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Abstraction and the *Esse is Percipi* thesis

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The Ohio State University, 1987
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ABSTRACTION AND THE ESSE IS PERCIPI THESIS

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate

School of The Ohio State University

By

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CHAPTER I
IDEAS AND LOCKE'S SEMANTIC THEORY

We seem to take it as obvious that at least some words stand for extra-mental objects. Consider, for instance, a proper name, say, 'Richard Nixon'. We often say that 'Richard Nixon' stands for the man, Richard Nixon. Or, we may say that there is a relation between a term and its referent. It seems in some way obvious that there is a relation between a term and an extra-mental object—the relation of "standing for" (or "referring to") an extra-mental object.¹

But perhaps we have been too hasty. Think of the matter in this way: maybe terms don't refer, in any direct way, to extra-mental objects at all. Instead, a term refers to an idea or a mental image in the mind of a speaker. On this view, a singular term, if it is a proper name, immediately refers to a mental image which resembles, in important respects, the bearer of the name. So, for example, our ability to use 'Richard Nixon' to refer to the man is somehow mediated by the fact that the image which directly attaches to 'Richard Nixon' resembles the man in certain important respects. The connection between a term and some extra-mental object is, on this view, an indirect one. Perhaps it is closer to the truth to say that words indirectly refer to extra-mental objects while directly referring to a speaker's ideas.

¹
What I have described is a theory which is, in its important respects, similar to the kind of theory developed by John Locke in his well-known work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. But, Locke intended that his theory should, in the main, apply to concrete general terms. Examples of such terms include 'dog,' 'white,' and 'triangle.' That is, he did not, as far as I can tell, specifically address the problem of how a speaker is able to use a proper name to successfully refer to a particular individual. For Locke, a general term, such as 'white' or 'triangle,' stood for some sort of "intermediate mechanism." Locke's "intermediate mechanisms" were ideas. Certain general terms do not, on Locke's view, directly refer to extra-mental objects. They do, however, refer directly to special kinds of ideas—"abstract general ideas."

Locke's general semantic thesis is that words (immediately) signify ideas. In Chapter Two of Book Three of *The Essay* he writes: "Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the Ideas in the Mind of him that uses them." A better way of stating this thesis might be: "Words immediately signify ideas in the mind of him that uses them." Restating this version of the thesis so that it applies to general terms we have: "General terms immediately signify abstract general ideas." Even so, we are confronted with a number of questions. Two rather obvious ones are: (1) What, for Locke, is the relation of "immediate signification," and (2) What are "abstract general ideas?" I doubt that much can be said in the way of an answer to the first question. For Locke says precious little concerning what he means by 'signification' or 'signify.' Furthermore, it is also worth pointing out that Locke's own expression of the relationship is confusing. Notice that within the quoted sentence Locke mentions two kinds of connections
between words and ideas. There is, on the one hand, the relation of "immediate/primary signification" and, on the other hand, the relation of "standing for." To make matters worse, it seems that Locke denies, within the quotation, that there is a distinction between "signification" and "standing for;" he seems to have collapsed "sense" and "reference." An answer to the second question will involve some remarks on some of the ways Locke uses 'idea' and his distinction between "simple and complex ideas" since many abstract general ideas are just special kinds of complex ideas. Let me begin with a few quick remarks on the first question. I will then go on to discuss an important qualification on Locke's general semantic thesis. Following that, I want to say some things concerning both Locke's use of 'idea' and his distinction between simple and complex ideas. I will close the chapter with a statement of Locke's theory of general terms.

As I said, Locke doesn't say much about the meaning he gives to 'signify.' Even so, a hint as to what he means by the term is given in his discussion of the meaningful use of pieces of language. Locke thinks that there are uses of pieces of language, or of verbal tokens, which are not (linguistically) meaningful. An example, which Locke provides, would be that of a parrot emitting English sounds. In that discussion Locke says:

But so far as Words are of Use and Signification, so far as there is a constant connection between a Sound and the Idea; and a Designation, that the one stand for the other: without which Application of them, they are nothing but so much insignificant Noise."
An interesting feature of this brief excerpt is the fact that it contains expressions such as 'Designation' and 'stand for.' Furthermore, as is clear from the quote, Locke is saying that verbal tokenings of words are nothing but "insignificant noise" unless such sound(s) are connected, in some way, to the relevant (abstract) ideas. The connection that Locke has in mind is one of "standing for" or "designation." For us, at least, these expressions are approximate synonyms for 'reference.' Whether or not Locke thought, pre-theoretically, of reference in the same way that we do is another question. In any case, I think we can safely read his semantic thesis as: "Words immediately refer to ideas in the mind of him that uses them." The question of what he may have meant by 'signifies' is not that important to what follows.

In Chapter Seven of Book Three of The Essay, Locke makes it quite clear that he intends that certain restrictions are to be placed on his principal semantic thesis. In addition to general and singular terms, Locke recognizes syncategorematic terms or, as he calls them, "particles." Examples of such linguistic tokens are familiar enough and include, among other things, the logical copula 'is,' as well as the logical connectives, grammatical conjunctions, definite and indefinite articles, prepositions, and the like. One may well have wondered whether Locke intended that every word should stand for some idea in the mind "of him that uses it." Locke explicitly denies that syncategorematic expressions stand for, by themselves, ideas of any kind be they mental images or thoughts. He writes: "...those words [the "particles"] which are not truly, by themselves, the names of any ideas, are of such constant and indispensable use in Language, and do so much contribute to Men's well expressing themselves."
Locke recognized, however, that particles do serve a function. He says, "BESIDES Words, which are names of Ideas in the mind, there are a great many others [again, the particles] that are made use of, to signify the connexion that the Mind gives to Ideas, or Propositions, one with another." Their function, Locke writes, is to serve as ... marks of some Action, or Intimation of the Mind. In any case, it is enough for present purposes to record the fact that Locke may have been concerned to head off what would otherwise have been a rather obvious objection: If we are to think of ideas as visual images or, in some cases, as copies of visual images, then what idea could 'is,' or any other similar term, signify?

To sum up, we have seen that Locke's principal semantic thesis is that words (with the exception of syncategorematic terms) immediately signify ideas in the mind of a speaker. Leaving aside the question of what could be meant by 'signify' or 'immediate signification' I propose that we read his thesis as simply: Words refer to ideas in the mind of a speaker. I turn now to the question of what it is that words refer to or, more precisely, to the question of what is an "idea" for Locke?

In the Introduction to Book One of *The Essay*, Locke makes it quite plain that he is prepared to use the term 'idea' in a very broad way:

But, before I proceed on to what I have thought on this Subject [human understanding], I must here in the Entrance beg pardon of my Reader, for the frequent use of the word Idea, which he will find in the following Treatise. It being that Term, which, I think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by Phantasm, Notion, Species, or whatever it is which...
the Mind can be employ'd about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it.  

The word 'idea' is a technical term not only for Locke but for the science of his day. The word is used, and in many cases misused, repeatedly in *The Essay*. Nearly every commentator on *The Essay* complains about the multiple uses to which 'idea' is put. By far, the most frequently occurring complaint is that Locke uses 'idea' ambiguously to denote both (usually visual) sensations (or images) as well as thoughts (where 'thoughts' is construed broadly so as to allow for both concepts (i.e., meanings) and episodes of "inner speech" such as doubting, believing, wishing, etc. Thus, Jonathan Bennett writes:

Locke's thought is dominated by his attempt to use 'idea' univocally as a key term in his accounts of perception and of meaning—or, in short-hand, by his use of 'idea' to cover both sense-data and concepts.  

D.J. O'Connor points out that Locke recognizes that the two kinds of idea, sensations and thoughts, have very different origins. Locke refers to itches, pains, and visual images as "ideas of sensation." And, he calls such things as doubting and believing "ideas of reflection." Locke indicates what sorts of things belong to the class of ideas of sensation when he says:

And thus we come by those Ideas, we have of Yellow, White, Heat, Cold, Soft, Hard, Bitter, Sweet, and all those which we call sensible qualities, which when I say the senses convey into the mind,
I mean they from external Objects convey into the mind what produces there those Perceptions. This great Source, of most of the Ideas we have, depending wholly upon our senses, and derived by them to the Understanding, I call SENSATION.\textsuperscript{12}

A little later on Locke tells us what type of ideas are produced by reflection:

...The other Fountain, from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with Ideas, is the Perception of the Operations of our own Minds within us, as it is employ'd about the Ideas it has got; which Operations, ..., do furnish the Understanding with another set of Ideas, which could not be had from things without: and such are, Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing, and all the different actings of our own Minds; ...But as I call the other Sensation, so I call this REFLECTION...\textsuperscript{13}

One interesting feature of this bifurcation of origin is its relevance to the question of how both sorts of ideas are mentally represented. Sensations, particularly visual ones, are easily thought of as images, or iconic structures, or mental pictures and beliefs and doubts are nowadays conceived of as internal propositions or sentences in the language of thought. Obviously, Locke was not familiar with this way of putting the difference between his two kinds of ideas. Even so, it is important to be aware of the fact that when Locke, as well as some of his critics, use ‘idea’ sometimes they are discussing mental images and sometimes they are talking about thoughts or episodes of ‘inner speech.’
In addition to these uses of 'idea' there is yet a third. R.S. Woolhouse, as does Bennett, observes that Locke sometimes uses 'idea' to denote a sensible quality, or monadic property of some particular (physical) object. He further observes that Locke is self-consciously aware of the fact that he sometimes slips between this use of the term and another in which 'idea' is used to pick out a mental entity which corresponds, in some way, to a sensible quality. Locke himself says:

...the Powers to produce those Ideas in us, as they are in the Snow-ball, I call Qualities; and as they are Sensations, or Perceptions, in our Understandings, I call them Ideas: which Ideas, if I speak of sometimes, as in the things themselves, I would be understood to mean those Qualities in the Objects which produce them in us.

Of course, much more could be said concerning the uses which Locke makes of 'idea.' And, indeed, much could be said about the kinds of ideas which Locke recognized. My point, for the time being, is just that if there is a univocal, or at least dominant use of the term 'idea,' it is as a rough synonym for 'visual image.'

In addition to the three uses of 'idea,' as a term for a visual image, a thought, and a sensible quality, Locke spends a good deal of time discussing various kinds of ideas. Locke maintains a distinction between simple and complex ideas which is important to providing a clear statement of his theory of general terms. Locke is silent, or nearly so, on the question of "defining" simple ideas. He seems, to speak somewhat loosely, to have chosen
to take these as primitives while defining complex ideas in terms of them.

He writes:

As simple Ideas are observed to exist in several Combinations united together, so the Mind has the power to consider several of them united together, as one Idea; and that not only as they are united in external Objects, but as it self has join'd them. Ideas thus made up of several simple ones put together, I call Complex....

In his efforts to "define" simple ideas, Locke relies mainly on examples:

The coldness and hardness, which a man feels in a piece of Ice, being as distinct Ideas in the Mind, as the Smell and Whiteness of a Lily; or as the taste of Sugar, and smell of a Rose: And there is nothing can be plainer to a Man, than the clear and distinct Perception he has of those simple Ideas; which being each in it self incompounded, contains in it nothing but one uniform Appearance, or Conception in the mind, and is not distinguishable into different Ideas.

There is, however, something of a hint as to how Locke would have us define 'simple ideas' in the passage quoted just now. For simple and complex ideas (usually the ideas involve visual sensations) we may say:

\[ (D1) \quad x \text{ is a simple (sensible) idea } \iff x \text{ cannot be distinguished into different (sensible) ideas. } \]

And, for complex (again usually visual sensations) ideas:
(D2) \( x \) is a complex (sensible) idea if \( x \) consists of a number of simple (sensible) ideas joined together in appearance or imagination.

So, for example, the visual impression produced in the presence of a lily, which one would report, if asked, as being a sensation of a lily, would be a complex idea. The complex idea of the lily can be broken down into its simple constituents. Its (simple) parts would include, among other things, an idea of the white in its petals and an idea of the green of its stalk.

Unfortunately, Locke's characterization of simple ideas isn't all that clear. While it would seem to work well enough for more or less ordinary sensory episodes like the perception of discrete, homogeneous patches of primary colors, there are considerations which show that such an impression is mistaken. Consider, for instance, the idea of an orange patch. An idea such as this would seem to be paradigmatically simple. But, surely, it is possible for a subject to distinguish between an idea of the color orange and an idea of some shape as constituents of the entire idea. For, it is certainly possible that the orange patch should have a determinate shape. My suspicion is that even if the orange patch had no determinate shape, it would still be possible for a subject to distinguish between an "orange idea" and a (possibly amorphous) shape of some type or other. Even so, there seem to be two ideas present: The color orange and a shape of some perhaps (in)determinate sort. And, it would seem, each of these ideas can be considered without being aware of the other in the understanding or imagination.
Perhaps Locke would say that, contrary to appearances, the orange patch example is a complex idea. But then, one wonders whether there are any simple ideas (of the visual image variety) at all. We began with what seemed to be the paradigm for a simple idea. If an orange patch isn't a simple idea, then I'm not sure what would count as an example of such an idea.

Perhaps this is too hasty. Locke could respond to this example by pointing out that the content of a perceptual episode such as this involves a homogeneous patch of the color orange. Maybe the orange/shaped patch is a complex idea, but we shouldn't automatically infer that there are no simple ideas. For, it is possible for a subject to distinguish the shape from the color. And, it's the color and the shape which individually constitute simple ideas.

Against this, one might say that it isn't possible or, it isn't very easy, to conceive or consider the color orange without its having some shape or others. This seems correct. Even so, one can, it appears, selectively (or individually) attend to the color and the shape alike even if it isn't possible to separate one from the other.

I suspect, then, that Locke's simple ideas cannot be thought of as completely separable from one another. For, they must, as the preceding discussion suggests, be possible objects of selective awareness (or attention). This means that they must be persistent features of occurrent sensory states as well. That is, they must endure at least long enough for a subject to focus attention toward them. If we put these considerations together, I think we can give a little more precision to (D1):
According to (D1'), then, a simple sensible idea is a feature that one can selectively attend to without having to literally separate it from some other sensible simple idea. We may continue to think of sensible complex ideas in the manner prescribed by (D2). So that the idea of an orange color patch would be a complex sensible idea consisting of two simple sensible ideas: a simple sensible idea of the color orange and a sensible simple idea of some shape or other.

Even so, Locke recognizes other kinds of complex ideas. Among them are ideas which he terms "abstract general ideas."19 As we have seen, it is a consequence of Locke's principal semantic thesis that general terms "immediately signify" abstract general ideas. It is now time to say something about both Locke's theory of general terms and abstract general ideas.

Natural languages contain an enormous variety of so-called general terms. And, one's first impression is that Locke thinks that he has developed a basic semantic theory which can deal with this variety. To a great extent, the variety of general terms recognized by Locke is limited to the variety he acknowledges among kinds of ideas. Some of the general terms and ideas which Locke acknowledges include: natural kind terms, such as 'tiger,' 'man,' and 'gold,' and color terms, such as 'red,' and so forth. The basic theory of general terms, if there is a "basic theory," is this: After exposure to a number of particulars, for the sake of an example let's say several particular persons, a subject begins to notice the respects in which their (complex sensible) ideas of each of these particular persons share certain features. One might
notice, for example, that each idea involving a particular man contains the feature(s) of having a face, torso, and limbs. There might be other ideational features present in some of the complex ideas which make up the subject's sample of (ideas of) men. But, for purposes of coming to have an abstract general idea, these features are ignored. The act of "ignoring" certain features is called "abstraction." To put it somewhat crudely, abstraction is the activity of "leaving out" of a complex idea certain features. Framing the abstract general idea of man is a process of retaining some commonly shared features and "leaving out" others. In the present example, one would retain the ideas of the common features, having a head, torso and limbs, while "leaving out" out of features which are found in but some of a person's ideas of particular men. Such features might be having red hair or a beard.

One of Locke's most concise statements of how we come by both general terms and abstract general ideas is given near the beginning of Book Three:

There is nothing more evident then that the Ideas of the Persons Children converse with, (to instance in them alone), are like the Persons themselves, only particular. The Ideas of the Nurse, and the Mother, are well framed in their Minds; and, like Pictures of them there, represent only those Individuals. The Names they first give to them, are confined to these Individuals; and the names of Nurse and Mama, the Child uses, determine themselves to those Persons. Afterwards, when time and a larger Acquaintance has made them observe, that there are a great many other Things in the World, that in some common agreements of Shape, and several other Qualities, resemble their Father and Mother, and those Persons they have been used to, they frame a Idea, which they find those
many Particulars do partake in; and to that they
give, with others, the name Man, for Example. And
thus they come to have a general Name, and a
general Idea.20

And so, abstraction is the process whereby general ideas are made through
retaining and omitting certain ideas. Which ideas are retained and which are
omitted depends on whether or not the idea is an idea of a feature common
to each idea in a sample of complex ideas of particular men. If the idea is an
idea of a common feature, it is retained in the abstract general idea. If it
isn't, then it is "left out" of the abstract general idea.

As we saw in the example Locke provides, the complex ideas of parti­
cular persons, out of which the abstract general idea attaching to 'man' is
somehow fashioned, is a visual sensation of some particular person or per­
sons. This suggests that at least some abstract general ideas are mental
images. A general term, as one would infer from Locke's principal semantic
thesis, immediately signifies an abstract general idea. We can summarize
these claims, and refer to them collectively as "Locke's apparent theory of
abstraction and general terms" (ATAGT), in the following way:

(1) General terms immediately signify abstract
general ideas.

(2) Abstract general ideas are drawn from com­
plex ideas involving particular objects.

(3) Certain abstract general ideas are mental
images.
Much of what I say in later chapters will be an attempt to qualify and restrict certain of these claims in various ways. It should be understood that, for the time being, I am not claiming that the (ATAGT) is Locke's own view, nor am I claiming that anyone attributes it to him. What's more likely the case, as we shall soon see, is that critics and expositors alike attribute one or more of (1)-(3) to Locke. The burden of the following chapter is to show that one of Locke's most famous critics, George Berkeley, reads Locke as though he holds some portion of (ATAGT).
NOTES

1 I take it that there is no important difference between the relations of "standing for" and "referring to" at least for Locke. Locke himself uses the phrase "stand for" when he writes of the relationship between words and ideas.

2 John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (hereafter *The Essay*), edited by Peter H. Nidditch, Oxford University Press (Oxford, England), 1975. All further references to *The Essay* are to the work edited by Nidditch. All citations to *The Essay* are given by page number, as well as by book, chapter, and section number.


5 There is yet another qualification on this version of Locke's semantic thesis which goes beyond the one that I am about to make. The qualification is necessary because Locke doesn't really have a unified semantic theory. Sometimes the "signification" of a general term is not an image (or an "idea" that is an image). For other classes of general terms, particularly color terms, the "referent" of a term is an image. So, the qualification contains two elements: (a) that certain sorts of common nouns "signify" while certain other sorts of common nouns "refer," and (b) some common nouns "signify" (or connote) ideas which are not images while other terms "stand for" (or denote) mental images.


7 *The Essay*, III, VII, 1, p. 471.


9 *The Essay*, I, I, 8, p. 47.


16 *The Essay*, II, XII, 1, p. 164.


19 It should be understood that at least some abstract general ideas have their origins in complex sensible ideas such as visual sensations involving particular objects.

CHAPTER II
BERKELEY ON ABSTRACT GENERAL IDEAS

The main thrust of Berkeley's attack on Locke's doctrine of abstract general ideas occurs in the Introduction of his Principles of Human Knowledge. My focus, therefore, in both this chapter and those that follow, will be on the Introduction to the Principles. For the most part, Berkeley is a close and careful reader of Locke. He is sensitive to the fact that Locke discusses more than one kind of abstract general idea. For instance, Berkeley realizes that certain abstract general ideas are "framed," to use a quasi-technical term drawn from Locke, or fashioned out of other abstract general ideas (hereafter agi). According to thesis (2) of (ATAGT), the raw material for an agi is supposed to come from a complex idea of a sensible particular. Interestingly enough, the commentators have either overlooked this kind of agi altogether or have attempted to fit it into some other classification.

Part of the blame for this omission, and other kinds of errors, lies with Locke himself. There are several different kinds of agi's which Locke discusses in The Essay and he is far from careful in keeping them distinct. So, a useful preliminary to understanding Berkeley's attack on the doctrine will be to develop a taxonomy of agi's. Part One of this chapter will be aimed at getting clear on the kinds of agi's recognized by Locke. In Part Two I will try
to match Berkeley's arguments with the "targets" discussed in Part One. The aim here is to bring out important assumptions which Berkeley makes in the course of his attack.

I

In this context there are two kinds of taxonomies that one could want:
(a) a catalog of the different types of agi's which Locke discusses in *The Essay*, and (b) a catalog of the types of agi's which Berkeley attacks in *The Principles*. A procedural decision is called for: We could combine (a) and (b), do each separately, or do one or the other of (a) and (b) but not both. I think we can avoid confusion if (a) and (b) are done separately. What I want to do first, then, is develop a classification of the different kinds of agi's which Locke specifically mentions in *The Essay*. Later on I will indicate which of the various kinds of agi's are under direct attack.

(1) **Simple Agi's** A simple agi is an idea which (apparently) consists of an idea of a single quality. As we will see later on, the content of a simple agi includes, at the very least, some few simple ideas of sensible qualities. A typical example of a simple agi would be an idea involving a particular secondary quality such as the color white. Locke describes such an example when he writes:

Thus the same Colour being observed to day in Chalk or Snow, which the Mind yesterday received from Milk, it considers that Appearance alone, makes it a representative of all of that kind; and having given it the name Whiteness, it by that
sound signifies the same quality wheresoever to be imagin'd or met with...²

After having observed several kinds of objects, a piece of chalk, or a glass of milk, a person may come to notice that each of these objects is similar in respect to color. Apparently, Locke intends that, at least in this case, coming to have an agi of the color white involves a feat of memory. That is, a subject is able to sift through a collection of stored complex ideas and separate from them a simple idea of the color white. That idea becomes the simple agi attaching to the term 'white.'

The immediate signification of 'white' is the agi attached to 'white.' In modern parlance, 'white' (or 'whiteness') is an abstract singular term. The agi connected with 'white' is a representative of the kind white. Generally speaking, an agi is a Lockean universal. Even so, an agi is an unusual kind of universal in that it is mind-dependent. For, agi's, like any other kind of idea, exist only in the mind of a speaker. Instances of the color white are said to "partake" in the agi associated with the term 'white.'³ A person in possession of such an agi recognizes a similarity between the agi and future instances of the color white. And so, such a person is able to apply 'white' when he or she is in the presence of white at some time in the future.

(2) Common Agi's A common agi is an abstract general idea which consists of a collection of simple ideas and which attach to terms of an intermediate level of generality. Locke does not explicitly recognize that there are common agi's. If he had, perhaps he would have given the agi which attaches to such terms as 'equilateral triangle,' 'clydesdale,' and 'Eskimo' as examples.
A common agi, it would seem, has every bit as much right to the status of being a universal as does a simple agi. For, quite clearly, there are particular equilateral triangles, clydesdales, and Eskimos. Some equilateral triangles, for example, have dimensions of one inch, others two inches, and so forth. Some clydesdales are brown, and others are black. Each particular equilateral triangle, clydesdale, and Eskimo "partakes" of an agi in pretty much the same way that each particular instance of the color white "partakes" of the simple agi attaching to the term 'white.' Furthermore, 'equilateral triangle,' 'clydesdale,' and 'Eskimo' are general terms; each is able to occupy the predicate position in syntactically well-formed sentences of English and each is applicable to indefinitely many singular objects. So, Locke would no doubt wish that such terms immediately signify something. And, for Locke, what else could play the role of the signification of a general term like 'equilateral triangle,' if it weren't a common agi?

(3) Rarefied Agi's. A rarefied agi, like a common agi, consists of a collection of simple ideas that are "compounded together." Examples of rarefied agi's include the (abstract general) ideas associated with 'triangle,' 'horse,' and 'man.' The principal difference between a rarefied agi and a common agi is that the former are, in some sense, more general than the latter. I think that the sense in which a rarefied agi is more general than a common agi can be characterized in the following way: we may say that a rarefied agi subsumes the particulars falling under a common agi. We may say, in the case of the agi attaching to 'triangle,' what it means for such an agi to subsume the instances falling under a common agi by saying that any term which satisfies the open sentence, "__ is an equilateral triangle" will
also satisfy the sentence, "__ is a triangle." Similarly, any term which satisfies the sentence, "__ is a clydesdale" will satisfy the sentence, "__ is a horse," and so on.

Locke explicitly acknowledges, or at any rate seems to, that there are abstract general ideas of the rarefied variety. He says:

For let anyone reflect, and then tell me, wherein does his (abstract general) Idea of Man differ from that (complex idea) of Peter, and Paul; or his Idea of Horse, from that of Bucephalus, but in the leaving out something, that is peculiar to each Individual; and retaining so much of those particular complex Ideas, of several particular Existences, as they are found to agree in?

The procedure which one follows in creating a rarefied agi involves, it seems, the recognition of certain commonly shared simple ideas among a collection of complex ideas of particular objects. What a subject retains in the rarefied agi attaching to 'horse' are the "common agreements" of shape, size, and so forth as each occurs among a collection of complex ideas involving particular horses. The property of being such-and-such a size, or having such-and-such a shape are the qualities, in Locke's terminology, which produce in a subject a corresponding simple idea or sensory impression. The important point is that the rarefied agi attaching to 'horse' is manufactured out of such simple ideas as are found to occur in a person's sample of complex ideas of particular horses. Which simple ideas are retained, and which are left out, of the agi associated with 'horse' is a matter of statistical frequency. Those simple ideas found among each and every complex idea of a particular horse are "combined together" to form the agi associated with 'horse.' More
precisely, a single idea, which is taken to be a representative of those ideas which occur among every element in a person's sample of complex ideas, is retained. On the other hand, those simple ideas which occur in fewer than all of the complex ideas of particular horses are left out of the agi associated with 'horse'.

(4) **Abstract Agi's.** An abstract agi consists, like common and rarefied agi's, of a collection of simple ideas joined together in the mind. Examples of abstract agi's include the agi's associated with the terms 'animal' and 'plant.' Locke asserts the existence of such ideas when he writes:

> Of the complex Ideas signified by the names Man, and Horse, leaving out but those particulars wherein they differ, and retaining only those wherein they agree, and of those, making a new distinct complex Idea, and giving the name Animal to it, one has a more general term, that comprehends, with Man, several other creatures.6

The interesting feature of an abstract agi concerns the apparent fact that, unlike simple, common, and rarefied agi's, the simple ideas out of which it is made are drawn from other abstract general ideas. As we saw before, the simple ideational constituents of simple, common, and complex agi's originate in complex ideas of particular, (usually) concrete objects. But, Locke's terminology is somewhat misleading here. For, he does call the ideas attaching to 'man' and 'horse' "complex." This suggests that the raw materials for an abstract agi are going to be complex ideas of a familiar variety, that is, of the same kind of idea involved in the production of the other kinds of agi's. Even
so, Locke's use of 'complex' in this context is as it should be. For, by (D1), a complex idea is just a collection of simple ideas. So, there is no problem with referring to an abstract agi as a "complex idea." Nor, perhaps with the exception of simple agi's is there a problem in calling any other kind of agi "complex."

The difference between an abstract agi and the other kinds of agi's discussed previously seems to lie in the fact that an abstract agi is compounded out of simple ideas whose immediate origins are to be found in agi's of "lower orders of generality." That an abstract agi is manufactured from other agi's is a claim which is suggested by two considerations. First, Locke plainly indicates that the agi attaching to 'animal' is drawn from the ideas attaching to 'man' and 'horse.' To paraphrase the quote given above, "leave out of the complex ideas signified by the names Man and Horse those particulars wherein they differ, and retain what is common to both, and the result is a complex idea which is the immediate signification of Animal." The ideas immediately signified by 'man' and 'horse' are just rarefied agi's. Secondly, Locke's thinking with respect to more comprehensive terms continues in a similar direction. He writes:

"Leave out of the Idea of Animal, Sense and spontaneous Motion, and the remaining complex Idea, made up of the remaining simple ones of Body, Life, and Nourishment, becomes a more general one, under the more comprehensive term Vivens... by the same way the Mind proceeds to Body, Substance, and at last to Being, Thing, and such universal terms, which stand for any of our Ideas whatsoever."
Locke's meaning seems quite clear. The most obvious reading of this quote suggests that less comprehensive general terms, such as 'man' and 'horse,' immediately signify agi's whose instances include particular men and particular horses. Moderately comprehensive general terms, such as 'animal,' immediately signify agi's which are themselves drawn from abstract general ideas attaching to less comprehensive general terms. And so on. Let us say, then, that a defining feature of an abstract agi is that it is produced directly from other abstract general ideas. One could make further distinctions within the category of abstract agi's since the terms associated with such ideas are of varying degrees of generality. In the interest of simplicity and economy, I shall end here.

(5) Modal Agi's. Modal agi's include as examples the agi's associated with such terms as 'justice,' 'cruelty,' 'murder,' 'gratitude,' and the like. Locke also refers to such ideas as these by calling them, "mixed modes." Locke maintains a distinction between simple and mixed modes. Briefly put, mixed modes consist of collections of simple ideas of different kinds whereas simple modes are collections of ideas of the same kind. Locke indicates how we come to have a modal agi when he says:

To understand this aright, we must consider wherein this making of these complex Ideas consists; and that is not in the making of any new Idea, but putting together those which the Mind had before. Wherein the Mind does these three things: First, it chuses a certain Number (of ideas). Secondly, it gives them connexion, and makes them into one Idea. Thirdly, it ties them together by a Name. If we examine how the Mind proceeds in these, and what liberty it takes in them, we shall
easily observe, how these essences of the Species of mixed Modes, are the Workmanship of the Mind.8

This isn't all that helpful. But, if we take Locke's suggestion that modal agi's or as he calls them "mixed modes," are manufactured out of ideas "which the Mind had before," then it seems that we are left with two readings: (a) Locke might mean that modal agi's are framed out of simple ideas (of kinds originating from perceptual contact with different particular objects) which the mind has perceived before, or (b) perhaps Locke intends that the agi attaching to a term like 'pride' is produced from having observed acts of pride at some time in the past. On reading (a), a modal agi would consist of simple ideas drawn from any number of sources. The difficulty here is that it does not make sense to think that the meaning of a term like 'pride' can be represented as visual image (or something like a visual image). Reading (b) fares a little better. It is not such a strain at the limits of plausibility to think that a person could form some complex idea, even a visual image, on the basis of having observed acts of pride in the past. But, what of other examples which, for all we can tell at this point, seem to fall in the same class of abstract general ideas as 'pride?' Consider 'justice.' There does not seem to be a unique kind of just act which is open to direct observation. Justice takes many forms. In fact, it is quite likely that our concept of justice, whatever it is, is not something that can be represented as visual image.

Of course, there might be other possible interpretations of what Locke could have in mind here. For example, if we wanted to drop Thesis (3) of (ATAGT), then maybe Locke intends that modal agi's consist not of simple ideas, of various kinds which are themselves represented as visual images,
or past observations of acts of pride. An agi of this sort might instead consist of some verbal item (as opposed to a sensory image) which is expressed in familiar terms. We have already seen that Locke's use of 'idea' includes much more than visual images. Remember, he defines 'idea' so as to include, "...whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks..." 9

Certainly, a verbal item which is expressed in familiar terms, would count, on such a broad construal of 'idea,' as an "idea which the Mind had before."

II

In this section I want to discuss Berkeley's arguments against the doctrine of abstract general ideas. Berkeley's main conclusion is that abstract general ideas are logically impossible objects. As we will soon see, Berkeley's attack is broad based. Just why he sought to completely destroy the doctrine is the subject of a forthcoming chapter. But, in what remains of the present chapter, I will try to match Berkeley's objections with some of the targets discussed in Section One.

(1) Single Properties. In an influential and well-known paper E.J. Craig has developed a taxonomy of the targets which Berkeley discusses in the Introduction to his Principles of Human Knowledge.10 Among the three targets which Craig distinguishes, the first is what he calls, "The Single Property View" (or conception of abstract general ideas). According to this conception, there are agi's which consist of an idea of a single quality only. On Craig's view a commitment to the single property conception, "...involves saying that it is possible for there to be an abstract idea, which is an idea of
one quality only, even though that quality cannot be instantiated unless others are instantiated with it. That is, on the single property view, it is possible for a person to have an abstract idea of, say, motion, even if it is not possible for a body to be displaced physically without it's being extended in time and space. Similarly, according to the "single property view" it should be possible for a person to have an abstract idea of color even though it is not possible for an object to instantiate the property of being colored without it's having some particular color or other.

As Craig observes, we find Berkeley setting up this target when he writes:

"For example, there is perceived by sight an object extended, colored, and moved: this mixed or compound idea the mind, resolving into its simple, constituent parts and viewing each by itself, exclusive of the rest, does frame the abstract ideas of extension, color, and motion. Not that it is possible for color or motion to exist without extension, but only that the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of color exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both color and extension."

Apparently, Berkeley is saying that in forming an agi of motion a person abstracts a single idea from a collection of simple ideas of qualities which are joined together in an object. According to Craig's Berkeley, motion is the single quality, or single property, which is "isolated" from the rest, extension and color. The idea of motion is somehow represented in the mind exclusive of the concomitant ideas of extension and color. Which simple idea, in turn, becomes the agi associated with 'motion.'
It is of some interest to point out which of the kinds of agi openly acknowledged by Locke fall under the "single property conception." Certainly, simple agi's fit the bill. A person's agi of the color red, for example, involves, it seems, nothing more than the representation of a single quality. The subject may have been acquainted with a red ball, a red house, and a red fence, and from these acquaintances he or she comes to have an agi of the color red. Note that any such instance of the color red co-occurs with some other property or properties. There is no red ball, for example, without the property of being a sphere, and so on. In order for the color red to be instantiated it must, it seems, be instantiated together with the property of being such and such a determinate shape.

As is already apparent, at least some of the agi's falling under the category of abstract agi's come under the single property view. Examples include the agi's attaching to such terms as 'extension,' 'being,' and 'body.' Craig classifies such agi's as falling under the single property conception of agi's. But his taxonomy is not sensitive to the difference between the agi attaching to a term like 'red' and the kind of agi associated with a term like 'extension.' The later term is much more general than the former. Even so, as I shall show, Berkeley's arguments against agi's conceived of according to the single property conception can be extended to the kinds of agi's associated with the names of secondary qualities.

What is Berkeley's argument against abstract general ideas conceived on the single property model? In order to fully appreciate the argument it is necessary to say a few words about Berkeley's understanding of the process of abstraction. There are two basic ways of understanding abstraction: (a) abstraction as an operation of selective attention, and (b) abstraction as an
operation of mental separation. Berkeley's own positive view concerning ab-
straction is quite similar to (a). On the selective attention model of abstrac-
tion one selectively observes, of some complex idea, let's say a remembered
sensory impression involving a particular piece of paper, certain simple
ideational constituents. In this case, some of these simple constituents might
include an impression (or simple idea) of a coffee stain, an idea of a line run-
ning across the width of the paper, and so forth. To abstract, in this sense, is
simply to selectively attend to each of these features. A person might focus
his attention on the coffee stain or the color of the paper or on one or more
of its lines.

On the mental separation model of abstraction the story is quite dif-
ferent. Abstraction, according to this model, involves an almost literal cutting
up of complex ideas into simple constituents. Certain simple ideas (ideas of
non-common features) are isolated or separated from a complex idea of
some particular object. In terms of the example given just now, to abstract
is to completely separate, say, the idea of the coffee stain from the total com-
plex idea of which it is a part. One is not shifting her attention from one
feature or another. Instead, on this model, it is supposed to be possible to
isolate, as it were "in the mind's eye," an idea of the coffee stain, or some
other feature, from the remaining ideas. The difference between the two
models might be put by saying that abstraction conceived of as selective at-
tention involves a complex idea of a particular object and so includes ideas of
qualities had by that particular object. On the other hand, in abstraction con-
ceived of as mental separation, although it involves a complex idea of a per-
ceived particular object, certain ideational features such as ideas of qualities
had by that particular object are separated, or just left out, of the original complex idea.

Berkeley, apparently, attributes the mental separation model to Locke. One place in which it appears that he understands Locke in this way occurs in a discussion of how, according to Berkeley's Locke, it is that we come by the agi of color:

So likewise the mind, by leaving out of the particular colors we perceive by sense that which distinguishes them one from another, and retaining that only which is common to them all, makes an idea of color in the abstract, which is neither red, nor blue, nor which, nor any other determinate color.¹³

The picture which Berkeley is drawing is suggestive. The agi attaching to the term 'color' is drawn from particular colors, red, blue, and so on. The mind surveys each stored or occurrent idea involving a particular color in a search for features common to every color. A feature which is not shared by every idea involving a particular color is "left out" of the agi associated with 'color.' The idea of color "in the abstract" consists (solely) of an ideational analog of that common feature. The features which are disregarded are, of course, the ideas of red, blue, and so on, as these features are not to be found in every idea of a particular color.

In Principles, Section Ten, we find Berkeley denying that he is able to form an abstract general idea of color after the manner described above. He says:
But I deny that I can abstract one from another, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid....

This excerpt does not, of course, constitute an argument against the doctrine of abstract general ideas. However, it does contain a mention of a special principle which Berkeley employs in the argument against Locke. The principle is derived, or more exactly, applied to agi's understood on the model of a mental image. The principle is so important to Berkeley's argument that it deserves a clear statement:

\[\text{(e)}\quad \text{For all sensible qualities, or properties, } F \text{ if } F \text{ cannot be instantiated without some other quality } G, \text{ then it is not (logically) possible to conceive of } F \text{ without } G.\]

Here to "conceive of } F \text{ without } G" is to have a mental picture, or idea, the content of which involves the ideational analog of quality } F \text{ without quality } G. \text{ For example, to have an idea or to conceive of extention "in the abstract" is to have a mental picture of extension without any other qualities as may be found to occur, as ideational analogs, in a complex idea of some particular extended object. Similarly, to conceive of color "in the abstract" is to have a mental picture of color whose content does not involve, or include as an ideational analog, any particular color. But, in each of these cases, notice, it is not (logically) possible for an object to instantiate these properties without it's instantiating certain others as well. It is not (logically) possible, for
example, for an object to instantiate the property of being colored, or of being extended, without that object's having some determinate color or other, or some determinate shape or other as well.

But then, according to Berkeley's principle (@), neither can one conceive, or have an abstract general idea, of extension or color without his or her idea "having a shape" or "having some color." Similarly, neither can one have an (abstract) idea of motion. He writes:

...it is impossible for me [that is, Berkeley, and, so he believes, anyone else] to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear [a body which follows a straight or curved path], and the like may be said of all abstract general ideas whatsoever.15

Why does Berkeley insist that it is (logically) impossible to have an agi in the manner described? As is by now obvious much of his argument rests on his principle (@). According to some commentators, Berkeley's attack on the doctrine of abstract general ideas is supposed to rest, at least in part, on what might be called "the picture theory of ideas."16 According to this view, agi's are like the kinds of complex ideas produced in ordinary episodes of perceptual contact with actual objects. And, I think, it is this conception of ideas which plays a (partial) role in the attack on abstraction. Berkeley, as we have seen, attributes to Locke, understandably in my view, the "mental separation" conception of abstraction. Both the picture theory of ideas and the mental separation model have crucial roles Berkeley's attack on the products of abstraction. Consider the abstract general idea of a particular color, let us
say, the color white. In order to come by a simple agi of the color white a
person begins with some stock collection of complex ideas involving the color
white. These complex ideas, let us suppose, include an idea of a snow
covered landscape, a glass of milk, and a piece of chalk. In each of these
cases, the snow, the milk, and the chalk make their initial appearance em-
bedded in a complex constellation of qualities. The snow in the landscape
might have been surrounded by trees, houses, and persons. Perhaps the
glass of milk was surrounded by other objects, a plate, or a basket of fruit.
The piece of chalk, perhaps, was placed in a blackboard tray. And so on.

Now, what one notices, along the way to having an agi of the color
white, is the respect in which each of these three items is similar. Plainly, all
three objects are similar with respect to possession of the color white. The
next step involves leaving out ideas of certain qualities as are found to occur
in one such complex idea. That is, one leaves out of the complex idea of the
snow covered landscape, the house and the trees, and even the contours of
snow, and retains only (an idea of) the color white. Similarly, the ideas of the
table, the plate, and the basket of fruit, and even the shape of the milk as it
is formed by the glass which contains it, are separated from the total image
of which they are parts. What is retained is the idea of the color white. One
leaves out of the complex idea of the chalk in the blackboard tray, the black-
board, the tray, and even the shape of the piece of chalk, and retains only
the color white.

Notice that in each of these cases, the starting point was a collection of
stored or occurrent complex ideas that are given in perception. That is, one
starts with a collection of visual images or mental pictures. Since the raw
material of a simple agi is, by Locke's (apparent) account, drawn from a
sample of complex ideas or mental pictures, the only thing that could remain, it seems, after mentally separating certain ideational constituents as are found to be peculiar to a given element of the sample, is another mental picture. That we abstract by a process of mental separation is perhaps conceded by Locke when he writes:

"...the Mind makes the particular Ideas, received from particular Objects, to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the Mind such Appearances, separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existences as Time, Place, or any other concomitant Ideas. This is called ABSTRACTION...." 17

It is clear, from this account of abstraction, that Locke would have one leave out of the (complex) idea of the snow covered landscape the adjoining ideas of the tree and the house. Perhaps, he even intends that the contour of the snow shaped, as it is, by the terrain beneath it is to be left out of the newly formed agi of the color white. For, he says, the particular idea of the color white becomes a general idea only after it is separated "...from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence as Time, Place, or any other concomitant ideas." The phrase, 'any other concomitant ideas' can be taken very broadly so as to include even those simple ideational constituents which contain information concerning the various shapes co-instantiated with the white of the snow covered landscape, the milk, and the piece of chalk.

The remainder of Berkeley's argument against the single property conception of abstract general ideas involves affirming the antecedent of (e).
The assertion that it is (logically) impossible for an object to instantiate the property, say, of being red, without co-instantiating some other property, say, being extended in time and space is conceded by Locke when he writes: "Tis true, Solidity cannot exist without Extension, neither can Scarlet-Colour exist without Extension." Here, it is important to note that Locke is not merely speaking of our (simple) ideas of scarlet, extension, and solidity. His point concerns the existence of qualities, or sensible properties of things. And, he is plainly indicating that there are certain properties which depend, in some sense, on the presence of certain other properties. For instance, the property of being red cannot be instantiated without the property of being extended. This, in itself, is not surprising. For objects, actual extended objects, instantiate such properties. There is no red ball, for example, without a co-instantiated extended sphere.

We can sum up Berkeley's case against agi's conceived of on the single property model by reminding ourselves of where we have been. If it is not (logically) possible for, say, a color patch to instantiate a particular color, say, white, without also instantiating some shape or other, then it is not (logically) possible to conceive of the color white without conceiving of some shape or other attaching to the color patch. As we have seen, Berkeley thinks the consequent of this particular instance of (@) is true, in part, because even a mental image must contain an ideational analog of the property of having some shape or other. So, he believes that it is (logically) impossible to have an idea of a color patch without also having an idea of some adjoining shape.

But, the ideational analog of this or that particular shape must be left out of the mental image of the color patch. For, Berkeley is led to believe, by
Locke's own words if by nothing else, that the property of having a shape of such and such a description is but one property, among a collection of properties, which constitute the class of "...all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence as Time, Place, or any other concomitant ideas." The mental separation model of abstraction instructs that such ideational features as correspond to this class of properties are to be separated from the simple idea of the color white. What remains, after abstraction, is an idea of the color white and nothing else. But, this is impossible since, as we saw earlier, even a "simple idea," like the idea of the color white, must contain an ideational analog of a shape of some description.

Note also that the justification for asserting the antecedent of (\( \forall \)) consists of an ad hominem against Locke. For, Locke would have to agree, and there is (some) evidence that he does, that it is not (logically) possible for an object to instantiate the property of being white without co-instantiating the property of having some shape or other. And so, it is not (logically) possible to have an agi of the color white after the manner described above.

Finally, we should note that Berkeley's conclusion that simple agi's are logically impossible objects may be obtained by repeated applications of (\( \forall \)), and its antecedent, for each particular case.

(2) **Multiple Properties.** Berkeley's attack here is focused on abstract general ideas which consist of collections of simple ideas that are "compounded together in the mind." The attack is aimed at abstract general ideas which fall under the category of common agi's. Much of what will be said in connection with the attack on agi's of these kinds will seem familiar. This is to be expected since Berkeley's arguments rest, to a large degree, on
assumptions which were encountered in the previous section. Specifically, these assumptions include the picture theory of ideas and the mental separation model of abstraction. Consequently, it may seem that Berkeley, in fact, has but one argument against the doctrine of abstract general ideas. My own (partially considered) opinion on the matter is that this is so. In any case, I prefer to remain officially neutral on the question.

This is the point in the attack at which Berkeley quotes the notorious "triangle passage" from Locke's *Essay*. That passage reads as follows:

For example, does it not require some pains and skill to form the general idea of a Triangle, (which is yet none of the most abstract, comprehensive, and difficult), for it must be neither Oblique, nor Rectangle, neither Equilateral, Equicrural, nor Scalennon; but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect, that cannot exist; an Idea wherein some parts of several different and inconsistent Ideas are put together.

Berkeley follows this with:

What more easy than for anyone to look a little into his own thoughts, and there try whether he has, or can attain to have, an idea that shall correspond with the description that is here given of the general idea of a triangle, which is "neither" oblique nor rectangle, equilateral, equicrural nor scalennon, but all and none of these at once?

Berkeley's argument here depends, it seems, almost entirely on an *ad hominem* against Locke. The crux of his argument can be summarized by saying that it is impossible to follow the instructions, instructions given by
Locke himself, for making a common agi of a triangle and so, it is impossible to conceive of the agi of a triangle. Hence, the agi of a triangle is a logically impossible object. On Berkeley's reading of the passage, Locke is saying, in effect, that the agi of a triangle must be, in the appropriately analogous way, triangular without being equilateral or, ..., or scalenon. Combine this reading of the passage with the assumptions (a) agi's (or at any rate some of them) are mental pictures, and (b) abstraction is a matter of mental separation, and once can show, with the addition of certain other obvious assumptions such as (a), that common agi's are logically impossible objects. Berkeley is reading Locke as though he were giving a recipe: Begin with a sample of complex ideas of triangles of different types. Next, examine a complex idea of one triangle. Mentally separate, or "cleave off," those ideas as are found to occur in less than every complex idea in the sample (the ideas which are left out would include the ideational analog of the property of being equilateral or the property of being the scalene, and so on). What remains is the idea associated with 'triangle.'

As before, the details of Berkeley's argument can be expressed in terms of his principle (a). It is impossible for an actual object to instantiate the property of being triangular without co-instantiating the property of being a triangle of some type or other. That is, any object exemplifying the property of being triangular has to co-instantiate at most one of the following properties, the property of being equilateral or, ..., or the property of being scalenon. But then, a mental image of a triangle must, in an appropriately analogous way, "instantiate the property of being equilateral or, ..., or scalenon." But, as it is (logically) impossible for an object to instantiate the property of being triangular without also instantiating the property of being
either equilateral or, ..., or scalenon, so it is (logically) impossible to conceive (or to have an idea) of an object's being, in the appropriately analogous way, triangular without it's being either equilateral or, ..., or scalenon. Since it is obviously the case that no object can instantiate the property of being triangular without co-instantiating the property of being either equilateral or, ..., or scalenon, it follows that it is impossible to conceive (or to have a mental image) of a triangle without it's being either equilateral or, 'triangle' is logically impossible.

I want now to close this chapter by recording a few observations. As far as I can tell, Berkeley does not explicitly attack modal agi's. Examples of these include the agi's associated with such terms as 'manslaughter' and 'murder.' In my opinion, it is very nearly impossible to save these without dropping the assumption that agi's are mental images and so I will leave them here. Even then much work would remain. Second, I hope that it is by now plain that Berkeley reads Locke as though he held theses (2) and (3) of (ATAGT). Our task in the next chapter is to explore one attempt to defend Locke against Berkeley's attack. Interestingly enough, this defense allows that at least some agi's are mental images.
NOTES


3Locke makes the point that instances "partake" of an abstract general idea when he is discussing the abstract general idea associated with 'man.' See *The Essay*, III, III, 7, p. 411.

4*The Essay*, III, III, 9, p. 412. The parenthetical insertions are mine.

5It is important to note that, although Locke himself is not explicit on this, the complex ideas of particular objects are drawn from a sample of restricted size. Locke obviously does not mean that one must have a complex idea of every particular man in order to have the abstract general idea associated with 'man.'


8*The Essay*, III, V, 4, pp. 429-430. The parenthetical remark is mine.

9*The Essay*, I, I, 8, p. 47.


16. See, for example, George Pitcher, *Berkeley*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London), 1977, p. 67. Pitcher admits that if Berkeley is right in thinking that Locke believed that at least some agis, like the agi associated with 'triangle,' are mental pictures, then Locke's doctrine cannot be defended.


19. Berkeley's argument against the doctrine of abstract general ideas seems to be aimed at the conclusion that abstract general ideas are logically impossible objects. But this statement of the conclusion is not quite accurate. What Berkeley has shown is that it is not logically possible to have an abstract general idea, which is a mental image, via the process of abstraction by mental separation.


CHAPTER III  
MACKIE ON SELECTIVE ATTENTION

In this chapter I want to begin by laying out an interpretation of Locke's account of abstraction which was developed by J.L. Mackie. Although other commentators have offered similar interpretations of Locke's theory of abstraction, Mackie's is, by far, the most ambitious. For, he claims, if we interpret Locke as holding a selective attention account of abstraction, his general semantic theory can be made plausible even for the names of mixed modes like 'manslaughter.' Of course, other adjustments to Locke's theory of general terms can be made in defending him against Berkeley's attack. Specifically, one might want to drop the assumption that Locke held a picture theory of agi's. Some commentators have taken this approach. Mackie, however, seems to want to maintain that agi's (particularly agi's associated with single quality terms) are mental pictures.

Even so, the main argument of the present chapter seeks to establish that Locke did not hold a selective attention theory of abstraction of the kind developed by Mackie. I say this because there is a good deal of textual evidence which conflicts with Mackie's interpretation. I will be reviewing that evidence in due course. Later on, I shall argue that Berkeley's objections can be overcome if Locke is interpreted as holding a sort of hybrid theory of
abstraction. That is, I will argue that we can interpret Locke as holding a theory of abstraction which involves elements of both the selective attention and mental separation accounts of abstraction. However, in the present chapter, my aim is to lay out Mackie's selective attention interpretation and to discuss certain problems connected with it. Interestingly enough, it turns out that Mackie's selective attention interpretation does not avoid Berkeley's objections to agi's associated with the names of secondary qualities.

I

In this section I want to indicate, in clear terms, what Mackie's selective attention interpretation is. I will also say how, according to Mackie, interpreting Locke in this way avoids Berkeley's objections.

According to Mackie, to abstract, or more precisely, to form an abstract general idea is just to pay attention to certain ideational features present in a complex idea of a perceived particular object. The account of selective attention is supposed to operate in cooperation with an account of resemblance. Although Mackie admits that Locke offers no account of resemblance, he evidently believes, perhaps rightly, that a philosophically rigorous account of resemblance is not required to drive Locke's theory of general terms. Mackie's reconstruction of Locke's basic theory of abstraction is, in its own way, rather elegant. To put it concisely, resemblance informs selective attention. That is, our ability to notice the respect(s) in which complex ideas of perceived particulars resemble one another, which is just the ability to make judgments of differences and similarity, guides the activity of selective attention. The features in a complex idea of a perceived
particular object which we selectively attend to are those which resemble, in a certain respect, the features found in every other stored complex idea of other perceived particulars. Of course, Mackie intends that the complex ideas used in making judgments of resemblance are drawn from a sample of restricted size. He obviously does not mean that our ability to make judgments of similarity and difference, and, accordingly, our ability to recognize resemblances requires that we call upon literally every stored or occurrent complex idea. He writes:

In other words, I see a white piece of paper at a particular time and place, and notice that it resembles in colour other pieces of paper, cups of milk, fields covered with snow, and so on; I pay attention to the feature in which it resembles these other things and pay no attention to the shape or size of the piece of paper or its surroundings or even to the time at which I see it; I remember this feature and associate the word 'whiteness' with it—and, what is really prior to this, though Locke does not mention it here, I associate the predicate expression 'is white' with the paper's having of this feature—and I am thus ready to use the same word 'whiteness' with respect to that same feature in any other things, at any other places and times, and to apply this predicate expression to them.3

There are some important points in Mackie's selective attention interpretation of Locke which deserve special mention and emphasis. First, what one selectively attends to, in coming to have an agi, is some particular object consisting of a complex collection of sensible qualities. In the example described by Mackie, the object of selective attention is just a particular piece of paper which consists of the quality or property of being white and
the quality of having a rectangular shape and, perhaps, some other qualities as well. Secondly, and more importantly, there is no talk at all of mentally separating simple ideational constituents, or cutting up complex ideas into their simple constituents and recombining certain ones to make another complex idea. Mackie sums up the selective attention interpretation by saying:

Locke's basic theory of abstraction, then, is that it consists in paying selective attention to one feature in a complex particular object of experience and ignoring the other features which are in fact occurring along with it, and in associating verbal expressions (or other signs) with the selected feature in such a way that one is ready to apply them to other objects that are like this one with respect to this one feature.

Mackie's account is a selective attention interpretation of abstraction and, in its present form, it is intended as a defense against Berkeley-style objections to simple agi's. Mackie writes: "However, this basic account of abstraction applies most naturally to such single quality terms as 'white' and the ideas which go with them." It now remains for me to explain exactly how Mackie's account of abstraction overcomes Berkeley's objection to simple agi's. Recall that Berkeley's objection to simple agi's depended on three assumptions: (a) that Locke held a mental separation theory of abstraction; (b) that agi's are mental pictures; and, (c) thesis (©). Mackie, apparently following Locke, seems to think that simple agi's are mental images. Now, it is not quite accurate to say that if one grants just (a), (b), and (c) to Berkeley, then he has a case against Locke. What is needed in addition to these things
are the instructions, provided by Locke himself, for creating simple agis by mental separation. What Locke says is that "the Mind makes the particular Ideas, received from particular Objects, to become general"...by separating from them... "any other concomitant ideas" (such as ideas of unique or particular shapes). Berkeley's argument then proceeds rather quickly. It is not (logically) possible for something, even a patch of the color white, to exist without its co-instantiating certain other properties as well (such as having a determinate shape of some sort). Hence, by Berkeley's principle (@), it is not (logically) possible to have an abstract general idea obtained after the manner of abstraction by mental separation. This is because a person's idea of determinate color must involve an idea of a determinate shape.

Now it is easy to see that this argument is ineffective if Locke is interpreted as holding a selective attention account of abstraction. Suppose one has a complex occurrent idea of a piece of paper. The person may then selectively attend to the color of the paper (while ignoring any other ideas produced by the surrounding context). Berkeley's objection to simple agis, conceived as mental images, relies on the fact that at least some ideas (like an idea of a particular color) require the presence of certain other ideas (like an idea of a particular shape) in order that the former be conceived at all. But, if one selectively attends to a particular color and then remembers that feature (and so makes that feature the immediate signification of a color term), one simultaneously selects as well the particular shape assumed by that color.

If this explanation of how the selective attention account of abstraction overcomes Berkeley's objection seemed far too brisk, there is a reason. In truth the account has no effect at all on Berkeley's objection to simple
agi's. Let me explain. In the course of describing the activity of selective attention Mackie indicates, in the passage quoted earlier, that we attend directly to the color of the piece of paper and ignore everything else about it. He says:

...I pay attention to the feature (the color white) in which it (the piece of paper) resembles these other things and pay no attention to the shape or size of the piece of paper or its surroundings or even to the time at which I see it; I remember this feature (the color white) and associate the word 'whiteness' with it. 7

The problem is this: If the selective attention account requires that we remember only the color of the piece of paper and nothing else, including our occurrent idea of its shape, then the account is still vulnerable to Berkeley's original objection. Remember, Berkeley's objection to agi's associated with secondary quality terms was just that it is not possible to have an idea of specific color without also having an idea of some determinate shape. Mackie seems to be requiring the impossible.

In response to what I have just said, one might say that this is just an oversight on Mackie's part and there is no reason why his overall interpretation should be faulted solely on the grounds of a careless remark. What we should do is revise the account or look elsewhere for a solution to the problem.

I am sympathetic to this response and it is of some interest to have a brief look at the kinds of moves that might be made. It is by now quite clear that the basis of Berkeley's objection, briefly put, that some ideas require the
presence of other ideas in order to be conceived at all, is particularly effec-
tive against agi's that are mental images. What we might do is simply disre-
gard the picture theory of ideas. I do not think that this move is very
promising. One reason is that there is some evidence that Locke thought that
some abstract general ideas, particularly the kinds of agi's which attach to
color terms, were mental images. So, dropping the picture theory would in-
volve nothing less than rewriting the relevant portions of The Essay. More-
over, there is some truth in Locke's contention that the reference or,
speaking loosely, the meaning of a color term is a mental image. As evidence
that there is something right in this, consider how difficult it is to articulate
the meaning of, say, 'white.' In any case, I think that it is possible to give an
account of abstraction, which avoids Berkeley's objections, while continuing
to take some agi's as mental images.

Perhaps there is a role for a selective attention account within the
context of a mental separation theory of abstraction. Think of it this way: A
person comes to have an idea of a determinate color and an idea of a deter-
minate shape which the color assumes by a process of mental separation.
That is, one would mentally separate the idea of the color and the idea of its
shape from the complex perception of which they are parts. Instead of
selectively attending to a single feature in a complex idea of a particular ob-
ject, what one selectively attends to is an aspect of the separated features.
We selectively attend to our idea of the color and ignore the co-occurring
idea of the shape.

I believe that this is a promising approach and I shall try to develop it
in the next chapter. But before going on to discuss further applications of
Mackie's selective attention theory, there is an important point to make
regarding Berkeley’s attack on simple agi’s. The point is important to those who think that, at worst, Mackie was careless in stating his interpretation. A useful result of the preceding discussion is that it reveals the certain assumptions at work in Berkeley’s case against simple agi’s. Nor, does it depend solely on Locke’s willingness to think of simple agi’s as mental images nor, for that matter, on Locke’s combining a mental separation theory of abstraction with a picture theory of ideas. Part of the problem lies in in what Locke says. What he says has the effect of requiring that every idea not found among each element in a sample of complex ideas of particular objects must be left out of the relevant simple agi. Since the idea of a particular shape instantiated by a particular piece of paper does not resemble the ideas of other shapes produced by other objects, it cannot be a part of the relevant agi. Berkeley then says that it is (logically) impossible to have an image of a color without also having an image of some shape.

His point, as we have seen, may be put in slightly more general terms: Some ideas require the presence of other ideas in order to be conceived. What is interesting is that there is clear evidence that Locke is aware of the point. In the course of arguing that body and extension are distinct he writes:

Many Ideas require others as necessary to their Existence or Conception, which are yet very distinct Ideas. Motion can neither be, nor be conceived without Space, nor Space Motion: Space can exist without it, and they are very distinct ideas; and so, I think, are those of Space and Solidarity."
In my view, the importance of this quote, in the present context, cannot be overestimated. Although Locke is here making the point that we cannot have an idea of motion without having an idea of space, he seems to have recognized the point that among distinct ideas there are some which necessarily require others in order to be conceived. Of course, he does not say, and to my knowledge he never does, that having an idea of a particular color necessarily requires that one have an idea of some determinate shape or other. But this is a small matter. He states the point as though he felt that there were other cases to which it applied. After all, he plainly says, "Many ideas require others as necessary to their Existence or Conception." So, there is no obvious reason to think that an idea of a particular color fails to fall under the principle of requiring "others as necessary to their Existence or Conception." It seems, in light of the fact that Locke obviously recognizes that some ideas require others as necessary to their conception, that Berkeley's attack of simple agi's depends on a careless remark by Locke.

II

In this section I want to describe and critically evaluate Mackie's selective attention interpretation as extended to other kinds of agi's. Much of what Mackie says in this connection is very perplexing. And, I am not sure if what I say in the way of stating his view is correct. In any case, the primary problem with Mackie's interpretation is that it is at odds with significant portions of *The Essay*.

Mackie's aim here is to rescue "Locke's triangles" and with them other kinds of agi's. But, unlike the account of Section One, agi's themselves are
going to be complex ideas of perceived particular objects. As such, their content may very well include some ideas of qualities unique to a particular triangle. For example, on this account, the agi associated with 'triangle' is just a complex idea of some particular triangle. Now suppose this particular triangle happened to be the only one, in a sample of triangles, which was green. Then, the agi associated with 'triangle' would, in the appropriately analogous way, be green. Interestingly, as we will see soon enough, this has the effect of pushing Locke's theory of general terms in the direction of Berkeley's.

Mackie describes the activity of abstraction by selective attention in the following way:

To have the abstract general idea of a triangle is just to pay selective attention, in one observed triangle, to the set of features in which this figure resembles the various other figures that we would also call triangles, to remember this set, to associate a word, say 'triangle,' with it, and so to be ready to apply this word (that is, other tokens of this type-word) to other triangles.10

So, we begin with a complex idea of a perceived triangle (apparently, it makes no difference to Mackie whether the complex idea is occurrent or stored away in the subject's memory). We pay selective attention to certain features present in the complex idea of some particular triangle. As before, the features to which one attends are those which resemble features found in each complex idea involving other particular triangles. The objects of selective attention would include the feature of having three lines, of those lines being joined together at each of their endpoints, and so on. Other
features are ignored. These might include, for example, an idea of the color of that particular triangle.

A similar account might be given for the general term 'man.' We start by paying selective attention to certain features present in a complex idea of a particular man, say, Peter. We might notice, for example, his overall shape, the fact that he has two arms and two legs, and so on. These are ideas of qualities that Peter has in common with all, or at any rate most, men. The important point is that the ideas to which we selectively attend are ideas of qualities which resemble, in a certain respect, the ideas of qualities found among each element of a sample. The sample consists of complex ideas of other particular men gotten on some previous occasion. These might include, say, the color of Peter's hair and so forth. The general term 'man' is somehow "associated" with the collection of ideas of common qualities.

Notice that pretty much the same might be said regarding agi's attaching to single quality terms like 'white.' That is, we begin by selectively attending to a certain feature of the complex idea of the piece of paper, namely, our idea of the color white. Other features, though present in the idea, are ignored. These might include, for example, the fact that the paper has a rectangular shape. On this version of the selective attention account, the agi associated with 'white,' since it is just the complex idea of the piece of paper, would contain an idea of a shape. Thus, Mackie would be able to avoid the charge that his account requires the impossible in that we are being asked to have a mental image of some color which lacks an idea of some shape or other. And so, he would have avoided Berkeley's original objection to simple agi's.
Now an interesting feature, in each of these three cases, is that there is no explicit discussion of abstraction by mental separation. In other words, Mackie's interpretation is a genuine rival to the mental separation account. Abstraction via mental separation is simply a matter of "leaving out" certain simple ideational constituents. As we have seen, those that are left out of the relevant agi are those simple ideas of qualities possessed by fewer than all of the objects in a person's sample. On Mackie's account, abstraction is accomplished by selective attention to ideas of common qualities. These ideas are embedded in a complex idea of some particular object. But, and this is important, they occur together with ideas of non-common qualities. Since the ideas of non-common qualities were not removed by an act of mental separation, they must still reside in the original complex idea. This means that, on Mackie's account, abstract general ideas themselves are nothing but complex ideas of particular objects. And, the immediate signification of a general term is just the set of ideas of common qualities as they occur in a complex idea of a particular object. In other words, a general term, of the kind associated with a common agi, immediately signifies a/the proper object(s) of selective attention. So, we might summarize Mackie's account of abstraction in the form of the following pair of theses:

1. Simple and common agi's are mental pictures of perceived particular objects, and,
2. The immediate signification of a general term are those features, present in a complex idea of a perceived particular object, which are common to objects of that kind.
There are two problems with this account as an interpretation of Locke: (a) thesis (1) is very close to Berkeley's own views, and (b) an account of abstraction like that proposed by Mackie is at odds with significant portions of *The Essay*.

Notice, first of all, that thesis (1) avoids Berkeley's objections to simple and common agi's very easily. Berkeley cannot now charge that Lockean agi's require that we conceive the impossible. In the case of simple agi's, we have no need of agi's which contain a simple idea of a color which does not also contain a simple idea of some determinate shape. This is because, according to thesis (1), the agi associated with 'white' is just the complex idea of a particular sheet of paper. In the case of common agi's, it is no longer required that one have an agi which is, in the appropriately analogous way, triangular without being, in a like manner, either equilateral or ... or isoceles. For, the agi associated with 'triangle,' in accordance with thesis (1), is just a complex idea of some particular triangle. And, that idea is, in an analogous way, equilateral.

This defense of Locke's doctrine of abstraction does indeed work, but only because Berkeley himself holds similar views. One does not generally defend the doctrines of an historical figure by attributing to him views held by the opposition. That Berkeley does hold views similar to those expressed by thesis (1) may be seen by considering what Berkeley says on the matter of general ideas:

And here it is to be noted that I do not deny absolutely there are general ideas, but only that there are any abstract general ideas ... Now if we will annex a meaning to our words, and speak only of what we can conceive, I believe we shall
acknowledge, that an idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general, by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort.\textsuperscript{11}

In other words, for Berkeley general ideas are, "considered in themselves, particular." That is, an idea of a particular triangle is made to stand for all other triangles. His explanation of how we can be certain that the truth of a geometrical proposition applies to all triangles, including the one used in the demonstration, proceeds by observing that the demonstration does not rely, in some way, on the particular features of the triangle for which the conclusion is proved. Thus, the generality of particular complex ideas, which is just their capacity to represent indefinitely many particulars, is explained by the fact that, for purposes of proving general propositions, we consider an idea of some particular triangle "merely as triangular, without attending to the particular qualities of the angles, or relations of the sides."\textsuperscript{12}

The other problem with Mackie's account is that it does not comport well with the way Locke speaks regarding abstraction. Nearly every key passage in The Essay in which Locke is discussing the activity of abstraction contains talk of "the leaving out and retaining of ideas." The account actually given by Locke is closer to the mental separation model of abstraction than it is to Mackie's selective attention interpretation. To see that this is so, consider that when Locke is discussing the agi associated with 'man' (taken generically) he says:

> Afterwards, when time and a larger Acquaintance has made them (children) observe, that there are a great many other Things in the World, that in some
common agreements of Shape, and several other Qualities, resemble their Father and Mother, and those Persons they have been used to, they frame an Idea, which they find those many Particulars do partake in; and to that they give, with others, the name Man, for Example. And thus they come to have a general Name, and a general Idea. Wherein they make nothing new, but only leave out of the complex Idea they had of Peter and James, Mary and Jane, that which is peculiar to each and retain only what is common to them all.13

There is an entire section in Book Three, which is where Locke gives his principal statement of abstraction and general terms, that contains a good deal of talk of the "leaving out" and "retaining" of ideas. The point of that section is to how we come by agi's of varying degrees of generality. Here Locke describes a series of stages through which one gradually passes along the way to attaining agi's "which stand for any of our Ideas whatsoever."14 One begins with a complex idea of some particular man, say, Peter. Certain features present in the idea of Peter are left out and others are retained. The remaining features constitute the agi attaching to 'man.' Says Locke:

...wherein does his Idea of Man differ from that of Peter, and Paul; or his Idea of Horse, from that of Bucephalus, but in the leaving out something, that is peculiar to each Individual; and retaining so much of those particular complex Ideas, of several particular Existences, as they are found to agree?15

Similarly, through comparing our (abstract) ideas of man and horse we come to have an agi which attaches to a more comprehensive term such as
'animal.' As before, the process involves a retention and omission of certain ideas. Locke writes:

Of the complex Ideas, signified by the names Man, and Horse, leaving out but those particulars wherein they differ, and retaining only those wherein they agree, and of those, making a new distinct complex Idea, and giving the name Animal to it, one has a more general term, that comprehends, with Man, several other Creatures.16

We obtain agi's for more general expressions, such as 'living thing' (Locke's word is 'vivens'), in a similar manner. That is, we "leave out" certain features present in the agi associated with 'animal' and "retain" certain others. Locke says:

Leave out of the Idea of Animal, Sense and spontaneous Motion, and the remaining complex Idea, made up of the remaining simple ones of Body, Life, and Nourishment, becomes a more general one, under the more comprehensive term, Vivens.17

In each of these passages Locke uses terms and expressions, such as 'leave out' and 'retain,' which strongly suggest that he is talking about abstraction as mental separation. Basically, abstraction is a process of leaving out certain ideas from certain kinds of complex ideas. Sometimes the complex ideas are ideas of particular objects, like the idea of Peter, and sometimes the complex ideas involve other abstract ideas, such as the (complex) idea attaching to 'animal.'
Of course, Mackie is proposing that we construe all of this discussion as a metaphor for what is conveyed in his selective attention account. But, at a minimum, it seems to me, we are justified in taking a philosopher's remarks non-literally only if independent evidence is provided which shows, or at least suggests, that he did not intend to be taken literally. Mackie has not given any evidence of this kind. Even the passage which Mackie quotes as a statement of "Locke's basic theory of abstraction and generality" contains elements of a mental separation theory of abstraction. Here is a portion of that passage:

"...the Mind makes the particular Ideas, received from particular Objects, to become general; which is done by considering them as they are in the Mind such Appearances, separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence, as Time, Place, or any other concomitant Ideas. This is called ABSTRACTION...."

The "hint" is given in the fact that Locke seems to be saying that we consider an idea, "in the Mind," separate from "all other Existence...." In other words, what is considered in the mind is an idea which has already been separated from the collection of ideas in which it was originally received in a perceptive act.

But, even if Mackie could produce better evidence for his selective attention interpretation, it would have to contend with the following point. There is evidence, to be found in another part of The Essay, which suggests that Locke was aware of the difference between selective attention and mental separation. What's more, the evidence plainly indicates that Locke
believed that mental separation and selective attention (or, as he calls it, "partial consideration") were distinct kinds of mental operations. Locke writes:

"Tis true, a Man may consider so much of such a Space, as is answerable or commensurate to a Foot, without considering the rest, which is indeed a partial Consideration, but not so much as mental Separation, or Division; since a Man can no more mentally divide, without considering two Superficies, separate one from the other, than he can actually divide, without making two Superficies disjoin'd one from the other: But a partial consideration is not separating. A man may consider light in the Sun, without its Heat; or Mobility in Body without its Extension, without thinking of their separation."19

Of course, ideas of a rather special kind are under discussion. But the same thoughts which Locke is expressing concerning the differences between "partially considering" and "mentally separating" parts of space apply to other kinds of ideas. Consider that Locke might have said: "Tis true, a Man may consider so much of a particular determinate line "as is answerable or commensurate to Foot, without considering the rest, which is indeed a partial Consideration, but not so much as mental Separation...." Certainly, Mackie would agree that we can selectively attend, or "partially consider," portions of a particular line or parts of a particular piece of paper. Even so, the passage shows that Locke is plainly aware of the differences between mental separation and selective attention.20 And, having been aware of the difference, he nevertheless chose to cast his theory of abstraction in language
which is closely connected to a mental separation view. What we need is a
defense of Locke which respects his views on abstraction.

III

In this, the final section, I want to sketch out how the process of ab-
straction is supposed to operate, according to Locke, in cases involving the
names of color terms and the names of some simple modes such as 'triangle.'
As I argued in Section Two, Mackie's selective attention account does not
seem to be in accord with Locke's words concerning the process of abstrac-
tion. I shall suggest that it is possible to give an account of the process of
abstraction which comports reasonably well with Locke's official word.

In Section Two I argued that there is ample reason to believe that
Locke conceived of the process of abstraction along the lines of a mental
separation, as opposed to selective attention, model. In accordance with this
I want to propose a modified mental separation account of abstraction for
the names of color terms and some simple modes like, for example, 'tri-
angle.' As we have seen, Berkeley's objection to the doctrine of abstract
general ideas is driven, to a large extent, by Locke's apparent claim that in
order for an idea of a particular object to become a general idea it must be,
"separate from all other Existences, and the circumstances of real Existence,
as Time, Place or any other concomitant Ideas."21 Berkeley's attack places a
considerable weight on the phrase, "any other concomitant ideas." Those
who are sympathetic to Berkeley are (quite understandably) unable to see
how the agi associated with 'white' could be conceived since there is, on the
one hand, a simple idea of the color white and a concomitant idea of some
determinate shape. The concomitant idea--the idea of a determinate shape--
has to be separated from the idea of the color white, if the phrase 'any con­
comitant idea' is stressed. As Berkeley notes, this is no simple psychological
feat. It is, he thinks, impossible for him and any other human concever. But,
as I noted earlier, Locke is plainly aware that there are ideas which require
other ideas in order to exist. Given that Locke himself has realized this, I
think there is some reason to place rather less emphasis on the phrase, "any
other concomitant Ideas" must be separated from the idea of white.

If this recommendation is followed, it is possible to construct a modi­
fied mental separation account of the abstraction process. On this account,
the agi associated with say, 'white,' turns out to be an idea of the color white
which is separated from any other idea except for an idea of some deter­
dinate shape or other. Locke acknowledges that "many Ideas require the exist­
ence of other Ideas" in order to exist. So, one could say that the agi associ­
ated with 'white' requires an idea of some shape or other in order to exist.
Similarly, the agi associated with 'triangle' is an idea which can be described
as a "Figure including a Space between three Lines;" it is a complex idea
consisting of an idea of a triangle type which is separated from ideas of the
context in which some actual triangle appears.
NOTES


3 See Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 110.

4 Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

5 Mackie, *op. cit.*, p. 112.


8 That Locke held the (PTI) for agi's attaching to such terms as 'white' is seen in the following: "Thus the same Colour being observed to day in Chalk or Snow, which the Mind yesterday received from Milk, it considers that Appearance alone, makes it a representative of all of that kind; and having given it the name Whiteness, it by that sound signifies the same quality, wheresoever to be imagin'd or met with" (*The Essay*, p. 159). Locke says here that we receive a sensation (or idea) of the color white from certain objects and to that idea is attached the word 'white.' What we remember is the idea or sensation of the color and that is what 'white' immediately signifies.


12 *The Principles*, Introduction, Section 16, p. 16.

Remarkably, some commentators have quoted the passage from pp. 172-173 as evidence that Locke held a selective attention account of abstraction. See, for example, M.R. Ayers, "Locke's Doctrine of Abstraction: Some Aspects of its Historical and Philosophical Significance," appearing in John Locke Symposium Wolfenbuttel 1979, edited by Reinhard Brandt, Walter de Gruyter (Berlin), 1981, p. 8. Locke says, in a chapter on complex ideas which immediately precedes the chapter in which the passage on "partial consideration" appears, that:

The Acts of the Mind wherein it exerts its Power over its simple Ideas are chiefly these three .... The 3d. is separating them from all other Ideas that accompany them in their real existence; this is called ABSTRACTION: And thus all its General Ideas are made (The Essay, II, XII, 1, p. 163).
CHAPTER IV
ESSE IS PERCIPI: PART I

The core of Berkeley's central metaphysical doctrine is that no sensible object can exist without someone's perceiving it. For Berkeley, the essential feature of any existing sensible object is that it be perceived, its esse is percipi. But, as stated, Berkeley's thesis that the esse of sensible objects consists in their being perceived is vague. It is vague in at least two ways: (a) it is not clear what 'sensible object' denotes, and (b) the presence of 'can' suggests that there are suppressed alethic operators which need to be made explicit if Berkeley's claim is to be adequately understood. Problem (a) is concerned with the scope of Berkeley's principle, whether it is to include "sensible objects" generally, such as tables and trees, or, instead, whether it is to be limited to the domain of purely mental entities, such as ideas. Although it is not clear at this point, problem (b) is connected with the question of whether or not Berkeley's esse is percipi is a necessary truth. I want to begin this section with a discussion of both problems. One might think of what follows as a kind of story. It is an account of both Berkeley's esse is percipi thesis and his central argument for it. Certain elements of this story can be found in well known accounts of Berkeley's metaphysical writings. Other parts of the story are reflected, in some way, in more recent work on
Berkeley's idealism.² Eventually, I will argue that the story is not the correct interpretation of both Berkeley's esse is percipi thesis and his most important argument for the thesis. Ultimately, I will say how it is to be rewritten.

I

As I have already said, 'sensible object' is vague. It seems to denote ideas, which in Berkeley's hands frequently turn out to be visual sensations or images, sensible qualities such as primary and secondary qualities, and ordinary physical objects like tables, trees, and books. For Berkeley, 'sensible object' is a technical term which he defines in a special way. In the first of Berkeley's Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous, Philonous is trying to establish a common vocabulary in which to couch the forthcoming discussion. Philonous and Hylas arrive at the following characterization of "sensible thing:"

**Hylas:** To prevent any more questions of this kind, I tell you once and for all, that by sensible things I mean those only which are perceived by sense, and that in truth the senses perceive nothing which they do not perceive immediately: for they make no inferences. The deducing therefore of causes or occasions from effects or appearances, which alone are perceived by sense, entirely relates to reason.

**Philonous:** This point then is agreed between us, that sensible things are those only which are immediately perceived by sense.³

Apparently, Berkeley is telling us that a feature of sensible objects is that they are not immediately perceived. Quite obviously, by this definition,
ideas are going to turn out to be sensible "things." Ideas, it is plain, are non-inferentially perceived; they are the immediate objects of sensory experiences. Elsewhere in The Three Dialogues Berkeley makes it quite clear that ideas are objects of immediate perception and so are deserving of the title 'sensible object.' Berkeley, speaking though Philonous, writes:

Philonous: As for the rational deducing of causes from effects, that is beside our inquiry. And by the senses you can best tell, whether you perceive anything which is not immediately perceived. And I ask you, whether the things immediately perceived, are other than your own sensations or ideas?

Obviously, the question with which the quote ends is rhetorical but its force is that ideas are immediately perceived.

But Berkeley also wishes that at least some of what are termed "primary and secondary qualities" fall within the denotation of 'sensible object.' In The Principles he provides a list of the primary and secondary qualities. He writes:

Some there are who make a distinction betwixt primary and secondary qualities: by the former, they mean extension, figure, motion, rest, solidity or impenetrability and number: by the latter they denote all other sensible qualities, as colors, sounds, tastes, and so forth.

And in the following quote, Berkeley specifically mentions colors and figures as possible objects of immediate perception:
You will further inform me, whether we immediately perceive by sight anything beside light, and colors, and figures: or by hearing anything but sounds: by the palate, anything beside tastes: by the smell, anything beside odors: or by the touch, more than tangible qualities.  

When Berkeley mentions colors and figures as examples of immediately perceived qualities he no doubt is thinking, in the case of colors, of determinate secondary qualities such as the color red and, in the case of figures, of determinate primary qualities like a specific shape. He could hardly have been thinking of determinable primary and secondary qualities since the realization that an object is shaped or colored is the product of inference; such realizations are the result of, one might say, "mediate perception." The inference that an object has a determinable primary quality involves a premise which expresses a property entailment. That is, one first immediately perceives a determinate shape, such as a rectangle, and infers, knowing that anything with the property of being a rectangle has the property of being figures, that the item immediately perceived also has the determinable primary quality figure.

Following this characterization of a sensible thing, Berkeley then offers what appears to be a second feature or characterization of a sensible thing:

Philonous: It seems, therefore, that if you take away all sensible qualities, there remains nothing sensible.

Hylas: I grant it.
Philonous: Sensible things therefore are nothing else but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities.  

It would appear that Berkeley has "defined" a sensible thing as a collection, or combination, of sensible qualities. I think, however, that it would be a mistake to call this a "definition." It is instead best thought of as a claim concerning the ontological composition of certain common, medium sized objects such as books, trees, and houses. What Berkeley is doing in this passage is arguing—that an argument is furnished is a clue that no definition is being advanced—for the identity of certain sorts of sensible things with collections of sensible qualities. The argument is straightforward enough. If you strip away all of an object's sensible qualities, then the object vanishes from sense. So, as Philonous says, "Sensible things therefore are nothing else but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities." What this suggests, at least to me, is that bundles of sensible qualities, such as houses and books, have every bit as much right to the name 'sensible object' as ideas and individual (determinate) sensible qualities. What helps to justify our calling books and trees "sensible objects" is the fact that, according to Berkeley, such things are identical to "so many sensible qualities." And, as we have seen, (determinate) sensible qualities are immediately perceived.

According to many commentators, Berkeley seems to have felt that his esse is percipi thesis was a necessary truth. At least a part of the evidence for attributing such a strong form of the thesis to Berkeley is taken from his own presentation of the argument for it. When one reflects on the argument there is a very strong impression to the effect that the denial of esse is
percipi entails a logical contradiction and hence, its affirmation is a necessary truth. In Section Twenty-three of *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, Berkeley writes:

> But say you, surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them. I answer, you may so, there is difficulty in it.... But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it does not show that you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind: to make out this, it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy.9

It looks as though Berkeley has argued in the following way: try to imagine, or form an image of, a tree existing without being perceived by someone. In order to construct such an image, one has merely to fashion an idea of the tree existing which does not include, as a part of its content, someone looking at, or otherwise perceiving, the tree. Berkeley concedes that it is within our power to do this much; he quite clearly says, "I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it...." However, what he is not conceding is the claim that in forming such an image, one has conceived of the tree existing without it's being perceived by anyone. For, in the very act of forming an image of the tree, the person constructing the image has perceived the tree. And so, someone has perceived the tree after all. Apparently, conceiving the tree existing without anyone's perceiving it would require, according to Berkeley,
that the conceivér herself fail to perceive the tree. But, it would seem, this can only be accomplished by conceiving the tree existing without at the very same moment conceiving the tree. And this, in Berkeley’s words, “is a manifest repugnancy” or, in more modern terms, a logical contradiction. An explicit contradiction arises in that when one conceives of the tree existing, the tree is conceived. And, when the tree is conceived without anyone’s perceiving it, it is not conceived. Thus, for Berkeley, to assert that it is logically possible for a conceivér to conceive of a sensible object’s existing unperceived, is to embrace, or to be logically committed to, the (apparent) contradiction, a conceivér can conceive of a sensible object’s existing without conceiving it.

As I indicated, it is clear that Berkeley believed that the denial of his esse is percipi thesis entails a logical contradiction. Still, in light of what was just said it turns out that the following claim entails a contradiction:

(1) It is logically possible to conceive of a sensible object’s existing unperceived.

The problem with this result is that it would now appear that the denial of (1) is esse is percipi. For, it is the attempt to conceive of sensible object’s existing unperceived which produces a contradiction. Possibly the most obvious candidate for Berkeley’s principle is best captured by:

(2) No sensible object can exist unperceived.

Claim (2) is, of course, logically equivalent to:
It is not very easy to see how Berkeley is able to move from the denial of (1) to (3). In other words, what permits Berkeley to infer that a statement, or more accurately a "state of affairs," is logically impossible from the fact that it cannot be conceived? Berkeley provides something of an answer to this question after presenting a version of the same argument in *The First Dialogue*. He writes:

**Philonous:** You acknowledge then that you cannot possibly conceive, how any one corporeal sensible thing should exist otherwise than in a mind.

**Hylas:** I do.

**Philonous:** And yet you will earnestly contend for the truth of that which you cannot so much as conceive.\(^{10}\)

Hylas, of course, contends that it is logically possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived. So, it would seem, Philonous is appealing to some implied principle in order to make his case against Hylas. The principle is not explicitly stated and, rather unsurprisingly, Hylas does not challenge it in any way. Perhaps Berkeley feels that the principle is too obvious to state or, at least, it is a principle which any critic of his argument would accept if put forward in a clear way. In any case, it seems that Berkeley's move from the
denial of (1) to (3) rests on the claim that what cannot be conceived is im-
possible.

On the account I have been discussing, we are to think of Berkeley's
argument as having two stages. In Stage One, Berkeley is trying to establish
that the supposition that one can conceive of a sensible object's existing
without someone's perceiving it entails a contradiction. In Stage Two,
Berkeley employs an instance of the principle, "what cannot be conceived, is
(logically) impossible." Thus, since it is not (logically) possible to conceive of
sensible object's existing without being perceived, it is not logically possible
for a sensible object to exist without being perceived.

According to the story I have been recounting, Berkeley's esse is per-
cipi thesis is best captured by (3) where 'sensible object,' as it occurs in (3),
denotes ambiguously. Furthermore, according to our story, the general struc-
ture of Berkeley's most important argument for (3) can be given in the fol-
lowing way:

(A) Suppose, for reductio, that one can conceive
of a sensible object's existing without any-
one perceiving it.

(B) If one can conceive of a sensible object's
existing without anyone, not even the con-
ceiver, perceiving it, then the object was not
conceived.

(C) But, in the act of conceiving a sensible ob-
ject's existing someone, the conceiver, has
conceived it "all the while."

(D) Thus, the sensible object was both conceived
and unconceived.
Therefore, it is not logically possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived.

If it is not logically possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived, then it is not logically possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived.

Finally, it is not logically possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived.

I want now to close this section with a few remarks concerning the plausibility of representing Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi in the manner given just now. First, it is important to note that Berkeley is deploying a reductio ad absurdum, or at least a species of this argument form, in order to establish the contradiction. So, it is natural to think that the argument begins with a supposition for reductio. Notice, in connection with line (A), that Berkeley's challenge is to conceive of any collection of determinate, sensible qualities existing unperceived. He says, "If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so." That Berkeley might have held line (C) is supported by the fact that he says that when the conceiver attempts to conceive of a tree existing "out of the minds of all spirits," she has conceived the tree "all the while." Berkeley inquires, "But do not you yourself (the conceiver) perceive or think (conceive) of them all the while?" Notice furthermore, in connection with line (D), that the contradiction is the one which Berkeley articulates. In order to show that it is possible that the "objects of your thought may exist without the mind ... it is necessary that you conceive them existing unconceived or
unthought of, which is a manifest repugnancy. Finally, lines (E) through (H) involve Berkeley's principle that what cannot be conceived is not possible. Line (F) is an instance of the principle, (E) the assertion of its antecedent, and (H) the derivation of the consequent of the principle. As we saw earlier, there is some textual reason for thinking that this piece of reasoning was an important part of Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi.

II

In this section I want to discuss and to explain some problems within Section One of Berkeley's esse is percipi thesis, and the argument for it, presented in the previous section.

Problem 1: The Conception-Perception Distinction. On the surface, it seems as though Berkeley has committed a rather obvious blunder. It appears that he sees no difference between conceiving a sensible object, and here I mean sensible objects of a rather special kind such as a collection of sensible qualities like a tree or some books, and perceiving it. At least, we might say, Berkeley is tacitly assuming the following premise:

\[(CP) \quad \text{If a sensible object (particularly sensible objects which consist of collections sensible qualities) is conceived, then it is perceived (by the conceiver).}\]

Without some such premise as (CP) Berkeley has shown only that it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unconceived when he has
promised to show that it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived. When Berkeley springs his trap through his rhetorical reminder, "But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while," he is apparently saying that the conceiver, in the very act of thinking, or conceiving, of the tree has perceived it "all the while." To put the point in another way, Berkeley can certainly say that the conceiver has thought, or conceived, of the tree when she tried to imagine it existing unperceived. But, he can hardly say that the conceiver perceived the tree.

What role would (CP) play in the argument given at the end of the previous section? To put the answer succinctly, (CP) would help Berkeley to establish one of the conjuncts in premise (D). More specifically, it would help to establish that a sensible object (such as a tree or a house) was un conceived at the moment the conceiver attempts to imagine it existing unperceived. This observation leads us directly to premise (B). For, the consequent of premise (B) is what produces the conjunct, "the sensible object was un conceived." Interestingly enough, it turns out that the contrapositive of premise (B) is:

\[(B') \quad \text{If the (sensible) object was conceived, then it is not the case that one can conceive of it's existing without anyone, not even the conceiver, perceiving it.}\]

But, why should we accept claim (B'), and so premise (B), as true? Why does it follow from the fact that the tree is conceived (by a certain individual) that it is not (logically) possible to conceive of it existing without being perceived (by the conceiver)? Apparently, what makes it the case that (B') is
true is the fact that the conceiver perceived the object at the moment she conceived it. It follows from this that someone perceived the object. And thus, the conceiver has failed to conceive the object existing without anyone's perceiving it. It is not (logically) possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing without anyone perceiving it because when the object is conceived, it is perceived by someone. But this is just what (CP) goes along way toward saying. Of course, (CP) does not yield the result that it is not (logically) possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived. What it does produce, and what Berkeley's argument seems to require, is the result that the sensible object was perceived once it had been conceived.

Claim (CP) is, at least to the modern ear, patently false. One does not perceive an object solely by virtue of thinking about it. If I am thinking, or entertaining an image, of my mother while she is situated on the other side of the planet, I am not perceiving her at the same moment. So, at least one problem with the account given of Berkeley's argument in the previous section is that it attributes to Berkeley a premise which is just false. But, even worse than that, it attributes a false premise to Berkeley without bothering to explain why he may have thought it was true.

One might attempt to explain why Berkeley might have held (CP), or a close variant of it, to be the case. Where certain kinds of (sensible) objects are at issue, Berkeley seems to have held that once such objects were conceived, then they were perceived as well. In Section Thirty-three of The Principles Berkeley makes it plain that even those ideas which are brought into existence through acts of conception are perceived. He says:

The ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called real things. and those excited in
the imagination being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly termed ideas, or images of things, which they copy and represent. But then our sensations, be they never so vivid and distinct, are nevertheless ideas, that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as the ideas of its own framing. The ideas of sense are allowed to have more reality in them, that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent than the creatures of the mind; but this is no argument that they exist without the mind. They are also less dependent on the spirit, or thinking substance which perceives them, in that they are excited by the will of another and more powerful spirit: yet still they are ideas, and certainly no idea, whether faint or strong, can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it.16

When Berkeley says, at the end of this passage, that "no idea, whether faint or strong, can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it," one gets the impression that he is referring to both ideas of conception and perception. The impression is created because he says that "ideas of sense" (or perception) are "more strong, orderly, and coherent than the creatures of the mind" (or the ideas of imagination and conception). So, there is some reason to think that Berkeley holds the following thesis:

(1) All ideas, whether produced by perception or conception, are perceived.17

It is also worth noticing that Berkeley speaks of ideas of conception as "images of things, which they (the ideas of conception) copy and represent." Presumably, the sorts of "things" which ideas of conception might "copy" are
sensible objects such as trees and books. Such an idea might be brought into existence when a subject occurrently conceives or imagines certain kinds of sensible objects like trees and books. This observation suggests that one might plausibly attribute the following claim to Berkeley:

\[(\text{CON}) \text{ If a sensible object, such as a tree, is conceived, then an idea of it is conceived.} \]

\[(\text{CON})\] could then be used to fashion an argument for (CP). And, if one could show that each premise in the argument was either explicitly stated by Berkeley or, failing that, show he was (logically) committed to it as the result of explicit statement, then one might be able to defend the claim that he held (CP). That is, if we could show, using theses which Berkeley believed, that there is an argument for (CP), then doing so would constitute indirect evidence that he held (CP). Here is how such an argument might go:

\[\text{(CON)} \text{ If a sensible object, such as a tree, is conceived, then an idea of it is conceived.}^{18}\]

\[(I) \quad \text{All ideas, whether produced by perception or conception, are perceived.}\]

\[(J) \quad \text{Therefore, if an idea of a sensible object is conceived, then an idea of it is perceived}\]

\[(K) \quad \text{If an idea of a sensible object is perceived, then the object is perceived.} \text{ (This move may seem to be problematic since it seems that the relevant perceived idea is not an idea of sense. I will say more about this in what follows. For now, let us suppose that}\]
the perceived ideas mentioned in (J) are not representing physical objects for Berkeley.)

(CP) If a sensible object, such as a tree, is conceived, then it is perceived.

I am not altogether sanguine about the success of the argument given just now since it contains an equivocation. Moreover, the equivocation concerns a distinction which Berkeley has already drawn in the passage which motivates the argument. This argument is not sensitive to the fact that there are two kinds of ideas which Berkeley recognizes. He quite clearly says that what we might call "ideas of perception" are more "strong, orderly, and coherent" than "ideas of conception" which are "faint" copies of the things they represent. Line (J), it would appear, is thought to follow more or less directly from line (I). Let's suppose that there is no problem on this matter. Even so, it is important to note that the kind of idea referred to in the consequent of (J) is an idea of conception. That an idea of conception, rather than an idea of perception, is perceived is established by the antecedent of (J). What (J) in effect says is that a sufficient, though certainly not a necessary, condition for an idea's being perceived is the occurrence of an act of conception. Satisfaction of the antecedent of (J) requires merely that an idea be conceived. And, presumably, the kinds of ideas that are conceived are ideas of conception (it remains an unexplored possibility as to whether or not the converse of (J) holds for ideas of perception).

Line (K), on the other hand, is a different matter. No argument for it is given and the only reason to think that it is plausible is if it is understood in advance that its range of application is restricted only to those ideas as are
brought about by acts of occurrent perception. The only other kinds of ideas, apart from those produced by occurrent perception, are ideas of conception, or more exactly, ideas of the imagination. But, clearly, (K) cannot be true of these since, if it was, (CP) would then be (nearly) a direct consequence of (K). That is, it would follow from the fact that an idea of conception was perceived, that the sensible object represented in such an idea is at the same moment perceived. Thus, the argument overlooks the differences between ideas of conception and ideas of perception. In the consequent of (J) it is an idea of conception that is perceived whereas in the antecedent of (K) an idea of perception is (immediately) perceived.

The confusing of ideas of perception with those of conception is really, after all is said and done, just a variation on the, by now, familiar theme of confusing perception and conception. In one case, differences between the acts of perception and conception are overlooked. In the other case, differences between the objects which such acts might take are overlooked. What we need is an account of Berkeley's argument which avoids this problem in either form.

**Problem 2: A Curious Contortion.** It is possible to think that esse is percipi is much more restricted than is indicated by proposition (3). More specifically, the claim is that esse is percipi is best represented by:

\[ (3') \text{ It is not logically possible for an idea to exist unperceived.} \]
Obviously, given the interpretation of 'sensible object' discussed in the previous section, (3) entails (3'). Just as obviously, (3'), by itself, does not entail (3). Proposition (3) is the stronger claim.

There are several reasons for thinking that (3') is really esse is percipi. First of all, Berkeley is constantly reminding us, in both *The Principles* and *The Three Dialogues* that no idea can exist unperceived. But, secondly, and more importantly, there is evidence from Berkeley's presentation of the argument for esse is percipi which suggests that (3') is the most accurate way to express the principle. Berkeley begins the argument by challenging his reader to conceive of a sensible object, such as a tree, existing unperceived. Immediately following the challenge, he then goes on to say what would happen if his challenge were accepted. Upon making the attempt to conceive of something's existing without it's being perceived by anyone, Berkeley thinks the most one would be able to do is to bring forth certain ideas. As we have seen, he grants that a subject can conceive, or imagine, some "books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them." And then he says:

...but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while? This therefore is nothing to the purpose: it only shows you have the power of imagining or forming ideas; but it does not show you can conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind... (*Principle*, 23, my emphasis on 'idea').
Here Berkeley seems to have concluded that one cannot "conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind." But what kinds of objects is he referring to? Is he referring to sensible objects like trees and books or ideas (of conception) of trees and books? Certainly a plausible first answer to this question is that Berkeley is referring to those objects which are (directly) before the mind at the moment one attempts to conceive of something's existing unperceived. But these objects are ideas. He even points out that one does nothing more than frame in one's mind "certain ideas which you call books and trees" when one tries to imagine something existing unperceived. His conclusion, apparently, is that these kinds of objects, collections of ideas "that one calls books and trees" rather than (sensible) books and trees, cannot exist without the mind or unperceived.24

There is also another reason for thinking that the argument of Principles #23 ought to be taken as argument for (3'). That is, there is a reason to think that the second occurrence of 'them' in the quote, "But what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone that may perceive them? But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while?", refers to ideas of books and trees instead of books and trees. The reason is to be found in Berkeley's distinction between ideas of conception (of the image variety) and ideas of sense. The distinction, as we have seen, is this: ideas of conception (of the image variety) are produced by a conceiver (or finite spirit) and are "weak" or more faint than are ideas of sense which are caused by God (or an infinite spirit). Now when one is asked to imagine a tree or a book existing unperceived, Berkeley, I think correctly, would (or should) say that the conceiver herself frames an idea of conception
which is perceived by her. Remember, Berkeley is calling upon his opponent to imagine a book or tree existing unperceived. In a mental act of this kind, a subject is (immediately) related to an idea of conception (which she has produced) instead of an idea of sense. Thus, when Berkeley asks, "But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while?", he is saying that the conceiver perceived an idea of a book or a tree. For, when the conceiver attempts to imagine a tree or a book existing unperceived she is (immediately) perceiving an idea of imagination. And being so related she cannot be said to have perceived a tree or a book since she is not, at the time the attempt is made, (immediately) related to an idea of sense.

It is also worth pointing out that on this interpretation of Berkeley's argument there is no need to attribute (CP) to him. In fact, any inclination to attribute (CP) to Berkeley would be seen to issue from a careless reading of the argument. Given that Berkeley holds thesis (I), he can show that it is not possible to conceive of an idea's existing without someone's perceiving it. Since all ideas, even those produced by conception, are perceived, Berkeley is correct when he says that the conceiver has perceived the idea of the tree, though not the tree, when she brought forth an "image of the tree existing."

The passage in which Berkeley appears to hint that (3') is esse is percipi is taken in isolation from a larger setting. There are features of that setting which have an important bearing on whether (3) or (3') is esse is percipi. First of all, when Berkeley calls on us to attempt to conceive of something's existing unperceived, his call is cast in a way which suggests that the attempt cannot be completed even if we try to conceive of a sensible object's (rather than an idea) existing unperceived. Berkeley seems to think that the argument will work, not only for ideas, but for collections of
(determinate) sensible qualities as well. In *The Principles* Berkeley makes the following remarks immediately prior to presenting his argument for *esse* is *percepi*:

Insomuch that I am content to put the whole upon this issue; if you can conceive it possible for one extended moveable substance, or in general, for any one idea or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause...25

In this passage Berkeley indicates that his argument will demonstrate (3'); it will show that no idea can exist without being perceived. But he also uses 'extended moveable substance' by which he apparently means something like, "an object possessing the determinate primary qualities of extension and motion," that is, an object which is constituted of some number of determinate sensible qualities. Of course, it is not crystal clear what Berkeley has in mind in writing of "extended moveable substances." Even so, a similar remark is made in *The Three Dialogues*, where pretty much the same argument is given, in which his meaning is unmistakable. His writes:

I am content to put the whole on this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.26

One interesting feature of this passage is that it shows how convinced Berkeley is of the power of his argument. He does not even mention, or
indicate in some way, that the argument will show only that no idea can exist unperceived. Instead, he straightforwardly challenges his opponent to "conceive it possible for ... any sensible object to exist without the mind." And, by 'exist without the mind' he seems to mean exist without being perceived.

Certainly, one could suggest that since Berkeley shifts between conceiving "it possible for one extended moveable substance, or in general, for any one idea... to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it," he is uncertain as to what he can demonstrate with his argument. But there is no mistake about the second passage; it shows that the intended conclusion is a claim which is closer to (3) than to (3').

I should point out that anyone who thinks that Berkeley sought to establish (3') rather than (3) by his argument has at least one other way to explain why he appears to have been satisfied with (3'). The explanation relies on what we may call Berkeley's "Phenomenal Thesis":

\[(PT) \text{ Sensible objects such as trees and books are identical to collections of ideas.}\]

Much of the first half of the First Dialogue, as well as a good portion of the first part of *The Principles*, is devoted to establishing (PT). In both places Berkeley is concerned to show that (determinate) primary and secondary qualities "exist only in the mind," that is, each (determinate) primary and secondary quality turns out to be no more or no less than an idea. We have already seen one example of the kind of argument Berkeley deploys in order to help reach (PT). In the following example, Berkeley deploys an "argument
from perceptual relativity” to show that a determinate primary quality of an object, in this case solidity, may be altered without bringing about a real change in the object itself. He writes:

Philonous: Then as for solidity; either you do not mean any sensible quality by that word, and so it is beside our enquiry: or if you do, it must be either hardness or resistance. But both the one and the other are plainly relative to our senses: it being evident, that what seems hard to one animal, may appear soft to another, who hath greater force and firmness of limbs. Nor is it less plain, that the resistance I feel is not in the body.27

The conclusion is that (determinate) resistance or solidity is “not in the body.” For Berkeley, the sensible quality must therefore “exist in the mind” and so it must be an idea. Since each and every (determinate) sensible quality is an idea, and since a sensible object is just a collection of determinate sensible qualities, it appears that a sensible object is just a collection of ideas. From here it is easy to understand what bearing (PT) has on the problem under review. If sensible objects such as trees and books turn out to be identical to collections of ideas, then, granting that no collection or constellation of ideas can exist without being perceived, idealism is within Berkeley’s reach. He would be able to show that no sensible object like a tree could exist without being perceived since, by (PT), such an object is a collection of ideas. Thus, there is a rather straightforward explanation of why Berkeley may have been satisfied with the likes of (3’). On this account, Berkeley is satisfied with (3’) since it, together with (PT) and the assumption that no collection of ideas can exist without being perceived, entails (3). It is now
possible to explain why Berkeley begins his argument in a way which indicates that it applies to both sensible objects like trees and books as well as mental entities like ideas. The explanation turns out to be rather simple. Berkeley has, prior to the argument for \( (3') \), sought to establish (PT). He thinks, whether correctly or incorrectly, that he has demonstrated (PT). Thus, he believes that he has shown that trees and books are nothing but collections of ideas. It is no wonder that he also believes that his argument for \textit{esse} is \textit{perceived} applies to sensible objects such as trees since these are just collections of ideas.

I don't think that this explanation of why Berkeley may have been satisfied \( (3') \) will work. The principal difficulty is that it ignores the fact that there is evidence which suggests that the argument for \textit{esse} is \textit{perceived} is independent of (PT). In the First Dialogue, immediately before presenting the argument, Berkeley writes:

\begin{quote}
But (to pass by all that hath been hitherto said, and reckon it for nothing, if you will have it so) I am content to put the whole upon this issue. If you can conceive it possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist without the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

In both \textit{The Dialogues} and \textit{The Principles} Berkeley plainly indicates that he is willing to rest his case for idealism on a single argument. This is some evidence that the argument for \textit{esse} is \textit{perceived} is independent of (PT). But there is also Berkeley's parenthetical remark in the passage cited just now. It indicates that he is willing to let pass all that he has said prior to the
presentation of his argument. Up to this point he has been arguing for (PT). His aim has been to show that collections of (determinate) primary and secondary qualities exist, not in an external object, but in the mind; his aim has been to show that collections of such qualities (= sensible objects) are ideas. So, what he seems willing to give up includes both (PT) and its supporting argumentation. And so, it would seem, we are to think of his argument for esse is perci pi independently of (PT). There is, then, textual evidence which suggests that Berkeley believes, correctly or incorrectly, that his argument can establish (3), the claim that no sensible object, such as a tree, can exist without its being perceived by someone, without appealing to (PT).

What we have, I think, is an interesting piece of data if not an interesting question. Why does Berkeley precede the argument with remarks to the effect that it will demonstrate (3), or something very close to (3), and then end it by drawing a significantly weaker conclusion in the form of (3')? The problem with the account of Berkeley's argument given in the first section is not so much that it misidentifies esse is percip. The real problem with the account of the first section is that it does not shed any light on the question why Berkeley seems satisfied with a weaker result when he evidently thinks that his argument shows something stronger. When Berkeley asks, "But do not you yourself perceive or think of them all the while," the word 'them' denotes ideas "which are called 'books' and 'trees'." But if this is right, there is a problem. Berkeley begins the argument by claiming, or certainly suggesting, that it will show that no sensible (physical) object exists unperceived. He certainly suggests that the argument can show this without appealing to (PT). Yet the argument ends with the apparent conclusion that
It is collections of ideas that are perceived "all the while" rather than sensible objects such as books and trees.

It should be understood that I am not claiming that it would be impossible, or unlikely, for an advocate of the account of the first section to provide an answer to the problem of why Berkeley seems satisfied with having shown merely that it is impossible for ideas to exist unperceived. At this point, all I can say is that I think I have an interpretation of the argument that will. That account will be given in the next chapter.

Problem 3: Conception and Logical Possibility

The version of Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi given in the first section begins with the supposition that one can conceive of a sensible object's existing without its being perceived by anyone. At this point, it is not clear how we should interpret 'can.' Ostensibly, the term 'can' as it occurs in line (A) is the can of logical possibility. It is not until line (E), where the declaration, "it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived" is made, that we are told how 'can,' as it occurs in previous lines, ought to be interpreted. Even so, there is something of a problem. It appears as though the modal strength of the argument has been surreptitiously upgraded somewhere between lines (A) and (E).

I am suggesting that the conclusion stated in line (E) is unwarranted. Still, someone might say, there is little if any grounds for suspicion in the matter of what modality is reflected by 'can.' It has to be (it must be) logical possibility. For, the supposition contained in line (A) entailed a contradiction and so it must be a (logically) necessary falsehood. Its negation, stated in line (E), must be a logical truth.
But I am not convinced by this line of reasoning. Notice, first of all, that when we are asked to conceive of a tree's existing with "no one by to perceive it," what we do, according to Berkeley, is form a mental image of a tree. So, what we conceive, directly we might say, is an image. And what we conceive, indirectly, by virtue of directly conceiving an image of the tree, is the tree or sensible object. In neither case, direct nor indirect conception, does one conceive either a proposition or any sort of object which might normally be used to convey linguistic meaning. The sorts of items that end up being direct objects of conception turn out to be entities which do not fit well with such prefixes as "it is logically possible" and "it is logically necessary." Such prefixes as these, in the normal case, attach directly to propositions or sentence like objects. And, the fact that the conceiver is not conceiving a proposition or sentence is some evidence that the prefix, "it is not logically possible," is inappropriate or even worse misappropriated.

Of course, a defender of the account given in the first section would be likely to point out that the prefix, "it is not logically possible," attaches directly to a verb which names a certain mental act— the verb 'conceives.' And, even though the object of (direct) conception is not a proposition or sentence but is instead a mental image, line (E) simply expresses the fact that a certain mental act cannot be performed. It asserts that it is not logically possible for a conceiver to perform the act of conceiving of a sensible object's existing without it's being perceived by anyone.

I think that this response is correct as far as it goes. Even so, it allows us to see the problem in a clearer light. According to the reply given just now, we are to think of line (E) as an expression of the (logical) impossibility of a certain psychological feat. But surely this is far too strong. We could
easily imagine worlds in which the psychological powers of human, or even non-human, conceivers have been greatly enhanced. Until and unless more has been said about what it would mean to "conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived," one might be able to coherently imagine a world in which someone conceives of a sensible object's existing unperceived.

To put the point somewhat differently, it looks as though Berkeley confuses two types of "possibility." On the one hand, there is a notion of logical possibility, on the other hand, within the context of Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi, it appears that Berkeley is working with a notion of possibility, call it "psychological possibility," which is weaker than logical possibility. With respect to modal strength, psychological possibility is closer to physical possibility than it is to logical possibility. Physical possibility is standardly defined in terms of the laws of physics of the actual world. This observation provides a clue as to how we might come to understand what "psychological possibility" is. We can say that a certain psychological feat, F, is psychologically possible if and only if the claim, 'F is performed' does not entail that a law of psychology is false. Perhaps we can envision a "mature psychology" complete with laws which determine such things as the conditions under which mental images are constructed. Given all of this, we might be able to understand what Berkeley means by his contention that it is impossible to form an image of a tree existing unperceived.

Even so, apart from the question of whether the notion of psychological possibility can be adequately explicated, it is worth pointing out that Berkeley, perhaps without realizing it, is really dealing with a type of possibility which is far weaker than logical possibility. I say this because the success of his argument (seems to) depend on whether or not it is possible for a
conceiver to perform a certain psychological feat, namely, that of imagining a sensible object existing unperceived. At this point, the only way to capture this kind of possibility is in terms of some crude and less well understood notion such as "psychological possibility." My aim is not so much to demonstrate that the account of the first section is blind to the difference between logical and psychological possibility. I am trying to raise some doubts as to whether the account errs in that it portrays Berkeley as being insensitive to this difference. Eventually, I will improve on the account of the first section by offering a clearer exposition of the logical moves that produce line (E). I intend to show that the question of whether or not the supposition contained in line (A) entails a contradiction, and hence that it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived, depends crucially on how (A) is analyzed or so I shall suggest in Chapter Five.
NOTES

1 In *The Principles*, Part I, Section 22, Berkeley writes: "It is but looking into your own thoughts, and so trying whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or figure, or motion, or color, to exist without the mind, or unperceived. This easy trial may make you see that what you contend for is a downright contradiction." Of course, Berkeley’s opponent is contending that it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived. In due course Berkeley will argue that the attempt to conceive this possibility eventuates in a contradiction. Thus, according to Berkeley, we should conclude from this that the supposition that it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived is a necessary falsehood and so, the claim that no such object can exist unperceived is a necessary truth. All references to *The Principles* are to the work edited by K. Winkler. See George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, edited by K. Winkler, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis, 1981.

2 I shall note, at the appropriate place, the earlier and more recent work that I have alluded to here.


4 See *The Dialogues*, p. 38.


6 *The Dialogues*, p. 11.

7 See *The Dialogues*, p. 11.

8 In order to say which commentators attribute this belief to Berkley it must be assumed that Berkeley’s *esse* is *percepi* thesis is just the claim that no collection of determinate primary and secondary qualities can exist unperceived. Commentators who have alleged that Berkeley took *esse* is *percepi* to be a necessary truth include: G. J. Warnock, *Berkeley*, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, 1983, p. 113. See also, *Berkeley’s...
Other commentators have taken the opposite view. See G.S. Pappas, “Adversary Metaphysics,” in *Philosophy Research Archives*, Vol. XI, 1983, pp. 571-585. Pappas cites passages in which Berkeley maintains that the denial of esse is percipi is meaningless. He takes this as evidence that Berkeley does not believe esse is percipi to be a necessary truth since its denial is meaningless and so, not even false (much less necessarily false). I think Berkeley’s remark ought to be treated as an aberration. For, he gives no argument for the claim that the denial of esse is percipi is meaningless but he does attempt to give an argument that denying it entails a contradiction.


10 *The Dialogues*, p. 36.

11 *The Dialogues*, p. 35.


13 *The Principles*, Part I, Section 23, p. 33

14 The textual evidence is the passage from page 36 of *The Dialogues* which I have just prior to lines (a) through (H).

15 I.C. Tipton specifically criticizes Berkeley’s argument with respect to this very problem. On his interpretation of Berkeley’s argument it turns out that Berkeley conflates conception and perception. On his view, Berkeley confuses the state of affairs of a sensible object’s existing unperceived with the mental image one is supposed to create when asked to perform the task of conceiving of a sensible object’s existing unperceived. It is the fact that Berkeley confuses the state of affairs with the mental image which allows him the (apparent) assertion that when a conceiving perceives a sensible object existing (forms a mental image of the object), she has perceived the sensible object. See I.C. Tipton, *Berkeley. The Philosophy of Immaterialism*, Meuthen and Company, London, 1974, pp. 165-166. In addition, Jonathan Bennett notes Berkeley’s tendency to conflate perception and conception (or imagination) in other contexts. See J. Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971.

16 See *The Principles*, Part I, Section 33, pp. 36-37.
To some there may be a problem with using this quote to support the contention that Berkeley believed that ideas of conception are perceived since the quote mentions only those ideas as are brought about by imagination. In the first place, I do not see that there is a significant distinction, for Berkeley, between ideas of imagination and ideas of conception (of the image variety). But, secondly, can there be any doubt that ideas of conception (again, of the image variety) are not immediately perceived. I am inclined to think that Berkeley would have said that such an idea of conception can exist if and only if it is perceived.

To some readers the locution, 'idea of x,' is bound to seem foreign to Berkeley. For one thing, such expressions suggest representational realism; a doctrine which is anathema to Berkeley. But, this is hasty. Notice that in this context we are speaking of ideas of conception and not ideas of perception or sense. Representational realists, certainly of the classic variety, were, I take it, exclusively concerned with ideas of perception. Surely, no one would seriously contend that my image of Pegasus represents anything real.

Someone might be inclined to think that there is no problem in supposing that there is nothing wrong logically with the move from (J) to (K) on the grounds that there is no difference, qua idea, between ideas of conception or imagination and ideas of perception. But, for Berkeley there is a difference between these two sorts of ideas. In the quotation from The Principles, Section 33, Berkeley plainly says that ideas of imagination are "weak" and ideas of perception are "strong" (this difference, and the way it is put, is adopted by Hume—I am thinking here of Hume's criterion of "force and vivacity"). Note also that ideas of perception, for Berkeley, are caused by God whereas ideas of imagination are caused by a "finite spirit." The differences noted between ideas of imagination and perception constitute one more reason for thinking that Berkeley did not hold (CP). For, sense perception and conception (or imagination) turn out to be different mental acts in that each takes a different object, that is, each has a different idea as its (immediate) object. Someone might also object to my discussion of (CON) through (K) as an explanation of why Berkeley might have held (CP) on the grounds that this discussion involves the locution, "idea of x." I admit that the locution is foreign to Berkeley but, notice, (i) in the present context the locution is non-toxic; there is nothing in my use of it which implies that Berkeley was a representational realist; (ii) nothing that I say by way of criticizing the (CON) through (K) explanation/defense of (CP) unfairly exploits the locution; (iii) the locution, granting that it is problematic, is a problem for
someone advocating the (CON) through (K) defense of (CP) instead of me; and,
(iv) I’m willing to let advocates of the defense employ the locution for the
sake of argument.

20 The philosophical community is sharply divided on the question of
what Berkeley’s esse is percipi came to. Some, like G.J. Warnock, think that
esse is percipi is just the claim each sensible (material) object is just a collec-
tion of ideas. See G.J. Warnock, Berkeley, University of Notre Dame Press,
Notre Dame, 1983. Somewhat similarly, proponents of what has come to be
called the “Inherence Account” seem to hold that esse is percipi is the claim
that each sensible quality is an idea. See Edwin Allaire, “Berkeley’s Ideal-
“flirts” with the idea that esse is percipi is the claim that no idea can exist
unperceived. See K. Marc-Wogau, “Berkeley’s Sensationalism and the Esse
is Percipi Principle,” Thoeieia, Vol. XXIII, 1957. Reprinted in David Armstrong
and C.B. Martin (eds.), Locke and Berkeley: Critical and Interpretive Essays,
320, he writes, “Another basic thesis in Berkeley’s philosophy is the esse est
percipi principle. It holds true of all ideas that their esse is their percipi (my
emphasis). Along these lines, G.S. Pappas notes that this version of the thesis
is a “common interpretation.” But, he goes on to criticize calling this thesis
esse is percipi on the grounds that no writer of Berkeley’s time would have
denied it. Instead, as Pappas says, esse is percipi is the claim that no sensi-
ble object (collection of determinate, sensible qualities) can exist unper-
ceived. See G.S. Pappas, “Ideas, Minds, and Berkeley,” American Philosophical
esse is percipi ought to be construed as the claim that no sensible (physical)
object can exist unperceived.

21 I say “logically” possible here since Berkeley appears to have felt
that (3’) was necessary truth. At Principles, Part I, Section 7, Berkeley
writes, “Now for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is a manifest con-
tradiction; for to have an idea is all one has to perceive....” Furthermore,
there are commentators who have remarked that (3’) is an “obvious neces-

22 For The Principles, Sections 3, 7, and 9. For The Dialogues, see pages
13, 17, and 31, where Berkeley says, “...any idea, or combination of ideas,
should exist in an unthinking substance, or exterior to all minds, is in itself
an evident contradiction.” This list of passages is by no means exhaustive.
As I say in the footnote above, I think esse is percipi ought to be construed as, "no sensible object (collection of determinate secondary and primary qualities) can exist unperceived. So, I side with those who think that the conclusion of Berkeley's Master Argument ought to be the claim that no physical object can exist unperceived. Even so, the passage admits of a reading in which it appears that (3') is the conclusion of the Master Argument. In Principles, Section 23, Berkeley says that one cannot "...conceive it possible, the objects of your thought may exist without the mind (or unperceived)...." Just prior to this he has granted that one has the power to frame in one's mind "ideas which you call books and trees." Here Berkeley seems to have called an idea a book (or a tree depending on the content of the idea). So, the object which Berkeley (apparently) thinks cannot exist without the mind is an idea which is called a book. Hence, he seems to have concluded (3').

Some commentators have taken notice of this problem. See K. Marc-Wagou's paper (already cited) and Pappas' "Ideas, Minds, and Berkeley" (previously cited). Pappas sketches what he calls a "Performance Analysis" of Berkeley's argument. The account of Berkeley's argument that I give in Chapter Five is a species of the "Performance Analysis." The reason that my account is at least a species of the "Performance Analysis" has to do with the fact that Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi depends on the possibility of subject's performing a certain mental act. That act consists in conceiving a sensible object existing unperceived. On my treatment of the argument, Berkeley reasons that since no one can perform the act, that is, since no one can conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived, it follows that esse is percipi is true.
CHAPTER V
ESSE IS PERCIPI: PART II

I

In what follows I shall be concerned primarily with an explication of the logical moves that begin with line (A) and end with line (E). What I want to suggest is that the supposition made in line (A) does produce a contradiction. I intend to provide a line-by-line account of how a contradiction may be derived if we suppose that it is possible to conceive of a sensible object existing without anyone's perceiving it. More specifically, I shall propose that we interpret the verb 'conceive' in its relational or de re sense. So interpreted it will become easier to see why Berkeley thinks that the supposition, "it is possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived," entails a contradiction. Although I'm going to use some technical machinery developed only very recently to illuminate Berkeley's argument, my use of it, I would hope, is not to be misunderstood. I want to propose another way of interpreting Berkeley's argument. The logical machinery is only an aid in reaching this goal. The interpretation that follows is, I think, fairly close to what Berkeley intended even though his technical knowledge and ultimately his own words may have failed him.
What is needed before we can reconstruct Berkeley's argument for the conclusion that it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived is an analysis of line (A). Line (A) is, as I have indicated, the assumption Berkeley makes for the purpose of a reductio. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which line (A) may be read; one de dicto and the other de re. If line (A) is read so that 'conceives' is taken in its de dicto sense, we obtain:

(Ad) One can conceive that a sensible object, such as a tree, exists without anyone's perceiving it.

(Ad) says that it is possible to conceive the proposition, "a sensible object, such as a tree, exists without anyone's perceiving it." I doubt that (Ad), for reasons that are probably apparent, is the correct analysis of line (A). As I have said, it seems that when Berkeley asks whether it is possible to conceive a sensible object existing unperceived, he is assuming that one constructs a mental image or an idea of a sensible object which does not contain, as a part of its content, "nobody by to perceive them (it)." But then, if one (directly) conceives an image, rather than a proposition or some sentence-like object or other, (Ad) cannot be a correct analysis of (A). (Ad) expresses the fact that an act of conception relates a conceiver to a sentence, whereas Berkeley evidently thinks that an act of conception, in the context of his argument, (directly) relates a conceiver to a mental image and (ultimately) to a sensible object.

Line (A) may be represented in such a way that the verb 'conceives' is taken in its de re sense as in:
(Ar) There is a sensible object, such as a tree, such that one can conceive of it existing without anyone's perceiving it (or, simply, conceive a sensible object existing unperceived).

(Ar) says something like, "there exists a sensible object such that it is possible to conceive of it existing and no one has perceived it." Although (Ar) is closer to what we want than is (Ad), there are other de re construals of (A) which we need to consider.

Before trying to state them, there is a feature of (A) that I want to bring into the foreground. First of all, although formally speaking we are treating 'conceives' as a predicate, 'conceives,' as well as other verbs of propositional attitude such as (notoriously) 'believes,' have a feature which makes the business of capturing the logical form of sentences in which they occur rather tricky. Verbs like 'conceives' may also be thought of as sentence forming operators. When prefixed by a singular term and joined, for example, to a simple declarative sentence like, "It is raining," a new sentence is formed, such as, "Oscar believes that it is raining." To the extent that we can think of them as operators, it is appropriate to think of them as possessing certain formal properties which relational and non-relational predicates do not have. Complex sentences like (A), which contain modal operators, suppressed quantifiers, and "nested intentional verbs" give rise to ambiguities of scope. With these variables there are many possible readings of (A). Thus, for example, under a de re construal of 'conceives,' we obtain the following possible reading of (A):
(A 1) There exists an unperceived sensible object such that it is possible to conceive it existing.

It would not be useful to enumerate the other possible variations on (A). Let me instead call attention to the problem with (A 1) and some of its cousins. What we need is an analysis of (A) which reflects the fact that two sorts of states of affairs are being conceived when Berkeley asks whether it is possible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. On the one hand, Hylas is being asked to conceive of the state of affairs in which a sensible object, such as a tree, exists. On the other hand, he also is being asked to conceive of a state of affairs in which the tree goes unperceived. Thus, (Ar) is likely to be closer to Berkeley's understanding of (A) than is (A 1) since it, unlike (A 1), is sensitive to the fact that Berkeley (evidently) thinks that it is not possible to conceive the tree existing and unperceived within a single act of conception.

I propose that we begin with a first approximation at how best to represent (A); hopefully, we can remain sensitive to the points made just now, and gradually work toward something which captures how Berkeley understood (A). One way to parse out line (A) along de re lines produces the following:

(Ar - 1) It is possible that there exists a sensible object, o, which is conceived existing and it is not the case that there is a perceiver, p, such that p perceives o.
If we instantiate on the appropriate quantifiers in (Ar-1) we get something very close to the following: "It is possible to conceive of, say, a tree existing without anyone present to perceive it." But, Berkeley grants that. He says, "There is nothing easier than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books existing in a closet, and nobody by to perceive them." He thinks that (A) is (necessarily) false. Thus, (Ar-1) cannot be an adequate characterization of (A) since, it would appear, Berkeley concedes what it asserts.

There is also another reason why (Ar-1) is not the best way to represent how Berkeley thinks of (A). Notice that its second conjunct says, "It is not the case that there exists someone who stands in the perceiving relation to some sensible object x." Of course, Berkeley is far from clear on the matter of what it means to "conceive of a sensible object unperceived." But here we can offer an hypothesis which will expose, if only partially, what Berkeley felt was required to conceive a sensible object unperceived—in order to do it successfully a conceiver has to conceive a sensible object without perceiving an idea of it. Under this interpretation of the argument the reason that one fails to conceive of a sensible object unperceived is that in making the attempt one nevertheless perceives an idea of it (the sensible object). It is as if one fails to conceive the object unperceived because it was, after all, perceived "in the mind's eye." In order to conceive it unperceived the conceiver has to imagine the object with no features (sensible properties) perceived. After Berkeley grants that one can conceive of some books existing in a closet without anyone around to perceive them, he says:

…but what is all this, I beseech you, more than framing in your mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to
On my reading of the argument, when Berkeley poses the second question he is indicating that the attempt to conceive of a sensible object unperceived has failed. But, more importantly, this passage shows that (Ar-1) does not accurately reflect Berkeley's intentions since the passage shows that what is at stake is whether the conceiver, at the moment she attempts to conceive a sensible object unperceived, perceives an idea of imagination (or conception). The relevant conjunct of (Ar-1) says that there is not anyone who perceives the object. But, since we are talking about an act of conception, this is simply irrelevant. In an act of conception (or imagination) a conceiver does not stand in the (sense) perceiving relation to sensible objects like trees and books. That is, the idea brought forth in imagination is not an occurrent idea of sensation. So, it is really not that difficult to see why Berkeley would not deny the truth of (Ar-1). For, admitting that it is true entails only that the conceiver formed an idea "called a tree" which does not have, as a part of its content, a perceiver gazing upon the tree. Consequently, it is just as easy to see why (Ar-1) is not the best way to represent how he might have understood (A) because forming a "tree-idea" with no one by to perceive the tree does not count as a conception of the tree existing unperceived.

So far I have been considering an analysis of (A) which interprets 'conceives' in its de re sense. As we saw just now, (Ar-1) asserts that a conceiver stands in the conceiving relation to a sensible object. The subject further conceives that no one stands in the perceiving relation to the same sensible object. At least one reason for thinking that (Ar-1) did not
accurately reflect how Berkeley might have thought of (A) is that (Ar-1) relates a conceiver to the wrong kind of (sensible) object. What we need in the way of an analysis of line (A) is a formulation which involves, in some way, the relation of a perceiver to an idea. As we saw in the previous section there are two kinds of ideas which Berkeley recognizes, ideas of sense or occurrent (veridical) perception and ideas of imagination or conception. Since Berkeley is concerned with the possibility of conceiving a sensible object it seems that ideas of conception are going to be the right sorts of objects. Furthermore, Berkeley is plainly aware that an act of conception of the image variety does not take an idea of sensation as its (immediate) object. So, the kind of idea that a conceiver would be related to is an idea of conception. This leaves us with the question of who is to stand in the perceiving relation to an idea of conception. Berkeley obviously thinks that the conceiver is related, in some way, to an idea of conception. For he writes, “But do not you yourself (the conceiver) perceive or think of them (ideas of conception) all the while?”

There are two ways to represent (A) along the lines discussed just now:

(Ar-2) It is possible that there exists a sensible object, \( o \), such that \( o \) is conceived existing and it is not the case that there exists an idea, \( i \), such that \( i \) is an idea of conception of \( o \) and \( i \) is perceived,

(Ar-3) It is possible that there exists a sensible object, \( o \), such that \( o \) is conceived existing and there is an idea, \( i \), of conception of \( o \) and it is not the case that \( i \) is perceived.
Notice, first of all, that both (Ar-2) and (Ar-3) continue to take 'conceives' in its de re sense. Both involve somehow a relation between a conceiver and a sensible object such as a tree. The difference between (Ar-2) and (Ar-3) lies in the fact that (Ar-2) denies the existence of an idea whereas (Ar-3) denies that the conceiver stands in the perceiving relation to an idea. That is, the right conjunct of (Ar-3) asserts that an idea exists unperceived, and therein lies the problem, while (Ar-2) denies that an idea exists (perceived or not).

Deciding which of these, (Ar-2) or (Ar-3), is the best way to represent how Berkeley understood (A) is no easy matter. Let me begin to do so by noting that (Ar-3) conflicts with a thesis that Berkeley clearly holds. Remember, Berkeley holds that all ideas, whether produced by acts of occurrent (veridical) perception or produced by conception, are perceived. By instantiation and conjunction elimination on (Ar-3) we can derive:

\[(I') \text{ There exists an idea, } i \text{, such that } i \text{ is an idea of conception of } q \text{ and it is not the case that } i \text{ is perceived.}\]

\((I')\), of course, says that there is an idea of conception, of a particular sensible object such as a tree, which a particular conceiver fails to perceive. But claim \((I')\) conflicts with Berkeley's thesis \((I)\). Since all ideas, even those that are produced by conception, are perceived according to Berkeley, the idea of conception which is produced when someone conceives of the tree existing is also perceived. And, since the agent is engaged in an act of conception, it follows that she perceives the idea of the tree. \((I')\) involves
quantification over an idea of conception of a tree whose existence an agent
is conceiving. Thus, in accordance with thesis (I), that idea cannot exist
without being perceived by someone. Consequently, I reject (Ar-3) as an
adequate representation of how Berkeley thought of (A) on the grounds that
it conflicts with his thesis (I).

We are left then with (Ar-2). What I want to do now is to show, in a
fairly rigorous way, that (Ar-2) will produce a (the desired) contradiction.
That (Ar-2) will produce a contradiction, coupled with the fact that it does
not, unlike (Ar-3), conflict with thesis (I), constitutes the argument that it is
the best, of the candidates considered here, way to say what Berkeley took
(A) to assert. The argument involves two other claims: (a) Berkeley's thesis
(I) and (b) that when a conceiver attempts to conceive a sensible object
existing, an idea of conception (of the object) is contemplated. Interestingly
enough, claim (b) is not only plausible (or even true), a close variant of it is
also stated by Berkeley when he concludes his presentation of the argument
for esse is percipi in The Principles. He says, "When we do our utmost to
conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contem­
plating our own ideas." Since the type of mental act is one of conception, it
is natural to assume that Berkeley is thinking of ideas of conception as the
(direct) objects of "contemplation." And, we may also suppose on Berkeley's
behalf, that if such an idea of conception is "contemplated," it exists.

Here is an interpretation of Berkeley's argument to the effect that to
conceive of sensible object's existing unperceived is to "conceive it existing
unconceived."

(Ar-2) It is possible that there is a sensible object,
\( o \), such that \( o \) is conceived existing and it is
not the case that there is an idea, \( i \), such that
\( i \) is an idea of conception of \( o \) and \( i \) is per­ceived.

**Justification:** (Ar-2) is an assumption for indirect proof.

(J) Sensible object \( o \) is conceived existing and it
is not the case that there is an idea, \( i \) such
that \( i \) is an idea of conception of \( o \) and \( i \) is
perceived.

**Justification:** (J) follows from (Ar-2) via existential
instantiation. An English paraphrase of (J) might be: "it is possible to conceive of a
sensible object existing and no idea of con­ception of it exists which is perceived.

(K) Sensible object \( o \) is conceived existing.

**Justification:** (K) follows from (J) by conjunction
elimination.

(b') If a sensible object, like a tree, is conceived
existing, then there exists an idea of concep­tion of the tree.

**Justification:** (b') follows from (b). (b), in turn, is a
claim Berkeley accepts. (b) is formally speaking an assumption.

(L) There exists an idea, \( i \), of conception of the
tree.

**Justification:** (L) follows from (K) and (b') by **modus ponens**.

(I) All ideas, including those of conception, are
perceived.

**Justification:** Berkeley accepts (I) which in the pre­
sent context is an assumption. Berkeley, it is
certain, held that ideas of conception of the
image variety are perceived.

(M) There exists an idea, \( i \), of conception of the
tree and \( i \) is perceived.
Justification: (M) follows more or less directly from (L) and (I).

(N) If a sensible object (such as a tree) is conceived existing, then there exists an idea of conception, \( i \), of the tree such that \( i \) is perceived.

Justification: (N) follows from (K) and (M) via conditional proof.

(O) It is not the case that there is an idea, \( i \), of conception of the tree such that \( i \) is perceived.

Justification: (O) follows from (J) by conjunction elimination.

(P) It is not the case that sensible object \( o \) (the tree) is conceived existing.

Justification: (P) follows from (N) and (O) by modus tollens.

(Q) Sensible object \( o \) is conceived existing and it is not the case that \( o \) is conceived existing.

Justification: (Q) follows from (P) and (K) by conjunction introduction.

(R) It is not possible to conceive "of a sensible object existing unperceived." 

Justification: (R) follows from (Ar-2) and (Q) by reductio ad absurdum.

We can now begin to get a grip on the details and the general structure of an important part of Berkeley's argument for esse is percipi. The details have been provided above so I will concentrate on the argument's general structure. On this account of the argument, each conjunct of the contradiction, "sensible object, \( o \), is conceived existing and it is not the case that \( o \) is conceived existing" is established by two routes. When one attempts to
conceive the tree existing, Berkeley thinks, an idea of conception of the tree, which the conceiver perceives, is brought forth. For Berkeley, it would appear that to conceive of a tree existing is to imagine it possessing certain properties. These properties are going to be of the same kind as virtually any medium size physical object. They might include, but need not be limited to, the property of having some physical dimension or other, of occupying space, of being green and brown (where we are conceiving of trees existing), and perhaps standing in certain spatial relations with other physical objects. Each of these features is represented somehow in the idea (of conception) of the tree. Collectively these features constitute the content of that idea. But, when one attempts to imagine or conceive the tree unperceived, the ideational representations of these features vanish from the stage of conception. This is because, according to the revised story of Berkeley’s argument, to conceive of the tree unperceived is to imagine the tree with no features perceived. And, to consider, through the medium of conceptual-imagistic representation, what it would be like if no such feature or collection of features was perceived is just to imagine what it would be like if no idea (of perception) of the tree existed. The best (perhaps the only) way, as Berkeley’s thinking is portrayed here, to conceive of what it would be like if no idea of perception of the tree existed is to simply “erase the idea of the tree from one’s conceptual screen.” But then, this is just to say that it is not the case that there exists an idea of conception, i, of the tree which is perceived which, parenthetically, is exactly what is asserted in the right hand conjunct of (Ar-2). Since no such idea exists, it follows that it is not the case that sensible object, o (the tree), was conceived existing. But, of course, it follows from (Ar-2) that the tree was conceived existing. Thus, the attempt
to conceive the tree existing produced the left-hand conjunct, "sensible object, o was conceived existing" while the attempt to conceive the tree unperceived issues in the right-hand conjunct, "it is not the case that o was conceived existing."

There is something of a problem with this account of Berkeley's argument which I want to address. The "problem" can be expressed in the form of a question: Is there a way to explain why Berkeley might have thought that the only way to conceive the tree unperceived is to cease entertaining, or to otherwise bring about the destruction (or annihilation), of an idea (of conception) of the tree? The problem might also be expressed in still another way: what is being sought is an explanation of why Berkeley might think that conceiving of the tree unperceived "entails" that no idea of conception of the tree exists. Unhappily, there is no way of explaining this "connection" which is particularly crisp. Perhaps the best way to begin the explanation is to ask what Berkeley could have in mind, if he had thought of the perception/conception of sensible objects in terms of the existence of ideas (of perception and conception). The brief answer is that, for Berkeley, if there is an idea of conception of the tree, then someone, namely the conceiver, has conceived "what it would be like" for her to have an idea (of perception) of the tree and so she has conceived the tree with some of its features perceived. An idea of conception of the tree is relevantly like the kind of idea she would have had were she to gaze upon a real tree. The only difference, to Berkeley, between the two ideas is that, as we have seen in Chapter Four, one (the idea produced by conception) is "fainter" than the other (the idea brought on by an act of perception). To entertain an image of the tree which was brought into existence via conception is to entertain an idea which
represents certain features of the tree such as its color and dimension. Many of these features would be present, though they would appear more vivid to be sure, in an idea which was brought into existence by an act of perception.

Actually, it may be that we can turn an apparent loss into fortune. We could accept a modified version of the preceding argument. This new version of the argument would employ, as an assumption for reductio, a modified form of (Ar-2). Instead of saying, as (Ar-2) does, that it is not the case that there exists an idea of conception of the tree which is perceived (by the conceiver) we could say that there exists an idea of conception, which does not contain as a part of its content an ideational representation of the tree, which is perceived (by the conceiver). So, for example, when the tree is conceived existing the conceiver begins by forming an image or idea of the tree which includes ideational representations of features found among actual trees. These features might include, among other things, the fact that the tree stands (or would stand if it were real) in spatial relations to other physical objects. Such an idea of conception might contain an idea of the tree situated on some landscape next to, say, a barn or a house. But, once the conceiver attempts to imagine the tree unperceived, that portion of her image which represents the tree would have to be erased. The result is that she still entertains an idea of conception, such an idea continues to exist, but the tree, or rather the "ideational tree," would cease to be a part of the content of her idea.

With this change in the argument we no longer have any need to explain why Berkeley might have thought that in order to conceive "what it would be like" if no one had an idea of perception of the tree requires the annihilation of an idea of conception of the tree. Furthermore, the argument
works just as well with the proposed modification. We begin, just as we did before, with the assumption that it is possible that there is a sensible object, \( o \), such that \( o \) is conceived existing and there is an idea, \( i \), which does not contain a representation of \( o \) and \( i \) is perceived. Now, suppose that \( o \) is conceived existing. Then, in accordance with Berkeley's thesis (b), it follows that there is an idea of conception of the tree. Let us suppose, for example, that the conceiver produces an idea of conception whose content consists of a tree located next to a house and perhaps some other features which we need not specify further. Suppose that \( o \) is conceived unperceived. To conceive of the tree unperceived she imagines the tree with none of its features perceived. And, to accomplish this she simply "erases" that portion of her idea which represents the tree. Thus, she is left with an idea of conception which does not contain an idea of the tree. But, notice now that she no longer conceives of the tree existing. Since the tree is no longer represented in her image, which now consists only of a representation of a barn together with some other features, the conceiver is not now thinking of the tree as possessing features common to existing objects such as being spatially related to various other objects in various ways. Thus, the tree is conceived existing and it is not conceived existing.

It may seem as though a small gain has been made. It is true that there is no need to argue that, or to explain why, Berkeley believed that to conceive of a sensible object unperceived requires the destruction of an idea of conception. Even so, the capsule reconstruction of Berkeley's argument that I have just given requires that in order to conceive of a sensible object unperceived, the conceiver has to bring about the destruction of some part of an idea of conception. In spite of this appearances, I want to argue that
progress has been made. For, there is clear textual evidence that Berkeley would have accepted certain global features of the story of his argument given just now as accurate. The evidence is to be found in the opening pages of *The Principles*. In these pages Berkeley attacks the doctrine of abstract general ideas. He argues, convincingly, that there are no abstract general ideas. However, he goes on to make the following concession:

I can imagine a man with two heads or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse. I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body. To be plain, I am myself able to abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others, with which though they are united in some object, yet, it is possible they may really exist without them.19

Here Berkeley is confessing that it is possible to make new ideas or images out of the parts of old ones. When he says that he "can imagine ... the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse," he is saying that he can have an image or an idea of centaur. It is natural to think that this image was brought about by a kind of "ideational surgery." That is, one "separates" the idea of a head and trunk and attaches this to an area of the body of a horse. The requirement on one's ability to perform the surgery is that it be possible, as it obviously is, for a head to be physically separated from a body. Returning to our example, it is clear that it is possible for the barn to exist without a tree being located next to it. So, one should be able, according to Berkeley, to imagine the barn without the tree being next to it. Therefore,
Berkeley would admit that certain features of an idea of conception of the image variety can be separated from others.

II

In this section I want to indicate, in a fairly precise way, how the account of Berkeley's argument presented in the first section overcomes the problems discussed in Chapter Four. I will take up these problems in the same order as they were given in Chapter Four.

Problem 1: The Conception-Perception Distinction. As we saw earlier, the account of Berkeley's argument presented in Chapter Four attributes to him, at least implicitly, what appears to be a false claim, namely, that conceiving a sensible object, such as a tree, implies (or entails) that the object was perceived. It is not very difficult to understand what lies behind the attribution. According to the account of Chapter Four, the task set before the concever is to conceive of a sensible object's existing without perceiving it herself. If but one person perceives the object, then it was not unperceived. Thus, since the concever perceived the object, at the moment of conception, one is led to think that she has failed to conceive it existing unperceived.

One can understand the temptation to attribute (CP) to Berkeley for another reason. Near the end of Berkeley's presentation of the argument in The Dialogues Hylas makes the following confession:

But now I plainly see, that all I can do is to frame ideas in my own mind. I may indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from
proving that I can conceive them existing out of the minds of all spirits.20

Notice that Berkeley has emphasized, "existing out of the minds of all spirits." That he does so creates the impression that Hylas has failed to conceive the tree "existing out of the minds of all spirits." In this context, "conceiving the tree "existing out of the minds of all spirits"; seems to mean something like, "conceiving the tree existing without being perceived by anyone." Therefore, since at least one "spirit" (or perceiver), namely Hylas, perceived the tree, it is not the case that he conceived it "existing out of the minds of all spirits (or perceivers)."

But, of course, in spite of his working, Berkeley does not really mean anything like this. What he means is that at the moment of conception the conceiver perceived an idea of a sensible object. And, since he had in mind an idea of conception, rather than an idea of perception, and in view of his thesis (1), there is no reason to think either that he held (CP) or that his argument required it. In fact, it would seem that Berkeley is perfectly justified in asserting that at the moment of conception the conceiver perceives an idea (of conception) of a sensible object. For, imagining or conceiving sensible objects such as trees is straightforwardly a matter of bringing forth images or ideas of such things. Ideas of conception, just like any other idea, are objects of (immediate) perception.

One virtue of the account of Berkeley's argument given in the first section of the present chapter is that it accords well with Berkeley's actual wording on this matter. Of course, it is easy enough to show that the argument of the first section does not require (CP). Inspection of the argument's
premises suffices to demonstrate this claim. But, what deserves emphasis is the fact that this version of Berkeley's argument pairs ideas (of conception) with the act of perception rather than sensible objects like trees. If one reads the relevant passages in *The Principles* and *The Dialogues* one finds that Berkeley is quite careful, and consistent, when he indicates that ideas, not sensible objects, are perceived when a conceiver attempts to conceive a sensible object existing unperceived. As we have just seen, in *The Dialogues* Berkeley has Hylas make the confession that all he can do when asked to conceive a sensible object existing unperceived is to, "conceive in (his) own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a horse, or a mountain, but that is all." And in *The Principles*, Part I, Section 23, Berkeley grants that a conceiver can frame an idea of, say, a tree and leave out of the idea some perceipient who sees the tree (represented in the idea framed by the conceiver). Furthermore, Berkeley also says in this passage that the conceiver does nothing other than frame "in (his) mind certain ideas which you call books and trees, and at the same time omitting to frame the idea of anyone else that may them?" Berkeley then asks, "But do not you (the conceiver) perceive or think of them all the while?" The conceiver is perceiving her own ideas, rather than perceiving by sense a tree, at the moment she attempts to conceive the tree existing unperceived.

On the account of Berkeley's argument being proposed the fact that the conceiver has perceived an idea (of conception) of a sensible object means not that the conceiver has perceived the object but rather that the conceiver has failed to conceive the object existing unperceived. One reason it can be said that the conceiver has failed to conceive of the tree existing unperceived is because Berkeley holds that ideas of conception (of the image
variety) resemble (visual) ideas of sensation. In this connection, it is worth pointing out that Berkeley holds a species of representationalism. In a passage already cited, Berkeley says:

The ideas imprinted on the sense by the Author of Nature are called real things; and those excited in the imagination being less regular, vivid and constant, are more properly termed ideas, or images of things, which they copy and represent. 21

What Berkeley is saying in this passage is that ideas of conception (of the image variety) represent certain ideas of perception or sense. An idea of perception, according to Berkeley, is a "real thing" while an idea of conception is the representation of a "real thing" or idea of perception.

The recognition that Berkeley holds a special kind of representationalism is vital to understanding his most important argument for esse is percipi. For, in light of this fact, we can see that when the conceiver perceives an idea of conception, she has conceived the object with certain of its features (qualities) perceived since, Berkeley believes, an idea of conception is a copy of an idea gotten by sense or perception. And, since she has conceived the object (= collection of determinate, sensible qualities) with certain of its qualities perceived, she cannot be said to have accomplished conceiving the object existing unperceived. The only way, or so it now appears, to conceive the object existing unperceived is to conceive the object existing without perceiving an idea (of conception) or, less crudely, without perceiving an idea (of conception) that is like an idea of sense perception. Doing this, Berkeley thinks, is quite impossible because a necessary condition for
conceiving the object existing is that the concealer bring an idea (of conception) into "view." The idea brought into view, when the feat is attempted, is going to resemble, in certain respects, an idea of sense perception. Such an idea, according to Berkeley represents an idea of sense perception. Conceiving the object unperceived would require that the concealer fail to perceive an idea (of conception) of the object. But, failing to perceive an idea (of conception) of the object results in failing to conceive the object existing. This gives Berkeley the other half of the contradiction; it produced the conjunct, "it is not the case that the object was conceived existing." Berkeley infers, "the object was conceived existing" from the fact that the concealer, just prior to the attempt to conceive the object unperceived, has conceived the object existing. Thus, he does not need (CP) to derive the contradiction nor does he need it to infer that the concealer perceived the object at the moment she conceived the object existing. For, on my account, he is not arguing that the concealer has failed to conceive the object existing unperceived because she perceived the object at the moment she conceived it existing. Instead, Berkeley is arguing that the concealer failed to conceive the object existing unperceived because she perceived an idea (of conception), an idea which is a copy or relevantly like an idea gotten by sense perception, at the moment she conceived the object existing.22

Problem 2: A Curious Reversal. Earlier I criticized the account of Berkeley's argument given in Chapter Four because it overlooked what seemed to be a curious feature of Berkeley's argument. It looks as though Berkeley begins his argument by claiming that he can demonstrate that no sensible object, such as a tree, can exist without being perceived. But,
ostensibly, he completes the argument by drawing a weaker conclusion in
the form of (3') which asserts merely that no idea can exist without being
perceived. This, as we saw earlier, raised doubts as to whether (3) is really
esse is percipi.

Let me say now that the earlier account of Berkeley's argument is cor-
rect in contending that (3) is esse is percipi. Berkeley does give a plausible
argument for something which, with the addition of certain other premises is
closer to (3) than it is to (3'). According to the reconstruction of Berkeley's
argument presented at the beginning of this chapter, Berkeley validly
demonstrates, via plausible premises, that it is not possible to conceive de re
of a sensible object, such as a tree, existing unperceived. Obviously, this lat-
ter claim is close in spirit to (3) than it is to (3').

The virtue of the account of this chapter over that of Chapter Four is
that we can now explain, or more accurately "explain away," Problem Two.
When Berkeley observes, "But do not you yourself perceive or think of them
(ideas of conception) all the while" he is not pointing out that it is impossible
to conceive of an idea existing unperceived. Instead, by the present account,
he is indicating that the attempt to conceive (de re) of a sensible object, such
as a tree, unperceived has failed. And indeed it has, if conceiving the tree
unperceived by anyone requires one to imagine the tree with none of its
features perceived. And, if this in turn requires one to imagine not having
an idea of perception of the tree, then the conceiver, at the moment she at-
tempts to conceive the tree unperceived, cannot entertain an idea of concep-
tion of the tree. This is because to entertain an idea of conception of the tree
is to imagine the tree with its features perceived by someone, namely, the
conceiver.
The purpose of Berkeley's observation is now easier to see in the light of the preceding remarks. The force of Berkeley's question, "But do not you yourself perceive them all the while?", is that the conceiver has perceived an idea of conception of the tree. And, in so doing, she has conceived someone, again herself, perceiving the tree. And so, she has failed to conceive the tree unperceived by anyone. Despite appearances, then, Berkeley is not ending his argument with (3') as a conclusion. Instead, he is drawing an intermediate conclusion which, he believes, entails that the conceiver has failed to conceive the tree existing unperceived. The intermediate conclusion is that the conceiver perceived an idea (of conception) of tree when she attempted to conceive the tree existing unperceived. It follows from this that the conceiver has failed to conceive the tree existing unperceived since in perceiving an idea (of conception) of the tree the conceiver imagined the tree perceived.

Problem 3: Conception and Logical Possibility. One problem with the account of Berkeley's argument given in Chapter Four is that it fails to make clear just what Berkeley takes the connection between conception and logical possibility to be. Furthermore, it is mute on the question of whether or not Berkeley thinks it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived. In what follows I shall argue first that Berkeley probably believed that it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived. Secondly, I shall suggest that Berkeley probably thought that the inability of any conceiver to conceive of a sensible object's existing unperceived is an indication that esse is percipi is a (special kind of) necessary truth.
We would do well to begin this with a question: why did Berkeley think that he had to produce an argument that would establish the necessity of esse is percipi—wouldn’t it have been enough if he could show that as a matter of contingent fact no sensible object exists without being perceived? The answer to this question will reveal a certain amount of dialectical mastery on Berkeley’s part. Berkeley sets the stage for his materialist opponent in the following way:

...and as for all that compages of external bodies which (the materialist) contend for, I shall grant you its existence, though you cannot either give me any reason why you believe it exists, or assign any use to it when it is supposed to exist. I say, the bare possibility of your opinion’s being true, shall pass for an argument that it is so.23

This passage shows that according to the terms of the debate, terms which Berkeley sets, that the “bare possibility” of an external body existing unperceived is sufficient to establish the claim that external bodies exist unperceived. Thus, in order to disabuse the materialist of his erroneous thinking Berkeley must contend that it is impossible for an external body to exist unperceived. And here he means it is logically impossible for an external body to exist unperceived. For anything less than this would show only that it is a contingent fact that external bodies do not exist unperceived.

The acid test for making a determination as to whether or not a state of affairs is logically possible is conceivability. As we have already seen, Berkeley thinks that there is a close connection between logical possibility and conceivability. He says that if his opponent can conceive of a sensible
object existing unperceived this would show that it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived and hence that idealism is false. He writes:

...if you can but conceive it possible for one extended, moveable substance ... to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall readily give up the cause....24

"Giving up the cause" in this context means, of course, abandoning idealism and with this the contention that it is logically impossible for a sensible object to exist unperceived. All that it takes for Berkeley to see the error of his ways is merely that one conceive a sensible object existing unperceived; all that it takes is to conceive of a state of affairs which consists of a sensible object (a collection of determinate, primary and secondary qualities) existing unperceived. If such a state of affairs can be conceived, then Berkeley is prepared to grant the possibility and, in view of this concession, he is willing to allow that sensible objects do exist unperceived.

We have seen that there is some reason for attributing to Berkeley belief in a thesis which may be somewhat crudely phrased as: If a state of affairs is conceivable, then it is logically possible. But, there is also some reason for thinking that Berkeley believed the converse of this claim. As I have already noted, Berkeley's argument for esse is perciπi requires that an instance of the following claim be true: If a state of affairs is inconceivable, then it is logically impossible. When Berkeley ends his presentation of the argument for esse is perciπi in The Dialogues he says:
Philonous: You acknowledge than that you cannot possibly conceive, how any one corporeal sensible thing should exist otherwise than in a mind.

Hylas: I do.

Philonous: And yet you will earnestly contend for the truth of that which you cannot so much as conceive.\textsuperscript{25}

As always, Berkeley is here speaking through Philonous. Philonous is suggesting that anyone who contends for the truth of that which he cannot conceive is not being "earnest." Of course, the charge of insincerity is a rhetorical device. What Berkeley really means is that the very fact that one cannot conceive a state of affairs is a good indication that the state of affairs is absurd or, in more technical language, a logical impossibility.

I think there is enough evidence to think that Berkeley accepts the following principle:

\begin{equation}
(\text{CL}) \quad \text{A state of affairs is logically possible if and only if it is conceivable.}
\end{equation}

The remaining question concerns the modal strength of 'conceivable.' As I said earlier, in the course of criticizing the account of Berkeley's argument for \textit{esse} is \textit{percepi} given in Chapter Four, it may be that Berkeley is asserting only that it is \textit{psychologically} impossible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. Under this interpretation of 'inconceivable,' Berkeley's conceivability principle would be read as, "A state of affairs is logically possible iff it is psychologically possible to conceive it." I doubt that Berkeley would want the principle to be understood in this way. In the first place,
under this reading, the principle turns out to be untenably weak. There are
a great many states of affairs that are psychologically impossible to conceive
but which are nevertheless logically possible. To take an example.26 Con-
sider a polygon having a thousand sides. It is psychologically impossible to
conceive such a figure. No human conceivier can form an image of a thousand
sided figure. Yet no one, least of all Berkeley, would contend that our (con-
tingent) inability to fashion a mental image of such a figure is any indication
that the figure is a logical impossibility. That we cannot entertain an image
of a thousand sided figure is due to the fact that performing such a feat lies
beyond the limits of human visual memory. Of course, the inability to form
an image of a thousand sided figure reflects a contingent fact about human
neurophysiology. We might have had different hardware. And, surely there
is a (logically) possible world in which human beings can (logically) conceive
of a figure with a thousand sides.

It is important to see that Berkeley would be able to respond to the
counterexample provided that we construe his conceivability thesis in a
stronger way. He could respond to the counterexample by claiming that the
consequent of his (intended) conceivability principle is not satisfied. That is,
it has not been shown (nor is it easy to show) that it is logically impossible to
conceive of a thousand sided figure. Indeed, it is the case that in another
(logically possible) world a conceivier with different neurophysiological hard-
ware conceives of a thousand sided figure. What is important to remember
is that this response, a response which is highly effective, is open to Berkeley
provided his principle is understood in the following way: "A state of affairs
is logically possible iff it is logically possible to conceive it."
Secondly, given what we now understand to be the meaning which Berkeley attaches to "it is impossible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived," a case can be made that it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. We can put the picture together bit by bit. Let us ask first what Berkeley might have meant by 'conceiving of a sensible object existing?' A clue is to be found in *The Dialogues*. Consider the following passage:

*Philonous*: But it is a universally received maxim, that everything which exists, is particular. How then can motion in general, or extension in general, exist in any corporeal substance.27

In the context from which this passage is taken Hylas is arguing that it is possible to conceive of a determinable, non-sensible quality, such as "motion in general," existing unperceived. In order to undercut this argument, Philonous resorts to the maxim, "whatever exists, is particular." What is important for our present purposes is that this is some evidence that Berkeley thought there was a close connection between existence and particularity. In the case of sensible objects, this connection may be expressed in the following way:

(PAR) If a sensible object exists, then it is particular.

For a sensible object to be particular, we may suppose, it must instance some property or properties. Sensible objects, for Berkeley, are collections of
determinate, sensible primary and secondary qualities. Thus, the properties which existing sensible objects instance are just determinate, sensible primary and secondary qualities.

(PAR) provides a clue as to what Berkeley may have meant by, "conceiving of a sensible object existing." It is clear that Berkeley held (PAR). Since he holds (PAR), he must say--in a case in which an object is not particular (or fails to instance determinate sensible qualities)--that the object does not exist. I want now to introduce an hypothesis which will be useful in uncovering the meaning, for Berkeley, of "conceiving a sensible object existing." The hypothesis can be given as:

\[(H)\] Certain conditions which are necessary for the actual existence of a sensible object are conditions which must be reflected in the act of conceiving that object existing.

According to (PAR), a necessary condition on the actual existence of a sensible object is that it be particular. If the object is "general" (in place of 'general' it would be more precise to say that "the object is a collection of general (determinable) qualities"), then it does not exist.28 According to (H), when conceiving of a sensible object existing, we must conceive of the object as particular. Conceiving the object as particular involves conceiving the object instancing certain determinate, sensible primary and secondary qualities.

These considerations suggest an informed guess as to the meaning, for Berkeley, of the phrase, "conceive(ing) of a sensible object existing." When one conceives of a sensible object existing one forms a mental image of a
sensible object as instantiating certain determinate, sensible properties (e.g., primary and secondary qualities). For example, taking the simplest case, consider an object like a red cube. Such an object is a collection of determinate primary and secondary qualities—being cubical is a determinant of extension while being red is a determinant of color. When one conceives of this collection of qualities existing one conceives it with the qualities which make it particular. That is, it is conceived with the qualities of determinate color and extension.

What I have said so far does not exhaust all I want to say concerning what it means to conceive of a sensible object’s existing. Much of what I want to add will be familiar. Even so, I include this material here in order to say, in fuller terms, what I think Berkeley means by ‘conceiving an object existing.’ In the first section I noted that Berkeley makes a rather interesting remark in his presentation of the argument for esse est percipi in *The Principles*. In that passage Berkeley says: “When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas.” The ideas we contemplate are, of course, ideas of conception which represent ideas of perception. In Berkeley’s fully matured philosophy, God—not the perception of a mind-independent physical object—is the cause of an idea of perception. Even so, the important point is that these ideas are images of what it would be like to have an idea of perception or sense. Even if God is the cause of an idea of perception, the content of an idea of conception (of the image variety) will be much like that of an idea gotten by perception. And, in an idea of perception what is “seen,” ostensibly, are ideas of determinate, sensible qualities. So, at least a part of what it
means to conceive of a sensible object's existing is to bring forth an idea of a
collection of determinate, sensible qualities.

But there is more. Conceiving of, say, a red cube existing does not
mean merely entertaining an idea of conception whose content is exhausted
by ideational analogs of determinants of color and extension. Conceiving of a
red cube existing, or for that matter of "trees (existing) in a park, or books
existing in a closet," involves in addition forming an image of the cube in-
stantiating properties common to other existing objects. As we have already
seen, some of these properties are just the possession of determinate fea-
tures. But other properties that might be mentioned include standing in
various spatial relations to other objects. And, including these features in a
conception of a sensible object existing involves conceiving not just the books
or the trees but also the books located in the closet or the trees existing in
the park. This means that a conception of a physical object existing will have
more imagistic content to it than merely conceiving the object simpliciter.
And ultimately it is this difference in content which distinguishes conceiving
the object (full stop) from conceiving the object existing.

Let me take up the question of what it means, for Berkeley, to con-
ceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. As we have seen, to conceive
of an object existing involves conceiving the object instantiating determinate
features and to conceive it spatially related to other objects. This means that
the conceiver forms an image in which such features as these are reflected.
Of course, the idea is an idea of conception. But, according to Berkeley's
special brand of representationalism, the idea of conception that is formed
when the conceiver conceives the object existing represents an idea of per-
ception; in conceiving the object existing, the conceiver has formed an image
of what it would be like to have an idea of perception. So, in order to conceive the object unperceived, the conceiver imagines what it would be like if she had no idea of perception. To accomplish this latter task she must, to put it crudely, "erase" from her idea of conception those contents which constitute the image of the object. Thus, to take an example, to conceive of some trees (existing in a park) unperceived, she must discontinue entertaining an image of the trees. But, once she has done this, she is no longer conceiving of the trees existing.

It is now easier to see why Berkeley put such value on his argument given what he probably meant by 'conceiving of a sensible object (such as a tree) existing unperceived.' To accomplish the feat, a conceiver has to form an image of the object (this suffices to conceive of the object existing) and at the same time she has to discontinue the image (this suffices to conceive of the object unperceived). But, once she no longer entertains an image of the object she fails to conceive it existing. It is, after all is said and done, an impossible feat to perform. For, it means conceiving the object existing and not conceiving the object existing.

Even so, one wants to know whether it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. There is no easy way to answer this question but an analogy can be used to sway one toward the view that it is logically impossible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived (at one and the same moment). Consider the task of walking forward and backward at the same time. My intuition is that this is a task that is logically impossible to perform. What lies behind the intuition pertains to the meanings of the expressions 'walking forward,' 'walking backward,' and 'walking forward and backward at the same time.' These
expressions mean (roughly) "taking one step from a fixed point," "taking a step in exactly the opposite direction," and "taking one step from a fixed point and at the same time taking a step in exactly the opposite direction," respectively. What makes the task of walking forward and backward at the same time a logical impossibility is connected with the meaning given to 'walking forward and backward at the same time.' Furthermore, the fact that there is a connection to linguistic meaning is some indication that we are dealing with a logical, as opposed to a mere physical (or psychological), impossibility.

Similarly, if what I say regarding the meaning which Berkeley gives to 'conceiving of a sensible object existing unperceived' is correct, it begins to look as though this too is a task which is logically impossible to perform. As I have said, 'conceiving a sensible object existing' means, for Berkeley, forming an image of a sensible object instantiating certain determinate features and being spatially related to other (sensible) objects. Thus, a conceiver has to form a mental image of the object. But, 'conceiving a sensible object unperceived' means, for Berkeley, conceiving the tree with none of its features perceived. This is because framing an idea of conception (of the image variety) of a sensible object is to conceive what it would be like if someone perceived the object since an idea of conception is a representation of a (possible) idea of perception. But then, in order to conceive the object unperceived the conceiver must cease entertaining an idea of conception (of the image variety) of the object. Thus, to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived a conceiver has to frame an idea of the object and "erase" the idea at the same time. Briefly put, the conceiver has to both perceive an idea and not perceive the (same) idea simultaneously. And, this is something
which is, like walking forward and backward (at the same time), a logically impossible feat to perform.

Lastly, there is the matter of Berkeley’s esse is percipi thesis itself—is this claim a necessary truth? The brief answer is that it is not (or so I shall suggest). What is more, I do not think that Berkeley intended it to be construed as a necessary truth. Notice, first of all, that an implausibly strong conceivability principle is required to derive esse is percipi as a necessary truth. What is needed is something close to the following (I’m going to express it in such a way that its defects will be obvious):

\[(CL^\prime) \text{ It is logically possible to conceive de re a state of affairs if and only if a sentence token which describes that state of affairs is a (logically) possible truth.}\]

\((CL^\prime)\) asserts that if it is not logically possible to conceive of a state of affairs, then the sentence token which describes that state of affairs expresses a (logically) necessary falsehood. But this claim is patently false. For even if it is not logically possible to conceive de re a state of affairs, it hardly follows from this that the relevant sentence token expresses a (logically) necessary falsehood. To put the point in another way, de re inconceivability is no indication of de dicto necessity.

I think that Berkeley intended his thesis to express the fact that a certain state of affairs is logically impossible—that of a sensible object existing unperceived. At the most, and even this is subject to doubt (particularly from those who reject \((CL)\)), all that he is entitled to assert is that the state of affairs which consists in a sensible object’s existing unperceived is logically
impossible. Even so, Berkeley assumes (CL). And, it is worth pointing out that many philosophers prior to Berkeley have maintained, without defense, some such principle as (CL).
NOTES

1That Berkeley believes that the phrase, "it is possible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived" entailed a contradiction is suggested by the following considerations: (i) in *The Principles* (Section 22) Berkeley writes, "It is but looking into your own thoughts, and so trying whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or figure, or motion, or color, to exist without the mind or unperceived. This easy trial may make you see that what you contend for is a downright contradiction" (see also *The Principles*, Section 23) and (ii) in both *The Principles* and *The Dialogues* Berkeley indicates that the contradiction itself has the form, "sensible object x is conceived and unconceived." This is important since it is some indication that the act (or the attempt to perform the act) of conceiving a sensible object existing unperceived is what eventuates in a contradiction.

2There is an important qualification regarding what I have to say about de re conceivability and Berkeley. It is this: I do not mean to be taken as asserting either (i) that Berkeley had any knowledge of the de re/de dicto distinction or (ii) that Berkeley had any knowledge of the formal machinery which is used to explicate the distinction. My claim is merely that the formalism connected with the distinction, and the distinction itself, can illuminate, though its utility in this regard does have limits, some things which Berkeley says but does not, precisely because he does not possess the requisite knowledge, say clearly. These kinds of considerations raise important questions.

On another matter, some may think that my use of the de re/de dicto distinction commits Berkeley to the view that existence is a property. This is because de re conception is a three-term relation between a conceiver, an attribute (or the property of existence), and an object. I would wish to remain neutral on the question of whether Berkeley thought that existence was a property (my own view is that Berkeley clearly did not regard existence as a sensible property although, I would say, he most likely thought of existence as what would now be regarded as a supervenient property—but a property in any case). Fortunately, there is a way to adapt (Quine's) formulation of the de re/de dicto so as to allow for neutrality on this matter. For Berkeley, we may say, conception de re is a three-term relation between a conceiver, an idea of conception, and a sensible object.
For more on the distinction, see W. V. O. Quine, "Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes," reprinted in *Reference and Modality*, ed. L. Linsky, Oxford University Press, 1967. It is also worth pointing out that there are other ways of analyzing and/or distinguishing between de re and de dicto attitudes. See, for example, J. Hintikka, "Semantics for Propositional Attitudes," reprinted in Linsky, *Reference and Modality*. Some of the factors which influence my choice of Quine over the various alternatives is ease of use and familiarity. Other factors which influenced my choice of Quine involve the compatibility with Berkeley.

3 See the work, already cited, by Quine.

4 Note that, following Quine, in conception a de re sentence like (Ar) is prefixed with an existential quantifier.

5 The other possible variations involve, for lack of a better term, "scope distinctions." As in the following, somewhat awkward, example: "There exists a possible unperceived sensible object which is conceived existing." Many of the other variations on (A) are like this one. And, as with the one given here, are so far from what Berkeley is trying to say that they can be rejected out of hand.

6 The surface grammar of (Ar - 1) makes it look as though 'possible' modifies the quantifier—it should not be read this way. Instead, (Ar - 1) should be read as though 'possible' modifies the verb 'conceives.' For, I intend that (Ar - 1) should say that it is possible to conceive of 0. Notice also, that there is more than one quantifier in (Ar - 1). The first quantifier is suppressed. Formally speaking, to make the first quantifier explicit, one converts the possibility operator into an existential quantifier. That is, one introduces quantification over a universe of discourse consisting of logically possible worlds. If one makes the conversion, it is then possible to instantiate on both quantifiers and logically manipulate syntactic strings which fall within their scope.

7 See *The Principles*, Section 23, pp. 32-33. In answer to the question Berkeley says: "I answer, you may so, there is no difficulty in it...."

8 See footnote (1) of the present chapter.

9 I will say more about what he means by this and other phrases in Section Two of this chapter.
10 See *The Principles*, Section 23, pp. 32-33.

11 See *The Principles*, pp. 36-37, where Berkeley distinguishes ideas of conception or imagination from ideas of sense. That he recognizes that an act of imagination takes a “faint idea” as its object while an act of perception takes a “strong idea” as its object is an indication that he did not, or at least could not, hold (CP) and that ideas of occurrent sensation are not produced in moments of imagination or acts of conception involving images.

12 See *The Principles*, Section 23, p. 33.

13 (I’) asserts that an idea of conception exists—an idea which is supposed to exist in the mind of a certain conceiver—but which is not perceived. In other words, (I’) asserts that there are unperceived ideas.

14 Thesis (I) was discussed in Chapter Four. That Berkeley held thesis (I) is supposed by the text. See *The Principles*, Section 33, pp. 36-37.

15 See *The Principles*, Section 23, pp. 32-33.

16 Strictly speaking, the correct conclusion to draw at line (R) is, “It is not the case that (Ar-2).” But, I have argued that (Ar-2) is how Berkeley understood (A). Thus, I have argued that, for Berkeley, (A) entails (Ar-2). But then, since (Ar-2) entails the contradiction (Q) (by the argument given above), it follows, by transitivity of entailment, that (A) entails (Q). And so, “it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object’s existing unperceived.

17 I will add another feature or property to the list given here later on.

18 So, the modified version of (Ar-2) would read: “It is possible that there is a sensible object, o, such that o is conceived existing and there is an idea of conception, i, which does not contain as a part of its content an idea of o, and i is perceived.

19 See *The Principles*, Introduction, p. 11.

20 See *The Dialogues*, p. 36.

22 See *The Principles*, Section 22, p. 32.

23 See *The Principles*, Section 22, p. 32.

24 See *The Principles*, Section 22, p. 32.

25 This passage was cited earlier. See, *The Dialogues*, p. 36.

26 The example appears in Descartes.

27 See *The Dialogues*, p. 28.

28 Some may think that the contrasting term for 'particular' is 'universal.' But this is not the case for Berkeley. For Berkeley, the contrasting term for 'particular' is 'general.'

29 See *The Principles*, Section 22, p. 32.

30 A notable example is Descartes.
CHAPTER VI
ABSTRACTION AND ESSE IS PERCIPI

Berkeley indicates, in more than one place within *The Principles*, that his *esse* is *perci* thesis "depends" on the doctrine of abstract general ideas. Unfortunately, he does not say in a clear way just why he thinks there is a connection between abstract general ideas and *esse* is *perci* nor does he say exactly what the connection is. This is no less a mystery to students of Berkeley. Many commentators have denied that there is a connection between abstract ideas and *esse* is *perci*.1 Certain other commentators have attempted to argue that there is an important relationship between *esse* is *perci* and abstract ideas.2 In what follows, I shall suggest that Berkeley believed that the doctrine of abstract general ideas entails that *esse* is *perci* is false. I will also be covering some other issues which are vitally important to understanding Berkeley's philosophy. In particular, I shall suggest that there is an important connection between the doctrine of abstract ideas and Berkeley's Master Argument. I will also criticize at least one previous effort to show that if there are abstract ideas, then the *esse* is *perci* thesis is false. The criticism is to be regarded as tentative. Let me begin with the critical work.
In a recent paper, G.S. Pappas tries to show, among other things, that Berkeley thought that if there were abstract general ideas, then the esse is percipi thesis would be false. I do not disagree with this much. Even so, I do think that there is a problem with Pappas' account of Berkeley's thinking on the matter. Let me begin with an explication of the Pappas line. On Pappas' view, Berkeley thinks that it follows from Locke's doctrine of abstract ideas that it would be possible to have (abstract) ideas of certain general qualities such as "tablehood." Here is how, according to Pappas, one might come to have such an idea. "Imagine that a person sees an extended object: he sees a red, heavy, square-shaped table. From this perception, Berkeley suggests, a first abstraction would result in (say) the abstract general idea of a table." Pappas' way of putting some of this involves an unfortunate choice of words. I have in mind the phrase, "...abstract general idea of a table." An ordinary table is a collection of determinate qualities for Berkeley. And so, one would think that an idea of an ordinary table would simply be an idea of a collection of determinate sensible qualities. In any event, if I understand Locke's official theory of abstraction and Berkeley's construal of it, the "first abstraction" which Pappas describes would result not in "an abstract general idea of a table." Instead, the product of such a process would be an idea of a general quality, e.g., "tablehood." For the time being we can label this problem as "terminological." Pappas continues,

A second abstraction would be to abstract or separate existence from the visual perception of the red, heavy table. This is something one can do, presumably, because when the red heavy table is seen it exists. Hence, existence is 'there to be
abstracted' just as a quality such as a certain existence is. The overall result would be the abstract general idea of *existing table*.\(^4\)

According to Berkeley's understanding of Locke, it would be possible to have abstract ideas of the sort described by Pappas. That is, it is possible to have an abstract general idea of "tablehood" joined together with an abstract idea of "existence." And, if one could have abstract ideas of this sort, Pappas thinks, it follows that the *esse* is *percepi* thesis would be false. The reason that *esse* is *percepi* is false, according to Pappas, is because if one could have an abstract general idea of "existing table," then "...there would in some sense be (exist) a sensible object (the *general* quality *being a table*), though no table would be perceived when one attended to or conceived this abstract general idea."\(^5\) Here it certainly seems that Pappas' reason for thinking that the *esse* is *percepi* thesis is false (if there are abstract general ideas) is because "the general quality being a table" exists but no table is perceived while one attends to the abstract idea of "existing table." Thus, *esse* is *percepi* is false since the general quality "tablehood" exists but no table is perceived.

But, if he does mean this, then there may be a problem. To see why let us grant that Pappas is right in contending that if there are abstract general ideas (of the sort he describes), then it follows that a general quality, i.e., tablehood, exists but no table is perceived by anyone. It does not follow from this that the *esse* is *percepi* thesis is false. Remember, Berkeley's *esse* is *percepi* thesis is the claim that it is not possible for a sensible object (collection of determinate, primary and secondary qualities) to exist unperceived. All that Pappas has shown, if I understand him, is that the *general quality* exists but no table (collection of determinate, sensible qualities) is
perceived by anyone. Even if this much is true, it is irrelevant. For, what is required to show that *esse is percipi* is false is that a collection of determinate sensible qualities exists without being perceived by anyone.

There is another approach which Pappas has which avoids the problem raised just now. Pappas' strategy here is to remind us first of all that Berkeley is willing to allow that merely conceiving of a sensible object existing unperceived is enough to show that it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived and so, *esse is percipi* would be false if there were abstract ideas since for Berkeley "attending to the abstract idea of existing table" is to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. Says Pappas,

Imagine one has the abstract general idea of existing table, as described above. Then consider a case in which one attends to or conceives this abstract general idea. One is thereby conceiving a sensible thing (a table) and conceiving of it existing (one is attending to an abstract general idea of an existing table), but one is not then conceiving of perception. Nor, I think Berkeley would say, is one perceiving a table by conceiving this abstract general idea. Thus, if one has an abstract general idea of the right sort, one can conceive of an existing but unperceived sensible object. And this, Berkeley is willing to allow, is enough to sweep away his new principle of *esse is percipi*. 6

It is at least misleading to speak of an "abstract general idea of an existing table." The reason that this way of putting things is misleading has to do with the content of the (abstract general) idea that is produced in the way Pappas says. There is, according to Pappas, a two-step procedure in framing the "abstract general idea of existing table." The first step involves
an idea of sensation which is gleaned from perceptual contact with a more or less ordinary table. A subject takes from this idea an idea of the general quality "tablehood." A second operation, which one surmises also involves an ordinary idea of sensation of the table, would be to abstract the general quality of existence from the idea of the table gotten by perceiving the table. According to Pappas, the result of this two-step procedure is "an abstract general idea of existing table." Moreover, according to Pappas, as Berkeley sees it, the fact that one has (or could have) such an idea is to conceive a sensible object existing unperceived.

The last move is one which may be problematic. To see why, notice first of all that Pappas says that the "abstract general idea of existing table" would itself "have the general quality existence and the general quality being a table." If the relevant idea had these general qualities (and Pappas clearly says that it does), then the idea would be of such a nature so as to distinguish it from an ordinary sense perception of a sensible object like a table. That is, since the (abstract general) idea which Pappas describes has the general qualities existence and tablehood, it seems that its content would be of such a nature so as to make it unlike an idea of sense (or imagination) of an ordinary table. Of course, it is not entirely clear just how Pappas' idea would differ in content from an idea of conception (or perception) of an ordinary table. But, this much is clear, since Pappas idea has the general qualities existence and tablehood, why would Berkeley think that such an idea counts as a conception of a sensible object (-collection of determinate-not general or determinable-sensible qualities)? The content of the Pappas idea simply is not of the right sort to count as a conception of a sensible object existing unperceived; it does not even count as a conception of a
sensible object (=collection of determinate primary and secondary) for the simple reason that ideas of such objects do not have general qualities. The reason that such ideas lack general qualities is that the objects themselves lack these qualities.

II

In this section I want to argue that Berkeley thought there was a close connection between his claim that no idea exists unperceived and abstract ideas. The first matter to take up involves the introduction of the passages in which Berkeley's remarks appear.

In Section Five of Part One of The Principles, Berkeley says:

If we thoroughly examine this tenet, it will, perhaps, be found at bottom to depend on the doctrine of abstract ideas. For can there be a nicer strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived?8

Let this passage be called, "passage (A)." The first item that I want to call attention to regarding passage (A) has to do with the phrase 'this tenet.' The passage is, of course, taken out of context. So, whatever "tenet" 'this tenet' picks out is more or less explicitly articulated within the larger context. But, 'this tenet' refers anaphorically so whatever tenet Berkeley has in mind must have been stated prior to passage (A). There are two candidates. In Berkeley's words, the tenet might be:
It is an opinion strangely prevailing amongst men, that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects have an existence natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding.\(^9\)

or,

...and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations, and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these or any combination of them should exist unperceived?\(^{10}\)

The first passage is an articulation of a thesis which is just the denial of the following claim:

\[
\text{(EEP)} \quad \text{No sensible object (such as a house or a tree) can exist without being perceived by someone.}
\]

The second passage involves a tenet which is more restricted than is (EEP). This weaker thesis may be stated as follows:

\[
\text{(EEP* ) No idea can exist without being perceived by someone.}
\]

\(\text{(EEP), of course, is just the claim that no sensible object, that is, no collection of determinate primary and secondary qualities, can exist without being}\)
perceived. On the other hand, (EEP*) asserts merely that no idea can exist without being perceived.

In another passage, call it "passage B," Berkeley again alleges that there is a connection between his metaphysics and abstract general ideas. In Part One, Section Eleven, of *The Principles* he says:

> Again, great and small, swift and slow, are allowed to exist nowhere without the mind, being entirely relative and changing as the frame or position of the organs of sense varies. The extension therefore which exists without the mind, is neither great nor small, the motion neither swift nor slow, that is, they are nothing at all. But say you, they are extension in general, and motion in general: thus we see how much the tenet of extended, moveable substances existing without the mind, depends on that strange doctrine of abstract ideas.¹¹

In this passage Berkeley is suggesting that there is a connection between abstract general ideas and the notion that "extended, moveable substances can exist without the mind." Let me indicate straightaway that I will have very little to say in the way of an explication of this passage. I mention it because I think it reflects the fact that Berkeley's views on the connection between idealism and abstract general ideas takes more than one direction. In Passage B, Berkeley is saying that the generality of abstract general ideas makes one inclined to think that there are mind-independent substances. In Passage A, Berkeley is focused on the feature of being abstract (or separable from any other ideas). The power to conceive abstract ideas supplies the reason for belief in mind-independent objects.
I want to begin by introducing a passage from the Introduction of *The Principles*. In this passage Berkeley distinguishes three types of abstraction. He denies that anyone can engage in the last two, but allows that it is possible for someone to do the first. He writes:

To be plain, I own myself able to abstract in one sense, as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others, with which though they are united in some object, yet, it is possible they may really exist without them. But I deny that I can abstract one from other, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated; or that I can frame a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner aforesaid. Which two last are the proper acceptations of abstraction.¹²

It will be useful to distinguish each type of abstraction in the following way:

(D1) Type I abstraction =df the process whereby a subject conceives separately a collection of determinate primary or secondary qualities which can exist or be instantiated without some other collection of primary and secondary qualities.

(D2) Type II abstraction =df the process whereby a subject conceives separately a determinate primary or secondary quality even though it cannot exist or be instantiated without some other determinate primary or secondary qualities.

(D3) Type III abstraction =df of the process whereby a subject conceives a collection of determinable qualities.
Berkeley provides examples of each type of abstraction. His example of Type I abstraction involves the idea of "a man with two heads or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse. I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body." His example of Type II abstraction involves an "idea of color exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both color and extension." His example of Type II and III abstraction, he writes:

And it is equally impossible for me to form the abstract idea of motion distinct from the body moving, and which is neither swift nor slow, curvilinear nor rectilinear; and the like may be said of all abstract general ideas whatsoever.

When Berkeley insists that he cannot "form the idea of motion distinct from the body moving" he is saying that he cannot perform an act of Type II abstraction. What he really means, though he does not say so explicitly, is that he cannot conceive of the determinate primary quality motion apart from a determinate body or figure. His reason for saying that he cannot have such a conception is that it is impossible for a determinate primary quality, such as a particular motion, to exist without some other determinate primary and/or secondary quality. Thus, for example, Berkeley would deny that one can conceive of a determinate figure, let us say a cube, without conceiving of some determinate color, say red, which is spread over the cube. His reason for denying this is that no cube can exist in nature without having some determinate color or other. In Berkeley's eyes, if a
determinate primary or secondary quality exists, then there has to be some other co-instantiated determinate primary or secondary quality. Determinate primary and secondary qualities can only exist, or occur in nature, together with some other determinate primary and secondary qualities.

Having distinguished three types of abstraction, I want to begin to argue that if there are abstract general ideas, then (EEP*) is false. There is an important qualification which has to be briefly discussed. As I have argued earlier, I think that one can make a case that there are abstract general ideas. However, they are not the kinds of ideas which Berkeley took Locke to be defending. Thus, the qualification comes to this: when I say that if there are abstract general ideas, then (EEP*)/(EEP) is false. I mean that if there are abstract general ideas, of the kind which Berkeley (incorrectly) attributed to Locke, then (EEP*)/(EEP) is false. From here on in the qualification will be suppressed. I will begin with a discussion of the connection between (EEP*) and abstract ideas.

The first premise required by the argument comes directly from Berkeley’s attack on the doctrine of abstract general ideas. It can be stated as:

\[(AGI) \text{ If there are abstract general ideas, then it is possible to perform acts of Type II abstraction.}\]

The basis of Berkeley’s attack on the doctrine of abstract general ideas involves showing that the process whereby such ideas are produced is impossible or incoherent. He says, “But I deny that I can abstract one from another, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should
exist so separated...." Since the process is impossible, that is, since one is unable to perform acts of Type II abstraction, it follows that the alleged products of the (impossible) process do not exist. But, to assert this much is just to assert the contrapositive of (AGI). One might also think of the matter in a slightly different way. That is, one might think of (AGI) as a necessary condition on the existence of the sorts of abstract ideas which Berkeley attributed to Locke. So, if there are abstract ideas associated in some way with the qualities of extension, color, and motion, it is only because one can engage in Type II abstraction. Berkeley describes the process in the following way:

But we are told [according to Locke], the mind being able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from those other qualities with which it is united, does by that means frame to itself abstract ideas. For example, there is perceived by sight an object extended, colored, and moved: this mixed or compound idea the mind resolving into its simple, constituent parts, and viewing each by itself exclusive of the rest, does frame the abstract ideas of extension, color, and motion.16

It is worth a brief digression to ask and answer the following question: Why did Berkeley think that the abstract idea associated with, say, (determinate) extension require that one be able to engage in Type II abstraction? The brief answer is that, for Berkeley, the abstract idea of (determinate) extension would not be abstract if it were not possible to engage in Type II abstraction. Such an idea could not have as a part of its content an idea of (determinate) motion or of (determinate) color; it is an idea of extension in
the abstract. That is, the abstract idea of (determinate extension is an idea which is separated from any other concomitant ideas, such as, ideas of (determinate) color and (determinate) motion. Thus, when Berkeley is attacking Type II abstraction, he is calling attention to the fact that Locke’s abstract ideas are not really abstract. For, the process that would make them abstract cannot be performed.

The next premise to consider may be stated in the following way:

(TWO) If one can perform acts of Type II abstraction, then one can conceive of an object (a determinate single quality) which cannot exist.

According to Berkeley, single determinate primary and secondary qualities are impossible objects. A determinate quality cannot exist or be instantiated without some other co-instantiated determinate quality or qualities. Th passage in which Berkeley distinguishes the different types of abstraction contains the assertion that certain qualities are impossible objects. The qualities that cannot exist are those which cannot exist by themselves. An example of such a quality is that of determinate motion "existing" without some determinate body or any other primary or secondary quality. It is worth pointing out that Berkeley is not presuming that his opponents believe that the quality of motion can exist without extension. In Section Seven of the Introduction, he writes:

Not that it is possible for color or motion to exist without extension: but only that the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of color
exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both color and extension. 17

Berkeley thinks that his opponent is merely asserting that a certain psychological or mental act is possible to perform, the act of conceiving a single determinate quality.

The next premise can be given as:

(IDE) If it is possible to conceive of an object (such as a single determinate quality) which cannot exist, then it is possible that there is an idea of an impossible object.

Suppose that it is possible to conceive of an object (such as a single determinate quality) which cannot exist. When Berkeley entertains this supposition, he is thinking of a special type of conceiving. What is conceived, or what a subject is related to by an act of conception, is not a proposition or sentence-like object. Berkeley is not using the verb 'conceive' in its de dicto or notional sense. What he really has in mind is a special sort of de re or relationship conception. What is important for our present purposes is to see that Berkeley takes conceiving to be a relation involving a conceiver and a mental image (rather than a sentence). When once conceives of a single determinate quality, or when one arrives at such a conception via Type II abstraction, one is directly related to a mental image (of the single determinate quality). One can also think of the matter in this way: a necessary, though by no means sufficient, condition for conceiving a single determinate quality, in Berkeley's sense, is that it be possible for the appropriate mental
image (or idea) to exist. So that, if it is possible to conceive (the single quality), then it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist.

The next premise to consider is:

(FAL) If it is possible for an idea of an impossible object (such as a single determinate quality) to exist, then (EEP*) is false.

Suppose that it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist. Now, consider the following proposition:

(CP') If it is possible to perceive an idea (of the single quality), then it is possible to perceive the single quality.

Berkeley, it should be noted, maintains a thesis which is very similar to this. In his Philosophical Commentaries he writes:

The having Ideas is not the same thing with (sense) Perception. A Man may have Ideas when he only Imagines (or conceives). But then this Imagination presupposeth Perception.18

What he seems to be saying in this passage is that the possibility of perceiving an idea (of conception or imagination) requires that it is possible to perceive (or have an idea of sensation) of the object conceived. As one would expect, there is more than one way to interpret Berkeley's remark. One might think that all that Berkeley is saying here is that conceiving (or}
imagining) a sensible object is a sufficient condition for perceiving it. Of course, if all that is meant by 'sensible object' is an idea of conception (or a mental image), then Berkeley is asserting merely that having an idea of conception is sufficient for perceiving an idea (of a collection of determinate, sensible qualities— the idea in this case is not an idea of sense). If his remark here comes to nothing more than just that imagination (or the possession of ideas of conception or images) entails that an idea is perceived, then there is nothing in this remark which would provide any support for attributing (CP') to Berkeley. Even so, Berkeley says something else which, I believe, inclines one to think that the passage here can be taken as an expression of (CP'). He says, interestingly enough by way of recapping his attack on the doctrine of abstract ideas, that he is willing to allow a certain sort of abstraction, "...abstraction, ...extends only to the conceiving separately such objects, as it is possible may really exist or be perceived asunder. But my conceiving or imagining power does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception." It is the last sentence which is important. Here, I think, Berkeley's meaning is unmistakable; he is saying that a necessary condition on the power to conceive (sensible objects generally) is that it be possible to perceive (such objects). So, I think we can plausibly attribute (CP') to him while granting that the remark from the Commonplace Book is not of itself sufficient to warrant the attribution.

Now, one may surmise that for Berkeley an act of conception is nothing over and above the perceiving of idea brought forth in conception or imagination. If he does identify the two notions, then we can substitute 'it is possible to perceive an idea (of the single quality)' for 'it possible to conceive (the single quality)' in, "If it is possible to conceive (the single quality), then
it is possible to perceive (the single quality)." Doing so would produce: "If it is possible to perceive an idea (of the single quality), then it is possible to perceive (the single quality). Now, in Berkeley's eyes, a single determinate quality is an impossible object; it is not possible for it to exist (by itself). Berkeley also believes the following claim which, interestingly enough, is the converse of (EEP):

(EEP*) For any sensible object, x, necessarily, if x is perceived, then x exists.20

Now, since the single determinate quality cannot exist, it follows from (EEP) that it cannot be perceived. But, if it cannot be perceived, then it follows from (CP) that it is not possible to perceive an idea (of the single determinate quality). Thus, it is not possible to perceive an idea (of the single quality). But, we are supposing that it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist. Hence, it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist and it is not possible for an idea (of the single quality) to be perceived. Since it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist and it is not possible for an idea (of the single quality) to be perceived, it follows that (EEP*) is false. Therefore, if it is possible for an idea (of the single quality) to exist, then (EEP*) is false.

We may now summarize our results in the following way:

(AGI) If there are abstract general ideas, then it is possible to perform acts of Type II abstraction.

Justification: Suppose there are abstract general ideas (of the kind which Berkeley attributed
to Locke). Then, there are (abstract) ideas of single determinate qualities like extension, motion, or color. Such qualities cannot exist by themselves. But, if it is possible to have ideas of them and since they cannot be perceived, it follows that they were produced by an act of Type II abstraction.

(TWO) If one can perform acts of Type II abstraction, then one can conceive of an object (such as a determinate single quality) which cannot exist.

Justification: Suppose it is possible to perform an act of Type II abstraction. Then, it follows from (D2) that one can conceive of an impossible object (such as a determinate single quality).

(IDE) If it is possible to conceive of an object (such as a determinate single quality) which cannot exist, then it is possible that there is an idea of an impossible object.

Justification: Suppose it is possible to conceive of an object (such as a determinate single quality) which cannot exist. Then, it is possible for an idea of conception (of the object) to exist. So, it is possible that there is an idea of an impossible object.

(FAL) If it is possible for an idea of an impossible object (such as a determinate single quality) to exist, then (EEP*) is false.

Justification: Suppose that it is possible for an idea of an impossible object to exist. Then, since the object cannot exist, the object cannot be perceived. If the object cannot be perceived, then it is not possible to perceive an idea of conception (of the object). Thus, it is possible for an idea of the object to exist and it is not possible for an idea of the object to be perceived. But then, it is possible for an idea to exist unperceived. Hence, (EEP*) is false.
Therefore, if there are abstract general ideas then (EEP*) is false.

III

In this section I am going to argue that if there are abstract general ideas, then (EEP)— the claim that no sensible object (=collection of determinate primary and secondary qualities) can exist unperceived—is false. That is, I shall argue that if there are abstract general ideas, then (EEP) is false. If I am right about the connection between abstract ideas and (EEP), then, or so I shall suggest, it will be easy to understand why Berkeley devotes much of the Introduction to his Principles of Human Knowledge to an attack on the products of abstraction. To put it briefly, Berkeley had to attack the doctrine of abstract ideas in order to prevent his materialist opponent from asserting that there are abstract ideas and then concluding that (EEP) is false. Thus, Berkeley is able to diffuse a possible counter-argument by denying his opponent the assertion of the antecedent in the following claim:

(AEP) If there are abstract general ideas, then (EEP) is false.

Before continuing, it is worth pointing out that there is an easy way to show that Berkeley accepted (AEP). Berkeley thinks, either correctly or incorrectly, that he has shown that there are no abstract general idea (at least of the kind he attributes to Locke). So, it is clear that Berkeley takes the antecedent of (AEP) to be false. Thus, provided (AEP) is construed materially,
one can make an easy case that he endorses (AEP) on the grounds that he considers its antecedent false.

Furthermore, it is also easy to show that Berkeley accepts (AEP) even if (AEP) is understood as expressing an entailment. One can make a case that Berkeley thought not merely that there are no abstract ideas but that such (mental) objects as these are (logically) impossible. He says, when speaking of abstract ideas, that it is not possible to conceive them. He writes; "But I deny that I can abstract, or conceive separately, those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated...." Here he seems to have said that it is (logically) impossible to conceive separate qualities like, for example, a determinant of extension absent any other co-instantiated determinate quality or qualities. So, it may be that one can argue that, for Berkeley, the antecedent of (AEP) is logically impossible. If so, its antecedent is false in any possible world w. Hence, for all w, (AEP) is true. And so, (AEP) expresses a true entailment.

Of course, one wants to know whether the connection between abstract ideas and (EEP) is more substantive and possibly more subtle than what has so far been said. I am going to argue that it is. So, part of what we need to know can be expressed in the following question: Does the doctrine of abstract general ideas relevantly entail that (EEP) is false? Allowing that Berkeley did not understand the connection between abstract ideas and (EEP) in terms of relevant entailment (and allowing also that the notion of "relevant entailment" is not clearly understood), one wants to know whether he saw that there was a connection between abstract ideas and (EEP)? In what follows I'm going to argue that the answer is yes.
The first premise required by the argument will seem familiar enough. It is:

1. If there are abstract general ideas, then an act of Type II abstraction has been performed.

The reason that one can say that Berkeley accepts (1) has to do with the fact that he deploys its contrapositive, or certainly a variant of it which is close enough to (1) to warrant attributing it to Berkeley, in the attack on the products of abstraction. In brief, Berkeley argues that since he (and so, he thinks, anyone else) is unable to "conceive separately those qualities which it is impossible should exist so separated," it follows that acts of Type II abstraction are (logically, and certainly psychologically) impossible. Thus, the products of Type II abstraction, abstract general ideas, do not exist because the process that would produce them cannot be performed. But then, this is just to say that if it is not possible to perform an act of Type II abstraction, then there are no abstract general ideas.

One may be inclined to look at the matter in another way. The reason Berkeley accepts (1) is that on his reading of Locke a necessary condition for bringing about the existence of an abstract general idea is the ability to engage in acts of Type II abstraction. To have an abstract idea, like that associated with 'extension' involves the separation of ideas of other determinate qualities, such as, color and motion. That is, one must be able to form an idea (or image if we follow Berkeley's reading of Locke) of a single determinate quality even though it is not possible for that quality to exist in
nature absent any other co-instantiated determinate qualities. In a word or two, to have an abstract idea requires the capacity for Type II abstraction.

The next premise to consider can be spelled out in the following way:

(2) If an act of Type II abstraction is performed, then it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate, sensible qualities (say a determinate of motion and color) without being co-instantiated with some other necessary quality (say a determinant of extension).

Notice, first of all that (2) follows pretty much straightforwardly from the definition of Type II abstraction. In order to perform an act of Type II abstraction one must be able to conceive separately those qualities which cannot exist in nature without some other necessary, co-instantiated quality or qualities. For example, it is not possible for a collection of sensible qualities, like determinants of color and motion, to exist in nature without being co-instantiated with some other quality, most notably some determinant of extension or other. Certainly Berkeley believed that this was the case. He says, "Not that it is possible for color or motion to exist without extension..." He goes on to say that according to advocates of abstraction, "...the mind can frame to itself by abstraction the idea of color exclusive of extension, and of motion exclusive of both color and extension." Berkeley probably endorsed (2). I say this because the definition of Type II abstraction was fashioned out of Berkeley's own words and because the consequent of (2) follows in a more or less obvious way from that definition.

The next premise which we need to consider can be given as:
(3) If it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate, sensible qualities (such as a determinant of color and a determinant of motion) without being co-instantiated with any necessary quality or qualities (such as a determinant of extension), then (EEP) is false.

Let 'Q1' denote a determinant of color, 'Q2' a determinant of motion, and 'Qn' some determinant of extension. Now, suppose it is possible to conceive of a state of affairs in which Q1 and Q2 exist without Qn. In other words, suppose that a subject can conceive a collection of determinate, sensible qualities (such as Q1 and Q2) without being co-instantiated with any necessary quality (such as Qn) or qualities. Then, it is possible to conceive of Q1 and W2 without Qn and since Qn is a necessary quality we may also infer that it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn. If it is possible to conceive of the state of affairs in which Q1 and Q2 exist without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without Qn, then it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 existing by themselves. So, if it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, then it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves.

Now, suppose, once again, that it is possible to conceive of a collection of determinate, sensible qualities, say Q1 and Q2 without any necessary quality or qualities, say a determinant of extension, Qn. Then, it follows that it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn since, by hypothesis,
Qn is a necessary quality. It is well-known that Berkeley believed the converse of (EEP):

(PEE) For any sensible object, o, necessarily, if o is perceived, then o exists.

In this context, of course, a sensible object is nothing but a collection of determinate qualities. But since it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, it follows from (PEE) that it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 without Qn. We may now suppose that if it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 without Qn, then it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. Hence, if it is possible to conceive Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, then it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves.

So far I have tried to show that if it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent any necessary quality, Qn, or qualities, then it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves and it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. Now, if it is possible for the collection of qualities which consist solely of Q1 and Q2 to exist and it is not possible to perceive the collection of qualities Q1 and Q2, then (EEP) is false. Thus, if it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent any other necessary quality, Qn, and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, then (EEP) is false.

We may now summarize the argument in the following way:

(1) If there are abstract general ideas, then an act of Type II abstraction can be performed.
**Justification:** Suppose there are abstract general ideas. Then, since such ideas exist, the process which produces them must be possible to perform. In particular, it must be possible to perform an act of Type II abstraction.

(2) If it is possible to perform an act of Type II abstraction, then it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate sensible qualities without being co-instantiated with some other necessary quality or qualities.

**Justification:** Suppose it is possible to perform an act of Type II abstraction. Then, it follows from (D2) that it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate sensible qualities absent some other necessary co-instantiated quality or qualities.

(3) If it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate sensible qualities absent any co-instantiated necessary quality or qualities, then (EEP) is false.

**Justification:** Suppose it is possible to conceive of a collection of determinate sensible qualities absent any other necessary quality or qualities. Then, it is possible to conceive of say, Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn (since by hypothesis Qn is a necessary quality). But, if it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without Qn, then it is possible to conceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. And, if it is possible to conceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves, then (in light of Berkeley's conceivability thesis) it is possible for the collection of qualities Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. Hence, if it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate qualities absent any co-instantiated necessary qualities, then it is possible for the collection of qualities Q1 and
Q2 to exist by themselves. Now, suppose once more than one can conceive of a collection of determinate qualities absent any other necessary quality or qualities. Then, (in view of (PEE) and the fact that it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn) it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 without Qn. But, if it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 without Qn, then it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. Thus, if it is possible to conceive of a collection of determinate qualities absent any co-instantiated necessary qualities, then it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. And so, if it is possible to conceive of a collection of determinate qualities absent any co-instantiated necessary qualities, then it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves and it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. And, if it possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves and it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves, then (EEP) is false. Finally, if it is possible to conceive a collection of determinate qualities absent any co-instantiated necessary qualities, then (EEP) is false.

(4) If there are abstract general ideas then (EEP) is false.

Justification: (4) follows from (1), (2), and (3) by hypothetical syllogism.

Let me now turn to some objections.

Objection #1: The first matter to take up involves a premise which is crucial for the justification of (3). That premise is: if it is possible to conceive of a collection of determinate qualities, say Q1 and Q2, absent any
other co-instantiated necessary quality or qualities, say Qn, then it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. During the course of the argument I had unpacked the antecedent of this premise in the following way: "it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 without Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn." The problem is this: given that it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, how could it coherently follow that it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves? After all, someone might say, if it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without Qn, then it surely must follow that it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves.

Reply to Objection *1: Notice first of all that the claim that it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves follows coherently (though not directly) from Berkeley's conceivability thesis and the fact that it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 without being co-instantiated with Qn. That is, the consequent of the premise at issue follows from the first conjunct of, "it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent Qn and it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without Qn" together with Berkeley's conceivability thesis. So what remains to be shown is whether Berkeley thought that the premise in question was true. In this connection, notice that for Berkeley (a) it is not possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent any determinant of extension, Qn (we know that he thought so from his attack on abstract ideas), (b) it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn (this too is suggested by his attack on abstract ideas), and (c) it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. This means that for Berkeley (i) it is false that it is possible to conceive of a collection of qualities Q1 and Q2 absent any determinant of extension, Qn, (ii) it is true that it is not possible for Q1 and
Q2 to exist without Qn, and (iii) it is false that it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. Thus, for Berkeley the antecedent and the consequent of the problem premise are both false. Consequently, for Berkeley, the premise itself is true.

**Objection #2:** One might allege, in spite of Berkeley’s wording, that there simply is no connection, at least of any importance, between abstract ideas and (EEP). It is true that impossible collections of qualities, such as a collection consisting solely of Q1 and Q2, cannot be perceived (as they cannot exist). But, because they cannot exist no threat to (EEP) is posed. True, if there are abstract ideas, then we can have ideas of impossible collections of qualities. But, it hardly follows from this that it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived. Thus, Berkeley could easily avoid the threat to (EEP) allegedly posed by the doctrine of abstract general ideas by simply granting that it is within our power to form ideas (of conception) of impossible collections of determinate qualities. Since this is a possible maneuver, though Berkeley does not avail himself to it, there really is not very much evidence for thinking that the existence of abstract ideas was importantly relevant to the truth of (EEP).

**Reply to Objection #2:** It is worth noting that instead of taking the approach sketched in the objection Berkeley, rather curiously, goes in nearly the opposite direction. He denies (instead of allows) that one can conceive of impossible collections of determinate qualities on the grounds that no such collections can exist. Thus, he denies (rather than allows) that we can have ideas (of conception) of impossible collections of determinate qualities.
There are, I think, two reasons why Berkeley takes this approach. The second reason is rather more interesting than the first. I shall begin with the first. It may be that Berkeley thought it best to deny that we can have ideas of impossible collections of determinate qualities because to admit this involves committing a factual error. Certainly, there are unproblematic examples of impossible collections of determinate qualities where it is not easy to see how one could come to have the corresponding idea (even one of conception). Consider the case of the single quality. It is not easy to see how one could have an idea of some determinate modification of extension which did not contain as a part of its content at least an idea of some determinant of color. A single quality cannot exist (by itself). So, one cannot get an idea of it via perception. That leaves conception as the only other possible source for such an idea. But here I can only side with Berkeley. It seems to be a psychological fact about us that we simply lack the power to fashion an idea of certain qualities. Certainly Berkeley did not see how a person could have an idea of a single quality and realizing this he may have felt that the facts of the matter supported denying that we can have ideas of impossible objects.

The other reason why Berkeley may have shunned the approach sketched in the second objection involves his conceivability thesis. In particular, the claim that conceivability entails possibility is implicated. Berkeley maintains this claim (for reasons to be discussed presently) and he may have seen that holding on to it could imperil (EEP). If it is possible to conceive of a collection of qualities Q1 and Q2 existing without Qn, then it follows from the conceivability thesis that it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. Berkeley's opponent could assert the antecedent of the conceivability thesis.
and derive it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves. But, of course, since it is not possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist without being co-instantiated with Qn, it follows that it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 by themselves. But, it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist by themselves (because it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent Qn). So, it is not possible to perceive Q1 and Q2 and it is possible for Q1 and Q2 to exist. Hence, (EEP) is false.

Now an easy way to diffuse this argument is to simply deny that the antecedent of the conceivability thesis is true in this case. That is, deny that it is possible to conceive of Q1 and Q2 existing without Qn. Doing so would leave the conceivability thesis intact since, in the present case, its antecedent would be false. This is exactly what Berkeley does; he denies that we can conceive of Q1 and Q2 absent Qn.

The interesting question is why did Berkeley want to retain the conceivability since letting it go is also an easy way to keep (EEP) out of harm's way. The answer is that adhering to it affords Berkeley an important dialectical advantage. Berkeley indicates that all it will take in order to show him that (EEP) is false is to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. If this could be done, that would show that (EEP) is false because, given the conceivability thesis, if one can conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived, then it is possible for a sensible object to exist unperceived. The reason that there is an important rhetorical and dialectical advantage attached to this cast of the argument is that, on the face of it, it does not look like Berkeley is asking his opponent to do very much in order to make his (the opponent's) case. The materialist does not even have to argue for his view. He does not even have to show that there are unperceived sensible objects. Indeed, he does not have to show it is possible that there are
unperceived sensible objects. All that he needs to show is that it is possible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived. Apparently, this is the fairest game in town! But it can only be played provided one retains the conceivability thesis.

**Objection #3:** It might be said that the possibility of an object consisting solely of the qualities Q1 and Q2 existing unperceived is not a threat to (EEP). This is because such an object, because it is not co-instantiated with certain necessary qualities (like a determinant of extension), is not a sensible object. The reason that it is not a sensible object is that an object consisting solely of the qualities Q1 and Q2 is an impossible object. That is to say, such an object cannot exist.

Along similar lines, one might also say that an object consisting solely of the qualities Q1 and Q2 is not a sensible object of the usual kind. The paradigm case of "a sensible object of the usual kind" would be a "full" collection of sensible qualities like a book or a tree. So, since (EEP) applies only to objects like trees and books, Berkeley has nothing to fear from the doctrine of abstract ideas. This is because the doctrine of abstract ideas would entail merely that unusual sensible objects could exist without being perceived.

**Reply to Objection #3:** It is important to note, first of all, that for Berkeley if a collection of qualities, such as Q1 and Q2, can be conceived, then it is possible for that collection to exist. This result issues from Berkeley's conceivability thesis. The argument which links abstraction to the falsity of (EEP) makes use of the conceivability thesis as an *ad hominem* against Berkeley. Thus, since Berkeley accepts the conceivability thesis he would
have to grant that, if there are abstract ideas, then it is possible for an object consisting solely of the qualities Q₁ and Q₂ to exist since, if there are abstract ideas, it is possible to conceive of an object consisting solely of the qualities Q₁ and Q₂.

It is also important to note that, for Berkeley, sensible objects are just collections of sensible, determinate qualities. Thus, a tree or a book is a sensible object, for Berkeley, because it consists of a collection of sensible qualities. Now all that is needed to show than an object consisting solely of the qualities Q₁ and Q₂ is itself a sensible object is the claim that such an object is composed out of a collection of sensible qualities. So, an object consisting solely of the qualities Q₁ and Q₂ will count as a sensible object if it can be shown that Q₁ is a sensible quality and Q₂ is a sensible quality. This can be established by noting that although it is not possible to sense Q₁ or Q₂ by themselves, it is nevertheless possible to sense Q₁ and Q₂ since these qualities can exist when they are co-instantiated with certain other necessary qualities, such as a determinant of extension.

Even so, it might be contested that I have shown only that it is possible for an "unusual" collection of sensible qualities to exist unperceived, if there are abstract ideas. Berkeley could still maintain a version of (EEP), call it (EEP'), which can be expressed as: no physical object can exist without being perceived. In this context 'physical object' denotes a collection of qualities like a house or a book. If this is the case, then clearly my argument is no threat to this variation on (EEP) since the argument I have would show only that an aberrant collection of sensible qualities exists unperceived, if there are abstract ideas.
All that can be done to meet this version of Objection Three is to sketch out an argument which would link abstract ideas to the denial of (EEP'). Before doing so, it is necessary to explore the connection between the Master Argument and abstract ideas.

As we have seen, for Berkeley, ideas of conception or imagination are copies of ideas of perception. This suggests that an act of imagining a collection of qualities existing, like the collection Q1 and Q2 and Q3, constitutes imagining that collection being perceived. This is the heart of Berkeley's Master Argument. The reason one cannot conceive of a physical object existing unperceived is that in order to conceive the object existing one must frame an idea (of conception) of the object. But, once this is done you have conceived the object being perceived (though you do not perceive the object). In Chapter Six I gave an account of how I think Berkeley intended this argument to work. Step One: Begin by trying to conceive of collection of determinate qualities existing. To do this one imagines a collection of determinate qualities as having features common to other ordinary objects which physically exist. These features might include standing in various spatial relationships to other objects, standing in various causal connections to them, and so on. This completes Step One and suffices as a conception of a sensible object existing. Step Two: Try to conceive of the object existing unperceived. To do this, one has to try to imagine the object with none of its features perceived. Since this is an act of conception and since Berkeley takes ideas of conception to be copies of ideas of perception, the only way to succeed in accomplishing Step Two is to annihilate the idea (of conception) one presently entertains. But once that it is done the collection of determinate qualities is no longer conceived existing. Thus, it is possible to perform Step Two only
by ceasing to perform Step One. Since it is not possible to perform Step Two without ceasing Step One, it is not possible to perform Steps One and Two simultaneously. So, thinks Berkeley, it is not possible to conceive of a sensible object existing unperceived.

Notice what happens to this argument under the supposition that an act of Type II abstraction can be performed. If Type Two abstraction is possible, then it is not the case that ideas of conception are copies of ideas of perception. For, if it is possible to engage in an act of Type II abstraction, then it is possible to have ideas of impossible (and unperceivable) objects. Let 'Q1,' 'Q2,' and 'Q3' denote determinants of color, motion, and extension.

Step One: Conceive the collection of qualities Q1, Q2, and Q3 existing. Imagine this collection of qualities to have properties common to other physically existing objects. Step Two: Imagine this collection of qualities unperceived. It is now easy to imagine this collection unperceived while continuing Step One. For, given Type II abstraction, I can complete Step Two without failing to perform Step One. If I should abstract Q1 and Q2 from Q3 (and from any ideas (of conception) of a determinant of extension), the result is an idea of Q1 and Q2 which does not contain as a part of its content any idea of a determinant of extension. This means that the idea of Q1 and Q2 will not be like an idea of perception at all. So, it can be said that I have conceived the collection unperceived. For, an idea of perception of Q1 and Q2 will contain some idea of some determinant of extension or other. But, notice, I have accomplished Step Two without ceasing to perform Step One for I can be said to have continued conceiving the collection existing though I do not, following Step Two, conceive all of its qualities.
Of course, someone might respond to this argument by saying that I have not succeeded in conceiving of the collection $Q_1$ and $Q_2$ and $Q_2$ existing unperceived for the simple reason that I am not conceiving that collection at all. The reason that this is so is because the idea that I now entertain when I allegedly conceive the collection of qualities existing unperceived does not contain, as a part of its content, an idea of all the object's qualities.

This objection assumes as a premise the claim that conceiving of a collection of sensible qualities existing unperceived entails conceiving all of the object's qualities. Still, there is some reason to doubt this claim. A pair of analogies will help. Consider, first, an ordinary case of sense perception. If I am standing in front of, say, the Sears Tower, and I am looking straight at it, it may be said that I am perceiving the Sears Tower. Notice, however, I am not perceiving all of its qualities; indeed I may not even be perceiving most of its qualities. Thus, if you think it is true to say that I am perceiving the Sears Tower, though I do not perceive all or even most of its qualities, why insist that in order to be conceiving a sensible object (existing unperceived) I have to conceive every quality of the object.

Another analogy can be used to make a somewhat sharper point.23 Suppose there is a red cardboard box and someone asks you to conceive or imagine that very box. You then frame, after Berkeley, an idea of conception of the red cardboard box. Now suppose you are asked to imagine the box painted black and crushed. This is easy enough to do. You form an idea of the box in which the box now appears black and crushed. Now the crucial question is this: Isn't it true to say that you were imagining the real red box when you entertained an idea of that box appearing black and crushed? If the answer is yes, then it looks as though the content of an idea of
conception can change in fairly radical ways without a change in the object of conception. That is, it is still the case that I stand in the conceiving relation to the actual red box even though the idea (whose content is an appearance of a black crushed box) is significantly different than the idea of a red cardboard box. It now begins to look as though the "intentional focus" (the actual red cardboard box) of an act of conception does not necessarily shift just because of a change in content of the idea (of conception) which is used to imagine how the box would appear under different conditions (say, if its color and extension were to change). So, I am inclined to think it is not necessary to conceive all of a physical object's qualities in order to conceive that object. Nor, I would say, is it necessary to entertain an idea of conception which is at all like the physical object conceived in order to stand in the conceiving relation to that object. Consequently, this cannot be the reason for saying that one fails to conceive a physical object existing unperceived when one conceives some portion of its qualities.

These considerations suggest an argument which would produce the following result: If there are abstract ideas, then (EEP') is false. Here is how such an argument might go:

(a) If there are abstract ideas, then it is possible to conceive a physical object existing unperceived.

Justification: Suppose that there are abstract ideas. Then, it would follow that one can conceive a physical object say, an object consisting of the qualities of determinate motion, color, and extension, existing without thereby conceiving or imagining certain necessary qualities (for example, if there are abstract ideas, then one can conceive of an
object composed of the qualities of determinate motion, color, and extension without thereby entertaining an idea whose content includes an idea of some determinant of extension. If it is possible to have an idea (or conception) of this sort, then one can conceive of a physical object existing unperceived. This is so since the idea produced in such a conception is not like an idea of sense because an idea of sense would have, as part of its content, an idea of some determinant of extension.

(b) If one can conceive of a physical object existing unperceived, then it is possible for a physical object to exist unperceived.

Justification: (b) is an instance of Berkeley's conceivability thesis. But note also that Berkeley is willing to grant that physical objects can exist unperceived if one can conceive a physical object existing unperceived.

(c) If it is possible for a physical object to exist unperceived, then (EEP') is false.

Justification: Premise (c) is obviously true.

(d) If there are abstract ideas, then (EEP') is false.

Justification: (d) follows from (a), (b), and (c) by hypothetical syllogism.
NOTES

Commentators who have denied that there is any connection between abstract general ideas and *esse is percipi* include: J.L. Mackie and Monroe Beardsley. Mackie denies that there is any such connection on the grounds that there is nothing present in an idea which pertains to object's being perceived. Thus, one could not distinguish existence from perception via abstraction and conceive of an object existing unperceived. See J.L. Mackie, *Problems From Locke*, Oxford University Press (Oxford), 1976, p. 121. For Beardsley, see "Berkeley on 'Abstract Ideas'," reprinted in *Locke and Berkeley: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by D.M. Armstrong and C.B. Martin, University of Notre Dame Press (Notre Dame), 1968, pp. 380-399.

2See G.S. Pappas, "Abstract Ideas and the 'esse is percipi' Thesis, *Hermathena*, Winter 1985, pp. 47-62. There are, however, some problems with the view advocated by Pappas. These are discussed in what follows.

3See Pappas, p. 55.

4See Pappas, p. 55.

5See Pappas, p. 55.

6See Pappas, p. 55.

7See Pappas, p. 55.

8See *The Principles*, Part I, Section 5, p. 25.


10See *The Principles*, Part I, Section 4, pp. 24-25.


12See *The Principles*, Introduction, p. 11.

13See *The Principles*, Introduction, p. 11.

15See *The Principles*, Introduction, p. 11.

16See *The Principles*, Introduction, p. 9. The parenthetical remark is mine.


19See *The Principles*, Section 5, p. 25.

20See Marc-Wagou's paper which was cited in Chapter Five, pp. 318-319, in Martin and Armstrong.


23George Pappas makes the point that in cases of perception we do not ordinarily require that a subject sees all of objects' features in order to perceive the object. See his paper "Berkeley and Immediate Perception," *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, E. Sosa (ed.), D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1987, pp. 195-213. I am grateful to him for his suggestion of the first analogy that I use. The second analogy makes my criticism of his account of the connection between esse is percipi tentative. For, the analogy shows that it is possible to conceive an object without producing an idea that is relevantly like the object conceived. My criticism presupposes that conceiving an object requires attending to an idea that at least resembles the object conceived.

24See *The Principles*, Section 22, p. 32.
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Primary Sources


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**Secondary Sources (Articles)**


