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All things exist as they are perceived — at least in relation to the percipient. “The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.” But poetry defeats the curse which binds us to be subjected to the accident of surrounding impressions. And whether it spreads its own figured curtain, or withdraws life’s dark veil from before the scene of things, it equally creates for us a being within our being.

P. B. Shelley, *A Defence of Poetry*

It is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas, and that no idea can exist unless it be in a mind. Nor is it less plain that these ideas or things by me perceived, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of my mind, since I know myself not to be their author, it being out of my power to determine at pleasure, what particular ideas I shall be affected with upon opening my eyes and ears. They must therefore exist in some other mind, whose will it is they should be exhibited to me.

George Berkeley, *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*

The fundamental Lockean premise that the human mind can only perceive ideas (and not reality) is differentiated by Berkeley¹ in making these “ideas” not “signs” of a material unknowable substance, but “ectypes” of God’s objects of thought². Berkeley’s “ectypal” ideas form a logical, if not ontological, link, I would suggest, between the “innate ideas” of tradition and the Lockean “ideas of sensation”, because whereas they are timely-imprinted, co-existent with perception, yet they are potentially pre-existent in the mind of the deity, and “eternally” perceived by God. The Lockean material substance as primary cause of our “mental imprints” is substituted by the Berkeleyan immaterial substance.

The contradiction that Berkeley detects in Locke’s conception of matter, in that an “unthinking” and insensible cause should be able to generate

"ideas" by acting upon mind, constitutes the basic premise for his adoption of an all-spiritual reality, thus establishing a system in which man finds himself alone with God in the universe³. What Berkeley in fact does, is retain the central epistemological "event" of the Lockean theory (mind-being-acted-upon)⁴, while changing the nature of the substratum, the ground of existence, from a material to a spiritual principle⁵. Berkeley's theory of *esse ist percipi*, by making the idea (perceived by the mind) of man an *ectype* of the *archetype* (idea in the mind) of the Author of nature, retains the Lockean set up of a mind-as-text "stamped" or "written upon" in the perceptual "act" (or "passion"). Also, by making the mind's own wilful activity, "thinking" or "imagination", a faint by-product of sense⁶ (as precisely Hobbes had done, calling imagination "faded sense"), Berkeley's immaterialism accords to mind (human mind) a position and function similar to that occupied in the materialistic systems of Hobbes and Locke. So the Imagination (exercise of man's will) is subservient and inferior to Sense (exercise of God's will), and becomes only a "copy" of the "real things" that constitute the content of mind in perception⁷; apparently, human intentionality, when interfering with divine voluntarism, introduces a component of "errancy" in what was originally systematic, lively, steady, and consistent.

Berkeley's ontological universe thus consists of *two perceiving subjects* (God/Man), and the objects perceived (mental ideas), forming all *one* spiritual reality with various gradations of vividness. In sensation, man perceives the ideas of God (or rather copies of the divine originals), whereas in the mental activities that follow upon perception (reflection, memory, imagination), he deals with faint reproductions of sensory images that are the human mind's own poor product, thrice removed from the divine moulds⁸. With Berkeley, sensation is not only the presupposition of all knowledge, but the highest activity of the mind, since it is then that the human and the divine come in their closest rapport. So what Berkeley really effects, is to transform the Author writing on the Human Text⁹ from a Corporeal to a Spiritual Substance; the mind of man in both cases remains a blank page, passively awaiting inscription.

It becomes fairly obvious, I think, that whereas the polemic of Locke was directed against the "innate ideas" of Platonic theology and attempted to liberate the mind from subservience to "transcendent" (and human) authority, Berkeley's contention, by accepting "ideas" as "innate" with God, while asserting that "no idea can exist than in a mind", is also subversive of Plato's conception of the Ideas as abiding separately from divine or human intelligence. So, there appear to be three *loci* of ideas: for Plato a place "apart" (where forms dwell "just by themselves" [*Parmenides*, 129d])¹⁰, for

Locke and Hume the mind of man (produced by an exterior material reality or from unknown causes), and for Berkeley (still within the tradition of Christian Platonism) the mind of God, from whence they are imprinted upon the mind of man in perception.

Was Berkeley a Platonist, a pseudo-Platonist, or an anti-Platonist? All three propositions have been supported, concerning his relation to Plato. What in fact we have, I believe, is yet another version of Platonism, or to be more specific, of Neoplatonism; and if we go by the norm of the Platonic dialogues, we would rather classify Berkeley with Locke's "new way of ideas" than with Plato's old way. The Berkeleyan "idea", as we have seen, is as closely associated with sense experience as is the Lockean, and in this Berkeley places himself in a counter position from Plato's. It is true, of course, that both Berkeley and Plato hold non-materialist positions in advancing the supremacy of mind, and this constitutes a common denominator that allows for their being grouped together. It is equally true, however, that Plato admits the existence of a reality other-than-Mind/Spirit in his ontological model ("for the creation of this world is the combined work of necessity and mind" [*Timaeus*, 47e-48a]), which gives his system a dualistic colouring absent from Berkeley's monistic metaphysics; as it is also true that Plato's epistemology demands at a certain point the rejection of sense-data as incompetent to lead man to knowledge of the Ideas, the senses capturing only shadows of reality — those things which "can be seen but not thought, while the ideas can be thought but not seen" (*Republic*, VI, 507b). For Berkeley, as indicated, knowledge is based on sense-perception, the senses being man's most direct channel into the "archetypal" ideas as seen by God. So to Plato's "objective realistic idealism" Berkeley counterposes a "subjective idealistic realism".

The proposition that a careful reading of Berkeley's work shows a "very gradual process in which, as if carried by an irresistible inner impetus, he brings himself more and more under the spell of the Platonic tradition", may be acceptable on the common ontological presuppositions that underlie both the Neoplatonic and Berkeleyan world models; but to "think of Berkeley himself as a passage or movement — the passage from Locke to Plato"¹¹ is, I believe, a gross injustice to all three philosophers involved. Berkeley, it appears, never grew out of Locke and into Platonism; he rather developed the full implications of a doctrine he had endorsed right from the beginning, crystallizing his epistemology into a cosmology. And the system or structure of reality that is the object of his inquiry in *Siris*, is precisely the one called the "laws of nature" in *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, "the set rules or established methods wherein the Mind we depend on excites in us the ideas of sense"¹². That Berkeley should read his own interpretation of reality

into Plato is too common a practice with post-Platonic philosophers to surprise us; evidently, the same attitude is to be found in some of his own readers, including Alexander C. Fraser, the editor of Berkeley's works, whose comment on the *Siris*, that it "breathes the spirit of Plato and the Neoplatonists in the least Platonic generation of English history since the revival of letters, and it extracts this Platonic spirit from a thing of sense so commonplace as tar"¹³, is indicative of a misreading of Plato similar to Berkeley's. Nor is the statement that follows fully justified, that in passing from the *Principles* to *Siris*¹⁴, "we are transported from Locke to Plato, and find revived the ancient conception of gradation in existence, and of the constant animation of the universe"¹⁵. Berkeley never quite inhabited the same ontological space with Locke or Plato (who, by sharing in premises of dualism and scepticism are, in a way, closer to each other than Berkeley to either of them). Berkeley's immaterialism is a blending of Christianity and Neoplatonism¹⁶, or a new version of the basic dogmas of Platonic theology; his one and only first cause, the Author of Nature, is an "inscribing" God duplicating the deity of "scriptural" revelation.

The pervading eighteenth-century image of the mind as a "lazy" or in any case "inactive" onlooker upon the "magnificent spectacle" that God paints on our senses, is dominant in Berkeley's philosophy. Or, transposing the metaphor from the field of the visual arts to that of linguistic science, the mind is again passively *instructed* in the divine discourse, reading and interpreting, but never exercising any form of initiative¹⁷. This model radically contradicts Plato's impassioned, wilful (and wily) mind in its pursuit after knowledge (*ἡ τοῦ ὄντος θήρα*), embodying the characteristics of the demonic eros (*Symposium*, 203d); within a premise which equates "love" with the active "lover" rather than the passive "beloved", verbs conveying action, almost to the point of "violation", accompany the Platonic act of knowledge, in contrast to the "spectator" metaphor of Berkeley. Even the moment of final encounter with true Being, a condition which entails stillness and inactivity, is described by Plato in terms of almost possessive aggressiveness (*Symposium*, 210d). Conversely, the passivity of the human individual before a higher authority, and specifically the authority of Authorship, is persistent throughout *Siris* as much as in Berkeley's earlier work: "The true inference is — that the self-thinking individual, or human person, is not the real author of those natural motions. And, in fact, no man blames *himself* if they are wrong, or values himself if they are right"; the slightest performance of the human person, such as music-playing for instance, is motivated "not from the musician himself" but "from some other Active intelligence"¹⁸. So the source of activity in Berkeley's conception of reality is a Mind other than human mind which becomes an unknown

recipient of the Other's creative performance.

The presence of elements from Berkeley's philosophical positions in the thinking and poetry — or "poetic thought" — of the Romantics is easily detectable. The extent to which the Romantic poets treated Berkeley as a Platonist, or a medium through which the Platonic doctrines were infiltrated to modern times, or a mirror that, like so many others, presented a distorted version of the original Platonic text, remains a questionable issue, though. Wordsworth's acquaintance with Berkeley's work, especially through his association with Coleridge, is widely acknowledged¹⁹; what probably attracted Wordsworth (and Coleridge for that matter) to Berkeley, is his attempt to reconcile the Christian with the empiricist world views in a new scheme that would guarantee the validity of sensation as a source of knowledge, while retaining faith in the providential role of a Supreme Being. The resulting pattern of experience, which incorporates epistemological as well as emotionalist aspects, and establishes the thesis that human sense-data are produced by the will of a Divine intelligence, must have been an attractive, though imperfect, solution to the acute problematics that disturbed the Romantic thinkers, concerning the relation of mind-nature. By reducing the old triadic structure of God-Nature-Man to a bi-polar God-Man, Berkeley's model offers one possible answer to the Subject-Object interrelation that was the chief concern of the post-Kantian generation of philosophers and poets. The spiritualization of the material world, and the metaphor of nature-as-language are fundamental concepts with Wordsworth and Coleridge as with Berkeley. To what extent Wordsworth also accepted Berkeley's attendant presupposition, the passive receptivity of the human mind in its transactions with the Author of Nature in sensation, would need more detailed investigation. That he did not approve of Berkeley's position unreservedly, we know from his optimum reality model of "an active mind in an active universe", which may or may not contradict his equally well-known dictum of "wise passiveness".

Coleridge's contention that "Hartley was ousted by Berkeley, Berkeley by Spinoza, Spinoza by Plato"²⁰, is supported by an incontestable biographical datum, the naming of his first son after Hartley and his second after Berkeley. Besides that, Berkeley was his favourite philosopher at least from 1796 to 1798, and apparently a major influence prior to his departure for Germany, which possibly paved the way for his attraction to Kantian philosophy²¹. Berkeley's deposition by Plato (via Spinoza) seems to contradict another statement of Coleridge's, that allows for a broad spectrum accommodating people and postulates conflicting with each other or mutually exclusive; referring to the times when " 'his metaphysical theories lay before him in the hour of anguish as toys by the bedside of a

child deadly sick', he turned again to 'Plato and the mystics, Locke, Berkeley, Descartes and Spinoza' "22. Muirhead attempts to justify the apparently ambivalent relation Berkeley bears to Plato in Coleridge's mind, by supporting that the "difficulty vanishes if we remember the difference between the earlier empirical Berkeley to whom *esse* is *percipi* and the later Platonic to whom *esse* is *concupi*, and that the discovery of this difference was itself one of the important steps in Coleridge's philosophical development"23. The implication is that Coleridge rejected the early "Lockean" Berkeley in favour of the late "Platonic" Berkeley; however, the presence of Locke's name in the second quotation alongside Plato's and Berkeley's, either indicates a (latent) correlation of the three philosophers, or makes of them an unusual company, unless their relationship is conceived in contradictory rather than conciliatory terms.

Shelley could not have been a Berkeleian, although it has often been claimed that he was24. The cornerstone of Berkeley's cognitive system, as pointed out, is theistic, and the reality of ideas or sense-data is guaranteed by a transcendent God whose authority and authorship constitute the ontological as well as the epistemological ground of human experience. This basic presupposition of Berkeley's theory and the well-known attitude of Shelley towards the God of tradition, resulting in the necessity of atheism, make it forbidding for Shelley to be a true disciple of Berkeley, despite Mary Shelley's conviction to the contrary. First, because, as Earl R. Wasserman argues, "without a Creator, Shelley has no ground for claiming that only regular, vivid, and constant ideas are real"25; second, and contrary to Notopoulos' view maintaining that the Platonism of Berkeley influenced Shelley who achieved a blending of the two philosophers"26, I think that Shelley could not have been a Berkeleian immaterialistic monist because he inclined towards being a (Platonic) realistic dualist - his epistemological model consisting of a "universe of things" flowing "through the mind" ("Mont Blanc"). In a letter to Godwin dated 29 July 1812, Shelley presents a severe critique of Berkeley's premises, reluctant as he is to accept the turning of material reality into immateriality:

Immateriality seems to me [to embody *cancelled*] nothing but a simple denial of the presence of matter, of the presence of all the forms of being with which our senses are acquainted, & it surely is somewhat inconsistent to assign real existence to what is a mere negation of all that actual world to which our senses introduce us. I have read Berkeley, & the perusal of his arguments tended more than anything to convince me that immaterialism & other words of general usage deriving all their force from mere *predicates* in *non*

were invented by the pride of philosophers to conceal their ignorance even from themselves²⁷.

In his introductory note to Shelley's "Essay on Life", David L. Clark obviously mistakes Shelley's position when he claims that, Shelley "has misunderstood Berkeley, for that philosopher did not deny the real existence of the external world: he merely asserts that we cannot *know* that objects do exist; all the mind has is an *image* of the various sensible objects"²⁸. Clark's misinterpretation concerning Shelley's attitude to Berkeley stems, I believe, from two causes: his own misreading of Berkeley, in that "we cannot *know* that objects do exist"; Berkeley's contention, on the contrary, is as affirmative as it could possibly be, and the existence of objects/ideas is absolutely authenticated by their prior sojourn in God's mind. It is also a distortion of Shelley's text, since the poet does not refer to Berkeley's hypothetical denial of the reality of the perceptual world, but of the existence of "matter"²⁹. In attempting to make Shelley a Berkeleyan, Clark identifies Shelley's axiom, "the mind cannot create; it can only perceive", with Berkeley's *esse est percipi*, without consideration of what is Berkeley's fundamental proposition, that the primary perception in the mind of God is a "creation", indeed; thus Shelley's dictum would appear to contradict the Berkeleyan tenet rather than support it.

A similar misrepresentation is put forward by Mary Shelley, whose assessment in her preface to *Shelley's Essays, Letters from Abroad, etc.* published in 1840, reads:

Shelley was a disciple of the immaterial philosophy of Berkeley. This theory gave unity and grandeur to his ideas, while it opened a wide field for his imagination. The creation, such as it was perceived by his mind — a unit in immensity, was slight and narrow compared with the interminable forms of thought that might exist beyond, to be perceived perhaps hereafter by his own mind: or which are perceptible to other minds that fill the universe, not of space in the material sense, but of infinity in the immaterial one³⁰.

If for Shelley, as Mary contends, the phenomenal universe was unsatisfactory, this is not Berkeley³¹ for whom the (human) sensible world *is* the very thinking of the transcendent (divine) Author, and who never underrates the validity of perception (nor does he, to my knowledge, allow for a direct viewing of "archetypes", human experience being limited to "ectypes"), but Plato, for whom the perceptual data are adulterated copies of transcendent Forms to be perceived by the "soul by itself" either in life or

afterlife (and certainly in pre-life, to complete the circle of generation).

The precise nature of the relation between creativity and perception has been an agonizing question with Shelley and appears in a variety of contexts covering the whole span of his intellectual evolution. In the early "Refutation of Deism" (published in 1814), the Christian Eusebes arguing from atheist premises (Epicurus, Bacon, Newton, Locke, Hume) against the deist Theosophus, proclaims: "Mind cannot create, it can only perceive. Mind is the recipient of impressions made on the organs of sense, and without the action of external objects we should not only be deprived of all knowledge of the existence of mind but totally incapable of the knowledge of anything"³². In the "Treatise on Morals" (placed loosely between 1815 and 1821, but most probably dating from 1812-15), the section on metaphysics (defined as an inquiry concerned with the "intenal nature of man"), opens with the following statement representing the fundamental tenets of empiricism — Shelley's degree of commitment to such postulates remaining indefinable: "It is an axiom in mental philosophy that we can think of nothing which we have not perceived. When I say we can think of nothing, I mean, we can imagine nothing, we can reason of nothing, we can remember nothing, we can foresee nothing"³³.

In a "Philosophical View of Reform" (written in 1819-20), Shelley places the distinctive mark of the "new epoch" in philosophy (Bacon, Spinoza, Hobbes, Bayle, Montaigne) in its "deeper inquiries into the forms of human nature", and in a critical questioning of "popular systems of faith with respect to the cause and agencies of the universe"; then "with a less interval of time than of genius followed [Locke] and the philosophers of his exact and intelligible but superficial school", putting forth "inferences the most incompatible with the popular religions"; in their wake, "Berkeley, and Hume, [and] Hartley [at a] later age, following the traces of these inductions, have clearly established the certainty of our ignorance with respect to those obscure questions which under the name of religious truths have been the watch-words of contention and the symbols of unjust power"³⁴. Here Berkeley is grouped with Hume and Hartley as an exponent of scepticism and a detractor of orthodox doctrines, instrumental in exploding the traditional theological body of established convictions. From this assumption, it is only a small step to translate the security and amplitude of Berkeley's ontological tenet "to be is to be perceived" (by God) into the insecurity and limitation of an epistemological proposition of "nothing exists but as it is perceived" (by man), which, read from the other side — "mind cannot create, it can only perceive" (and re-invested with metaphysical properties) — gives Shelley's model of Mind as the passive percipient of a creation caused by a Power other-than-mind. Shelley's

interest in the philosopher of immaterialism seems to originate more in that random critique inscribed as marginalia to Berkeley by the obscure poet Charles Lloyd, than in the thought of Berkeley himself:

It would give me much pleasure to know Mr. Lloyd. Do you know when I was in Cumberland I got Southey to borrow a copy of Berkeley from him, and I remember observing some pencil notes in it, apparently written by Lloyd, which I thought particularly acute. One especially struck me as being the assertion of a doctrine of which even then I had long been persuaded regarding the imagined cause of the Universe. 'Mind cannot create; it can only perceive.' Ask him if he remembers having written it³⁵.

What remains to be examined is Shelley's own text of the "Essay on Life"³⁶ where he actually appears twice as a convert to the Berkeleyan monistic system. In the fourth paragraph of the short piece (twelve paragraphs all in all) that undertakes to investigate the meaning of life and the mystery of being, appears for the first time the phrase "nothing exists but as it is perceived"³⁷ (evidently a close version of the Berkeleyan tenet, "to be is to be perceived"); Shelley seems to offer his unwavering support to the fundamental concept of Berkeley's theory, in his polemic against what he calls "the popular philosophy of mind and matter" on the one hand, and "materialism" on the other.

The most refined abstractions of logic conduct to a view of life which, though startling to the apprehension, is in fact that which the habitual sense of its repeated combinations has extinguished in us. It strips, as it were, the painted curtain from this scene of things. I confess that I am one of those who am unable to refuse my assent to those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived³⁸.

In the developement of Shelley's argument, two things become distinct: that his own philosophical evolution proceeded from a rejection of the popular philosophy of "mind-and-matter" (British empiricism) to the acceptance of "matter" (French materialism), which doctrine was in its turn found unsatisfactory; then he goes on to inform us that both the above systems were forbiddingly irrelevant to his own contemplations, which he ultimately found consistent with what he calls "the intellectual system"³⁹.

One controversial point concerns Shelley's references to the various philosophical schools which enter into the formation of his own thinking: the

popular philosophy of mind and matter (which Clark specifies as “the so-called intellectual philosophy advocated by Locke, Hume, Hartley, Priestley”), *materialism* (attributed to the French thinkers Holbach and Cabanis), and the *intellectual system*, whose “most clear and rigorous statement”, Shelley claims, “is to be found in Sir William Drummond’s *Academical Questions*”⁴⁰. The content of Shelley’s notion of “materialism” being fairly obvious, this leaves us with the confrontation (and they are meant to be seen as opposite and mutually exclusive systems of thinking) between the “empirical system” (i.e. the popular philosophy of mind and matter or, in Clark’s explanation, “intellectual philosophy”) and the “intellectual system”. Which of the two constellations does Berkeley belong to?

Furthermore, Shelley’s confession of assent to the theories of *those philosophers who assert that nothing exists but as it is perceived*, is tainted by verbal ambiguity manifest in an acceptance that is in fact a double negation (“am unable to refuse”); also, a subtle irony, it seems to me, plays around a “view of life” that “strips the painted curtain from the scene of things” and liberates from “habitual sense”, but is also the result of the “most refined abstractions of logic” (his reservations concerning both “abstractions” and “logic” being emphatically pronounced throughout his work). Shelley’s endorsement of such “conclusions”, he admits, has been a “decision” made against “all our persuasions”, voicing an enforcement of equivocal nature, in that “we must long be convicted before we can be convinced that the solid universe of external things is ‘such stuff as dreams are made of’ ”⁴¹. This could be Berkeleyan immaterialism, but also Lockean epistemology (the veil-of-perception doctrine). Hence, the sentence immediately following, which ridicules the “shocking absurdities of the popular philosophy of mind and matter, its fatal consequences in morals, and their violent dogmatism concerning the source of all things”, could as easily include Berkeley as exclude him.

Since “the popular philosophy of mind and matter” is the tradition stemming from Locke, Berkeley could be enlisted under its auspices; and the statement that “nothing exists but as it is perceived”, interpreted in a broader perspective, certainly advocates the empirical thesis of the phenomenal nature of reality from the standpoint of the human observer. So, to consider Shelley’s “intellectual system” as Berkeley’s “immaterialism” (with the indisputably centralized authority of the Author of Nature whose “ideas” are human “perceptions”) seems to me highly improbable. Shelley, giving us the nucleus of his own metaphysical and moral premises, contends that,

man is a being of high aspirations, "looking both before and after," whose "thoughts wander through eternity," disclaiming alliance with transience and decay; incapable of imagining to himself annihilation; existing but in the future and the past; being, not what he is, but what he has been and shall be. Whatever may be his true and final destination, there is a spirit within him at enmity with nothingness and dissolution. This is the characteristic of all life and being. Each is at once the centre and the circumference, the point to which all things are referred, and the line in which all things are contained. Such contemplations as these, materialism and the popular philosophy of mind and matter alike forbid; they are only consistent with the intellectual system⁴²

Can Berkeley be considered an advocate of this "intellectual system"? If we judge by the content Shelley gives to this theory, looking upon man as "a being of high aspirations", the focal point for all creation — a view basically following the humanistic tradition (or perhaps the transcendentalist) — nothing could be farther from the Berkeleyan theocratic model of reality, centralized as it is upon God who "imprints" life and being on man, the passive recipient. The only way that the above proposition could be thought of as inspired by Berkeley, is by translating "each" (man) into an "author" of nature, writing his own "text" of perception, in a Self- (and not Other/God) referential existence; thus, however, perception would become a human rather than a divine act of (imaginative) creation, and that, of course, precludes Shelley from being a disciple of Berkeley. And if we forget for a moment the epistemological problem and concentrate on the conceptual model of man that Shelley presents, the "each is at once the centre and the circumference", then we are confronted with a (Romantic) mind that "authorizes" individualism and (human) "thought" which becomes "the measure of the universe" (*Prometheus Unbound*, II, iv, 73)⁴³ — though not its generator. So Berkeley seems to be "suspended" between the two systems. And although Shelley uses expressions that have a Berkeleyan register, his unquestionable rejection of an authoritative Author of creation debars any easy adoption of the basic premise of Berkeley's creed. The poet is simply putting the philosopher's words to his own usage, emptying them of their original content. Doesn't he, after all, in this very essay, speak of "words and signs" as the "instruments" of mental creation⁴⁴, and the difficulty of finding terms "adequate to express so subtle a conception as that to which the intellectual Philosophy has conducted us"⁴⁵?

The two crucial propositions, "Nothing exists but as it is perceived", and, "Mind cannot create, it can only perceive"⁴⁶, seem at least contradictory,

although they are only three paragraphs apart. The first, as we have seen, sounds close to the Berkeleyan notion of the creation of phenomenal things taking place in the mind of the Author of Nature; the second could again be interpreted as the Berkeleyan thesis applied to the human mind; the two together might be incorporated in a statement denoting something like this: "Nothing exists but as it is perceived/created/imagined in the Divine Mind; human mind cannot create, it can only perceive what has already been perceived by God"⁴⁷. The problem that Shelley's line of thinking presents, as Wasserman points out, is that the poet rejects on theological grounds the belief in a "Creator Mind that governs its creation"⁴⁸, which inevitably writes out the possibility that the first "perceived" refers to a Divine Mind, whereas the second "perceive" to human mind. What may be a plausible interpretation of the antithetical statements is to reverse the subjects of the two sentences, which would result in the following reading: (Divine) "Mind cannot create, it can only perceive"; it cannot be the cause of life, as religion instructs us, nor an agent distinct from life, acting upon life. Shelley's conclusive proposition is in perfect agreement with such an interpretation: "It is infinitely improbable that the cause of mind, that is, of existence, is similar to mind"⁴⁹. Thus Shelley appears to reject, quite in the manner that Wasserman charts, the notion of the popular philosophy (or theology) — to which we could be justified now to include Berkeley — that Mind is the ultimate cause of life. The self-referential and solipsistic undertones that obviously accompany the interpretation that "nothing exists but as it is perceived" (by human mind) are noted by Wasserman, who formulates the central questions of Shelley's lifelong inquiry into the nature of "life", as, "Is there a substantive reality independent of the mind? Or is the 'external' world only the mind's perceptions? Is there a sense in which all the thoughts of the mind are real existences?"⁵⁰.

What, I believe, happens is that Shelley rejects the "truth" of empiricism while endorsing its "method", i.e. its critical/sceptical attitude which "destroys error and the roots of error". The mode of Shelley's "intellectual system" is essentially negative, creative in being destructive; the human mind in its "Copernican" role of being "the centre and circumference", is reduced to an existentialist *freedom of acting*, and re-creating words and signs after it has been *vacated* and relieved from customary beliefs. "Our whole life is an education of error"⁵¹, Shelley proclaims, emphasizing that the cognitive process necessarily passes through a "deconstructive" stage of violent scepticism, which leads (as in Platonic dialectic) to knowledge through knowledge of ignorance.

This second appearance of "Nothing exists but as it is perceived" is incorporated into a discussion on "unity", a view of life "presented by the

most refined deductions of the intellectual philosophy", where Shelley finds only a *nominal* differentiation between "ideas" and "external objects". He starts from a recollection of powerful childhood sensations and proceeds to the adult condition of "reverie", when due to the intensity of experience men become "conscious of no distinction" between self and world, and "feel as if their nature were dissolved into the surrounding universe, or as if the surrounding universe were absorbed into their being"; such are states of mind, he continues, "which precede, or accompany, or follow an unusually intense and vivid apprehension of life"⁵². Shelley collapses not only the distinction between "ideas" and "objects", but also finds the "existence of distinct individual minds" (as the common assumption is) "to be a delusion", and "the words *I, you, they*" as mere signs denoting "the different modifications of the one mind"⁵³. Wasserman interprets the above position as yet another reinforcement of the view that, "since his rejecting the doctrine of a Creator and accepting the universe as eternal, Shelley had been inclined toward a belief that all individual minds are subsumed in a universal mind, and his impulse at all times appears to have been to dissolve individual identity in an all-encompassing unity"⁵⁴. Wasserman refers to what he describes as Shelley's "monistic idealism", his identification of the "one Mind with Existence", and recognizes an essential paradox in that whereas the "intellectual philosophy" does not "make the ordinary phenomenal world any less illusory", yet it "allows the indisputably present phenomena to serve as the means of an imaginative leap from the realm of Existence to the realm of Being on which it depends"⁵⁵.

Wasserman's statement that, the "universal Mind is the same as Existence according to the 'intellectual philosophy,' and all human minds are factors of it"⁵⁶ does not easily correlate with a theory of visual deception. And his assertion that, in spite of "the obvious fascination the Platonic dialogues had for Shelley, it is both unnecessary and misleading in structuring his ontology to introduce Platonism, from which it differs in radical ways"⁵⁷ is an unfair — to say the least — treatment of Shelley's suggestions as to how his works should be approached, in favour of Mary's⁵⁸. "Shelley's philosophic evolution", Wasserman clarifies, "followed the logical course from the empiricism that was his native heritage to scepticism and then, dodging the implicit solipsism, to an objective idealism dependent upon a non-theistic and nontranscendental Absolute"; but although the poet "structured his ontology in his own special ways, it shares the characteristics of almost all idealisms in such essentials as the distinctions between appearance and reality, diversity and unity, thing and idea"⁵⁹. Yet it is precisely in what are the common characteristics of all idealisms — and some materialisms, too — i.e. the existence of a reality that cannot be detected by perceptual

consciousness, where Plato, Christianity, the Neoplatonists, Berkeley, Kant, the post-Kantians (to remain within the sphere of western metaphysics) present their most fundamental contradictions and irreconcilable positions — which makes for a plurality of “idealisms” as a source of conflicting ontological notions in-forming Shelley’s own philosophical speculations⁶⁰.

That neither Berkeley was a Platonist, nor Shelley a Berkeleian, has been recognized by a number of critics⁶¹. G. S. Brett contends that the “immaterial philosophy of Berkeley was not strictly platonic: it was nearer to some forms of neoplatonism and has a somewhat indefinite relation to the whole history of idealism”⁶². C. E. Pulos has argued in favour of the obvious antithesis in the two thinkers’ concept of reality, emphasizing that Shelleyan idealism views ultimate reality as unknown and differing from mind, whereas for Berkeley mind (Divine Mind) is “the basis of all things”⁶³. In interpreting the same lines from Shelley’s essay “On Life”, that, “Mind cannot create, it can only perceive”, Pulos contests that, “Shelley’s ‘the one mind’ appears to be not a metaphysical but a psychological concept, analogous to Jung’s well known theory of collective unconscious.’ It refers, at all events, to something less than ‘the basis of all things’ ”⁶⁴.

To the persistent question of why Shelley refused to accept the Berkeleian concept of reality as mind, Pulos offers a “plausible conjecture”, the fact that Shelley found in Berkeley’s doctrine “some suggestion of an anthropomorphic theology, which he viewed with repugnance”; and with a penetrating insight that takes us right to the heart of the problem, he claims that, there is “nothing in Shelley’s references to Berkeley to indicate that Berkeley ever impressed the poet. Critics have been able to conclude otherwise only by misinterpreting Sir William Drummond, whose ‘Intellectual Philosophy’ Shelley embraced, as Berkeley’s disciple”⁶⁵; to which I would add, at least on the evidence given earlier in this paper, Mary Shelley’s misled — and misleading — identification of Shelley’s “idealism” with “immaterialism”. Pulos’ conclusion on the nature of Shelley’s idealism, which makes of the poet a negative Berkeleian and a positive Platonist⁶⁶, raises a number of other issues concerning the three thinkers’ concepts of reality: “Shelley was still at liberty, of course, to formulate a theory of either feeling or probability, and in this manner to pass from the doctrine that denies the independent existence of phenomena to the doctrine that identifies reality with mind. But there is no evidence that he did so. Shelley tends toward the idealism of Plato through a kind of ‘sceptical solution to doubt’”, Pulos confirms, closing his discussion with a definitive statement, that it is impossible for Shelley to “accept Berkeley’s concept of reality as mind, even upon the most tentative grounds”⁶⁷.

The central position occupied by Drummond in Shelley's thinking and reading has been recognized by modern criticism; one could even support the thesis that "Drummond may be looked upon as one of the sources of Shelley's Platonism"⁶⁸. The question is, which Platonism? Idealistic Platonism that "served as a magnet to draw Shelley away from materialism to Plato", and even acted as "an incentive for Shelley to read Plato directly"⁶⁹; Platonic daemonology⁷⁰; or sceptical Platonism, scepticism being what "prepared the way for Shelley's acceptance of Plato and at the same time rendered inevitable his basic divergence from Plato"⁷¹. In any case, Drummond is considered as the conciliatory ground for British empirical philosophy and Platonism, in the conjunction of Locke-and-Plato, or in the fusion of Plato and Hume under the auspices of scepticism, of which both philosophers partake (though in a different measure and with different objectives). Consequently, Pulos maintains that the "sceptical tradition prepared the way for Shelley's acceptance of Plato by resolving the objection to Plato held by the *philosophes* and by depicting Plato as a kind of sceptic himself — or as, at least, a forerunner of scepticism"⁷². Concerning the possibility of integration of the Lockean and Platonic tenets, John Laird looks upon Drummond's work as "an anti-materialistic phenomenalism" which "did not despair of the possibility of building a bridge between Locke and Plato"; indeed, Laird continues offering an illustration from Drummond's work to support this unorthodox contention: "in a prominent place, namely, in a footnote to his preface, he remarked: 'I cannot indeed, comprehend any thing, which is neither a sensation nor obtained from one; I do not, however, on that account, deny the existence of divine intelligible ideas, as these are explained to be possible'"⁷³.

Drummond seems to be quite aware of the precise nature of Plato's dualistic conception of reality⁷⁴, which renders it possible for him to be *both* an idealist, i.e. a believer in the supremacy and knowability of the "ideal" world, *and* a sceptic (precisely in the way empiricists like Locke and Hume were), concerning the unknowability of corporeal reality: "Plato, in speaking of the primary matter, from which modern philosophers have borrowed their doctrine concerning material substance, observes, *that it is a question dubiously to be understood, and difficult to be comprehended*"⁷⁵. Drummond's own kind of scepticism, however, goes beyond Plato's and reveals its affiliations with contemporary speculations, in denying not only the intellegibility of matter (which is the Platonic position), but its very "existence", which is both the Berkeleian premise (leading to an all-inclusive spiritual view of reality), and the Humean (implying an all-inclusive "agnostic" attitude). Drummond's motives concerning the "denial" of matter, however, are the exact opposite to Berkeley's; whereas

Berkeleyan immaterialism establishes “authority” as external to man, Drummond’s incorporeality (in Plato’s fashion) questions “authority” and establishes “doubt” as the presupposition against “necessitarian causality”:

It may be asked how I account for sensations, if I question the existence of a material *substratum*? . . . To assign causes for everything has been the vain attempt of ignorance in every age. It has been by encouraging this error, that superstition has enslaved the world. In proportion as men are rude, uncultivated, and uncivilized, they are determined in their opinions, bold in their presumptions and obstinate in their prejudices. When they begin to doubt, it may be concluded, they begin to be refined. The savage is seldom a sceptic — the barbarian is rarely incredulous⁷⁶.

The target of Drummond’s sceptical attitude to free the mind from subjugation to superstition, credulity, received opinions, i.e. authority-as-otherness, is basically Platonic (but Lockean as well). “Intellectual philosophy” confers upon the human mind the freedom to investigate reality, divorced from the secure anchorage in divine authority (whether it be Berkeley’s Author of Nature or the Christian God); the counterpart of such liberty is the uncertainty and insecurity that attends the unaided intellect (fallen into “a violent distrust” of all that was “formerly held true” [*Republic*, VII, 539c]), in its awareness that the hermeneutics of the real rests on man’s own creative activity, which may very well be a “vision”, but it might equally well be a “dream”. In his moments of confidence in the power of human intelligence, Shelley endows it with an imaginative plentitude, a “wondrous vision” (*Symposium*, 210d) that Plato placed within the mind’s potential, and Berkeley reserved for the mind of God only — as for instance in his masterful (rhetorical) question addressed to transcendent Power, which inconclusively concludes the epistemological complexities of “Mont Blanc”:

And what were thou, and earth, and stars and sea,
If to the human mind’s imaginings
Silence and solitude were vacancy?

NOTES

1. Jonathan Bennet interprets Berkeley's idealistic solution as the only alternative to the Lockean "veil-of-perception" theory (*Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971], p. 145).

2. For the indebtedness of Berkeley's theory to Neoplatonic and Christian views, see Peter S. Wenz, "Berkeley's Christian Neoplatonism", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (1976), 537-46.

3. In his Preface to the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, Berkeley announces the objective of his philosophical endeavour, being that "atheism and scepticism will be utterly destroyed" (ed. Robert M. Adams [Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1979] p. 4).

4. For a discussion of the consequences attending upon Berkeley's modified adoption of Locke's model, see A. D. Nuttall, *A Common Sky: Philosophy and the Literary Imagination* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1974), pp. 38-39.

5. "Berkeley realized", Paul J. Olscamp argues, that "the impersonal cause we can infer as a necessary entity is not satisfactory as a concept of God, at least as seen through Christian eyes" (*The Moral Philosophy of George Berkeley* [The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970] p. 110).

6. *The Principles of Human Knowledge; Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, ed. G. J. Warnock (1962; Glasgow: Collins/Fontana, 1979), 30.

7. *Ibid.*, 33.

8. How removed such a notion is from Shelley's attitude to mental operation becomes evident in the following extract from his "Treatise on Morals", which endows the reflective activity with a power that is akin to Platonic "recollection": "The caverns of the mind are obscure and shadowy; or pervaded with a lustre, beautifully bright indeed, but shining not beyond their portals. If it were possible to be where we have been, vitally and indeed — if, at the moment of our presence there, we could define the results of our experience — if the passage from sensation to reflection — from a state of passive perception to voluntary contemplation were not so dizzying and so tumultuous, this attempt would be less difficult" (*Shelley's Prose, or the Trumpet of a Prophecy*, ed. David L. Clark, corr. edn [1954; Albuquerque: The University of New Mexico Press, 1966], p. 186).

9. More specifically, "the author of nature communicates with us, using a language or system of signs (the ideas of truth, sight, sound, etc.)" (Robert L. Armstrong, *Metaphysics and British Empiricism* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970], p. 133).

10. All references to Plato's text are to *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961). For a presentation of the opposite view originating in the realization that sometimes Plato "uses language which lends itself to the interpretation that the ideas are the thoughts of

God", and a diachronic examination of such an attitude, see Harry A. Wolfson, "Extradeical and Intradeical Interpretations of Platonic Ideas", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22 (1961), 3-32.

11. John Wild, *George Berkeley: A Study of His Life and Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1936), pp. 66-67.

12. *The Principles of Human Knowledge*, 30.

13. *The Works of George Berkeley*, ed. Alexander C. Fraser, 4 vols (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1901), III, 118.

14. Berkeley's mode of Platonism as presented in *Siris* is inevitably conditioned by his early system of immaterialism. The sequence that forms the structural pattern of *Siris*, whose full title is *Siris: A Chain of Philosophical Reflections and Inquiries Concerning the Virtues of Tar Water, And divers other Subjects connected together and arising one from another*, is precisely an all-inclusive Chain of Being, from the lowest manifestation of reality (Tar Water) to the Godhead itself.

15. *The Works of George Berkeley*, III, 119.

16. Berkeley's basic misrepresentation of the Platonic model is, I think, that he translates Plato's proposition concerning the "unknowability" of the second cause into a theory supporting the "non-existence" of matter, thus substituting (precisely as the Neoplatonists had done) "negation" or "absence" where Plato had detected "otherness" (*The Works of George Berkeley*, III, 277).

17. *The Works of George Berkeley*, III, 245.

18. *Ibid.*, III, 246.

19. See Ellen D. Leyburn, "Berkeleyan Elements in Wordsworth's Thought", *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 47 (1948), 14-28.

20. Quoted in John H. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher* (London: George Allen & Unwin; New York: Macmillan, 1930), p. 46.

21. James V. Baker, *The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination* (1957; New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 22-23.

22. Muirhead, *Coleridge as Philosopher*, p. 46.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

24. Shelley's interest in Berkeley was initiated by Robert Southey in 1811 during the poet's visits in Southey's house at Keswick; the copy of Berkeley's works that Shelley borrowed from Southey "was the property of Charles Lloyd, and Shelley "was too much the disciple of Locke and the sensational philosophy to be impressed by Berkeley as much as by a very un-Berkeleyan pencilled note of Lloyd's: 'Mind cannot create, it can only perceive'" (Newman I. White, *Shelley*, 2 vols [1940; New York: Octagon Books, 1972], I, 184); on the evidence of Shelley's prose fragment "On Life", however, probably written in 1815, White is prepared to accept that "by this time Shelley had abandoned Locke for Berkeley, whom he had rejected in 1812" (p. 424). A similar view is held by Neville Rogers informing us that whereas in 1812 Shelley "was still full of the doctrines of the eighteenth-century materialist philosophers and could see nothing but

word-juggling in the immaterialist doctrines of Berkeley", between 1812 and 1815 he "became thoroughly converted to Berkeley from whom, it may well be, he imbibed indirectly quite as much Platonism at the time as from his direct Platonic study then being fostered by Peacock" (*Shelley at Work: A Critical Inquiry* [Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1956], p. 122). James A. Notopoulos, however, places the date of the essay "On Life" not earlier than 1819 ("The Dating of Shelley's Prose", *PMLA* 58 [1943], 489-91).

25. *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (1971; Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), p. 144.

26. James A. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley: A Study of Platonism and the Poetic Mind* (1949; New York: Octagon Books, 1969), pp. 121-26.

27. *The Letters of Percy Busshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1964), I, 316.

28. *Prose*, p. 171. Clark elsewhere gives us an account of references in Shelley's letters and other writings of the period (1810-13), where it appears that monism (in both its versions of materialism and immaterialism) is found unsatisfactory: "'I have long been convinced of the eternal omnipotence of mind over matter,' (October 12, 1811?). 'Every day makes me feel more keenly that our being is eternal . . . how inadequate are reasonings to demonstrate it,' (December 11, 1811). 'Words are only signs of ideas . . . Southey agrees in my idea of Deity, the mass of infinite intelligence . . . I, you, and he, are constituent parts of this immense whole,' (January 2, 1812)"; Clark also notes that an "examination of other productions written by Shelley during this period", establishes Shelley's interest in the same questions "of materialism and immaterialism, of the nature of matter, of his early crude materialism, and how philosophy had failed to answer his doubts, and how finally he came to the conclusion that God, the spirit of the universe, did exist, and in consequence the soul of man" ("The Dates and Sources of Shelley's Metaphysical, Moral, and Religious Essays", *University of Texas Studies in English* 28 [1949], 190).

29. Amiyakumar Sen, in his tracing of philosophical influences on Shelley's metaphysics, emphatically asserts the contrast between Berkeley's and Plato's attitudes to the material world (*Studies in Shelley* [1936; New York: The Folcroft Press, 1969], pp. 252-53).

30. Quoted in G. S. Brett, "Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond", in *Studies in English by Members of University College, Toronto*, ed. M. W. Wallace (Toronto, 1931), p. 172.

31. Joseph Barrell characterizes Mary Shelley's remark "unfortunate", arguing that "it is doubtful if it can be applied to any of Shelley's poetry" (*Shelley and the Thought of His Time: A Study in the History of Ideas* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947], p. 124)

32. *Prose*, p. 136.

33. *Ibid.*, p. 182.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-33.

35. In his letter to Leigh Hunt, September 27, 1819 (*Letters*, II, 122-23).

36. For a reading of the essay as "Shelley's first definite announcement of his rejection of a materialistic philosophy and adoption of a spiritual 'intellectual system'", see Frederick L. Jones, "Shelley's *On Life*", *PMLA* 62 (1947), 774-83.

37. *Prose*, p. 173.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 173. It is apparent, I think, that what Shelley calls "intellectual system" does not quite coincide with what Clark calls "intellectual philosophy" to define Shelley's "popular philosophy of mind and matter".

41. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 173.

43. All references to Shelley's poetry are to the *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, corr. edn G. M. Matthews (1905; 1943; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970).

44. *Prose*, p. 173.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

47. Joseph W. Beach supports the thesis that Shelley "seems to have adopted the Berkeleian analysis of objective reality in terms of thought, but to have balked at Berkeley's view of active mind (or God) as the spring of the universe", such a premise being inconsistent with his "non-theistic position" (*The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* [1936; New York: Russell & Russell, 1966], p. 589).

48. *Shelley*, p. 132.

49. *Prose*, p. 175.

50. *Shelley*, p. 134.

51. *Prose*, pp. 173-74.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

53. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

54. *Shelley*, p. 146.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

58. Wasserman often seeks confirmation of his reading of Shelley in Mary Shelley's insights into her husband's work, probably not always an infallible guide through the labyrinth of the poet's thought. He also invokes Mary's authority in detecting a convergence between the "Immaterial Philosophy" and Shelley's "intellectual philosophy" (*Shelley*, p. 152). Thus Wasserman — and Mary — join together what, I believe, Shelley tried to keep asunder.

59. *Shelley*, p. 147.

60. Barrell is critical of the "looseness of the criticism that has been showered upon the idealism" of Shelley's poetry, Plato and Berkeley being the obvious sources, with Spinoza and Drummond following not far behind; what is in fact needed, Barrell proposes, is a "survey of the various idealisms upon which Shelley's poetry is said to rest" (*Shelley and the Thought of His Time*, p. 121).

61. The opposite view, which "marries" the Platonic and the Berkeleyan aspects of Shelley's so called idealism, is held, among others, by George S. Bower of the late nineteenth century, who finds in Shelley's work "the reasoned tenets of Berkeley" together with "Plato's eagle spirit" ("The Philosophical Element in Shelley", *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 14 [1880], 429).

62. "Shelley's Relation to Berkeley and Drummond", p. 174.

63. *The Deep Truth: A Study of Shelley's Scepticism* (1954; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1962), p. 108.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 53. P. M. S. Dawson also disclaims the indebtedness of Shelley to Berkeley, supporting that "it would be wrong to assume that Shelley shares Berkeley's concerns", his interest being less "in abstruse metaphysical questions than in their moral implications" (*The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980], pp. 107-108).

65. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

66. For discussions of Shelley's Platonism see Lilian M. Winstanley, "Platonism in Shelley", *Essays and Studies* 4 (1913), 72-100; Ross G. Woodman, "Shelley's Changing Attitude to Plato", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 21 (1960), 497-510; William J. McTaggart, "Some New Inquiries into Shelley's Platonism", *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 21 (1970), 41-59.

67. *The Deep Truth*, p. 52.

68. Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 151.

69. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

70. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-49.

71. Pulos, *The Deep Truth*, p. 69.

72. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

73. *Philosophical Incursions into English Literature* (1946; New York: Russel & Russell, 1962), p. 121.

74. That Plato's reality model is strongly dualistic (or even pluralistic) is supported by modern scholars, one of the most articulate and forceful voices being that of Raphael Demos arguing that "Plato's whole bent is anti-monistic" (*The Philosophy of Plato* [1939; New York: Octagon Books, 1966], p. 124).

75. Quoted in Notopoulos, *The Platonism of Shelley*, p. 150.

76. Quoted in Pulos, *The Deep Truth*, pp. 29-30.