of the word: the word 'animal' in this sentence does not "stand for any Idea at all" (MI, §34, bracketed text omitted), and hence the sentence does not express a Lockean mental proposition. In this sentence, "if [the word 'animal'] be made stand for another [particular animal idea] different from that is marked by the Name *Melampus*, the Proposition is false and includes a Contradiction. And if it be made signify the very same

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38. The entire discussion of 'good things' and 'reward' is reduced to a single rhetorical question in the published text: "May we not, for example, be affected with the promise of a 'good thing', though we have not an idea of what it is?" (PHK, Intro §20). St Paul is not quoted.

Individual that *Melampus* doth, it is a Tautology" (MI, §35). According to Berkeley, every animal idea is an idea of some one particular animal. There is no abstract general idea of animal. Yet the word 'animal' in this sentence cannot signify any particular animal idea. 'Melampus is Fido' is a falsehood and 'Melampus is Melampus' is a tautology, yet 'Melampus is an animal' is neither (see Pearce 2017a, §4; 2017b, 143–144; 2022, §2). Thus, Berkeley concludes, 'animal', in this context, signifies no idea at all.

How, then, does the sentence 'Melampus is an animal' get to be meaningful? How can it be used to express or convey a belief? According to Berkeley, "All that I intend to signify thereby [is] only this. That the particular [creature][39] thing I call Melampus has a right to be called by the Name Animal" (MI, §34).

To signify that Melampus has a right to be called by the name 'animal' cannot here mean to inculcate in one's hearer the belief that Melampus has a right to be called by the name 'animal'. The belief that Melampus is an animal is simpler than the belief that Melampus has a right to be called 'animal'. Signifying that Melampus has a right to be called by the name 'animal' is best understood as inculcating in the hearer the *disposition* to call Melampus by the name 'animal' (see Pearce 2017b, 34). Berkeley's discussion of the proper use of the word 'triangle'—in both the manuscript and published versions—suggests that the definitions of words can be regarded as *rules* governing speakers' dispositions for calling things by those names (MI, §32; PHK, Intro §18).

If this is correct, then the account of the eschatological mystery in the *Manuscript Introduction* is fundamentally unified with the account of ordinary assertions like 'Melampus is an animal'. The belief that a sincere speaker possesses and aims to inculcate in the hearer is some collection of cognitive, practical, and affective dispositions.[40]

The account in *Alciphron* is basically similar, but developed in greater detail and framed more explicitly as a response to Toland. Euphranor's initial thesis statement is as follows:

> words may not be insignificant, although they should not, every time they are used, excite the ideas they signify in our minds, it being sufficient, that we have it in our power to substitute things or ideas for their signs when there is occasion. It seems also to follow, that there may be another use of words, besides that of marking and suggesting distinct ideas, to wit, the influencing our conduct and actions; which may be done either by forming rules for us to act by, or by raising certain passions, dispositions, and emotions in our mind. A discourse, therefore, that directs how to act or excites to the doing or forbearance of an action may, it seems, be useful and significant, although the words whereof it is composed should not bring each a distinct idea into our minds. (Alc, §7.8)

Euphranor here assumes that words *sometimes* excite ideas. However, he argues

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39. Brackets in original.

40. This interpretation of the philosophy of language in MI is defended at greater length in Pearce 2017b, ch. 2.

that the ability of a form of words to produce practical effects is sufficient for that form of words to be "useful *and* significant" (i.e., meaningful), whether or not the words excite ideas on a particular occasion of use.

Near the end of the discussion of language in *Alciphron* VII, Euphranor states his conclusion in a stronger form:

> Thus much, upon the whole, may be said of all signs: that they do not always suggest ideas signified to the mind... that they have other uses besides barely standing for and exhibiting ideas, such as raising proper emotions, producing certain dispositions or habits of the mind, and directing our actions in pursuit of that happiness, which is the ultimate end and design, the primary spring and motive, that sets rational agents at work: that the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather something of an active, operative nature, tending to a conceived good; which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such idea to the mind. (Alc, §7.17 [1732 ed.])

The key here is that whether words are significant must be judged in relation to "the true end of speech," which is practical in nature. The signification of ideas is a tool that may sometimes be employed to achieve these practical ends, but it is not an end in itself, and it is not the only tool in the linguistic toolbox.

Within this framework, words get to be meaningful by their association with certain practical rules. The role of rules becomes explicit in Euphranor's discussion of the role of language in the production of general knowledge:

> the human mind, naturally furnished with the ideas of things particular and concrete, and being designed, not for the bare intuition of ideas, but for action or operation about them, and pursuing her own happiness therein, stands in need of certain general rules or theorems to direct her operations in this pursuit: the supplying which want is the true, original, reasonable end of studying the arts and sciences. Now these rules being general, it follows, that they are not to be obtained by the mere consideration of the original ideas, or particular things, but by the means of marks or signs, which, being so far forth universal, become the immediate instruments and materials of science. (§7.14)

These signs, which make general rules possible, include the words of ordinary language, technical terms of physics such as 'force' (§7.14), as well as "the notation of numbers" and "algebraical symbols" (§7.15). This discussion is introduced by the observation that "Science [i.e., scientific knowledge] and faith agree in this, that they both imply an assent of the mind" (§7.14) and ends by drawing conclusions about "assent, in all its different degrees" (§7.17). The aim

of the entire enterprise of language, belief, knowledge, and inquiry—including Christian theology, Newtonian physics, and mathematics—is the acquisition of general rules that direct us toward practical ends.[41]

To assent to a sentence (that is, to believe it), according to Berkeley, is to be a follower of certain linguistic rules (Pearce 2017b, 141–157). These rules are practical and affective, as well as cognitive. Many of them do not involve ideas at all, and this is the case not only in theology but also in such paradigmatically cognitive domains as mathematics and natural science (Alc, §§7.9–10, 14–17). Thus, according to Euphranor, "There is... a practical faith, or assent, which shows itself in the will and actions of a man, although his understanding may not be furnished with... abstract, precise, distinct ideas" (§7.12).

We see, then, that for Berkeley 'mysteries'—that is, instances of assent to sentences containing words not corresponding to ideas—are everywhere, not just in religion. Further, Berkeley's response here is not to identify some special class of religious utterances that require special treatment, but instead to defend a pragmatist theory of meaning, belief, and truth in general.[42] There remain, however, some specially tricky cases. We proceed now to discuss Berkeley's remarks on some particular mysteries.

5.2 The Mysteries of Free-thinking

As we saw in §??, a major rhetorical trope in Berkeley's corpus is that (so-called) free-thinking is really a "loose, rambling way" of undisciplined intellectual libertinism (DHP, 168), rather than the disciplined freedom to follow reason where it leads. The free-thinkers are fond of criticizing others for unreflective prejudices in favor of traditional religious doctrines, but the free-thinkers' own prejudice against religion prevents them from applying their rules of thought consistently. Thus the free-thinkers inveigh against faith in matters of religion, but pin their faith upon their own free-thinking authorities (Alc, §7.33; cf. Bentley [1713] 1725, 4, 7–9, 13–15). Similarly, the free-thinkers attack the Christian mysteries while swallowing mysteries of their own.

Mysteries accepted by free-thinkers, according to Berkeley, include the doctrine of force in Newtonian mechanics (or Leibnizian dynamics) (Alc, §7.9–10); the doctrine of fluxions in the Newtonian calculus (DFM, §3), the denial of divine providence (Alc, §7.11), and the affirmation of personal identity over time (§7.11). Berkeley himself clearly accepts the Newtonian doctrine of force, though it receives a creative interpretation within his immaterialism (see Downing 1995; Peterschmitt 2003; Pearce 2017b, 91–96). Berkeley has usually been understood as rejecting the doctrine of fluxions (see, e.g., Jesseph 2005, 215–226, *et passim*), though Clare Moriarty (2018) has recently argued that Berkeley's attitude is much more complex. Berkeley's own views on personal identity are unclear (see, e.g., Roberts 2007, ch. 4; Pearce 2017b, 137–138). Divine providence is the most interesting case for our purposes.

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41. For a detailed analysis of Berkeley's understanding of these rules, see Pearce 2017b, ch. 4.

42. For further defense of this claim, see Pearce 2017b.

The notion that the *rejection* of divine providence should amount to a mystery is rather surprising. This is what Berkeley says about the matter:

> EUPHRANOR. . . . it may not be amiss to inquire, whether there be any thing parallel to this Christian faith [in the Trinity] in the minute philosophy. Suppose, a fine gentleman or lady of fashion, who are too much employed to think for themselves, and are only free-thinkers at second-hand, have the advantage of being betimes initiated in the principles of your sect, by conversing with men of depth and genius, who have often declared it to be their opinion, the world is governed either by fate or by chance, it matters not which: will you deny it possible for such persons to yield their assent to either of these propositions?
>
> ALCIPHRON. I will not.
>
> . . .
>
> EUPHRANOR. And yet it is possible, those disciples of the minute philosophy may not dive so deep as to frame any abstract, or precise, or any determinate idea whatsoever, either of fate or of chance. . . And may not this faith or persuasion [that the world is governed by fate or chance] produce real effects, and show itself in the conduct and tenor of their lives, freeing them from the fears of superstition, and giving them a true relish of the world, with a noble indolence or indifference about what comes after[?] (Alc, §7.11 cf. §7.13)

Berkeley assumes that there are three, and only three, possibilities for why history unfolds as it does: either an intelligent agent has a plan for the universe (providence); the universe is directed toward some predetermined end, but not by any intelligent agent (fate); or there simply is no reason why history unfolds as it does (chance). This trilemma was standard in the period (see, e.g., Edwards 1695, 14–20; [Synge] [1693] 1737, §2.27; Clarke [1705] 1998, 43–46).[43] In Berkeley's view, not even "men of depth and genius" could possibly have ideas of fate or chance because such ideas would be abstract. However, Euphranor does not appeal to anti-abstractionism here. Instead, he simply alleges (and Alciphron does not dispute) that some people have accepted the free-thinking denial of divine providence without actually understanding what the alternative to providence would be. Alciphron had previously argued that this rejection of

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43. In place of the fate horn of Berkeley's version of the trilemma, the sources cited have eternity—that is, the hypothesis that the world has always been orderly, with one orderly state causing another. The origin of the trilemma can be traced to Cicero (*De Natura Deorum* 2.34–35), who frames this horn as "necessity of some sort" (2.35). Eternity and fate may be understood as two proposals for what kind of necessity this might be (though neither corresponds to the usual meaning of 'necessity' in metaphysics today). Cicero argues at great length against the 'chance' horn (2.37–67), but does not really provide any argument against the 'necessity' horn. For analysis of Cicero's argument, see Hunter 2009. On the argument's influence in the 17th and 18th centuries, see Schliesser 2020, manuscript. For more on early modern framings of the debate between theism and atheism, and particularly the influence of Cicero, see below, §??.

providence can have salutary effects in teaching us to be motivated by the intrinsic beauty of virtue, rather than by the expectation of reward or punishment (Alc, §3.3). The point here is that the ideas are not actually needed for this project. Instead, faith in the mysteries of free-thinking shows itself in a set of practical, emotional, and ethical attitudes, whether or not there are any ideas at all.

The free-thinkers "have laid it down for a maxim, that the same logic, which obtains in other matters, must be admitted in religion" (§7.11), yet, according to Berkeley, they fail to follow this maxim when they reject Christianity because it requires faith in mysteries, yet have faith in mysteries of their own.

5.3 The Mysteries of Christianity

One of the points that Berkeley presses in *Alciphron* is that the free-thinkers (and, in particular, Toland) hold an inconsistent position regarding the Christian mysteries. In the first place, according to Toland, mysterious doctrines were introduced by the clergy as a strategy for gaining power over the laity (CNM, 163–169; Toland 1720, 133–136).[44] On the other hand, Toland writes that "what I don't conceive can no more give me right Notions of God, or influence my Actions, than a Prayer deliver'd in an unknown Tongue can excite my Devotion" (CNM, 29–30; see 1 Corinthians 14:4–19).[45] If, however, the mysteries were incapable of influencing action, then the clergy would not have been able to use them to gain power. For instance, Toland specifically accuses Cyril of using the *homoousios* to stir up the mob to the murder of Hypatia (Toland 1720, 133–135), but this is to suggest that this (paradigmatically mysterious) word actually has a profound influence on action.

That Toland admits so much explains why Berkeley's character Crito can confidently assert that if we recognize that "faith. . . [is] placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding" then "it will. . . be no difficult matter to conceive and justify the meaning and use of our belief in mysteries" (Alc, §7.13): Berkeley's pragmatism, which holds that the meaning of these utterances just *is* their use, allows us to infer immediately from the fact that these words make a difference to our feelings and actions to the claim that they are meaningful. Toland, however, (inconsistently) admits that they do make such a difference.

If this was all Berkeley had to say in defense of the Christian mysteries, he would win at best a Pyrrhic victory, for this would be to claim that the mysteries are meaningful insofar as they are effective tools of political oppression. Berkeley needs to show that the mysteries of Christianity, despite containing words standing for no ideas, *can* (contrary to Toland) serve to give us *right*

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44. This was a common trope in deistic and other anti-clerical writings. See e.g., *Impartial Account of the Word Mystery* 1691, 3; Tindal (1730) 1732, 214–218.

45. 1 Corinthians 14, to which Toland alludes frequently, was a favorite passage of Protestant polemicists. See, e.g., [Williams] 1685, 24, *et passim*; [Synge] (1693) 1737, §3.60. Clarke apparently endorses Toland's point here: "nothing influences mens *practise*, but what they understand" (Clarke 1730–31, 1:235).

notions of God and influence our actions *toward the good*.

In the fifth dialogue of *Alciphron*, Crito says:

> What is the sum and substance, scope and end of Christ's religion,
> but the love of God and man? To which all other points and duties
> (whether positive or moral)[46] are relative and subordinate, as parts
> or means, as signs, principles, motives or effects. Now I would fain
> know, how it is possible for evil or wickedness of any kind to spring
> from such a source. I will not pretend, there are no evil qualities
> in Christians... But this I affirm, that whatever evil is in us, our
> principles certainly lead to good. (Alc, §5.15)

Toland would in fact agree with this passage, for it is on this basis that he
asserts, "they were no Christians that kill'd HYPATIA" (Toland 1720, 133).
After all, "*slaughters, and fightings, and such like things, are quite foren to
the Christian Institution*" (Toland 1720, 133; quoting Socrates Scholasticus,
Ecclesiastical History, ch. 7.15).[47] Toland blames the death of Hypatia on the
clergy's practice of "substituting precarious Traditions, Scholastic fictions, and
an usurp'd Dominion, to the salutiferous Institution of the holy JESUS" (Toland
1720, 133). What Berkeley needs to show is that the mysteries are in fact part
of the "salutiferous institution" whose aim is not oppression and violence but
rather "the love of God and man."

Berkeley says less about this than one might wish. A great deal seems to be
riding on Crito's concluding suggestion (after the free-thinkers' departure) that
a person who "proceeds to examine, and compare the differing institutions of
religion" should ask:

> which of these is the most sublime and rational in its doctrines,
> most venerable in its mysteries, most useful in its precepts, most
> decent in its worship? Which creates the noblest hopes, and most
> worthy views?... which owes least to human arts or arms? Which
> flatters the senses and gross inclinations of men? Which adorns and
> improves the most excellent part of our nature? Which has been
> propagated in the most wonderful manner? Which has surmounted
> the greatest difficulties, or showed the most disinterested zeal and
> sincerity in its professors?... what savours of the world, and what
> looks like wisdom from above? (Alc, §7.32)

This passage is clearly calling for a *holistic* evaluation of religious claims
(see Pearce 2017b, 167–169). Most of these questions are addressed to at least
some extent at some point in *Alciphron*, but what we do not get is a detailed
argument that the Christian mysteries in particular are actually 'venerable' and
do actually promote "the love of God and man."

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46. Parenthetical phrase added in 1752.

47. On Toland's understanding of, and attitude toward, the moral teaching of the Christian
Gospel, see Jaffro 2012.

With respect to two Christian mysteries, Berkeley does at least suggest the mechanism by which they might be expected to produce salutary moral effects. Regarding the doctrine of the divinity of Christ, Euphranor says:

> may not Christians. . . be allowed [i.e., admitted] to believe the divinity of our Saviour, or that in him God and man make one Person, and be verily persuaded thereof, so far as for such faith or belief to become a real principle of life and conduct? inasmuch as by virtue of such persuasion they submit to his government, believe his doctrine, and practice his precepts. (Alc, §7.11)

Given a prior conception of God, the identification of Christ with God will have an impact on how one receives Christ's teaching, regardless of one's (in)ability to make metaphysical sense of the notion of a person who is at once human and divine. In a similar fashion, Crito says regarding the doctrine of original sin, "the belief thereof may produce in [a person's] mind a salutary sense of his own unworthiness, and the goodness of his Redeemer: from whence may follow good habits, and from them good actions" (§7.13).[48] The doctrine of original sin involves a kind of practical and emotional attitude regarding one's own moral standing in relation to God.

The central Christian mystery—in Berkeley's immediate polemical context and in the broader tradition—is the Trinity. Here, *Alciphron* contains very little that is of any use. Euphranor simply affirms that

> a man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity. . . provided, that this doctrine of a Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier makes proper impressions on his mind, producing therein, love, hope, gratitude, and obedience, and thereby becoming a lively operative principle influencing his life and actions, agreeably to that notion of saving faith which is required in a Christian. (§7.11)

No explanation is given of *how* the doctrine might accomplish these effects, and this is far from obvious.

Berkeley's defense of trinitarian orthodoxy in *Alciphron* appears half-hearted at best. He says that it is possible to believe in the Trinity "if [one] finds it revealed in Holy Scripture, that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are God, and that there is but one God" (§7.11).[49] There is, however, more to the orthodox doctrine than this, and this additional content had been singled out as a target of Toland's ire. This, as previously mentioned, is the *homoousios* of the *Nicene Creed*. When Alciphron raises this question, Crito pointedly refuses to defend either the *homoousios* itself or the conduct of its defenders. Instead, regarding this controversy, Crito says:

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48. Berkeley's pragmatic account of religious mysteries is notably similar to that of William King (1709, §14), and the similarity is particularly striking in the case of original sin. We know Berkeley read this text and, although he had a negative opinion of the sermon on the whole (see CGB, 36), it is one of the likely sources for Berkeley's pragmatism. For more on the pragmatist elements of King's thought, and its probable influence on Berkeley, see Berman 1976, and below, ch. ??.

49. This formulation is derived from the Athanasian Creed, §§15–16.

> To me it seems, that, whatever was the source of those controversies, and howsoever they were managed, wherein human infirmity must be supposed to have had its share, the main end was not, *on either side*, to convey precise positive ideas to the minds of men, by the use of those contested terms, but rather a negative sense, tending to exclude Polytheism on the one hand, and Sabellianism on the other. (Alc, §7.12, emphasis added)

According to Crito, both the Nicene and the Arian faction had the same basic intent and an overblown controversy was generated due to "human infirmity."

Berkeley's primary aim in *Alciphron* VII is the defense of belief in mysteries *in general* against the Locke-Toland argument which purports to show that such belief is impossible. Insofar as this is Berkeley's aim, he can perhaps be excused for providing only a sketch of an argument regarding the question of *which* mysteries we should believe (given that such belief is possible). However, this sketch provides insight into the particular vision of Anglicanism Berkeley is advocating. The conception of orthodoxy embodied in Berkeley's remarks on the Trinity places him firmly in the latitudinarian camp of Synge and Clarke. Appreciating this latitudinarian background can help us to understand how Berkeley saw his pragmatist approach as providing a defense of Anglican orthodoxy.

5.4 Trinitarian Orthodoxy in Berkeley and Other Latitudinarians

The established church's doctrinal standard consisted of the Thirty-Nine Articles together with three ancient creeds which that document incorporates by reference: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the so-called 'Athanasian' Creed.[50] The last of these is so-called because it was at one time believed to have been written by Athanasius of Alexandria. In fact, it is of significantly later date. Its date and authorship were generally considered to be in doubt in the period under discussion.[51] None of these texts uses the word 'mystery'. However, they do include doctrines which Stillingfleet, Toland, Browne, and Berkeley take to be paradigms of religious mysteries—most importantly, the doctrine of the Trinity.

With regard to the Trinity, these doctrinal standards require a great deal of interpretation. The Apostles' Creed is quite vague on the relation of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; the Nicene Creed expresses that relation by the obscure term *homoousios*; and the Athanasian Creed seems rather to glory in paradoxes than to resolve them. The Thirty-Nine Articles (arts. 1–5) summarizes these earlier statements but does not explicate them.

There were, of course, interpretive traditions associated with these texts, but the precise role of tradition in defining orthodoxy was a disputed matter in

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50. One might also think that the Bible is in some sense incorporated by reference in the doctrinal standards. However, people were not usually accused of heresy for misinterpreting the Bible on matters not addressed by the Articles or the creeds.

51. See, e.g., Cudworth 1678, 620; Bennet 1709, 276–278; Clarke 1712, 444–446.

17th and 18th century Anglicanism (Dockrill 1990; Lucci 2018).[52] Recall that latitudinarians are, by definition, committed to the strategy of comprehension, which involves making the bounds of orthodoxy as inclusive as possible in order that more of the populace might freely join themselves to the established church. To this end, Edward Synge developed an account of subscription to creeds aimed at maximizing this latitude. According to Synge, those who attempt to remain within the established church despite rejecting its teachings are guilty of hypocrisy: "where no Assent is inwardly given, none ought to be outwardly professed" (Synge [1715] 1737, §45).[53] However, a person is not rejecting the teachings of the church unless she dissents from what the church has *authoritatively* and *unambiguously* taught. Hence, first, no departure from mere tradition—no matter how extreme—is, for Synge, a departure from orthodoxy. Only the articles formally adopted by church authorities are relevant. Second, the adoption of an alternative interpretation of the articles is not a form of dissent, since the availability of such an interpretation shows that the church has not *unambiguously* condemned the relevant view. Synge expresses this position as follows:

> As far as a Man is at liberty to make Profession of his Faith and Religion in Words of his *own choosing*, he ought always to express his Thoughts in the *clearest* and most *determinate* manner that he can...But where a *certain Form of Words*...is *already settled* and established, and a Man is required, out of Peace and Unity, or in Obedience to lawful Authority, to profess his Assent thereunto...if there be no Sentence or Expression in that Form, but what is fairly capable of such an Interpretation as is in itself true, I see no reason why any honest Man, having this Apprehension of the Matter, may not subscribe or profess his Assent to it...For if the Words of such a Form are *doubtful*, why must I be obliged to understand them in such a Sense as contains *false* Doctrine, if they are fairly reconcileable to that which is true? Or if they are very *general* or of great *Latitude*, what necessity is there why I should *restrain* or *limit* them at all, since the Authority which imposed them, has not thought fit to give or require any Explication or Limitation of them, beyond what is contained in the Words themselves? (§48)

According to Synge, when I assent to the Articles, or to a creed, I assent

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52. Many treatments of latitudinarianism by religious historians have tried to answer the question of whether the latitudinarians were orthodox. For a trenchant critique of this historiographical approach, with extensive citations, see Blosser 2011. The Port-Royal *Logic* had already recognized that importing the historian's own conception of orthodoxy was a recipe for confusion (Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 46–48). As Locke famously remarked, "everyone is orthodox to himself" (Locke [1685] 1993, 390). My question here is, how did these latitudinarians understand 'orthodoxy' and how did they attempt to defend it? This is closely connected with the broader question of how Berkeley and other latitudinarians sought to distinguish themselves from the deists.

53. Synge does support a degree of toleration for those who openly and conscientiously dissent from the established church, though his conception of toleration may perhaps not be so broad as that defended by his son, Edward Synge the younger. See below, ch. ??.

to "all that the Church has *expressed*" and it is "most unreasonable to expect any more from me. For if the Church had required more, why should she not plainly tell me so?" Accordingly, Synge concludes, "as for our *Thirty Nine Articles*, let every Sentence in them be taken in that *Generality* and *Latitude*, with which they who composed them were content. . . to express themselves" (Synge [1715] 1737, §48; cf. [Fowler] 1671, 190–192). To select from among the many possible interpretations of the Articles one particular interpretation which must be believed is to impose a new doctrinal requirement which is not backed by the authority of the church. It is thus Synge's view that no person should be accused of heresy or hypocrisy who sincerely believes *one possible interpretation* of the church's doctrinal standards, regardless of whether that interpretation is traditional or aligns with the intentions of the framers of the creeds.

Synge wrote this account, in 1715, in defense of a theological approach already in use among latitudinarians. One latitudinarian text that was generating considerable controversy at the time was Samuel Clarke's 1712 *Scripture-Doctrine of the Trinity*.[54] Clarke understands the Protestant commitment to individual judgment in religion and the doctrine of *sola scriptura* to imply that, in interpreting God's revelation (which is found in the Bible alone) "men are. . . sincerely to make use of their best Understanding; and, in order thereunto, to take in all the Helps they can find, either from living Instructors or antient Writers: But this, only as a Means to assist and clear up their own Understanding, not to over-rule it" (Clarke 1712, i–ii). Hence, in employing extra-Biblical resources we must "take[e] care to use them, only as Helps and Assistances; not confounding and blending them with the Rule [of faith] itself" (iv).

According to Clarke, the rule of faith is the teaching of Christ and his apostles, and the Scripture is the only ultimately reliable source conveying that teaching to us (iii–v). The aim of any creed or confession is to summarize from Scripture the "plain fundamental Doctrines, which were delivered as of necessity to be known and understood by all Christians whatsoever" (vii). The earliest baptismal creeds, Clarke correctly reports, were quite brief.[55] However, according to Clarke, "As in process of time men grew less pious, and more contentious; so in the several Churches they inlarged their Creed, and Confessions of Faith; and grew more minute, in determining unnecessary controversies" (vii). Nevertheless, despite these human failings, the purpose of creeds and confessions remains the same: to summarize the essential points of belief found in Scripture.

Clarke's crucial and controversial move, in terms of his interpretive methodology, is his claim that the *general* intent of creeds (to summarize the essential points of belief found in Scripture) overrules whatever *specific* intent the original authors may have had with respect to a particular article. Thus:

> *As* in reading a Comment upon any Book whatsoever, he that would

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54. In 1714, a Convocation was held to investigate Clarke for heresy. The investigation was dropped after Clarke promised not to preach or write about the Trinity again (Pfizenmaier 1997, 185–186).

55. For texts and analysis of surviving early Christian baptismal creeds, see Schaff (1931) 2007, 2:11–41.

thence understand the true meaning of the Text, must not barely consider what the words of the Comment may of themselves possibly happen to signify; but how they may be so understood, as to be a consistent Interpretation of the Text they are to explain: *So* in considering all Forms of Humane Composition in matters of Religion, it is not of importance what the words may in themselves possibly most obviously signify. . . but in what Sense they can be consistent Expositions of those Texts of Scripture, which they were intended and professed to interpret. (Clarke 1712, xxii)

In this interpretive exercise, Clarke goes on to claim, it is irrelevant how "they who first put the Article into the Creed. . . might mean and intend it should be. . . understood" (xxiii; cf. 444). The articles of the creed must be interpreted in a way that makes them "consistent Expositions of those Texts of Scripture, which they were intended and professed to interpret" even if this means interpreting particular articles in a way their authors would not approve.

The rationalistic individualism with which Clarke began means that this methodology is ultimately the same as Synge's: the individual, employing reason and Scripture to find the truth, assents to the articles insofar as she can find an interpretation of them that appears to her to be true (see xxv). Clarke indicates that he himself adheres in this way "to the Forms by Law appointed, and to all words of Humane Institution" (xxiv–xxv). However, he gives these texts radically non-standard interpretations, and near the end of the book he suggests revising the Thirty-Nine Articles to remove the requirement of adherence to the Athanasian Creed (446–454)[56] and even shockingly suggests that the use of the *homoousios* in the Nicene Creed was a mistake (470–471), since these are difficult to interpret and have therefore caused scandal to others.[57]

In giving his own account of the Trinity, Clarke rejects Arianism only in a narrow, legalistic sense.[58] That is, he rejects the specific form of words condemned by the Council of Nicaea, "*there was a time when the Son was not*" (279).[59] However, in resolving the central paradox of the Trinity—how three

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56. In 1689, an ecclesiastical commission composed entirely of latitudinarians considered precisely this proposal. The commission ultimately accepted a recommendation from Stillingfleet that the Athansian Creed be retained, but its concluding anathemas softened so as not to damn all those who disliked its formulations. However, the commission's recommendations were never brought to the floor of the Convocation and the Thirty-Nine Articles remained unchanged (Sirota 2013, 38–41).

57. A council held in Constantinople in the year 360 objected to the *homoousios* on essentially the same grounds. Clarke and many of his readers (including Berkeley) would likely have been familiar with the creed promulgated by that council since the text is recorded in Athanasius, *On the Councils,* §30. Traditionally (primarily on the basis of Athansius' narrative) this would have been regarded as one of the many 'Arian' councils of the fourth century, although its creed has little to do with the theology of the historical Arius. For the historical context, see Ayres 2004, 157–166.

58. Thus Zebrowski (1997, 14–18) is quite right that Clarke rejects the defining statement of Arianism, but incorrect to suggest that this ought to have put the accusations of Arianism to rest. On a somewhat broader conception of Arianism—common enough in the history of Christian theology—Clarke's opponents had good reason for levelling the charge.

59. The 'Nicene Creed' in the Anglican prayer book is in fact the Western version of the

Persons may be called 'God', given divine honors, etc., when there is only one God—Clarke employs essentially the Arian strategy:[60] he says that, in the strictest possible sense, the Father alone is God, but it is nevertheless acceptable to apply divine names and honors to the Son and the Holy Spirit in a subordinate or derivative sense (Clarke 1712, 296, 304, 351–364).[61] Clarke insists that his own explication is intelligible, while traditional Trinitarian theology is not (288–289, 349).[62]

Clarke does not hold precisely the Arian proposition that Toland dismissed as unintelligible, namely, the doctrine of "*a dignifi'd and Creature-God, capable of Divine Worship*" (CNM, 27; see above, §3), for he denies that "the *Son* was *made... out of Nothing*" as ordinary creatures are (Clarke 1712, 276). Nevertheless, Browne was justified in describing Clarke's book as "a Body of *Clandestine* Arianism" (PEL, 301): Clarke aims, essentially, to employ the Arian strategy for resolving the Trinitarian paradoxes in a way that nonetheless adheres to the Anglican doctrinal standards, suitably reinterpreted.

Returning now to Berkeley's remarks on the Trinity in *Alciphron* VII in light of this latitudinarian background, we can begin to see what Berkeley is up to. First, Euphranor says that, once we have accepted his use theory of language which does not require words to signify ideas, "it seems to follow, that a man may believe the doctrine of the Trinity, if he finds it revealed in Holy Scripture that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are God, and that there is but one God." This belief does not require "any abstract or distinct ideas of Trinity, substance or personality." What it does require is "that this doctrine of a Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier makes proper impressions on his mind, producing therein, love, hope, gratitude, and obedience, and thereby becomes a lively operative principle influencing his life and actions" (Alc, §7.11). Berkeley insists that "the sum and substance, scope and end of Christ's religion, [is noth-

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Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Old Nicene Creed—the one actually adopted at the Council in 325—includes a concluding anathema against "those who say: 'There was a time when he was not'." For the texts and a brief summary of the history, see Schaff (1931) 2007, 1:24–29. For a detailed scholarly study of this history, see Ayres 2004.

60. By 'Arian' I here refer to the Arian heresy as it was understood in the eighteenth century, that is, the view that the Son is a supernatural being who existed prior to, and participated in, the creation of the world but is not in the strictest sense divine. On the complex relation between this heresy and the theology of the historical Arius, see Ayres 2004, chs. 2–5. For an analysis of the relation between Clarke's view and his Patristic sources, see Pfizenmaier 1997, 135–141. Pfizenmaier argues that Clarke can be classed among the 'homoiousians', who should be distinguished from the actual followers of Arius.

61. Synge ([1693] 1737, §2.22) likewise says, "*I call each Person* [of the Trinity] *God: But I give that Title of God in a more emphatical manner unto the Father than unto the Son or Holy Ghost.*" However, Synge's exposition of this saying hews closer to the tradition than Clarke's, Synge gives a straightforward endorsement of the *homoousios* ("I therefore say, that [the three Persons] are *One in Essence* or Substance"), and Synge does not suggest revising the church's doctrinal standards.

62. Clarke's earlier discussion of the Trinity, in his second Boyle lectures, appears to be more orthodox, citing Athanasius and saying that the Son existed "by eternal and complete Communication of the Divine Essence, and Emanation from [the Father], partaking equally with him of all the Divine Attributes, excepting only that of Self-Origination" (Clarke 1706, 292).

ing] but the love of God and man[,] To which all other points and duties are relative and subordinate" (Alc, §5.15). In making this kind of moral formation the core of Christian religion, Berkeley is in agreement with other latitudinarians, including Synge and Clarke ([Fowler] 1671, 18–19; [Synge] [1693] 1737, §1.42; Clarke 1706, 141, 337–343; 1730–31, 1:235).[63]

If, however, the importance of the doctrine of the Trinity is subordinate to or derivative from its role in producing "the love of God and man," we must take seriously Alciphron's questions: "What are we to think then of the disputes and decisions of the famous Council of *Nice* [*sic*], and so many subsequent Councils? What was the intention of those venerable Fathers the *Homoousians* and the *Homoiousians*? Why did they disturb themselves and the world with hard words and subtle controversies?" (Alc, §7.12). It is already not perfectly clear what the (allegedly) Biblical doctrine that each of the Three is God and yet there is only one God has to do with "the love of God and man." It is far more doubtful that the moral ends at which Christianity (according to Berkeley) aims should be promoted by the introduction of the technical vocabulary of 'person' and 'substance' (in art. 1 of the Thirty-Nine Articles and in the English translation of the Athanasian Creed) or 'homoousios' (in the Nicene Creed). Indeed, insofar as these "hard words" caused ugly controversies and divisions in which, as Berkeley's Crito admits, "human infirmity must be supposed to have had its share" (§7.12), it appears that these terms have just the opposite effect, causing division and hatred (Toland 1720, 133–135).

The response Berkeley's Crito gives to this is that "the main end was not, on either side [of the Arian controversy], to convey precise positive ideas to the minds of men, by the use of those contested terms, but rather a negative sense, tending to exclude Polytheism on the one hand, and Sabellianism on the other." Because this is all that is intended, it is a mistake to attempt "the explication of mysteries in divinity" (Alc, §7.12). Keeping in mind the impossibility of achieving ideas of the mysteries, together with the practical, moral aim of religion and religious language, we can see that "one that takes his notions of faith, opinion, and assent from common sense, and common use, and has maturely weighed the nature of signs and language, will not be so apt to controvert the wording of a mystery, or to break the peace of the church, for the sake of retaining or rejecting a term" (Alc, §7.13; cf. [Synge] [1693] 1737, §1.41).

The latitudinarians sought to combine a basically moralistic conception of religion with a defense of the traditional Anglican doctrinal formulas. In pursuit of the strategy of comprehension, they endorsed a minimalist approach to those formulas, allowing for non-traditional interpretations. However, most of these latitudinarians had still assumed that the words in the formula must correspond to ideas in the mind of each person who endorsed them. Synge, for instance, emphasizes that the standards of propriety of language often leave open several possibilities for what a word might stand for in a particular context. According to Synge, we can, for the sake of peace and unity, assent to a form of words

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63. For discussion of this aspect of Clarke's theology, see Pfizenmaier 1997, 66–71.

provided we sincerely hold one of the many beliefs it can permissibly be used to express. It is, however, quite puzzling why the church should require assent to a particular form of words if there is no requirement that those words be used to express a particular belief. How could this possibly relate to the moral ends of religion?

Berkeley's use theory of language provides an answer to this question. In Berkeley's view, *the words themselves* employed by the religious community serve to produce "love, hope, gratitude, and obedience" and other morally relevant beliefs, emotions, and actions, without the need for any kind of cognitive mediation (Alc, §7.11).

The deeper problem for Berkeley is, again, why we should believe that Trinitarian language would have this effect. Here, I think, Berkeley must lean heavily on his claim that a person may assent to these statements "if he finds [them] revealed in Holy Scripture" (§7.11). Berkeley takes extremely seriously the notion that the Scripture provides divine guidance to lead us to virtue, including the structuring of religious language in a morally beneficial way, and he has already defended the status of Scripture as a divine revelation extensively in earlier portions of *Alciphron* (see Jakapi 2002, 2010). Hence, even if the moral relevance of the revealed doctrine of the Trinity is not perfectly clear to us, it is nevertheless (according to Berkeley) part of what God has seen fit to reveal, and therefore must be assumed to be relevant to the ends at which religion aims.

Recognizing this feature of Berkeley's view will also enable us to respond to an objection against my use-theoretic interpretation raised by Keota Fields (2021).[64] According to ideational theories of meaning, such as Locke's, meanings are objective and pre-exist any convention. The role of convention is simply to link words to these meanings. As Fields correctly emphasizes, use theories, such as the one I attribute to Berkeley, hold that meaning is *constituted* by the linguistic conventions governing the use of words. There is no meaning or truth prior to these conventions. Fields complains that this would take away the status of revealed truth as universal, necessary, and objective, so that God would be limited by human conventions.

What Fields fails to recognize is that, for Berkeley, a great deal of speech is aimed at the *reform* of linguistic conventions. Thus, in the *Theory of Vision Vindicated*, Berkeley writes,

> The work of science and speculation is to unravel our prejudices and mistakes, untwisting the closest connexions, distinguishing things that are different, instead of confused and perplexed, giving us distinct views, gradually correcting our judgment, and reducing it to a philosophical exactness. And, as this is the work of time, and done by degrees, it is extremely difficult, if at all possible, to escape the snares of popular language, and the being betrayed thereby to say things strictly speaking neither true nor consistent. . . For, language

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64. Fields' excellent paper also raises a number of other important objections to my interpretation, as well as developing a very interesting alternative reading. However, this is not the place to respond to all of these objections.

> being accommodated to the prænotions of men and use of life, it is
> difficult to express therein the precise truth of things, which is so
> distant from their use, and so contrary to our prænotions. (TVV,
> §35)

Thus, 'science and speculation', according to Berkeley, aims at a kind of linguistic and conceptual reform, and it is clear that this includes Berkeley's own philosophical works (see, for instance, the discussion of causation in PHK, §§51–52, 65). I maintain that this likewise includes the revealed divine speech of Scripture. God is not bound or limited by human convention, since part of what God is doing in making revelation is *reforming* those conventions. The Bible aims to constitute a new community, bound by new conventions, aiming at our moral and spiritual good.

Does this allow the truth of Scripture to be universal, objective, and necessary? First, Berkeley takes the commands of Scripture to be addressed universally to all human beings. Of course, we are not all required to speak the Biblical languages, but the kind of reform of our form of life, including our use of words, advocated in Scripture is for everyone. Second, Berkeley takes the moral and spiritual values at which the Scripture aims to be the objectively correct ones. Finally, just as Fields says, Berkeley maintains that, necessarily, what is spoken by God is true (and, I would add, also *good* and *right*). But none of these points undermine my claim that, for Berkeley, the kind of fit with reality required for truth is pragmatic in nature. After all, "it [is]…the design of Nature and Providence, that the end of speculation be practice, or the improvement and regulation of our lives and actions" (DHP, 167).

Thus far regarding the Biblical revelation. How, though, are we to understand the post-Biblical formulations of Trinitarian doctrine, with their technical vocabulary? Here the essential claim is that these formulas aim "to exclude Polytheism on the one hand, and Sabellianism on the other" (Alc, §7.12). Berkeley understands the creeds and councils as a kind of legislation for the regimentation of theological language in a manner consistent with the underlying Biblical revelation. In other words, how do we talk about the Father as God, the Son as God, and the Holy Spirit as God without implying that there are three gods? For the communal life of the Church, and its growth together in love and virtue, a common language of this sort is needed, and such a language was provided by the Councils. From Berkeley's Protestant perspective, it is perfectly orthodox to deny that such extra-Biblical language is *uniquely* correct, that it is the *only possible* linguistic expression of Trinitarianism. Nevertheless, when we understand that the aim of these statements is to regiment our language in a way that allows for a shared religious discourse that promotes love and virtue and preserves the Biblical revelation, then we "will not be so apt to controvert the wording of a mystery, or to break the peace of the church, for the sake of retaining or rejecting a term" (§7.13). The role these words and phrases play in the communal life of the church helps to constitute their meaning, and so the very fact that these are the accepted formulas gives us reason to accept them. Those who make these formulas a cause of dissension have mistaken their true

aim, purpose, and meaning.

Berkeley does not bother to dispute Toland's claim that Cyril and other purportedly orthodox Fathers of the early church fell into this trap. However, he hastens to add that Toland and other religious radicals who reject the traditional Trinitarian language are falling into the same trap, employing these terms to generate strife and division rather than employing them to promote "the love of God and man."

6   Browne's Critique of Berkeley on Mysteries

At the beginning of the final chapter of *Divine Analogy*, Browne reports that "JUST as this Treatise was finished and sent away to the Press, [he] was very accidentaly surprised with a threatning Appearance of a powerful Attack upon the Doctrine of Divine Analogy, from an anonymous Author under the Disguise of a Minute Philosopher" (Browne 1733, 374). The reference is, of course, to Berkeley's *Alciphron*. This added eighth chapter, clearly written in haste, amounts to some 180 pages, or nearly one third of Browne's book. Browne trains the majority of his fire on the account of the divine attributes in *Alciphron* 4, which will be discussed in the next chapter. However, he also offers a substantive critique of Berkeley's treatment of mysteries.

Browne accurately ascribes to Berkeley the view, "*That Words may be vital, active, ruling Principles; tho' they have no clear and distinct, or determinate Idea or Conception annexed to them*; Nay, *Tho'* in some Instances *It is as impossible to affix any such Idea to them*, as if they were altogether inarticulate." Browne argues that "this [is a] dangerous Position directly destructive of all Religion" (377).

Browne gives the following account of the function of words:

> Words are *Signs*; and if so, then they must be Signs of something besides themselves: They are external, sensible, instituted Signs of Ideas[,] Conceptions or complex Notions in our Mind; which not being *Immediately* communicable, cannot be made known to others without some such Indications. . . because of the vast variety of such Ideas and Conceptions, they could not be *Clearly* and *Distinctly* communicated if those Words were not *Various* and *Articulate*. Accordingly unless some Idea or Conception or Notion in the Mind is annexed to each of these Signs, it hath lost its Use and can have no *Signification*. Take away these from the Words and they are no longer *Signs*; the whole Intent and Purpose of human Language is intirely subverted and destroyed; we should converse after the Manner of Brutes: And upon this Author's Principle, if we *Brayed* to one another, or *Bellowed*, or *Chattered*; it might as well have answered all the Ends and Exigences of human Life and Religion. (535)

Browne's understanding of the function of words and other signs is standard in the period (see, e.g., Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 74–75; EHU, §§3.1.1–2),

and in fact Berkeley has his character Alciphron remark that a view of this sort "is the opinion of all thinking men" (Alc, §7.7). Thus, according to Browne, Berkeley has no account of the meaningfulness (significance) of words.

The problem runs deeper for, as Browne points out, "without some [ideas or conceptions] affixed to the Words we make use of, we can never form a *Mental* Proposition answering to the *Verbal*." This is extremely problematic since, according to Browne, mental propositions are the items on which reasoning operates (Browne 1733, 511). This is, again, a standard view (see, e.g., Arnauld and Nicole [1662] 1996, 135–136; EHU, §4.17.2).[65] Further, according to Browne, the "true End and Use of Reason, is to acquire and impart a Perception of the Agreements and Disagreements of our Ideas[,] Conceptions and Notions" (Browne 1733, 538; cf. EHU, §4.2.2). These "Agreements and Disagreements" just are mental propositions (EHU, §§4.5.2–3). As I've argued elsewhere (Pearce 2022), Browne's interpretation of Berkeley here is correct: Berkeley rejects the mental proposition entirely, and therefore stands in need of a new account of the phenomena it was meant to explain.[66]

Berkeley in fact says a great deal about what assent might be without a mental proposition, but all of it rests on his claim that:

> the true end of speech, reason, science, faith, assent, in all its different degrees, is not merely, or principally, or always the imparting or acquiring of ideas, but rather something of an active, operative nature, tending to a conceived good; which may sometimes be obtained, not only although the ideas marked are not offered to the mind, but even although there should be no possibility of offering or exhibiting any such idea to the mind. (Alc, §7.17; cf. PHK, Intro §20)

Regarding this passage, Browne writes, "Surely more Confusion and Absurdity could not possibly have been crowded into the Compass of one short Period" (Browne 1733, 537).

In unravelling this confusion, Browne does not deny that what is needed is an account of how language serves "the Ends and Exigences of human Life and Religion" (535). Instead, Browne insists,

> It is by Means of those clear and distinct Ideas or Conceptions annexed to the Terms. . . that they are rendered in any Degree usefully conceivable and intelligible to an human Mind; that they are made the Objects of our Knowledge, Faith, or Opinion; that we can discourse and reason upon them, so as to come to Resolution and form

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65. Arnauld and Nicole are not always careful or explicit about the distinction between mental and verbal propositions (and they do not explicitly introduce any terminological distinction), but the propositions discussed in the passage cited are said to have ideas as their subjects and attributes, and therefore must be mental propositions. Similarly, in the section cited from Locke, the phrase 'mental proposition' is not used, but Locke speaks of connections of ideas which, according to Locke's theory, is precisely what mental propositions are.

66. For detailed discussion of Berkeley's attempts to solve the problems caused by the rejection of the mental proposition, see Pearce 2017b, ch. 8.

Conclusions concerning them with undoubted and determinate Certainty; and that Words thus applyed to things supernatural with those clear Ideas and Conceptions, become *Active vital and ruling Principles* for regulating and influencing the Faith and Practice of Mankind. (Browne 1733, 532–533).

The core disagreement between Berkeley and Browne is this: Browne affirms, and Berkeley denies, that the influence of words on our feelings, actions, and character must be mediated by some cognitive process (see 537–540). This philosophical disagreement is closely linked to their religious disagreement about the standards of orthodoxy. Browne and Berkeley agree that Christian faith is ultimately concerned with "producing holy lives, rather than subtle theories" (Alc, §7.13). However if, as Browne holds, the words that express religious doctrines produce holy lives *by* producing certain complexes of ideas in the understanding, which in turn affect feelings, actions, and character, then it is crucial that the words produce the correct complexes of ideas, in order that they might have the correct practical impact. As a result, the proper interpretation of religious doctrines is of great importance for Browne and the kind of latitude favored by Clarke, Synge, Berkeley, and others is not to be allowed.

On the other hand if, as Berkeley holds, words can produce their effects directly, without cognitive mediation, then the kind of theological dispute about the interpretation of Trinitarian language in which Clarke, Browne, and many others are engaged is of little importance. As Berkeley's Crito puts it: "If the moment of opinions had been by some litigious divines made the measure of their zeal, it might have spared much trouble both to themselves and others" (§7.13). These disputes are of little moment because it is neither possible nor necessary "to beget nice abstracted ideas of mysteries in the minds of common Christians" (§7.12), and "the Christian religion [must be] considered as an institution fitted to ordinary minds, rather than to the nicer talents, whether improved or puzzled, of speculative men" (§7.13). The central issue, for Berkeley, is whether we are succeeding in regimenting religious language in a way that makes it productive of "the love of God and man" (§5.15).

Browne raises two serious objections to this view. Browne's first objection is that Berkeleian faith has "Words only for its Object" and is therefore "no other than believing certain Sounds and Syllables. . . your believing in God would be very useful; tho' upon his Scheme it may be no more than Faith in a Monosyllable" (Browne 1733, 539). The consequence of this, according to Browne, is "to sap the very Foundation of Religion. . . And to resolve it all at last into nothing more than a blind implicit Faith, and an empty Senceless Sound of Syllables without any real Meaning[,] Use or Signification" (549). Although Browne's remarks could be clearer, his central point here seems to be that even if Berkeley can give some kind of pragmatic analysis of what it is to assent to a sentence in the absence of ideas, such assent would not really amount to *taking the world to be a certain way*, and thus Berkeley cannot secure the result that (e.g.) the doctrine of the Trinity is descriptive of a really existing supernatural reality. This, however, is a general objection to Berkeley's philosophy of language, and I have

addressed it at some length elsewhere (Pearce 2017b, ch. 8). In Berkeley's view, talk about God is every bit as 'descriptive' as talk about Socrates, but neither God-talk nor Socrates-talk involves the kind of mapping of words to ideas to realities that features in (e.g.) Locke's theory of language.[67]

Browne's second objection has to do with the process whereby religious language influences feelings and actions. Browne writes:

> Surely if there be any common Sence remaining it will inform us, that it is some Idea or Conception or Notion in the Mind, affixed to the Word or excited by it, which gives it all its *Significancy*[,] *Life* and *Activity*; and which renders it a *Ruling Principle*, as he calls it [Alc, §7.14], for the Conduct of Men's Faith and Practice. . . where [people] have [no ideas] annexed to [words] or excited by them, they are downright Nonsense; and of no real Influence, Use, or Signification. But if it were true, as this Author asserts, that Words without any Ideas or Conceptions belonging to them could realy affect and move us; such Emotions would be merely *Mechanical*: At Best Men must be affected as mere *Animals* only; they would be moved when there was nothing but Wind or Sound to move them; they must be wrought upon and disposed without any Concurrence of Thinking or Reason; and they would be intirely under the Guidance and Direction of Tones and Accents of the Voice, without any *Rational*, *Moral*, or *Religious* Influence and Meaning. (Browne 1733, 536–537)

Browne's point here is that if, as Berkeley claims, words can influence feeling and action *directly*, without the mediation of any cognitive process, then the resultant actions cannot be seen as the products of rational agency and hence are not morally evaluable. Thus, the influence of such processes would be "merely *Mechanical*" rather than "*Rational*, *Moral*, or *Religious*." The congregant's response to the words of the Nicene Creed would be not much different from an involuntary response to a posthypnotic suggestion.

Browne's concerns could only have been heightened if he had been familiar with Berkeley's account of belief in the heavenly reward in the earlier unpublished works (see above, §5.1). That account is, as David Berman (1994, 162) points out, not much different from Pavlovian conditioning: it is merely association, due to repeated experience, between certain words and certain pleasurable outcomes that drives the response.

Berkeley studiously avoids questions about human free will. Immediately following the discussion of the philosophy of language in *Alciphron*, the free-thinker raises one final objection: that religion is incoherent because it presupposes that human beings are moral agents with free will, and this is false. Berkeley's reply is deflationary: he simply insists that we are aware of our individual actions being free and we praise or blame ourselves for them. He gives no accounts of the nature of this purported freedom (Alc, §§7.19–23). Hence, Berkeley has no

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67. For more on Berkeley's univocal approach to God-talk, see below, §§**??** and **??**.

account of what would be required for our response to religious words to be free, responsible, and morally evaluable.

Having said this, however, it seems that Berkeley does have an answer to Browne's objection available. Words, for Berkeley, are themselves merely ideas conveyed through the senses. Ideas are perfectly passive (PHK, §25; Alc, §7.8). As a result, these words cannot literally *cause* the hearer to respond in any particular way. Only minds can be causes, so the hearer's response must be caused either by the hearer or by another mind. Thus, we must insist that, on Berkeley's view, responding to words is genuinely an action of the hearer, despite the lack of cognitive mediation. It is for this reason that Berkeley has Crito say that faith is "placed in the will and affections rather than in the understanding" (Alc, §7.13). Contrary to Browne, Berkeley is not committed to the claim that "all faith... terminate[s] in the Ear" (Browne 1733, 539). Rather, as Berkeley tells Samuel Johnson, it is his view that "words... as often terminate in the will as in the understanding" (CGB, 319).[68] Although, according to Berkeley, the impact of words may bypass the understanding, they do not bypass the will, and for this reason the hearer may exercise genuine agency, and not just an involuntary reflex, in response to what she hears. Nevertheless, the response is not simply random. It is the fact that hearers respond to words in predictable ways that makes language possible, and this is also how the mysteries of religion can serve to shape lives of virtue.

7 Conclusion

In Berkeley's immediate context, there was wide agreement that certain traditional Christian doctrines—most notably the Trinity—purport to refer to realities of which we can have no ideas. The defenders of the established church, including both latitudinarians and high church writers, generally argued that in these cases we must in some sense 'believe what we cannot understand'. However, standard views in the theory of mind and language during this period rendered such belief impossible. On this basis, Toland argued that Christianity could not be endorsed unless it could somehow be rendered unmysterious. Browne responded to this problem by advocating a modification to the standard picture of mind and language. Berkeley responded by advocating its total rejection and its replacement with a pragmatist theory that identifies meaning with use.

According to Toland, the mysteries of religion amount to nothing but pernicious nonsense. According to Bertil Belfgrage, the early Berkeley (of the *Manuscript Introduction*) regarded the mysteries of religion as *useful* nonsense.[69]

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68. Compare Clarke ([1708] 2011, 275): "It is not *Understanding*, but *Will*, that makes a Man capable of religion."

69. Williford (2003, 291) accuses Belfrage (1986a; 1987b, 46–50) of making Berkeley's religious mysteries into useful nonsense. In a later paper, Belfrage (2007, 44–47) admits that his interpretation does this. However, he holds that Berkeley was dissatisfied with this (unpublished) view for precisely this reason and subsequently sought a better solution to the problem (51).

There is something right about this interpretation. Berkeley and Toland agree that 'mysterious' religious utterances play a role in the construction of certain social and political structures. They disagree in that Toland regards these structures as pernicious while Berkeley regards them as beneficial. This disagreement regarding the social role of religion is an issue to which we shall return in chapters **??** and **??**.

Berkeley and Toland further agree that these mysterious utterances do not meet Locke's criterion of meaningfulness and hence are, by Locke's standards, nonsense. However, Belfrage is mistaken in supposing that these utterances lack meaning by Berkeley's own standards, even in the *Manuscript Introduction*. The core of Berkeley's response is, rather, his claim that the role words play in guiding feeling, thought, and action in order to structure our social world is sufficient for meaningfulness.

Here and in previous work (Pearce 2017b, 2022) I have been attributing to Berkeley a use theory of language with striking similarities to the later Wittgenstein. The examination of Berkeley's context undertaken in this chapter shows why there is no anachronism here: the proto-Wittgensteinian theory is a very natural solution to a problem Berkeley inherited from other latitudinarians like Synge and Clarke. Synge and Clarke regarded confessions and creeds fundamentally as regulating the community's *speech* in a way that nevertheless allowed for a great deal of diversity in *thought*. Further, they regarded the moral formation of ordinary folks as the primary aim of religion. The problem this leaves is: how can this kind of regulation of religious speech play any role in the production of virtue? The proto-Wittgensteinian answer is both radical and natural: a language is a form of life, and these religious forms of speech get their meaning not from ideas they purport to signify but from the role they play in structuring this form of life.

That this is Berkeley's core strategy certainly explains Browne's exasperation. Browne agrees with Berkeley and Toland that the mysteries are important because of their role in shaping individual character and action as well as broader social and political structures. He further agrees with Berkeley, against Toland, that these effects are beneficial and traditional religion must for this reason be defended. However, Browne insists that these beneficial effects are the product of the *beliefs expressed by* the traditional creedal formulas, not the words and phrases themselves. Browne assumes that belief must be understood in roughly the way that Locke (following a great deal of earlier tradition) understood it: a subject idea and a predicate idea must be put together into a sort of 'sentence-shaped' mental state, the mental proposition. Without this, the words do not express beliefs and therefore do not provide a basis for rational moral agency.

In this dispute between Berkeley and Browne, each sees the other as making a disastrous concession to Toland. Berkeley concedes to Toland that, in contemplating religious mysteries, if one lays aside the words one will find "a perfect vacuity or privation of all ideas" (Alc, §7.4). Browne concedes to Toland that "unless some Idea or Conception or Notion in the Mind is annexed to each [word], it hath lost its Use and can have no Signification" (Browne 1733, 535). Taken together, these two concessions give Toland everything he needs

for his argument against mysteries. In this context, Browne's accusation that Berkeley "gives up the whole Cause of Revelation and Mystery" (Browne 1733, 508) makes perfect sense, as does Berkeley's counter-accusation that Browne's account gives "triumph to atheists" (TVV, §6).

At a deeper level, the dispute between Berkeley and Browne reveals a division between high church and latitudinarian perspectives on the nature and purpose of religion. For Browne the high churchman, orthodoxy (right belief) comes first and positive moral, social, and political effects follow after. For Berkeley, religion is primarily an ethical, social, and political phenomenon and is to be analysed in these terms: "the sum and substance, scope and end of Christ's religion, [is nothing] but the love of God and man[.] To which all other points... are relative and subordinate" (Alc, §5.15). In this, Berkeley is at one with other latitudinarians, such as Clarke and Synge. Berkeley, however, goes a step farther. Clarke had argued that, in understanding a creed, one must interpret it in such a way as to make it a coherent interpretation of the Scripture. Berkeley argues that to understand any form of (Christian) religious discourse, including the Scripture itself, is to understand how that discourse serves to promote "the love of God and man." Even within this framework, there may be limits to our ability to understand revealed mysteries such as the Trinity, but this understanding of the nature and purpose of Christianity provides, for Berkeley, significant normative constraints on the use of the language of the Scripture and the creeds.

It is tempting to regard this as involving emotivism or some other form of anti-realism about religion. Browne seems to interpret Berkeley in this way. This, however, is a mistake because this analysis of religious language is of a piece with Berkeley's broader philosophy of language, which takes meaningfulness to arise from the practical use of words in a public social practice. Religion, for Berkeley, is such a practice but, Berkeley is at pains to emphasize, in this it is just like such 'cognitive' linguistic practices as Newtonian physics. Thus, one may say that latitudinarianism exhibits inchoate pragmatist tendencies which, in Berkeley's hands, are for the first time developed into a pragmatist philosophy of mind and language.

Abbreviations

Alc Berkeley, George. (1732) 2010. *Alciphron: or, the Minute Philosopher*. In Jaffro, Brykman, and Schwartz 2010, 17–274.

BW Berkeley, George. 1948–57. *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*. Edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop. 9 vols. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

CGB Hight, Marc A., ed. 2013. *The Correspondence of George Berkeley*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

CNM   Toland, John. 1696. *Christianity not Mysterious: Or, a Treatise Shewing, That There is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor Above it: And that no Christian Doctrine Can be Properly Call'd a Mystery.* 2nd ed. London: Sam. Buckley.

DFM   Berkeley, George. (1735) 1948–57. *A Defence of Free-thinking in Mathematics.* In BW, 4:109–141.

DHP   Berkeley, George. (1713) 2008. *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous.* In D. M. Clarke 2008, 151–242 (cited by marginal numbers).

EHU   Locke, John. (1690) 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding.* Edited by Peter H. Nidditch. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

G   Gerhardt, C. I., ed. (1875–90) 1978. *Die philosophischen Schriften.* By G. W. Leibniz. 7 vols. Hildesheim: George Olms Verlag.

LCNM   Browne, Peter. 1697. *A Letter in Answer to a Book Entitled Christianity not Mysterious.* Dublin: John North.

LW   Locke, John. 1823. *The Works of John Locke.* 10 vols. London: Thomas Tegg.

MI   Berkeley, George. 1987. *George Berkeley's Manuscript Introduction: An Editio Diplomatica.* Edited by Bertil Belfrage. Oxford: Doxa.

PEL   Browne, Peter. 1729. *The Procedure, Extent, and Limits of Human Understanding.* 2nd ed. London: William Innys.

PHK   Berkeley, George. (1710) 2008. *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge.* In D. M. Clarke 2008, 67–149.

SCG   Aquinas, Thomas. 1955–57. *Summa Contra Gentiles.* Edited by Joseph Kenny. New York: Hanover House.

ST   Aquinas, Thomas. 1920. *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas.* 2nd ed. Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns Oates & Washbourne.

TCR   Astell, Mary. (1705) 2013. *The Christian Religion, as Professed by a Daughter of the Church of England.* Edited by Jacqueline Broad. The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: Toronto Series 24. Toronto: Iter Inc. / Center for Reformation and Renaissance Studies.

TVV   Berkeley, George. (1733) 1998. *The Theory of Vision, or Visual Language, Shewing The Immediate Presence and Providence of a Deity, Vindicated and Explained.* In *Philosophical Works Including the Works on Vision,* edited by Michael Ayers, 277–304. London: J. M. Dent.

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