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ON THE ORIGINS OF THE BERKELEIAN DEFINITION OF 'EXISTENCE'

'tis on the Discovering of the nature & meaning & import of Existence that I chiefly insist. This puts a wide difference betwixt the Sceptics and me (*Commentaries*, Entry 491)¹

The remarkable feature of Berkeley's philosophy is his extremely ambitious and challenging project to reformulate the metaphysical framework of the relation between mind and world, which was directed against the sceptical threat and culminates in his famous explicit denial of the existence of material substance. The definition *esse est percipi aut percipere*, 'to be is to be perceived or to perceive', labelled by Berkeley as the 'New Principle', plays the crucial role in this proposal.

This existential aspect of Berkeleian thought is surprisingly neglected by commentators. As rightly observed by Ayers, "Berkeley's claims about existence raise an apparently less than obvious question, or at any rate one which is seldom asked: why did Berkeley believe, or come to believe, that at the heart of his theory lies a theory about *existence* or, more particularly, about the meaning of the word 'exist'?" (1986: 567). The aim of the paper is to make an attempt to answer this question by determining the genesis of the Berkeleian definition of 'existence'.

¹ All references to Berkeley's works are to their critical edition by Luce and Jessop (1948–57). Besides *Commentaries* (which I quote by entries), *Principles* (quoted by sections), and Locke's *Essays* (which I quote by book, chapter and section numbers), all other quotations are by page numbers. In my paper the crucial role for the understanding of the arguments contained in the *Principles* and *Dialogues* plays Berkeley's private philosophical notebook (probably written during 1707 and 1708), given the title *Philosophical Commentaries* by Luce in his *editio diplomatica* of 1944 (hereafter quoted as *Commentaries*). In many points it is of an extraordinary interest and value because highlights (at least heuristically) Berkeley's preparatory work for his first major publications, which helps to reconstruct his motivation, development and tendencies of his consideration, and the proper design of arguments. Moreover, it reveals also explicitly the opposition to and agreement with other particular philosophers by names.

The argument of my interpretation consists in the following four steps: (i) firstly, I reconstruct the Berkeleian position on existence by stipulating its role in his philosophical project; (ii) secondly, on that ground, I reconstruct its Cartesian intellectual settings; (iii) thirdly, I argue in more detail that his definition of existence was designed to block the sceptical consequences of Cartesian (Bayleian) thought; and (iv) finally, I explain the general character of Berkeley's proposal (of re-definition of 'existence') by placing it in the framework of possible anti-sceptical strategies. I will try to demonstrate that with respect to the existence of external reality, Berkeleian philosophy and his philosophical goals are most plausibly understood as Cartesian in a broad sense, i.e. as at least inspired by the issues and arguments of the continental metaphysics of the seventeenth century.

I

Scepticism takes different forms. It depends on the domain, which is taken into doubt. It might focus on the question about the validity of an inquiry or on the refutation of the possibility of knowledge in a certain field (e.g. in epistemology, ethics or religion), or on some particular issue (e.g. about the existence or nature of the external world). Berkeley was motivated antisceptically by problems, which were brought up by sceptics as regards the existence and the knowledge of the nature of the external world.

Berkeley was convinced that a separation of the world from the way it is experienced, in terms of the representational theory of perception, is a source of scepticism. According to him, it results from "supposing a two-fold existence of the objects of sense, the one intelligible, or in the mind, the other real and without the mind" (*Principles*, §86), since "for so long as men thought that *real* things subsisted without the mind, and that their knowledge was only so far forth *real* as it was conformable to *real things*, it follows, they could not be certain that they had any real knowledge at all. For how can it be known, that the things which are perceived, are conformable to those which are not perceived, or exist without the mind?" (*Ibidem*).

The key argument, showing how scepticism arises out of the representational theory of perception, is one that undermines the objectivity or mind-independence of primary qualities. If one were able to prove that both secondary and primary qualities are mind-dependent, that is, are perceptions, then a merely 'veil of our ideas' would be our only ground for believing that there is some world of objects represented by them, which world is ab-

solutely unknowable both in respect of its existence as well as its nature. And since our perceptions are subjective and variable, and moreover they constitute dreams and hallucinations as well as what is taken as a veridical experience, it follows that an absolute distinction between what we perceive and what we take our perceptions to be perceptions of arises. "So that, for aught we know, all we see, hear, and feel, may be only phantom and vain chimera, and not at all agree with the real things, existing *in rerum natura*" (*Principles*, §87). Following that reason, Berkeley argued that:

So long as we attribute a real existence to unthinking things distinct from their being perceived, it is not only impossible for us to know with evidence the nature of any real unthinking thing, but even that it exists. Hence it is, that we see philosophers distrust their senses, and doubt of the existence of heaven and earth, of every thing they see or feel, even of their own bodies (*Principles*, §88).

The same point is argued in the 'Preface' to the *Dialogues*, where Berkeley wrote that "[u]pon the common principles of philosophers, we are not assured of the existence of things from their being perceived (...). Hence arise scepticism and paradoxes" (*Dialogues*: 167). In the *Second Dialogue*, he emphasises this point by saying to Hylas (a representant of materialism – in Berkeley's terms, a position that contains an insistence on the existence of material substance):

You indeed said the reality of sensible things consisted in an absolute existence out of the minds of spirits, or distinct from their being perceived. And pursuant to this notion of reality, you are obliged to deny sensible things any real existence: that is, according to your own definition, you profess yourself a sceptic (Ibidem: 11–2; see 228–9, 246, 258, *Principles*, §§92, 101).

For Berkeley, then, the source of the sceptical threat is a wrong definition of 'existence', which is the root of the thesis that what there is exists independently of perception. It results in arguments opening an unbridgeable gap between experience and experience-independent reality. It raises a serious difficulty as a knowing subject is only ever acquainted with his perceptions, with its own immanence ('private items'), and never with the items which putatively lie inaccessibly beyond his perceptions but which somehow give rise to them. Perceptions are therefore supposed to represent in some way or even resemble the beyond. But how could he know about this resemblance, since it follows from that inaccessibility beyond his perception that he has no justification for asserting that there are such 'external'

items, still less that he can know anything of their intrinsic nature. Moreover, a different way of existence is characteristic for each item: a mental or an intentional existence of perceptions, and non-mental ('material' or 'physical') existence of represented things. But both have an absolute or independent modality of existence as a consequence of an existential assumption of the Cartesian dualism of substance: mind or spirit and matter or body are equally real in their existence.

On that ground Berkeley concluded that scepticism arises directly from the philosophical view that there is matter, that is, corporeal substance, existing independently from our perceptions of it, and having properties which belong to it 'absolutely' – i.e. the primary qualities. However, according to him, "the supposition that things are distinct from Ideas thaws away all real Truth, & consequently brings in a Universal Scepticism, since all our knowledge is confin'd barely to our own Ideas" (*Commentaries*, Entry 606).

II

Among the modern philosophers, it was Descartes who initiated the discussion about the existence of a material world (see McCracken 1983: 18–9; 1998: 624–5; Burnyeat 1982: 3–40; Groarke 1984: 281–301). Although Descartes does not regard the issue as to be taken seriously in ordinary life, it must be taken into account by the philosopher, who wants to build knowledge on the basis of sure and infallible foundations, which are not vulnerable to sceptical arguments. Both Descartes and Berkeley designed their philosophical positions as tools for rejecting sceptical reasoning.

At two points of central importance for Berkeley, Descartes (1641/1984–5) was the thinker who focused his attention on the issue of whether we can know that there is a material world (see *Commentaries*, Entries 738, 784, 8222), and he also proposed the doctrine that the mind is an incorporeal substance whose nature consists in 'thinking' or 'perceiving' (in a broad sense of these terms, understood in seventeenth-century philosophy as any mental activity both of reasoning or sensing and willing) (see Descartes 1641/1984–85: 126–27). While Berkeley rejected Descartes' position that body is a material substance, he shared his view that mind is a spiritual substance and that its essence can be clearly known as a 'thinking thing' (*Commentaries*, Entries 429–429a; *Principles*, §§98, 141).² He argues that

² This view of mind as substance is firmly non-Lockean, as Locke argued that there is no essence of mind – there are merely its operations (*Essays*, IV.iii.6; see also Loeb 1981: 90–1).

the *esse* of mind is *percipere*, and mind cannot be imagined as existing without thought (*Commentaries*, Entries 650–2, 842).

Descartes held that infallible foundations of knowledge require proving that bodies exist, and he believed that in *Meditation VI* this was achieved. However, Malebranche claims that it is very difficult to prove conclusively that the things we see as external to our minds do have “a real existence, independent of our minds”. Moreover, sustaining the high Cartesian requirements for knowledge, he denies that such proof is possible for either geometry (mathematics) or physics (Malebranche 1674–78/1980: 482–84). In the first edition of the *Search* (1674–5), he argues that these sciences are concerned with relations amongst our “pure” (non-sensuous) ideas of extension, of which we have indispensable demonstrative knowledge, whether or not there are bodies. Within the *Elucidations*, appended to the third edition (1677–8), he reconsiders the issue of the existence of the external world. In the *Elucidation VI* (Ibidem: 569–74), he explicitly denies that material things could be proved on the evidence either of sense or of reason. In support of this claim, Malebranche argues from versions of the ancient and Cartesian sceptical arguments concerning perceptual relativities, dreams and hallucinations, and feebleness of human reason. Eventually, his argument culminates in the conclusion that the ground for the belief in the existence of the material world rests merely on faith. That is, he argues that any certainty in this matter comes only through faith in God’s revelation in Scripture that He did indeed create a corporeal world.

So far as testimony of the senses and the deliverances of human reason go, there is only a balance of probability in favour of being the external world. He qualified this claim, arguing that any kind of certain knowledge can be attained only by unmediated acquaintance with ideas-archetypes in the mind of God. In support of this, he considers the finitude and impotence of the human mind to demonstrate the inadequacy of Descartes’ doctrine that what is clearly and distinctly perceived is true because God, as a perfect being, could not deceive us. Distinguishing between *sensations* as modification or acts of our minds and *ideas* as proper objects of our knowledge (i.e. as set of necessary and general claims) Malebranche argues that ideas are, by their nature, the eternal and immutable essences of things, and hence cannot be a part of any finite mind. Finite minds, being powerless, cannot on their own possess clear and distinct ideas of things, for such power is to be found only in the divine mind.

Therefore, he concludes that the Cartesian account of knowing, without his improvements, must lead to scepticism. For ideas are regarded by Descartes as modifications of the mind, and the eternal essences cannot be

modifications of finite minds. Moreover, finite minds have to rely merely on an assumption that their ideas correlate adequately to represented things. Hence, they cannot be sure at all that any such correspondence holds. According to Malebranche, clear and distinct ideas could be saved then as the criteria of knowledge only if it is assumed that finite minds are in direct contact with the only power capable of apprehending the conformity between ideas and things, namely, the divine mind. Hence, the only plausible explanation of the origin of our knowledge is that “we see all things in God”.

There is an interesting analogy at this point in the philosophical approaches of Berkeley and Malebranche. As we will see later, Berkeley was also motivated by the threat of philosophical scepticism. The central feature of Malebranchean and Berkeleian attempts to block that outcome is the denial of the distinction between ideas and things (appearances and reality), and in consequence, establishing material substance as something indemonstrable, unknowable and unimportant. For Berkeley, both these claims were immensely significant. Entries (265, 288, 288a, 358, 424, 686, 800, 818) in *Commentaries* show that what Malebranche proposed in the *Elucidation VI* captured his attention. However, as we will see in his reaction to Bayle’s arguments, Berkeley was alerted by another possible sceptical horn established paradoxically by the anti-sceptical manoeuvre of the denial of the existence of material substance by Malebranche. Berkeley had to have it in mind, when he wrote: “Malebranche in his Illustrations differs widely from me He doubts of the existence of Bodies I doubt not in the least of this” (Entry 800; see 686, 686a, 818). And, although in some respect his answer was more radical – because he denied any rational or religious proof for the existence of external material reality (*Principles*, §§82–4; *Third Dialogue*: 250–6; see also Jessop 1938: 121–42; Brykman 1984: ch.1; Glauser 1999) – he wanted to save the claim that physical reality exists by reformulation of the notion of its existence. For Berkeley, the key point here is to reformulate the mode of the existence of the external world by denying the absolute character of the existence of material substance.

III

The culmination of the seventeenth-century Cartesian sceptics’ attack on the putative knowledge of and the existence of the external world arrived in Pierre Bayle’s *Historical and Critical Dictionary* (1697–1702/1974). Bayle is evoked in *Commentaries* in a duplicated entry, 358 and 424, which joins him with Malebranche, and expresses the contention that their arguments

prove decisive against material things. Indeed, Bayle's dictionary articles on Zeno and Pyrrho are arguably the prime source for the sceptical problem Berkeley sought to solve (see Luce 1934: 53–55; 1963: ch. 4; Popkin 1951–52; Grayling 1986: 14–5; McCracken and Tipton 2000: 76–89). I will argue that it provides the original motivation for Berkeley's definition of 'existence'.

In the remark B of the article "Pyrrho", and remarks G and H of the article "Zeno", Bayle uses every argument that had been advanced against Descartes' proof of the existence of the external world.³ The two most important lines of arguments against matter that Bayle mentions are:

- (i) that all the arguments posited against the reality of secondary qualities apply with equal force to the primary qualities as well,
- (ii) that (mathematical) arguments from infinite divisibility are either false or prove at best that extension does not exist without the mind that perceives it.

Both of these kinds of arguments we find in *Commentaries*, in entries nos. 20, 26, 236. In my opinion, it is very likely that it was from Bayle that Berkeley learned 'the full force' of his first argument against the absolute or independent existence of matter.

The crucial point here is that all these arguments for scepticism are echoed, even in phraseology, by Berkeley. Both Bayle and Berkeley focused their attention on the fact that Cartesianism assumes that material objects possess in themselves such primary or 'original' qualities as extension, figure and motion, while the secondary qualities of objects exist only in relation to the minds of perceivers. The distinction was held to be important because even if secondary qualities – such as sound, colour, taste, etc. – are variable and at least in part subjective, as indeed they appear to be, knowledge of primary qualities, as measurable properties of objects themselves, were thought to provide access to mind-independent reality. On this the Cartesians insisted, for it played a crucial role in the Cartesian strategy of proving the existence of the external world, i.e., the world independent from perceiving minds.

Bayle, accepting the subjective character of secondary qualities, indicates, however, that there is no adequate argument for the objectivity of primary qualities either. He writes: "none among good Philosophers now doubt that the Sceptics are in the right to maintain that qualities of bodies which strike our senses are only mere appearances" (1697–1702/1974: 380). He goes on to argue that from this there follows a general scepticism about

³ The arguments formulated by Foucher, Malebranche, Regius, Lanion, and Fardella (see McCracken 1998: 635).

all types of qualities, and *ipso facto* the primary qualities as well. He argues that if the secondary qualities are in the mind rather than in the objects, the same must be held of the primary qualities. Following Malebranche, Bayle writes:

Cartesians agree that heat, smell, colours etc are not in the objects of our senses; they are only some modifications of my soul; I know that bodies are not such as they appear to me. They were willing to except extension and motion, but they could not do it; for if the objects of our senses appear to us coloured, hot, cold, smelling, though they are not so, why should they not appear extended and figured, at rest, and in motion, though they had no such thing. Nay, the object of my senses cannot be the cause of my sensations: I might therefore feel cold and heat, see colours, figures, extension, and motion, though there was not one body in the world. I have not therefore one good proof of the existence of bodies (Ibidem).

Aiming to ‘overthrow of the reality of extension’, in “Zeno” Remark G, Bayle again emphasises that: “the same body appears to us little or great, round or square, according to the place from whence we view it; and certainly, a body which seems to us very little, appears very great to a fly” (Ibidem: 381). The core of this argument relies on the claim that the conclusion must inevitably follow from accepting the view that secondary qualities are mind-dependent: for just as secondary qualities are relative to the state or situation of perceivers, so are the primary. As it is not possible to affirm which quality – whether sweetness or bitterness, largeness or smallness – belongs ‘independently’ or ‘absolutely’ to an object, then, *a fortiori*, it is not possible to affirm that the object has a general quality of ‘taste’ or a general quality of ‘extension’ at all.

In Remark H of the “Zeno” article, Bayle qualifies his conclusion about the ‘unreality of extension’, arguing that a belief in there being external bodies, independent from perceiving minds, is not in any case required to explain the nature either of experience or the existence and nature of the external world. Following Malebranche again, he goes on to argue that it is so because “whether or nor matter exists, God could equally communicate to us all the thoughts we have” (Ibidem).

Then, the main line of the sceptical argument considered by Bayle sought directly to impugn the view that, however relative or subjective secondary qualities may be, there can be assurance concerning the existence and the nature of an independent reality, namely, by means at least of empirical access to the primary qualities of things. His conclusion is to say that once a gap is opened between sensory experience on the one hand, and an

external material reality on the other, there is no philosophical foundation to suppose any kind of correlation between them, since external material reality cannot be known, given the inescapable subjectivity of sensory experience in respect not only of the secondary but of the primary qualities of what is sensed: that is to say, scepticism follows immediately.

It seems plausible to argue that these lines of the sceptical consequences of Cartesian philosophy were warnings for Berkeley. They could be regarded as leading to “the establishment of a very dangerous Pyrrhonism” (Ibidem). It is not possible to avoid total scepticism as the outcome, if it is combined the contention that the external world cannot be known given the indispensable subjectivity of sensory experience (either of secondary or primary qualities of what is experienced), and the Malebranchean doubts about the efficacy of reason. In the following, very early entry from *Commentaries*, Berkeley expresses his fear about these sceptical consequences:

Mem. that I take notice that I do not fall in wth sceptics Fardella etc, in yt I make bodies to exist certainly (prima manu without us) wch they doubt of (Entry 79).⁴

Moreover, the striking entries in *Commentaries* connect Berkeley’s ‘New Principle’, viz. *esse est percipi* (and the new turn that it gave to his whole philosophical project), with the danger of scepticism and his discovery of the way to undermine the sceptical arguments:

(1) In entry 304, Berkeley writes:

The Reverse of ye Principle introduc’d Scepticism

In that context, the reverse of the Principle is obviously that of *esse est non percipi*. As noted by Luce, “[t]he entry is repeated with amplification in No. 411, where scepticism, folly, contradictions and absurdities are traced to the same source” (1963: 73).

(2) In further part, in entry 491, pointing out that many ancient and Cartesian sceptics run into absurdities, Berkeley writes:

[T]his sprung from their not knowing wt existence was and wherein it consisted this the source of all their Folly, ‘tis on the Discovering of the nature & meaning & import of existence that I chiefly insist. This puts a wide difference betwixt the sceptics & me.

⁴ In “Zeno”, Bayle records that M. Fardella, Franciscan monk and philosopher, asserts the same doctrine as Malebranche, i.e. that objects may not be like their ideas, and that God may have so disposed our senses that they represent non-existing things as existing.

On that ground, we can conclude that scepticism about the external world – the threat of this scepticism and the possible recovery from that scepticism, seems to play a large if not decisive role in Berkeley’s formulation of the definition of ‘existence’. It is very likely that it was a major factor that influenced his original project (in *Commentaries*), and later mature conclusions (in *Principles* and *Dialogues*); as Berkeley put it himself, both his “first arguings” and his “second thoughts”. Bayle’s articles were then probably his main source of information about continental Cartesian metaphysics and scepticism as its possible outcome. Therefore, it is very likely that they motivated him in making his revised and original version of immaterialism formulated in the ‘New Principle’.

IV

In order to explain the above statements of Berkeley, let’s turn now to place his proposal on the map of possible anti-sceptical manoeuvres. Following Dąbmska (1952), it seems to me that we can enumerate the following types of strategies for the refutation of scepticism:

- (i) axiological type: tries to show that scepticism leads to moral consequences, which are impossible for us to accept (as undermining our morality, religion or science, or even our everyday life practices)
- (ii) logical type: tries to prove a logical inconsistency in the sceptical argument itself
- (iii) epistemological type: tries to undermine epistemological reasons for scepticism, mostly by:
 - (iii.a) changes made to the conceptual apparatus assumed by sceptics – by redefinition or replacement of one element of the sceptical premises by another element, which is not vulnerable to sceptical threat:
 - (iii.a.α) by redefinition of the notion of truth,
 - (iii.a.β) by redefinition of the notion of knowledge, or
 - (iii.a.γ) by redefinition of the notion of the object of knowledge;
 - (iii.b) showing that even assuming the premises of sceptical conceptual scheme, it is mistaken to claim that there are no satisfying methods of saying what is true or false.

It is worth to note that there is some correlation amongst these types of anti-sceptical strategies. Firstly, the axiological type is not an adequate tool to refute an epistemological (theoretical or normative) scepticism, which is

Berkeley's aim, and could combat merely some practical consequences of the former. Moreover, though these practical consequences might be implied by theoretical or epistemological scepticism, it is not a necessary implication. Then, contrary to the intentions of anti-sceptics, which are trying to use this practical type of argument, they do not reach scepticism in its most fundamental form. It seems that a successful anti-sceptical strategy should be aimed at the refutation of theoretical (epistemological) scepticism. Secondly, the logical strategy does not seem a satisfying tool to refute the sceptical threat, either. It consists in proving a logical inconsistency of the sceptical doctrine, which could be in fact avoided by an adequate reformulation of the sceptical position.

The most fundamental strategy to refute scepticism seems an epistemological type, then. We can note that variant (iii.a) might take a form which could be regarded as a moderate (modified) scepticism. For many seventeenth-century philosophers this was true of Descartes' position, whose methodological scepticism or his systematic consideration of a proof for the existence of the external world, were perceived as a new form of scepticism (see Jolley 1999: 393–423). On other hand, a change or a redefinition of the notion of the object of knowledge, which was transcendental according to sceptics, could lead within an epistemological anti-sceptical strategy to a form of idealism (by mentalizing the object).

Presumably, Berkeley's view on scepticism could be considered as the (iii.c) variant of an epistemological type of anti-sceptical strategy, namely, by changing the notion of the object of knowledge. It has to be emphasised, however, that the Berkeleian proposal implies a fundamental ontological assumption. For it is not merely a simple change in the meaning of the object of knowledge, but first of all it is the redefinition of a modality of existence of the object of knowledge. We have here not only an epistemological claim, but also a strong ontological thesis about the definition of 'existence', which in fact implies the former as more fundamental. If it were a merely epistemological thesis, it might be enough to say that a 'perceived thing' is an 'idea' or 'complex of ideas' (viz. 'obiectum est percipi'). But Berkeley said that 'to be (a physical thing) is to be perceived' (viz. 'esse est percipi'), which demonstrates his deep interest in a more fundamental or theoretically prior question about the meaning of 'existence': what it means for a physical object to exist.

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To conclude, the influence of a Cartesian metaphysics and post-Cartesian scepticism seems to provide a plausible answer to the question why

Berkeley came to believe that the theory of existence is the heart of his philosophical project. Berkeley's New Principle is intended to achieve the aim of refuting scepticism by demonstrating that the only substance there can be is mind or spirit. Metaphysical reformulation of the concept of existence or the meaning of existence is supposed by Berkeley to be a proper tool to undermine the claim about the existence of material substance, which is the source of the sceptical threat.

By showing the origins of the Berkeleian definition of existence, we have reached also an interesting philosophical moral on the general strategy of the refutation of scepticism. Berkeley's strategy seems very modern. In my opinion, it is possible to see this strategy as a kind of a proto-semantic approach, which resembles, at least to some extent, the dominant philosophical tendency associated with radical conventionalism. From such a perspective, we can describe Berkeley's strategy as an attempt to redefine the conceptual apparatus, which is understood as a list of the basic meanings ascribed to the terms of the given language. Interestingly, the motivation for doing this is the empirical fact that the meanings are not strictly stipulated by our experience, which is a source of the misuses and misunderstanding of our philosophical discourse. Berkeley seems to mean that a sceptical threat is a consequence of the fact that some of our basic propositions about the world, contain the meanings, which we assert and which in fact form our world picture, but which are not unambiguously stipulated by data of our experience. They depend on the conceptual apparatus we use to describe our experiential data. In other words, Berkeley probably realized that we have to choose some conceptual apparatus or other, and this decision will change our world picture. We can suppose that the definition of existence was seen by Berkeley as the most primitive notion, which presumably was expected to tie the proposed conceptual apparatus of his position with the experience. From his empiricist position, only this kind of relation might warrant the most adequate picture of the world, as it was supposed to be verified by empirical data. The empirical verification of the meaning of existence (by perception) was so important because it was presumably a way of undermining the gap between our conceptual or cognitive representations and the world of the things-in-themselves. In other words, how things are and how we experience them.⁵

⁵ An earlier draft of this paper was presented in Polish at the conference on modern philosophy entitled "Oblicza filozofii XVII wieku" (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Lublin, Poland, 17–18 September 2007), and subsequently published in Polish as "O genezie Berkleyowskiej definicji »istnienia«" in *Oblicza filozofii XVII wieku*, ed. S. Ja-

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Piotr K. Szalek

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Summary

The paper seeks an interpretation of Berkeley's metaphysics, which is characterised in terms of an attempt to formulate a kind of ontology of the existence. Although essential, this existential aspect of Berkeleyian thought is surprisingly neglected by commentators, presumably due to the dominant epistemological tendency in the interpretation of his philosophy. The aim of the paper is an attempt to fill the above lack in the scholarship on Berkeley's philosophy. In order to accomplish this task, I will ask what is the motivation for emphasising the importance of the notion of the existence

On the Origins of the Berkeleian Definition of 'Existence'

and in particular its formulation by Berkeley. Considering the above, I will examine this concept in the respect of its metaphysical assumptions and possible influences by the closest metaphysical context to Berkeley's philosophy, namely, as I will argue, the rationalist continental tradition of René Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche and Pierre Bayle. I do not maintain that Berkeley ignored or that he was not influenced by Locke's philosophy, which is the traditional framework within which Berkeley's thought is discussed. My claim is rather that Locke's philosophy should not be overestimated in the readings of Berkeley because it tends not to possess the features which are specific to the issue of external world existence elaborated by Berkeley, which are the characteristics of a Cartesian tradition and indeed the metaphysical heart of Berkeleian philosophy.