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## BERKELEY AND IMAGINATION

R. ATTFIELD

IN AN article in *Philosophy*, April, 1968,<sup>1</sup> Roger Woolhouse observes that in supplying 'differentiae' for ideas of the imagination as distinct from ideas of reality, Berkeley contrives to mark off two different sorts of cases without necessarily observing there were two Real-Imaginary distinctions to be drawn. The two sorts of cases of imagination are fancy and illusion. But Berkeley may not have been confused. 'I have not claimed . . . that Berkeley failed to realise that ideas of the imagination fall into two sorts, and confusedly ran these two distinctions together' (sc. the Real-Fanciful and Real-Illusory distinctions) 'or that he did not, and I am not sure which one should claim.'<sup>2</sup> The difficulty of exculpating Berkeley of confusion is at its worst in paragraph 33 of the *Principles of Human Knowledge* where 'Berkeley talks as though all the ideas of the imagination lack all the three characteristics that the ideas of sense possess,'<sup>3</sup> namely *vividness* and *non-voluntariness*, proper both to cases of illusion and reality, but not fancy, and *coherence*, proper both to fancy and reality, but not illusion: though it is not claimed that Berkeley asserts what his words suggest. A defence of Berkeley would have to show he was aware of the distinctness of fancy and illusion, and that at *Principles*, paragraph 33, one kind of fancy was rightly held to lack all three characteristics, without illusion coming into the picture.

In the Third Dialogue between Hylas and Philonous Hylas objects that on the immaterialist thesis there is no difference 'between real things and chimeras formed by the imagination or the visions of a dream'; all are equally 'in the mind'.<sup>4</sup> In reply, Philonous is careful to distinguish between waking imagination and dreams. Unlike the 'ideas of sense', 'the ideas formed by the imagination are faint and indistinct', and have besides 'an entire dependence on the will'. By contrast the visions of a dream are 'dim, irregular and confused' (though not 'dim' in all senses, as they may be extremely 'lively and natural').<sup>5</sup> The objection about imagination and dreams has thus been dealt with, before, for the first time in this Dialogue, illusions are mentioned. How, on the immaterialist thesis, Hylas now asks, 'can a man be mistaken in thinking . . . an oar, with one end in the water, crooked?'<sup>6</sup> The reply is in terms of mistaken inferences. If the man expects the oar to feel crooked or look crooked when taken out of the water, present ideas will not cohere with future ideas. But there is no suggestion that the oar illusion will be faint or voluntary like an imaginary sun, nor irregular and confused like a dream about the sun. Illusions are dealt with subsequent to and in isolation from both fancy and dreams, and three Real-Imaginary distinctions are observed.

Is the Illusory similarly segregated in the *Principles*? Matters are less clear, but I contend that it is. After a concentrated discussion of the qualitative difference between ideas of reality and ideas of imagination, an objection is put at paragraph 34, namely that 'all things that exist, exist only in the mind, that is they are purely notional'. If so, our beliefs will be illusory: their objects will be 'but so many chimeras and illusions on the fancy'.<sup>7</sup> From his reply, it is evident that Berkeley, as opposed to the objector, distinguishes 'chimeras' and 'illusions': for the illusory character of reality is denied, while (within non-illusory experience) 'the

distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force'. This has already been shown, says Berkeley, in paragraph 29, 20 and 33, 'where we have shown what is meant by real things in opposition to chimeras or ideas of our own framing.'<sup>8</sup> What 'real things' are here opposed to is cases of fancy, not illusions: for it is nonsense to hold that a man's illusions are framed by himself at will. Illusions and fancy are kept distinct.

At this stage, then, Berkeley, purports to have been discussing in the preceding paragraphs the Real-Fanciful and not the Real-Illusory distinction: but at paragraph 30, when 'a steadiness, order and coherence',<sup>9</sup> is attributed to the ideas of sense, we could reasonably look for a distinction from objects of illusion, while fancy seems irrelevant. Yet Berkeley need not have illusions in mind: for he talks of the 'regular train or series' of ideas of reality, and spells out this concept not in terms of the coherence of sight and touch which illusions lack but of the orderliness of successive and law-governed events of determinate types. This regularity is ascribed to the Author of nature and distinguished from the ideas 'which are the effects of human wills' which are often 'excited at random'.<sup>10</sup> The allusion, I suggest, is to the spontaneous and sporadic *occurrence* of our imaginings, not to the disordered *content* of our illusions.

The same account may suffice for the description in paragraph 33 of ideas excited in the imagination as 'less regular . . . and constant' than 'real things'.<sup>11</sup> Berkeley may intend the occurrence of our imaginings rather than the quality of their objects, though 'less vivid' must apply to the latter. But there is an alternative solution. As we have seen, Berkeley is prepared to speak of dreams as 'irregular and confused'. But dreams are not 'excited in the imagination' nor exactly 'creatures of the mind'. Yet those trains of thought we call day-dreams share both the voluntariness of our imaginings and the irregular sequence of scenes characteristic of dreams. Perhaps at paragraph 33 Berkeley had in mind the character of this kind of fantasy; which could also be said to be 'less vivid' than 'real things' in that we do not expect imaginary creatures to act towards us in the manner of real ones. On this reading of Berkeley only the Real-Fanciful distinction is in question, and the type of fancy intended lacks vividness, non-voluntariness *and* coherence.

One further point argues less confusion on Berkeley's part than may appear; in the main discussion it is from 'ideas of the imagination', not 'imaginary ideas' that 'ideas of reality' are distinguished. Now we often call illusory objects imaginary, but, except in expressions like 'a figment of the imagination', we rarely think of them as objects of the faculty 'imagination'. The imagination is hardly in a position to be misled; nor, I suspect, does Berkeley so abuse language as to suggest otherwise. Only by analogy is illusion a type of imagination: in distinguishing 'imagination' from 'reality', fancy and not illusion is what Berkeley means.

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<sup>1</sup>Roger Woolhouse, 'Berkeley, The Sun that I See by Day, and that which I imagine by Night', *Philosophy*, April, 1968, pp. 152-60.

<sup>2</sup>Op. cit., p. 157.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 157.

<sup>4</sup>The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne; Edited by A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop (London, 1949), Vol. II, p. 235.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 238.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 54.