34. WHAT IS GOD DOING IN THE QUAD?

ROBERT MCKIM
University of Illinois, Urbana--Champaign

ABSTRACT. I begin with an examination of Berkeley’s various suggestions about how to account for the continued existence of physical objects which are unperceived by finite spirits. After dismissing some of these suggestions I attempt to combine others in a unified theory which involves an appeal to what finite perceivers would perceive if they were in the right conditions, to the operation of the will of God, and to the perception of God. I assess the merits, both philosophical and textual, of the unified theory. In the final section I comment on the implications of this theory of continuity for our conception of a Berkeleian physical object.

1. The Continuity Problem.

If esse est percipi, that is if to be is to be perceived, then physical objects which are not being perceived do not exist. Yet commonsense suggests that physical objects exist when they are not being perceived. How is Berkeley to make sense of this commonsense belief?

It is hard to know how important it is to Berkeley to accommodate commonsense beliefs. I assume that the more prevalent and deep-seated he takes a putative commonsense belief to be, the greater is his concern to show he can accept it, or at least to show how it can be interpreted so that it is consistent with his views. The commonsense belief in the continued existence of unperceived objects is very prevalent and very deep-seated. So it is no surprise to find Berkeley dealing with the issue of continuity from the earliest entry in the Philosophical Commentaries to the final pages of the Dialogues.

2. Two Unsatisfactory Responses to the Continuity Problem.

Sometimes it seems that Berkeley’s response to the continuity problem is simply that it is impossible to believe in the existence of unperceived objects, for "unperceived object" is a contradiction in terms. What is not perceived does not exist. This response is presented in the course of Berkeley’s reply to the fourth objection to his views which he considers in the Principles. The fourth objection is that it follows from his principles that "things are every moment annihilated and created anew" and that "[the] objects of sense exist only when they are perceived; the trees therefore are in the garden, or the chairs in the par-
lour, no longer than while there is somebody by to perceive them". Berkeley responds as follows:

... I refer the reader to what has been said in Sect. 3, 4, & c. and desire he will consider whether he means anything by the actual existence of an idea, distinct from its being perceived. (P45)

What Berkeley means the reader to attend to in sections such as 3 and 4, I take it, is his case for physical objects having no existence apart from their being perceived. The claim that an idea cannot be distinguished from its being perceived is part of this case. It is unfair of his opponents, Berkeley goes on to observe, to criticize him for "not asserting to those propositions which at bottom have no meaning in them".

There are two ways to read this response. Berkeley may be saying that someone who claims that things continue to exist when not perceived by us, that "the trees ... are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlour, [even when there is nobody] ... by to perceive them" is not really claiming anything at all. Objects which we perceive by sense exist only when they are perceived. But if this is his point, it is not very satisfying. If there is a problem about continuity, it arises because Berkeley's principles seem inconsistent with the belief that objects continue to exist when we do not perceive them. Observing that his principles entail that this belief cannot properly be held does not get us very far. If we think continuity to be a problem, we are unlikely to be satisfied. Berkeley's many attempts to account for continuity suggest that he was not satisfied.

So perhaps we should read these remarks as an incomplete statement of another response. This other response appeals to the perception of another spirit, or other spirits. There is something appropriate about reading Berkeley's reply to the fourth objection in this way since he concludes that reply by observing that "we may not ... conclude [that objects of sense] ... have no existence except only while they are perceived by us, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them, though we do not". (P48) On this reading, when he says that it is meaningless to claim that unperceived objects exist, he is in effect observing that some spirit must be perceiving an existing thing. So he is not emphasizing the fact that there cannot be unperceived objects, although he thinks that to be so. His emphasis is rather on the fact that objects can continue to exist when not perceived by any particular spirit, provided they are perceived by another spirit, either finite or infinite. So his response to the continuity problem here is not just that what is unperceived does not exist, but rather that objects which are unperceived by a spirit can continue to exist provided that there is some other spirit which perceives them. I will have a lot more to say about this appeal to another spirit.

Some commentators have suggested that Berkeley accepts and then rejects the following distinct position on the existence of unperceived objects. It is impossible for an object to exist unperceived. If you think otherwise, just try to imagine such an object. If you imagine it, then it exists. (See e.g. PC472, 3, P23, D200.) On this reading, Berkeley is saying this to his opponents: if you think that it is possible for anything "to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it" (P22), the onus is on you to come up with an example of such a thing. And it is
impossible to do so since any example you conceive of will be in your
mind. It must be true that unperceived objects cannot exist, since if
they could exist, you should be able to come up with an example of such
an object, but you cannot do so. Berkeley realizes that he ends up with
a very wide notion of existence. ("... I use the word Existence in a
larger sense than ordinary" (PC473) since anything "perceiv'd by the
senses ... imagin'd, thought on ... mention'd of, discours'd of ...
must necessarily exist" (PC472).) But in doing so he need not abandon
the distinction which he wishes to maintain, and with which common sense
is obviously in agreement, between, on the one hand, genuinely existing
things and, on the other hand, figments of imagination, illusions, random
thoughts, and so on. However, as a solution to the problem of continuity
this second response is seriously lacking. Even if it enables us to pre­
serve some existence for unperceived objects, that existence is no less
fleeting and intermittent than the existence of perceived objects. If ob­
jects unperceived by sense exist only if they are being imagined or
thought of, what about their existence when they are not being per­
ceived or thought of?3

At P23 Berkeley may be proposing this as a solution to the contin­
uity problem, although it is not certain that this is so. His remarks at
P23 come at the end of a long discussion of why the hypothesis that
there are external unperceived objects is unnecessary and meaningless.
It is the final part of a proof of the incoherence of that supposition, of
a proof that the believers in external unperceived objects are confused.
They are confused because they think they can conceive of bodies ex­
isting without relation to thought; but, since they are conceived of,
such bodies do have a relation to thought. These remarks may have im­
lications for the problem of continuity, but he does not here seem to
mean to be dealing with that issue. In passages in his major works
where continuity is the focus of his attention, he does not introduce
this response, and its defects as a solution are patently clear. It seems
reasonable not to view it as part of his considered position.

3. The Conditional Theory.

Berkeley sometimes seems to respond to the continuity problem as
follows. Unperceived objects exist in the sense that if a perceiver were
suitably placed, the objects would be perceived:

The Trees are in the Park, that is, whether I will or no
whether I imagine any thing about them or no, let me but
go thither & open my Eyes by day & I shall not avoid see­
ing them. (PC98)

The table I write on, I say, exists, that is, I see and feel it;
and if I were out of my study I should say it existed,
meaning thereby that if I was in my study I might perceive
it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. (P3)

Hylas Pray let me see any sense you can understand [the
creation] in.

Philonous Why, I imagine that if I had been present at the
Creation, I should have seen things produced into be­
ing; that is, become perceptible, in the order de-
I call this response the "Conditional Theory" since it says that the continued existence of an unperceived object consists in the fact that, if certain conditions were to hold, the object would be perceived. Berkeley took this response very seriously. The fact that it is presented at the beginning of the Principles and towards the end of the Dialogues suggests that he thought it important, and that it should figure in any full account of his position. I will return to the Conditional Theory, and here I will just make two comments about it. First, there are grounds for a little uncertainty about whether or not Berkeley ever understood it as a complete explanation of continuity. He never unequivocally presents the Conditional Theory as his entire response to the continuity problem. The closest that he comes to doing so is in passages such as PC96 and P3. But it is not certain that he means that the existence of, for example, the unperceived trees in the park consists entirely in the fact that we would perceive them if we were there. He may just be pointing to part of what the continued existence of the trees consists in, or to something which is the case whenever an unperceived object continues to exist. Second, there is something unsatisfying about the Conditional Theory. How could the existence of the tree in the quad, when there is no one in the quad, consist in the fact that if there were someone there, she would perceive it? That she would see the tree in the quad, were she in the quad, may be a fact, but one wants to say that it is not the sort of fact that the continued existence of the tree in the quad could consist in.

4. Other Created Spirits.

Sometimes it seems that Berkeley's view is that non-human created spirits guarantee the continued existence of objects. He brings in such spirits when discussing how there could have been a creation prior to human existence. He wants to show that his views are consistent with the Biblical account of creation. If non-human spirits existed prior to humans, they could perceive objects. One mention of other spirits in this context is in a letter, dated September 6, 1710 (the year the Principles were published) to Sir John Percival. Percival's wife, unlike many early critics, did Berkeley the honor of opposing his ideas with argument rather than invective. She had wondered if Berkeley's principles were consistent with the creation. Berkeley replies as follows.

... I must beg you will inform her Ladyship that I do not deny the existence of any of these sensible things which Moses says were created by God. They existed from all eternity in the Divine Intellect, and then became perceptible (i.e. were created) in the same manner and order as is described in Genesis. For I take creation to belong to things only as they respect finite spirits, there being nothing new to God. Hence it follows that the act of creation consists in God's willing that those things should be perceptible to other spirits, which before were known only to Himself. Now both reason and scripture assure us there are other spirits (as angels of different order, &C.) besides man, who, 'tis possible might have perceived this visible world according as it was successively exhibited to their view before man's

It seems that insofar as Berkeley is dealing with creation, he is thereby dealing with continuity. The former problem is nothing but a version of the latter. A solution to the one is almost certainly a solution to the other. But it is not clear that Berkeley saw the problem of the creation as an instance of, or even as closely related to, the general problem of continuity. The clearest indication of this is that he nowhere unequivocally appeals to other spirits as a solution to the continuity problem. So we have little reason to conclude that his solution to the continuity problem would rely on the perception of other spirits.

Moreover, even in the passages in which he proposes the perception of other spirits as a way of making his views consistent with the account of the creation, he is rather hesitant to rely on them. Perhaps he thought the move a bit contrived. His hesitancy is clear from the letter to Percival: "'tis possible", he says, "[that] other spirits . . . might have perceived this visible world according as it was necessarily exhibited to their view before man's creation". (Ibid., my emphasis) In that letter Berkeley goes on at once to suggest the Conditional Theory. In discussing the creation in the Dialogues, Berkeley's allusions to other spirits are also very tentative:

... [When] things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them; then are they said to begin a relative existence, with respect to created minds. Upon reading therefore the Mosaic account of the Creation, I understand that the several parts of the world became gradually perceivable to finite spirits, endowed with proper faculties; so that, whoever such were present, they were in truth perceived by them. (D252, my emphasis)

... [Created] beings might begin to exist in the mind of other created intelligences, beside men. You will not therefore be able to prove any contradiction between Moses and my notions, unless you first shew, there was no other order of finite created spirits in being before man. (Ibid., my emphasis)

In the first passage Philonous says that creation occurs when things are "made perceptible" (or "become perceivable"), not when things are actually perceived, and he says they were perceived by "whoever such were present", which does not imply that any were present. In the second passage Philonous does not say that there is no contradiction between the writings of Moses and his notions because there were non-human spirits before the creation of man. His view seems to be that there is no contradiction here because there could have been such spirits present. In short, there is no unequivocal reliance on other finite spirits.

5. Divine Perception.

At least until recent decades the standard approach to the continuity problem has been that, for Berkeley, objects unperceived by us
can exist in God's understanding. I refer to this as the "Perception Theory". It seems to be what he has in mind in the Principles when he writes as follows:

\[
\ldots \text{[Physical objects which] are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or that of any other created spirit, \ldots must either have no existence at all, or else subsist in the mind of some eternal spirit \ldots} \quad (P6)
\]

In the Dialogues this view is expressed a number of times in the second and third dialogues.

\[
\text{[An object existing without our minds] is truly known and comprehended by (that is, exists in) the infinite mind of God \ldots [Such objects are] perceived by God. (D235; also D212, 230-1, 240, 252)\]
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Sometimes the Perception Theory is implied rather than stated; for the emphasis is sometimes on the things we perceive existing external to our minds at all times, not just when we do not perceive them. Yet Berkeley makes it clear that in the process continuity is secured. (E.g., D230-1) And in some of its occurrences in the Dialogues, the Perception Theory serves as part of an argument for the existence of God. (E.g., D197, 220) This is the well known "Continuity Argument" which goes as follows. Physical objects exist continuously. Since we perceive them only intermittently, there must be a mind which is aware of them when we are not perceiving them. And this is the mind of God. This argument is sound only if God is the sole available perceiver at times during which we need to guarantee the continuity of objects. So in some formulations of the argument Berkeley expressly indicates that non-human finite spirits are not perceiving objects at such times. (E.g., D220)

Some aspects of the Perception Theory merit comment. God's perception is not like ours. For example, we always see physical objects from an angle. There are parts of an object which are not visible to us when we see it. We see things only within a certain distance. And so on. Similar remarks can be made about the other senses. We can taste very few tastes, and smell very few smells, at once. Presumably none of this holds true for God. God can simultaneously perceive objects in Ireland, America, and the farthest reaches of the universe. So God's perception could simultaneously keep objects in existence in Ireland, America, and the farthest reaches of the universe. God is not to the left rather than to the right of a physical object. God can perceive all that can be perceived. And it is not just that God perceives what is in deserted valleys and unexplored galaxies. In the Dialogues Philonous says there is a "twofold state of things, the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal and eternal". (D254) So God perceives the "archetypes" of what we see as "ectypes". The archetypes exist "from everlasting in the mind of God". God is eternally aware of what has only a temporal existence for us. Moreover, we sense physical objects but God does not do so since God has no senses, and hence no sensations. (D241)

Does God perceive what we perceive? I take it that Berkeley thinks that each perceiver perceives only his own ideas. Your ideas, my ideas, and God's ideas, for example, are numerically distinct in an important respect. An idea of mine is an episode in my mental life, not in yours. One way to put this is to say there is an interpretation of "same
idea" on which it is correct to say that different perceivers do not perceive the same idea. But there is another interpretation of "same idea" on which it can be correct to say that different perceivers perceive the same idea. This is when we think of the content of the idea rather than of it as something in the mind of a particular person. So there is a way to understand the notion of being the same idea, numerically the same idea, such that different perceivers can perceive the same idea. Perhaps Berkeley recognizes the distinction between these uses: "Identity of Ideas may be taken in a Double sense either as including or excluding Identity or Circumstances. Such as time, place & c". (PC568) When we individuate ideas according to their content, having the same content, or something close to the same content, is sufficient for being the same idea. Qualitative identity, or some considerable degree of qualitative similarity, is sufficient for the numerical identity of ideas so individuated. This distinction between two interpretations of what it is to be the same idea helps us to explain those passages in which Berkeley writes of the existence of our ideas when we are not perceiving them. For instance, in the Dialogues Phelous remarks that it is evident "that these ideas or things perceived by me, either themselves or their archetypes, . . . must exist in some other mind . . ." (D214) And later he remarks that "whatever ideas we perceive from without, are in the mind which affects us". (D239; see also D240.) I suggest that it is only when we individuate ideas with respect to their content, and not when we individuate them as episodes in someone's mental life, that it is correct to say that the ideas in the minds of different perceivers are numerically identical. And if this is not quite what Berkeley had in mind, it is the best way to read him. (I want to set aside for the moment the question of whether or not God perceives the same physical objects that we perceive. That depends, of course, on what a physical object is.)

Berkeley puts forward the Perception Theory a number of times, but this is not his considered view. He seems to have thought it to face an insurmountable problem. The problem is not that it cannot avoid the objections which Berkeley raises against representationalism. The divine archetypes could serve to guarantee continuity without the implication that what we perceive is less real than what God perceives. We do not need to locate the real object in the mind of God. Nor is the problem the one which Berkeley raises when he asks (e.g., D190, 239) if something which is constantly changing and which does not exist eternally, can be qualitatively identical with something which never changes and which exists eternally. That problem seems to be soluble. God is eternally and completely aware of everything. We are intermittently and incompletely aware of things. But this need not prevent us from perceiving the same things. Provided our ideas, whenever they occur, are qualitatively identical with some of God's ideas, there is no reason why we cannot perceive some of what God perceives.

Nor is the problem quite the one raised by Charles McCracken ("What Does Berkeley's God See in the Quad?", Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie, 61, 1978, 260-92).

[One reason why] it won't do to identify the [unobserved] tree . . . in the quad with some purely intelligible, nonsensuous archetype in God's mind . . . [is that] . . . there is no sense of "copy" for Berkeley in which sensible ideas could intelligibly be said to copy nonsensible ones. "How can that which is sensible be like that which is nonsensible?
Can a real thing in itself invisible be like a colour; or a real thing which is not audible be like a sound?" (283; the passage cited is from D206.)

Now God must have some awareness of the world we perceive. God's willing that we should have certain sensations would be entirely arbitrary in the absence of such an awareness. If God lacked such an awareness, God would be ignorant of much that we know. And God's awareness of things seems at least eligible as a candidate for constituting, or partially constituting, the continued existence of things. So although God's ideas are not sensations, some of them must resemble sensations. And Berkeley has other reasons to believe that sensations and other ideas resemble each other: he could not account for memory or imagination, for instance, without assuming this to be so. If I can remember what I have perceived by sense, then I must be able to have both sensations, and ideas which are not sensations, of the same thing, which seems to require that the sensations and the ideas which are sensations must resemble each other. Finally, in the passage which McCracken cites, Philonous asks "[How] can that which is sensible be like that which is insensible? Can a real thing in itself invisible be like a colour; or a real thing which is not audible be like a sound?" But then he adds: "[In] a word, can any thing be like a sensation or idea, but another sensation or idea?" (D206) Both the additional question and the context of Philonous's remarks indicate that Berkeley's purpose here is to oppose material archetypes. When he asks rhetorically how something sensible can be like something insensible, he does not mean to imply that sensed ideas cannot resemble ideas which are not sensations, but rather that sensed ideas cannot resemble anything material and unperceivable.

It seems to have been the following problem that Berkeley thought to be insurmountable and that led him to abandon the Perception Theory. If God's awareness is a sufficient condition for the existence of an object, then since God is eternally aware of everything, all objects which exist at any time exist eternally. To borrow a phrase from Tipton, the continuity problem becomes a discontinuity problem. That Berkeley thought this to be a difficulty seems clear from some passages near the end of the Dialogues.

Philonous When things are said to begin or end their existence, we do not mean this with regard to God, but His creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or which is the same thing, have an eternal existence in his mind: but when things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them; then are they said to begin a relative existence, with respect to created minds. (D251-2)

Hylas Do you not make the existence of sensible things consist in their being in a mind? and were not all things eternally in the mind of God? Did they not therefore exist from all eternity, according to you? (D253)

It appears that Berkeley thought this a good reason to reject the Perception Theory.
6. The Volition Theory and the Combined Theory.

I will have more to say about the Perception Theory, but first a word or two on a theory which appeals to the will of God. According to this theory, objects unperceived by us can exist as powers, or volitions, or dispositions, or decrees in the mind of God to create ideas in the minds of perceivers in the right conditions. I call this response the "Volition Theory". In the Commentaries Berkeley adopts a modified version of Locke's account of powers. Locke's powers are in bodies. (Essay II.8.23f) Bodies have, for instance, the power to arouse ideas of secondary qualities in us. Berkeley's powers are not in bodies since his bodies are entirely passive; only spirits are active, therefore whatever powers there are must be in spirits. (PC41) He does not tell us much about the powers he has in mind, but since he appeals to them in attempting to account for continuity, the powers in question cannot be abilities or capacities. God, being omnipotent, has the ability to produce all sorts of things, including things which never actually exist. The powers must involve something like an inclination or disposition to produce certain ideas.

The Volition Theory and the Conditional Theory are compatible. In fact they complement each other, as Berkeley recognized. I refer to the combination of the Volition Theory and the Conditional Theory as the "Combined Theory". On the Combined Theory the reason why I would see a tree in the quad, were I in the quad, is that God is disposed to arouse certain ideas in anyone who is in the right conditions to see a tree in the quad. And if God is disposed to arouse ideas of the tree in a perceiver in the right conditions, then if one is in those conditions, one will see the tree.

Consider these remarks in the Philosophical Commentaries:

Bodies & c do exist even wn not perceiv'd they being powers in the active being. (PC52)

The Trees are in the Park, that is, whether I will or no whether I imagine anything about them or no, let me but go thither and open my Eyes by day & I shall not avoid seeing them. (PC98)

Bodies taken for Powers do exist wn not perceiv'd but this existence is not actual. wn I say a power exists no more is meant than if in ye light I open my eyes & look that way I shall see it i.e. ye body & c. (PC293a)

The Simple idea call'd Power seems obscure or rather none at all. but onely the relation 'twixt cause & Effect. Wn I ask whether A can move B, if A be an intelligent thing, I mean no more than whether the volition of A that B move be attended wth the motion of B, if A be senseless whether the impulse of A against B be follow'd by ye motion of B. (PC461)

Not to mention the Combinations of Powers but to say the things the effects themselves to really exist even wn not
actually perceiv'd but still with relation to perception. (PC802)

In PC293a Berkeley suggests that he thinks of the Volition Theory and the Conditional Theory as together constituting one theory—what I refer to as the Combined Theory. Actually PC293a seems to say that the claim that a power of the requisite sort exists means (only) that a certain object would be perceived if a perceiver were suitably situated. But on the basis of PC52 and 461 we may reasonably conclude that 293a is not a claim about meaning, and may be just a claim about entailment: if such and such a power exists, it follows that a certain object would be perceived by a suitably situated perceiver. Or perhaps the point in 293a is that the only respect in which the presence of a power in which the existence of an unperceived object to some extent consists, makes a difference to what we perceive, is that when we are in the right conditions, we will receive certain sensations. PC52 tells us that the powers relevant to continuity are in God. PC461 seems to tell us that to be a power is to be a cause, and that the claim that an intelligent being is causally related to something implies that the intelligent being has volitions. Presumably this applies to God as well as to other intelligent beings.

In PC293a he says that "Bodies taken for Powers do exist wn not perceiv'd but this existence is not actual". If objects which exist as powers in God's mind are not actual, then how can their continued existence suffice for the continued existence of objects? Is Berkeley indicating here that he is dissatisfied with the Volition Theory, and therefore with the Combined Theory, of which it is a part? If we thought this to be so, we might then explain the remainder of PC293a in accordance with this interpretation:

Wn I say a power exists no more is meant than if in ye light I open my eyes & look that way I shall see it i.e. ye body & c.

He may imply here that the Volition Theory suggests an obscure and mysterious force, but that the only sense he can make of this is in terms of the Conditional Theory. And the beginning of PC461 might be thought to be consistent with this:

The simple idea call'd Power seems obscure or rather none at all but onely the relation 'twixt cause & Effect,

as might PC802 where Berkeley resolves "Not to mention the Combination of Powers", but to offer instead what appears to be the Conditional Theory. Some commentators see PC802 as Berkeley's final rejection of the Powers theory. But considerations such as these should not lead us to conclude that Berkeley abandoned the Combined Theory.

The Conditional Theory occurs with such frequency in his writings that it seems clear he always accepted it as at least part of the explanation of continuity. The Volition Theory is stated at PC52: unperceived objects exist as powers in God. 293a does say that "Bodies taken for Powers do exist wn not perceiv'd but this existence is not actual", but we should not be misled by Berkeley's use of the term "actual" here. PC473 tells us that "existence is vulgarly restrain'd to actual perception". So something lacks actual existence unless it is perceived by
sense. Unperceived objects "taken for powers", therefore, may well exist, although by definition, since they are unperceived by sense, they will not have "actual existence". PC 802, where Berkeley says that he intends "not to mention the Combination of Powers", may be just a statement of policy. He may be choosing not to mention the Volition Theory but not abandoning it. He might prefer not to mention it because he is dissatisfied with it, and the first sentence in PC 461 suggests that he is. He might believe, for example, that fundamentally it is correct but that it is confusing or misleading. One question which he raises about powers on a number of occasions in the Philosophical Commentaries is whether there are many powers, or only one power, in God. (See, e.g., PC84 or PC282.) Perhaps he thought that to say there are many powers in God is to compromise the unity of God. On the other hand, if we say that there is but one power in God then what can we pick out as being identical with a particular unperceived object? For reasons such as these he might prefer not to mention the "combination of powers". It might cause antagonism or suspicion which he could well do without.

The evidence in the Commentaries does not show that Berkeley abandons either the Volition Theory or the Combined Theory. But whether or not he abandons the Volition Theory for a time, it occurs again in the discussion of creation in the Dialogues. God's perception cannot account for creation. So the creation must be understood to have taken place

when things before imperceptible to creatures, are by a decree of God, made perceptible to them; then are they said to begin a relative existence, with respect to created minds. (D252, my emphasis)

Again, the creation must have taken place

when God decreed they should become perceptible to intelligent creatures . . . (D253, my emphasis)

God decrees that things which were imperceptible are to be perceivable. Berkeley seems to think God's decrees to be identical with God's volitions. Since God is omnipotent, and what God wills to be done is done, objects exist when God has the will, or is disposed, to arouse certain perceptions in us. "The act of creation consists in God's willing that those things should be perceptible to other spirits, which before were known only to Himself." (Berkeley to Percival, September 6, 1710, 38, my emphasis) Berkeley may have in mind an appeal to God's will as at least part of his response to the problem of continuity from early in the Commentaries through the time of writing the Principles and Dialogues.

7. Modifying the Combined Theory.

I suggest that the Combined Theory is at least part of Berkeley's position; so the existence of unperceived objects consists, at least in part, in states of the will of God. A difficulty that arises if this is taken to be Berkeley's solution in its entirety, is that it compromises his claim that esse est percipi. If God's perception has no role, Berkeley in effect abandons the claim most closely associated with his name. If, on the other hand, divine ideas are among the constituents of physical things, the esse of physical things includes their being perceived by God. This is a
strong reason for us to look for a way to include God's ideas in a complete theory. Of course any attempt to account for the existence of objects unperceived by us will run afoul of *esse est percipi*, if "percipi" means "to be perceived by finite perceivers"; the need to ensure continuity is a reason not to so construe it.

So what is the role of God's perception? Berkeley says that God's will must be guided by his understanding, or else it would be entirely arbitrary.

The properties of all things are in God i.e. there is in the Deity Understanding as well as Will. He is no Blind agent & in truth a blind Agent is a Contradiction. (PC812)

If God's will is guided by the archetypes, perhaps the archetypes serve as something akin to a musical score, in accordance with which now this perception, and now that, is aroused in the understanding of finite beings. So the Combined Theory also presupposes the operation of the divine understanding. But if God is perceiving everything eternally, how is the will of God guided in giving us sensations? How would an eternal unchanging perception of all things guide the understanding of God in giving us our sensations? Perhaps it is like this. God knows eternally that we are to receive such and such sensations today. God's ideas may reflect change and they may guide God in giving us different sensations at different times. So for instance, God might know eternally that you are to receive such and such sensations, perhaps tree-in-the-quad sensations, at this very moment, and this knowledge might lead God to give you just those sensations at this moment. So nothing would change in God's understanding, but the volitions would come into operation at the right moment. The archetypes would be an eternal and unchanging blueprint for change. God perceives everything eternally and unchangeably, and reveals now this and now that to us. Do God's volitions involve ideas? I suggest we think of God's volitions as follows. They involve both a description of the sensations to be produced, should the right conditions hold, and a disposition or readiness to produce those sensations. God is in a certain state with respect to the production of those sensations. When God is in this state, God has certain ideas. For instance, when God is disposed to produce ideas of a tree in the quad in the minds of any perceivers who are in the right conditions, God's being so disposed involves God's having certain ideas.

Can what is in God's understanding figure somehow in a complete account of the existence of unperceived objects? If we take Berkeley at his word when he says that God's ideas are eternal and unchanging, the only possibility would seem to be that the archetypes, though unchanging, might be partly constitutive of things when those things exist. So, for instance, even though the divine archetype of the tree in the quad is unchanging, it is partly constitutive of the tree when that tree exists. The archetype remains the same, but has a role at certain times which it lacks at other times. At some times it is partly constitutive of the tree, at other times not so. While this idea is coherent, there is no textual support for it whatsoever. On the other hand, if we do not take Berkeley at his word about the eternal and unchanging nature of God's ideas, other possibilities emerge. If God has ideas which guide God's willing, and which change through time—let us call them guiding ideas—
these too could have a role in the continued existence of unperceived things.

Even if there are ideas in God's understanding which could have a role in the continued existence of objects, they may not have such a role. It is possible that the understanding has a role in guiding the will, but that the ideas which are in God's understanding do not partly constitute physical things, and objects unperceived by us do not continue to exist, even in part, as ideas in the divine understanding. It may be that an object consists of:

(a) our sensations,
(b) facts about possible sensations, and
(c) God's willings.

And in order for God to have the willings in question, God must have, say, guiding ideas, but those ideas are not part of the object. The fact that a volition always involves or is accompanied by the occurrence of various ideas in the understanding may be more or less irrelevant to the analysis of continuity.

There are many conditions which hold when we perceive a Berkeleyan object, but which should not be thought to partly constitute the object. For example, when you see the tree in the quad, God presumably knows that you do so. And God knows that God wills that you should receive tree-in-the-quad sensations. And God knows that God knows both of these things. And so on. There is no reason to think all of these facts to partly constitute the tree. There is much going on when an object exists, and much going on in virtue of the fact that an object exists, without all that goes on constituting the object. Perhaps that is so for the occurrence of the ideas in God which guide His willing.

We can pose the question of what constitutes the continued existence of an unperceived Berkeleyan object in the following way. When an object exists, many things occur, and many things are the case. These include:

(a) our sensations,
(b) facts about possible sensations,
(c) God's willings,
(d) God's guiding ideas, if there are such,
(e) God's archetypes, if these have a temporal role and are distinct from (d),
(f) God's knowledge that we are having certain sensations, and
(g) God's knowledge that God is willing in certain ways.

And so on. Many more conditions obtain too. Where should we draw the line between conditions in which the continued existence of the object consists, and conditions which accompany the continued existence of the object? The problem of continuity arises if (a) alone is taken as the analysis of an object. What about (a) and (b)? Even if it is a fact that were we there we would see the tree in the quad, it is hard to see how the existence of the tree when we are not perceiving it can consist in this fact, although such existence may be better than nothing. And if the Conditional Theory is better than nothing, perhaps we should look on the Volition Theory as adding something better again. Although it
must be said that, if one is unhappy about an object continuing to exist merely in the form of facts about possible sensations, one might also be unhappy about continued existence which consists in divine volitions to give us certain sensations. Neither of these seem very like the green, leafy, solid object that we see in the quad. Where is Berkeley's world of solid objects that we touch, see, smell, and so forth?

I suggest we take the following approach. We should recognize first that it is appropriate that we should be somewhat vague about what Berkeley's view really is, since he never explains himself on the issue of continuity in a thorough way, and probably never thought the issue through in a thorough way. We should also recognize that there are a number of equally good ways to account for the continuity of the Berkeleian object. These ways are equally good as far as their conceptual adequacy is concerned. And if they are not equally good as far as their faithfulness to the texts is concerned, they are not far off it. An object can continue to exist as (b) facts about possible sensations and (c) God's willings, or as (b) and (d) God's guiding ideas, if there are such, or as (b) and (e) God's archetypes which have a temporal role, if there are such, or as (b) and (c) and (d). And so on. Obviously there are other possible combinations. On the basis of the textual evidence, I am inclined to opt for a combination such as (b), (c) and (d), or (b), (c) and (e). If God's ideas cannot function either in the way suggested by (d) or in the way suggested by (e), then the combination of (b) and (c) seems to be the best option. But it is fitting that we should look for a way to accommodate God's ideas in our full account, since Berkeley sometimes clearly has recourse to those ideas when he deals with continuity. The problem is that when we try to extend the Combined Theory there is nothing which naturally and unproblematically lends itself to being included.

8. Continuity and the Berkeleian Object

If the continuity problem admits of a solution, a Berkeleian object cannot consist solely of a family of sensations. Suppose it consists of a family of

(a) sensations,
(b) facts about possible sensations, 
(c) divine willings, and
(d) divine guiding ideas, if there are such.

In that case we perceive physical things directly in sense perception, although we do not perceive them in their entirety. Now there is a price to be paid for this approach. The price is that the Berkeleian physical object is something whose nature is largely hidden from us. It is not that the sort of scepticism which would arise if we located the real thing external to us in the mind of God rears its head. But this approach makes physical objects very mysterious. They are the things we perceive, but we perceive, as it were, only the surface of them. There is an awful lot to them that we do not have access to. Perhaps Berkeley would say that this is not a very big price to pay and that it would be presumptuous of us to think that in sense perception we get the whole truth about the physical world. He might say that what we perceive is
what it is good for us to perceive, and that in any case this is no more of a difficulty for him than it is for his opponents.

It might be objected that the analysis of a Berkeleian object suggested here is at odds with some of the things that Berkeley himself tells us about physical objects. For instance, at P1 Berkeley tells us that "a certain color, taste, smell, figure and consistence having been observed to go together, are accounted one distinct thing, signified by the name apple. Other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and the like sensible things; . . ." Is Berkeley not telling us here that a physical object consists of nothing but a family of sensations? But this is not a serious objection. For one thing, at P1 Berkeley may be more concerned to give us an account of how we come to use certain terms than he is to give a full account of physical things. And if he is giving us an account of physical things, it cannot be the account he would give if he were to reflect on his wish to defend the continued existence of objects unperceived by us. Pitcher cites P1 when he writes of Berkeley's "[identification of] what we call real physical objects . . . with ideas of sense. Fire water, thumbs, hammers, trees, and every other thing . . . that we commonly consider to be physical or material in nature, are nothing but sets, families, or collections of ideas of sense". (Berkeley, 137, also 143; Pitcher also cites other passages.) I suggest that we read P1, and other passages of this sort, as at most partial accounts of the nature of an object. At least we should read such passages in this way if we want to know what is Berkeley's considered judgment about the nature of an object.

For we need to distinguish Berkeley's considered judgment about the nature of an object from what he sometimes says on this topic. It is helpful to distinguish what we might call his thin and his thick conceptions of an object. One thin conception is the view that an object is nothing but a family of sensations. As I have just indicated, there are passages which lend themselves to being construed in this way. A thinner conception of an object is postulated by Berkeley when he remarks that, strictly speaking, we do not perceive the same object by different senses, and an even thinner conception is postulated when he implies that every new sensation might be considered to be a new object. ("Strictly speaking . . . we do not see the same object that we feel; neither is the same object perceived by the microscope, which was by the naked eye. But in case each variation was thought sufficient to constitute a new kind of individual, the endless number or confusion of names would render language impracticable." (D245)) The thick conceptions all agree that an object is something more than a family of sensations. And thick conceptions differ with respect to what is the "something more" which, together with sensations, constitute an object. The thickness of a conception is determined by how much the conception says it takes to make up an object.

Any of the thin conceptions suggest the first reaction to the problem of continuity considered above, namely that there is no meaning to the claim that objects continue to exist when not perceived by us. But concern with continuity is probably one of the factors which led Berkeley in the direction of a thicker conception of an object. Common-sense calls for continued existence, and for that you need one or another thick conception.11
ENDNOTES

1 In this paper The Principles of Human Knowledge is referred to as "P" and the Philosophical Commentaries as "PC". I follow the Thomas edition of PC. (Alliance, Ohio: Mount Union College, 1976) Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous is referred to as "D", and in referring to passages in D I refer to the version in The Works of George Berkeley II edited by A.A. Luce and T.E. Jeasop (London: Thomas Nelson, 1949).


3 For a discussion of other defects in this proposal, see Tipton, op. cit., 163.

4 See e.g., Luce, "Berkeley's Doctrine of the Perceivable" Hermathena, no. 60, (1942), 4; G.J. Warnock, Berkeley (London: Pelican, 1953), 122.

5 Pitcher believes that Berkeley accepts the "Conception Theory" and not the Perception Theory. According to the Conception Theory, God keeps unperceived things in existence by thinking of them, not by perceiving them. (Berkeley, 145) In spite of Berkeley's references to God's perception, Pitcher holds that Berkeley's God cannot perceive. And if God cannot perceive, then when Berkeley says that God perceives, he must mean something else. Pitcher offers some arguments in support of the claim that Berkeley's God cannot perceive. I will not examine these arguments in detail here except to observe that Berkeley has two uses of the term "perception", which I refer to as the narrow and the broad use. In the narrow sense the mind is passive to a very considerable extent. In particular the will of the perceiver is not involved in the production of ideas perceived in this way. Sense perception is the clearest example of perception of this sort. In the broad sense, "perception" includes sense perception and active perception, where ideas have their origin in the will of the perceiver. Since God is thoroughly active, God's perception is thoroughly active, which is to say the will of God is responsible for all of God's ideas. (D240-1) Much of our perception is active too. Memory and imagination are viewed by Berkeley as cases of active perception. So Berkeley can allow that God perceives, and this reason at any rate should not persuade us that it is wrong to impute the Perception Theory to him.

6 Jonathan Dancy (Berkeley: An Introduction (Blackwell, 1987), 52ff.) and David Raynor ("Berkeley's Ontology", Dialogue, WINT 1987) argue for the numerical identity of our ideas of sense and God's ideas in the sense in which I reject it. I am not convinced by their arguments, but it would take another paper to explain why.

7 At one point Philonous might be thought to suggest that the real object is in the mind of God: "[T]o a Christian it cannot surely be shocking to say, the real tree existing without his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, exists in) the infinite mind of God." (D225) But the point here is that the real tree exists when perceived
only by God, just as when it is perceived by us, not that the tree we perceive is not the real tree.

8 Here I side with Mabbott, Bennett, and Tipton against Luce, Purtle, and Pitcher. See 336 ff. of Tipton where more support for my view can be found.

9 Here I take issue with some of Kenneth Winkler's views. Winkler attempts to build an account of Berkeley's view of continuity around Berkeley's denial of blind agency. ("Unperceived objects and Berkeley's denial of blind agency", Hermathena 139 WINT 85, 81-100; Reprinted in George Berkeley: Essays and Replies, ed. David Berman (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1986)) He thinks this account to be one which Berkeley ought to have held and one which we may reasonably take him to have held. According to this account "[objects] owe their existence to divine volitions, but these volitions cannot exist apart from the appropriate divine perceptions". (34) The occurrence of the relevant volitions involves the occurrence of certain ideas. God's perception, therefore, has a role in securing the existence of unperceived objects, but God's perception which has this role "is nothing more than the perception inevitably involved in his volition. God's knowledge of real existence therefore derives entirely from his acquaintance with his volitions." (96) I doubt that Winkler has quite the right slant on the force of Berkeley's denial of blind agency here. But the important point here is this. Whatever precisely may be the sort of perception which is involved in, or accompanies, God's volitions, we cannot settle the question of wherein the continued existence of an unperceived object consists by observing that that perception is occurring.

10 Whatever may be the explanation of the fact that Berkeley never thought the issue through in a thorough way, Jonathan Bennett's judgment that Berkeley is indifferent to continuity is excessive. (Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 172ff.) For discussion of Bennett's claim see, in particular, Tipton, op. cit., 322f., and A.C. Grayling, Berkeley: The Central Arguments (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1986) 117ff.

11 My thanks to David Berman, Nancy Kendrick, Charles McCracken, Kevin McNeil, Chong-hwan Oh and David Raynor for comments on earlier drafts of this paper.