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Abstract General Ideas in Hume

George S. Pappas

Hume followed Berkeley in rejecting abstract general ideas; that is, both of these philosophers rejected the view that one could engage in the operation or activity of abstraction — a kind of mental separation of entities that are inseparable in reality — as well as the view that the alleged products of such an activity — ideas which are intrinsically general — really exist. What has not been clear to commentators on either of these two philosophers has been why they each were so opposed to abstraction and abstract general ideas. The provision of an answer to this question is the main thrust of this paper.

The nature of the question should be clarified at the outset. I am **not** asking the psychological question, what were Berkeley and Hume's actual intentions when they were moved to reject abstraction and abstract general ideas. Though I regard this question as one of great interest and importance, I am presently aiming to answer a somewhat different one, viz., what **role**, what **philosophical** role, does the rejection of abstraction and abstract general ideas play in the philosophies of Berkeley and Hume? The answer to this latter question is apt to have some bearing on the right way to answer the first question; but, for present purposes, it is important to keep the two questions distinct.

The main contention of the paper is that the rejection of abstraction and abstract general ideas lies at the very heart of the philosophy of Berkeley, and that pretty much the same may be said for Hume. Berkeley's defense of a kind of idealism stands or falls with the success of his attack on abstract general ideas, and Hume's critique of infinite divisibility in matters pertaining to space and time, along with his destructive critique of various metaphysical notions, crucially depends on the **successful denial of abstract general ideas**.

I. Berkeleyan Idealism

Berkeley's most extended treatment of abstract ideas comes in the introduction to the *Principles of Human Knowledge*, first published in 1710. However, since he does not take up the topic in any systematic way later in the same book, nor in the *Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), it has seemed to many commentators that Berkeley's attack on abstract ideas is a local matter, one having only to do with issues concerning language use and a somewhat isolated criticism of Locke. That this is the wrong way to look at things is

perhaps best indicated by a couple of passages from the *Principles*. In section 5 of that work Berkeley says:

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

The tenet Berkeley is here referring to is to the effect that sensible objects such as trees and chairs exist independently of perception. This allusion is made clear when we notice that in the immediately preceding passage Berkeley says:

It is indeed an opinion strangely prevailing among men that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But, with how great an assurance and acquiescence soever this Principle may be entertained ... whoever shall find in his heart to call it in question may ... perceive it to involve a manifest contradiction. For, what are the aforementioned objects but the things we perceive by sense? and what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? and is it not plainly repugnant that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived? (*Principles* 4)

The claim that sensible objects exist independently of all perception is the very denial of Berkeley's *esse is percipi* thesis regarding such objects. For the latter thesis holds that each sensible object is such that it exists if and only if it is perceived. So, in the first-quoted passage from *Principles* 5, Berkeley is saying that the denial of *esse is percipi* 'depends on' the doctrine of abstract ideas. Surely, the *esse is percipi* thesis is part of the core of Berkeley's idealism, so that in the passages lately quoted Berkeley is saying that the denial of his idealism (or of a core element in it¹) depends on abstract ideas. What might Berkeley mean in this context by 'depends on'?

The most natural reading would be that, as Berkeley sees it, the main reason people have for accepting realism regarding sensible objects, or the denial of *esse is percipi* concerning such objects, is that they think there are abstract ideas. Thus, in the quoted passages he is attributing to his opponents the view that

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- (1) if there are abstract general ideas, then the *esse is percipi* thesis is false.

Now these same opponents, Locke as Berkeley read him, are prepared to affirm the antecedent of (1), thereby accepting that

- (2) there are abstract general ideas.

From (1) and (2), of course, we may readily derive that

- (3) the *esse is percipi* thesis is false,

a conclusion Berkeley's opponents are in a position to establish, given the truth of these two premises.

Thus, on this reading of 'depends on', Berkeley is telling us, *inter alia*, that his idealism stands open to quick refutation by realists such as Locke, given the close connection between abstract ideas and the denial of *esse is percipi*. Moreover, Berkeley says nothing about (1), thereby suggesting that he accepted it, or at least was willing to concede it for the purposes of the argument. So, the importance of the attack on abstract general ideas emerges at once. The success of that attack is needed to block an easy refutation of idealism, a refutation that would follow directly from (1) and (2). Small wonder, on this reading, that Berkeley rejected abstract general ideas.

We may think of the above reading of *Principles* 4 and 5 as yielding, along with the introduction to the *Principles*, a negative use of the rejection of abstract general ideas. Those same passages also admit of a positive reading, however, one in which Berkeley says of his opponents that a necessary condition of their being moved to reject the *esse is percipi* thesis is their acceptance of abstract general ideas. He is attributing to his opponents, then, the view that

- (4) the *esse is percipi* thesis is false only if there are abstract general ideas.

If this is a plausible reading of the relevant passages, then we can readily see the importance, dialectically, of the acceptance of abstract general ideas by non-idealists. Only if there are such ideas is the road to idealism effectively blocked. The simplest way to see this is to notice that if we conjoin (4) with

- (5) there are no abstract general ideas,

we get directly that

- (6) the *esse is percipi* thesis is true.

Thus, on this reading of *Principles* 4 and 5, Berkeley is saying that his opponents need to endorse the denial of (5) or embrace abstract general ideas if they are to thwart the case for his idealism.

This is not all, however. For if Berkeley himself accepts (4), or at least if his opponents are prepared to concede it to him, then Berkeley has at hand a straight route to the *esse is percipi* thesis. He simply derives (6) from (4) and (5). Thus, on this reading of the relevant passages, we have an additional important role for Berkeley's denial of abstract ideas emerging. That denial, when coupled with (4), yields immediately the truth of *esse is percipi* for sensible objects.

Whether the negative or the positive interpretation of *Principles* 4 and 5, or both, is correct as an account of what Berkeley is attributing to his opponents is a matter which is quite complex, turning partly on whether statements (1) and (4) are true. However, some reason has recently been given in favor of the truth of both (1) and (4), and it is worth mentioning what this reason comes to, however briefly.²

In *Principles* 22-24, and then again in the first of the *Three Dialogues*, Berkeley produces what has come to be called the 'master argument' for the *esse is percipi* thesis. In this argument, Berkeley allows that if one can conceive a sensible object existing unperceived, then the *esse is percipi* thesis is false; and he also argues that if one cannot conceive a sensible object existing unperceived, then the *esse is percipi* thesis is true. Conceivability of a certain sort is thus intimately connected to Berkeleyan idealism. Now consider what, in one way or another, is examined by Pappas, Atherton, and Bolton, viz., the thesis that

- (7) one can conceive a sensible object existing unperceived if and only if there are abstract general ideas.

If this statement is right, then the role of the denial of abstract general ideas in Berkeley's philosophy is manifest: the *esse is percipi* thesis stands or falls, given Berkeley's views about conceivability, with truth or falsity of the doctrine that there are abstract ideas.

To see the great intuitive plausibility of (7), consider its first conditional (if there are abstract ideas, then one can conceive sensible objects existing unperceived). Suppose one could have abstract ideas and, in particular, that one could have an abstract idea of an **existing brown desk**. Then, by conceiving this idea one would be *ipso facto* conceiving a brown desk without thereby perceiving the desk. Conceiving a thing by means of attending to an abstract idea of it is not perceiving that thing, even for Berkeley. So, if there were abstract ideas

of this sort, then one could engage in the very sort of conception of sensible objects that, Berkeley grants, would refute *esse is percipi*.

Or, consider the other part of (7), that is, if one can conceive a sensible object existing unperceived, then there are abstract ideas. Suppose there are no abstract ideas of any sort. Then, when one tries to conceive a sensible object existing unperceived, given Berkeley's account of what it is to conceive such an object, one would *eo ipso* perceive the sensible object in question. That is, Berkeley's notorious conflation of conception and perception holds in the context where there are no abstract ideas. If there were no abstract ideas, then one could not engage in the relevant conception, for the attempt to do so would collapse into a form of perception.

We may summarize this account of Berkeley as follows: the denial of abstract ideas functions negatively in the sense that only if that denial is correct is a short and effective refutation of *esse is percipi* avoided; and that same denial functions positively in the sense that, given certain views about conception of sensible objects, the fact that there are no abstract ideas establishes the *esse is percipi* thesis. The conjunction of these two claims entitles us to say that the attack on abstract ideas is at the very heart of Berkeley's philosophy; his case for idealism rests squarely on the success of that attack.³

II. Space and Time in Hume

In Part II of the *Treatise*, and then again more briefly in the *Enquiry*⁴, 124-129, Hume discusses the vexing questions of whether space, or spatial extension, and time are infinitely divisible. His answer to both questions is **no**. In constructing his arguments in favor of these two negative results, Hume considers whether our *ideas* of space and time are themselves infinitely divisible. His answers to these two questions, of course, are negative, too. Moreover, his negative answers concerning the infinite divisibility of ideas are essential elements of some of his arguments for negative answers concerning infinite divisibility of space and time. One passage which illustrates this is:

Nothing can be more minute, than some ideas, which we form in the fancy; and images, which appear to the senses; since there are ideas and images perfectly simple and indivisible. (T 28)

Hinted at in this passage is the well-known copy thesis concerning ideas and images (impressions), and something like another copy thesis to the effect that certain features of images (in this case their size) are correlated reliably with sizes of non-images or with objects in the world. Or, consider this passage:

Our system concerning space and time consists of two parts, which are intimately connected together. The first depends on this chain of reasoning. The capacity of the mind is not infinite; consequently no idea of extension or duration consists of an infinite number of parts or inferior ideas, but of a finite number, and these simple and indivisible: 'Tis therefore possible for space and time to exist conformable to this idea: And if it be possible, 'tis certain they actually do exist conformable to it; since their infinite divisibility is utterly impossible and contradictory. (T 39)

Here, too, it is clear that Hume is assuming the second copy thesis just noted — assuming, that is, that there is some sort of correlation between what is true of ideas or impressions and what is true of objects. From an earlier argument Hume had concluded that no idea is infinitely divisible, so that there are least-sized ideas. These possibly conform to real objects, to space and time; and it is possible that our finite ideas of space and time conform to space and time as well. Why infer that these finite ideas do conform to space and time unless Hume is assuming, too, that our ideas of space and time, whether they be infinite or finite, conform to space and time themselves?

What I have here referred to as the second copy thesis raises very important questions which I will not pursue further. Current interests concern not the question of how Hume argues from the nature of our ideas of space and time to conclusions about space and time themselves, but rather how it is that Hume establishes that ideas of space and time are themselves finite and not infinitely divisible, particularly the latter. In connection with this matter, here is what he says in the *Treatise*:

'Tis universally allow'd, that the capacity of the mind is limited, and can never attain a full and adequate conception of infinity: And tho' it were not allow'd, 'twou'd be sufficiently evident from the plainest observation and experience. 'Tis also obvious, that whatever is capable of being divided in infinitum, must consist of an infinite number of parts, and that 'tis impossible to set any bounds to the number of parts, without setting bounds at the same time to the division. It requires scarce any induction to conclude from hence, that the idea, which we form of any finite quality, is not infinitely divisible, but that by proper distinctions and separations we may run up this idea to inferior ones, which will be perfectly simple and indivisible. In rejecting the infinite capacity of the mind, we suppose it may arrive at an end in the division of its ideas; nor are there any possible means of evading the evidence of this conclusion. (T 26-7)

Here the argument seems to be quite simple. Human minds are finite in capacity; hence, for any idea a human being has, he or she cannot 'reduce' that idea, break it into parts, indefinitely. That is, one cannot carry on this process indefinitely, not in the sense that it cannot carry on a process or operation for an indefinite time, but rather that the mind's capacity is such that it cannot 'reduce' an idea below a certain limit in size or break up an idea into parts which it does not have.

Even if the human mind is so limited in capacity, one might say, that does not show that the ideas one has after the mind has exhausted its capacity of reduction in either simplicity or size of some given idea are themselves either intrinsically simple or indivisible or such that nothing can be smaller in size. The argument shows only that it is psychologically impossible for the human finite mind to reduce these ideas further in the relevant manner. From this it does not follow, we could reply to Hume, that these psychologically simple and indivisible ideas are in fact least-sized or indivisible, nor even that they have no actual parts. So, the argument does not show that it is logically impossible that these ideas should be further reduced; and it is this sort of impossibility that Hume is trying to establish.

This is a powerful criticism of Hume's argument, but it is not clear that it is decisive. To help see why not, we can consider Hume's copy thesis as it applies to impressions and ideas. One statement of this thesis, given early in the *Treatise*, is as follows:

That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent. (T 4)

We can apply this copy thesis (hereafter, CT) to the argument concerning the finite capacity of the human mind in a fairly direct way. Imagine that, having started with some complex idea, one has reduced it to what Hume thinks are most simple, least-sized indivisible ideas, one of which is X. Given the CT, we know that there is an impression, call it Y, which X "exactly represents." Thus, it would not be logically possible for X to be simpler or less in respect of size than Y. Suppose, too, that the impression Y is itself simple in that it has no parts. Then, the impression Y is itself indivisible; having no parts is logically sufficient for indivisibility. It would follow that the idea X is also simple and in the same way, viz., it has no parts. Thus, X would be indivisible, that is, logically incapable of being further reduced or divided.

The foregoing argument makes use of three assumptions on Hume's behalf. The first is the copy thesis itself, but there is no doubt that Hume accepts that, at least when it is restricted to simple ideas and impressions. The second is that there are simple impressions; and

the third is that simplicity in the sense of lacking in parts suffices for indivisibility. To see that Hume accepts the second assumption, consider this passage:

What consists of parts is distinguishable into them, and what is distinguishable is separable. But whatever we may imagine of the thing, the idea of a grain of sand is not distinguishable, nor separable into twenty, much less into a thousand, ten thousand, or an infinite number of different ideas.

'Tis the same case with the impressions of the senses as with the ideas of the imagination. Put a spot of ink upon paper, fix your eye upon that spot, and retire to such a distance, that at last you lose sight of it; 'tis plain, that the moment before it vanish'd the image or impression was perfectly indivisible. 'Tis not for want of rays of light striking on our eyes, that the minute parts of distant bodies convey not any sensible impression; but because they are remov'd beyond that distance, at which their impressions were reduc'd to a minimum, and were incapable of any farther diminution. (T 27)

And to see that Hume accepts the third assumption, consider this passage:

Every idea, that is distinguishable, being also separable, let us take one of those simple indivisible ideas, of which the compound one of extension is form'd, and separating it from all others, and considering it apart, let us form a judgment of its nature and qualities.

'Tis plain it is not the idea of extension. For the idea of extension consists of parts; and this idea, according to the supposition, is perfectly simple and indivisible. (T 38)

So the argument amounts to this: it is logically impossible that least-sized, most reduced ideas be divisible, given the truth of the CT together with the assumptions just noted. In this way we can see the manner in which Hume's case for the indivisibility of simple ideas rests on the copy thesis, and not merely on his claims about the finite capacity of the mind. If it is also correct, as it seems to be, that Hume argues **from** the indivisibility of the mind's simple ideas — or, even better, **from** the claim that ideas of space and time are not themselves infinitely divisible — **to** the claim that space and time themselves are not infinitely divisible, then we may also maintain plausibly that

Hume's contention that space and time and not infinitely divisible rests crucially on the CT. But the CT, I now want to argue, itself crucially depends on there being no abstract general ideas.⁵

III. The Copy Thesis and Abstract Ideas

Hume does not explicitly link the CT and abstract general ideas. In this respect he is quite unlike Berkeley who, we have already seen, does note a connection between abstract general ideas and the *esse is percipi* thesis. At one point Hume does say something which **might** be construed as stating a relationship between abstract ideas and the CT, however. In his discussion of primary and secondary qualities and our ideas of them, Hume says:

*The idea of extension is entirely acquired from the senses of sight and feeling; and if all the qualities, perceived by the senses, be in the mind, not in the object, the same conclusion must reach the idea of extension, which is wholly dependent on the sensible ideas or the ideas of secondary qualities. Nothing can save us from this conclusion, but the asserting, that the ideas of those primary qualities are attained by **Abstraction**, an opinion, which, if we examine it accurately, we shall find to be unintelligible, and even absurd. (E 154)*

On one reading of this passage, Hume is saying that if there were abstract ideas — ideas which result from a special process of abstraction — then our idea of extension need not have originated in a certain manner, a manner which he here specifies only as depending on the senses of sight and feeling. This suggests, but does not say, something like this:

- (8) If there are abstract ideas (that is, ideas formed by a process of abstraction) of extension, then the CT is false.

Nonetheless, though I cannot find any place where Hume endorses (8), it seems to me that it is true. Moreover, a related conditional is also true, namely:

- (9) If there are no abstract ideas, then the CT is true.

Of these, we can consider (8) first.

To test (8) we need to consider simple ideas since we have noted that the CT is restricted to simple ideas and impressions. Imagine that one sees a circular red spot, and thereby receives a visual impression of a circular red shape. Suppose that one can abstract and separate the

color from the shape, mentally, in some manner, thereby attaining an idea of a circular shape with no color quality. This idea would be abstract because formed by abstraction — mental separation of what is, so we and Hume suppose, not in fact separable. And there is no impression corresponding to this idea, since there is never an impression of just shape without some color. Perhaps a more illustrative example would be one in which one sees a number of differently shaped red things, thereby getting visual impressions of, let us imagine, a circular, a triangular, and a rectangular red shape. Then, by using the process of abstraction twice, one could arrive at an abstract general idea of shape — but no particular shape. There is surely no impression correlative to this abstract idea. So, if there were abstract ideas of either of these two sorts, not to mention others, the CT would be false.⁶

We can now begin to see what role the denial of abstract ideas plays in Hume's philosophy and simultaneously notice the parallel to Berkeley. Consider an argument that Hume would have to be in a position to counter:

(8) If there are abstract ideas, then the CT is false.

(10) There are abstract ideas.

(11) Thus, the CT is false.

This is an argument that an opponent of Hume, real or imagined, might well compose and, of course, if it is sound, it does not do just minor damage to Hume's philosophy. For the CT is a vital and necessary first step in Hume's destructive critique of traditional metaphysics. Without the CT, those critical attacks really do not succeed because they do not even get started in most cases. So, it is of paramount importance that Hume denies the second premise, (10). To the question, "What role does the denial by Hume of abstract ideas play in Hume's philosophy?" we now see the answer: Just as in Berkeley, Hume needs to deny such ideas if he is to fend off a quick and easy refutation of one of the most important and essential elements in his overall work. And, just as in Berkeley, it is thus difficult to see anything of any greater importance for Hume than the denial of abstract ideas.

The parallel is even more striking when we notice that the CT in Hume's philosophy plays something like the same role that *esse* is *percipi* plays in Berkeley's. Both claim that they have discovered an important new truth with wide ramifications, and both use the newly discovered truth to effectively criticize and dismantle doctrines of other philosophers. In this way, though the CT is not at all the same thesis

as that of *esse* is *percipi*, the role of the denial of abstract ideas is the same in Hume's philosophy as it is in Berkeley's.

What then of (9)? To see how plausible it is, suppose its antecedent is true, and then consider some idea — perhaps the idea of a circular, red shape — and ask the question: "Where might this idea have come from, if it did not result from a process of abstraction?" The alternatives to the CT then come readily to mind: perhaps this idea is innate; or perhaps it arose spontaneously; or perhaps it derives from an earlier impression of a circular red shape which it does not "exactly represent"; or perhaps it derives from some impression of some other sort, even of another sense modality, which it does not "exactly represent." There are, of course, other possibilities too numerous to mention (for example, it might have been directly caused by God), but those given here exhaust those suitable in any discussion of Hume, I would think. None of these alternatives has initial plausibility. The case against innate ideas had long since been made by Hume's day, and he takes it for granted that there are no such ideas. And the case against each of the other possibilities is that there is no evidence in favor of any one of them and correspondingly plenty of evidence in support of the CT. These hypotheses concerning the origin of ideas, then, are 'non-starters', and it is not surprising that Hume ignores them. Nor is it surprising that he denies abstract ideas, for consider the argument one might form using (9):

(9) If there are no abstract ideas, then the CT is true.

(12) There are no abstract ideas.

(13) Thus, the CT is true.

We have just noted that the real form of (9) is more complex — its antecedent should make explicit reference to all the other possible explanations. But this point aside, given (9), the road is open to a demonstration of the CT itself. Abstraction, in effect, is the only serious competitor of the CT as an account of the origin of simple ideas of sundry sorts. The elimination of that competitor leaves the field wide open for nothing but the CT.

Once again we note the parallel to Berkeley. For him, as we saw, the denial of abstract ideas opens the way to establishing the *esse* is *percipi* thesis. For Hume, the equally important CT is virtually assured once the roadblock of abstract ideas has been cleared.⁷

It might be objected that Hume is in no position to use the denial of abstract ideas as support for the CT since, after all, he also uses the CT in one of his arguments against abstract ideas. Hence, my argu-

ments here, if correct, land Hume in a circle — hardly a welcome result.⁸

This objection would be decisive were I claiming to reconstruct the structure of Hume's intentions *vis-a-vis* his several arguments pertaining to the CT and abstract ideas. But I am not considering Hume's intentions. Nor am I considering the slightly different question we might put as: "How did Hume conceive of the role that his rejection of abstract ideas may have played in his larger philosophy?" Instead, as noted earlier in the paper, I have tried to investigate the different question of just what actual role does the rejection of abstract ideas play in Hume's philosophy. The answer to **this** question may well be as I have given it, even when what I have given would not be a good or proper answer to questions regarding Hume's intentions or how he conceived his own arguments.

Conclusion

Though both Berkeley and Hume deny that there are abstract ideas, and offer remarkably similar accounts of how ideas which are particular intrinsically may nevertheless function to represent many different things, it has never been quite clear just why each philosopher rejected abstract ideas. It has seemed to many that Berkeley's rejection of such ideas is representative of merely a local dispute between him and Locke, while the case of Hume has, so it has seemed, verged on total mystery. After all, though Berkeley says comparatively little about abstract ideas, Hume says far less. Yet if the arguments of this paper are correct, the real role of the rejection of abstract ideas for both Berkeley and Hume goes very deep; in both cases, that rejection lies at the very heart of their respective philosophical doctrines and theories. If their individual attacks on abstract ideas succeed, nearly all that is of central interest in their theories has a plausible foundation; while if those attacks fail, everything that makes Berkeley's philosophy uniquely his and Hume's his, collapses.⁹

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1. I take Berkeleyan idealism to consist minimally of two theses: (1) that the only kinds of non-perceiving entities which exist are those which exist if and only if they are perceived; and, (2) that each perceiver, whether finite or infinite, is a spirit.
2. See G. Pappas, "Abstract Ideas and the *Esse* is *Percipi* Thesis," *Hermathena* 139 (1985); compare, too, M. Atherton, "Berkeley's Anti-Abstractionism," and M. Bolton, "Berkeley's Objection to

- Abstract Ideas and Unconceived Objects," both in *Essays on the Philosophy of George Berkeley*, ed. E. Sosa (Dordrecht, 1987).
3. There are many other ways in which the attack on abstract ideas is of crucial importance in Berkeley. For further details, see the articles by Pappas, Atherton, and Bolton (above, n. 2), as well as Pappas' "Science and Metaphysics in Berkeley," *International Studies in Philosophy of Science* 7 (Fall 1987).
 4. References to the *Treatise* and to the *Enquiries* will be from the following editions, respectively: David Hume, *Treatise*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1965); David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1972). Further references ("T" or "E") will be given in parentheses within the body of the text.
 5. It is worth noticing that this argument does not require that the CT and the statement that there are simple impressions should both be necessary truths. It requires only that they be true. However, Hume's missing shade of blue case causes trouble here, so that the argument as given needs amendment. What Hume needs here is not the CT as given, but rather this: Every idea which is caused by some simple impression exactly resembles that impression. This change in the argument would force a correlative change from the earlier statement that there are simple impressions to the statement that there are simple impressions which cause ideas. However, both the argument stated above in the text and the emended argument suggested here need the third assumption, viz., that what has no parts is indivisible be a necessary truth. But it is plausible to claim that it is, and plausible to think that Hume would have agreed.
 6. The idea of shape, but no particular shape, one might say, echoing Berkeley and Hume, is contradictory. Thus, the sentence asserting that there are such entities would be a contradiction, thus making (8) have a necessarily false antecedent from which anything, including the denial of the CT, would follow. It is important to see that the case for (8) does not depend on this trick; that case is fully made by the first example as well as by the second.
 7. There is even more of a parallel. Berkeley notes the close connection of the thesis that there are abstract ideas to many other doctrines (see the articles cited in n. 3, above); and, if the arguments of section II of this paper are correct, and Hume's case against infinite divisibility of space and time depends on the CT, then we may say that his various doctrines concerning infinite divisibility, too, depend on the successful rejection of abstract ideas.

8. This objection was pressed by John Passmore in his commentary on my paper presented at the meetings of the Hume Society, Marburg, West Germany, August, 1988. Passmore there also noted a respect in which Berkeley and Hume are not parallel, namely that Berkeley **starts** with the rejection of abstract ideas and later comes round to the issue of *esse is percipi*, whereas Hume begins the *Treatise* with a statement and defense of the CT, and then later deals with abstract ideas.

This point concerns the **order of exposition** followed by Berkeley and Hume. What I have argued in this paper concerns only what role the rejection of abstract ideas may have played in their respective philosophies, and such a question is quite independent of the order of exposition followed by each author. Thus, the fact that there is no relevant expository parallel, as Passmore correctly notes, leaves what I have argued untouched.

9. My thanks for John Passmore for his useful comments and criticisms of the conference version of this paper.