BERKELEY ON THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BRUTES AND MEN

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Abstract

I attempt to shed more light on Berkeley's theory of mind by analyzing what little he tells us about the nature of brutes and how they differ from men. I start by noting what Berkeley says about the distinction, namely that men have a free rational faculty whereas brutes are determined. I then argue that there are separate pressures within Berkeley's writings that led him to endorse both a form of compatibilism and libertarianism about the free will. These pressures lead to various difficulties that might make one question whether Berkeley's claims about the nature of brutes are consistent with the rest of his metaphysics. After exploring the various avenues available to him to preserve his stated distinction between brutes and men, I contend that Berkeley has some options that will preserve the coherence of his system, but none of them solve the deeper philosophical issues concerning the nature of the free will.

The Difference Between Brutes and Men

Like most of his contemporaries, George Berkeley maintains that there is a clean distinction between brutes and men, despite other superficial similarities. He recognized, however, that the distinction had to be motivated. He has Lysicles write in the *Alciphron*: "Have brutes instincts, senses, appetites, and passions, to steer and conduct them? So have men...." (Alc V 27). Given the superficial overlap, one should wonder how Berkeley thinks men and brutes differ and, furthermore, how he accommodates his theory of difference within his unique immaterialism.

In this paper I argue that Berkeley's views about the difference between men and brutes hide tensions with his conception of the mind, specifically with respect to his views about free will. Berkeley is forced either to embrace a form of libertarianism about the will, which I argue is

a poor fit with some of his other philosophical claims, or else endorse a form of compatibilism that flirts with theological unorthodoxy and raises philosophical problems of its own. I do not see a happy resolution to the dilemma given the textual evidence we have. This paper is more a discussion of the conceptual territory surrounding Berkeley's insistence that man and beast are distinct kinds of beings rather than a criticism of his views, although I believe our explorations here will force us to rethink some portions of his system.

So what is the difference between brutes and men according to Berkeley? To start, he explicitly rejects one theory of the difference between men and brutes advanced by John Locke. He dismisses Locke's claim that men differ by their ability to form abstract ideas. Berkeley argues that humans cannot perform that feat either (PI 11) and continues by arguing that Locke's position depends on the observation that brutes do not use language or signs. The inability of animals to use language, however, is poor evidence for Locke's conclusion. There might be other reasons animals cannot use language, and language use by itself is no guarantee that an agent actually has abstract ideas, as Berkeley argues at length in the *Principles* and elsewhere.[1]

Positively, over his career Berkeley articulates a number of distinctions between men and other animals. Despite superficial disparities, they all ultimately may be brought into agreement in a single theory. Let's consider each briefly in turn. (1) Men differ by shape and language use, but only in degree. Thus Berkeley writes, "If you take away abstraction, how do men differ from Beasts. I answer by shape. By language rather by Degrees of more & less." (NB 594)[2] Elsewhere Berkeley argues that we have knowledge of other minds (souls) only by their *effects*. "From the speech and motion of a man we evidently infer the soul or spirit within him."[3] As a result, a natural way to understand Berkeley's distinction is that the minds of beasts differ from those of men because empirically we can perceive that brutes do not produce the same kinds of complicated effects as men. Brutes do not speak, nor act with the same kinds of sophisticated intentions as men. This characterization of the distinction is not enough, however, since it obviously parallels Locke's theory, which Berkeley has already rejected.

Elsewhere Berkeley narrows the point, pursuing a second theory of the

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[1] The strategy here mirrors Berkeley's remark in the *Notebooks* (NB 746) where he notes that brutes do not have the ideas of unity or existence either. Thus his reason for rejecting the Lockean theory remains consistent in his writings.

[2] The passage is not "+" marked.

[3] See *Works*, vol. 7, 97 and P 145.

difference. (2) Men differ by possessing the ability to compose complex ideas and have notional knowledge, especially concerning God. Thus he wonders in the *Notebooks*:

> Qu: whether Composition of Ideas be not that faculty which chiefly serves to discriminate us from Brutes. I question whether a Brute does or can imagine a Blue Horse or Chimera. (NB 753)[4]

The ability of men to know extends beyond ideas, however. Berkeley on a few occasions extends this point to include knowledge of God. "Man alone of all animals hath understanding to know his God." (Alc V 28) Part of what enables us to rise above mere brutes is that we are capable of contemplating our immortality.[5] As I shall subsequently argue, this point holds special importance for Berkeley. Beasts do not have this power of contemplation, or at least do not demonstrate any power to do so.

Most often, however, Berkeley joins the first two distinctions in a more general formulation. What enables us to use language and compose complex ideas and contemplate God is that we are free, rational agents. Thus, the most fitting theory of the difference between men and brutes as displayed by Berkeley is the general claim (3): Men differ from brutes insofar as they possess a free rational faculty. This faculty enables men to have a conscience, be moral agents, engage complex ideas, use language, and rise above their own animal natures associated with the senses and passions:

> It is evident there are two parts in the composition of man: The mind which is pure and spiritual, which is made in the image of God, and which we have in common with angels: and the corporeal part containing the senses and passions which we have in common with brute beasts.[6]

Brutes are consistently associated with the senses and passions (only),[7] whereas men, similarly burdened with these animal features, are distinct in virtue of their ability to regulate these desires through the use of reason. The more we suppress our appetites, the more Godly and angelic we are.[8] When Euphranor (one of Berkeley's spokespersons) engages Alciphron about the brutish nature of man, he admits that men are creatures with senses, passions, and appetites that do not always display their rational

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[4] The passage is not "+" marked.
[5] *Works*, vol. 7, 222. Guardian Essay XI "Immortality."
[6] *Works*, vol. 7, 88. Sermon VI "On the Mystery of Godliness."
[7] Compare Alc I 12.
[8] See Alc I 13.

nature. That said, he defends the nature of man as being rational even if not all men consistently demonstrate that quality.[9] Thus, what ultimately distinguishes man from beast is that the former is rational.

The theme of rationality is a common one in the history of western thought, and Berkeley tows the line. "The same faculty of reason and understanding, which placeth us above the brute part of creation, doth also subject our minds to greater and more manifold disquiets than creatures of an inferior rank are sensible of."[10] As we should expect from the foregoing passages, typically Berkeley presents the difference in rationality as a matter of degree. Men have a greater degree of rational power than beasts. "But as the human mind is dignified by a more comprehensive faculty than can be found in the inferior animals...."[11] But if the difference is of degree, how are we to capture this difference in a manner that explains the distinction between men and brutes? Merely saying that men are more rational and complicated than beasts does not immediately enable Berkeley to separate human persons from the occasionally odious rules of the natural world that free-thinkers want to extend to men. Thus Euphranor complains, "What motives, what grounds, can there be for bringing down man, in whom are all these things, to a level with such a creature? What merit, what ambition, in the minute philosopher to make such an animal a guide or rule for human life?" (Alc II 14) Berkeley clearly wants to draw a clean line between the rational capabilities of men and those of our animal brethren.

As Lysicles notes immediately following the aforementioned speech, Euphranor is the one who admits "freedom of thought." Thus the key to separating men from brutes is that only the former will *freely*. That is, there is a difference only of degree between men and brutes in terms of *being* rational, but there is a difference in kind in terms of *how* men are able to will and exercise their reason. Crito expresses Berkeley's position best later in the *Alciphron*:

> Besides, other animals are, by the law of their nature, determined to one certain end or kind of being, without inclination or means either to deviate or go beyond it. But man hath in him a will and higher principle; by virtue whereof he may pursue different or even contrary ends; and either fall short of or exceed the perfection natural to his species in this world; as he is capable, either by giving up the reins to his sensual appetites, of

[9] See Alc I 14.
[10] *Works*, vol. 7, 223. Guardian Essay XI "Immortality."
[11] *Works*, vol. 7, 214. Guardian Essay IX "Happiness."

> degrading himself into the condition of brutes, or else, by well ordering and improving his mind, of being transformed into the similitude of angels. (Alc V 28)

Thus Berkeley provides us with one of the clearest examples of how he conceives of the difference between man and brute. Although we share a base nature, human persons have a key feature that lofts them above other animals. Men are *freely* rational and not determined to any one end.

Berkeley on Human Freedom

As anyone with even a passing familiarity with the literature in the metaphysics of freedom knows, much hinges on what one *means* by 'free' in these discussions. Furthermore, the issue is sufficiently dense and difficult that we ought not be surprised to find entanglements in the thoughts of even first rate philosophers. I assert that such might be the case here. Berkeley typically defends a Lockean-style compatibilist theory of human free action, but he also makes claims that appear to require a libertarian conception of the free will. I am not interested in the metaphysical merits of any particular position; rather, I am interested in Berkeley's metaphysical commitments given his clear allegiance to the claim that men and brutes differ in virtue of the nature of their rational wills. So I turn first to examine Berkeley's views concerning the freedom of men and their wills.

Late in the *Alciphron* Berkeley advances a theory of free action that is partly reminiscent of Locke's own theory as outlined in Book II Chapter 21 of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Berkeley's primary spokesman Euphranor provides an explicit definition when the topic of whether man is free arises:

> Euphranor: In my opinion, a man is said to be free so far forth as he can do what he will. Is this so, or is it not?
> Alciphron: It seems so.
> Euphranor: Man, therefore, acting according to his will, is to be accounted free. (Alc VII 19)

If I will to raise to my hand and can do so, Berkeley thinks I am freely acting. Only when I am precluded from executing my will may I be said to not be free. Like Locke's famous prisoner, if I voluntarily will to be (or stay) in a locked room, then I am a free man.[12] When Alciphron challenges

[12] See Winkler 1989, 131-132, who has a similar analysis of Berkeley's views in

him on the point and asks whether a man is free to will, Euphranor dismisses the point as idle. "That is, whether he can will as he wills? ...it is not doubted that man is accountable, that he acts, and is self-determined." (Alc VII 19) Following Locke, Berkeley does not at this point seem to have a theory of the freedom of the *will*, a position he thinks apparently is nonsensical. It only makes sense to speak of *acts* that are free, and his analysis mirrors that of Locke.

Unfortunately, there are strong reasons to think that Berkeley was not a consistent advocate of a Lockean-style compatibilism. In order to more cleanly engage the issues, I want first to isolate and sketch a particular libertarian theory of the will that I think resonates with Berkeley's thinking. In particular, we require a theory that accommodates a robust conception of moral accountability, which is dear to him. Once we have completed this sketch, we can turn to see whether it lurks within Berkeley's thinking.

Perhaps the most simple libertarian theory is that genuinely free actions of the will must satisfy two criteria. First, the action must be the agent's action and no other's. If an action is performed by my body because another has somehow taken control of it, the action is not genuinely mine and hence not free. Second, the metaphysical foundation for the principle of alternative possibilities (PAP) must be true. The principle, as formulated famously by Harry Frankfurt, indicates that "a person is morally responsible for what he has done only if he could have done otherwise."[13] The metaphysical ground for the principle is the physical possibility of agents acting otherwise given the exact same conditions. I am not morally responsible for actions that are in fact unavoidable, and the very possibility of moral responsibility thus requires the physical possibility of having been able to have done otherwise. Note that I am not defending the merits of this theory and I recognize that there are many important subtleties and variants to libertarian accounts. It is a convenient tool that will enable me to demonstrate the libertarian strands in Berkeley's thinking. With this loose conception in mind, we can turn to investigate more of what Berkeley says about our freedom.

When discussing the nature of the will, I believe that Berkeley retained the standard early modern view inherited from René Descartes that the will is always free.[14] Like Descartes, Berkeley seems to think that the

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the different context of God's foreknowledge.

[13] Frankfurt 2003, 167.

[14] See *The Passions of the Soul*, I, Article 41, where Descartes writes "But the will is by its nature so free that it can never be constrained." Descartes 1985, vol. I, 343.

faculty of the will is identical with freedom of choice. He delights in continually attacking Locke's theory of uneasiness as the determinant of the will.[15] Unease and indeed anything ideational cannot possibly determine the will, since both are passive whereas the will is active. To my knowledge, Berkeley at no time ever mentions *anything* that determines the will. Similarly, Paul Olscamp identifies four separate lines of argument aimed by Berkeley against determinism, noting in particular that Berkeley holds the will to be undetermined.[16] Thus, when Berkeley ridicules Alciphron for asking whether the will is free (by recasting the question as whether a man can will as he wills), perhaps Berkeley ought not be thought of as endorsing a form of compatibilism. Instead, his position, at least here, may well be closer to that of libertarianism. Consider another speech by Euphranor later in the *Alciphron*:

> Euphranor: It is no less evident that man is a free agent: and though, by abstracted reasonings, you should puzzle me, and seem to prove the contrary, yet, so long as I am conscious of my own actions, this inward evidence of plain fact will bear me up against all your reasonings, however subtle and refined. (Alc VII 18)

When it comes to separating men from brutes, the difference is not that men can act according to their wills whereas brutes do not. Instead, the difference is that men have wills that may *deviate* from their natural desires; there are ***multiple*** physically possible options for men. Furthermore, we know this by introspection. An appeal to everyday commonsense experience reveals that our wills are not determined; hence they are not.[17] This passage is strikingly reminiscent of the strategy Descartes uses to defend the freedom of the will in the fifth set of replies:

> You may be unfree, if you wish; but I am certainly very pleased with my freedom since I experience it within myself.... I affirm what I have experienced and what anyone else can experience for himself, whereas your denial seems merely to be based on your own apparent failure to have appropriate experience; so my own view is probably entitled to receive more widespread acceptance.[18]

If we just carefully *look* into our own minds we can experience our own freedom. Such claims strongly suggest that Berkeley would endorse

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[15] See "On Immortality," *Works*, vol. 7, 11 and NB 653. See also NB 611, 611a.
[16] Olscamp 1970, 91-2.
[17] Olscamp has a similar analysis. Olscamp 1970, 97.
[18] Descartes 1985, vol. II, 259-60.

something like the principle of alternative possibilities.

One might object at this point that Berkeley is aware of the issue and rejects my claim. Consider entry 616 from the *Notebooks*: "To ask whether a man can will either side is an absurd question. for the word can presupposes volition." This particular entry, however, does not undercut the ground for the principle of alternative possibilities; rather, if anything the entry reinforces it. The presupposed volition is itself non-determined. To ask whether we can will otherwise is absurd first because it is asking to treat the volition as an object of thought. But as they are actions, we can have no ideas of volitions. Second, since Berkeley believes that volitions are undetermined, positing a case where a volition determines an outcome with options begs the question about the nature of volitions and whether they are determined in the first place. In any event, a more positive case can be made for the presence of a libertarian strand in Berkeley's thinking.

In *Principles* 28 Berkeley asserts that he can "excite ideas in my mind at pleasure." Now what does this mean? It might mean (a) I can will when I choose to will. That is, when I am determined to will, I do and the willing is mine. That is a compatibilist reading. The problem, of course, is that such a reading is perfectly consistent with what brutes do as well. When my dog is determined to will, he does and the willing is his. No difference betwixt man and beast is to be found there. The more likely option, I believe, is that Berkeley believed it to mean (b): I can will without having my ideas determined by something else.[19] I admit that Berkeley never explicitly endorses libertarianism, and in fact in general does not say as much on the issue as one would prefer, promising instead to discuss the topic of human freedom at the start of the mysteriously missing second part of the *Principles*.[20] Nevertheless, at times he does say things that imply a fairly straightforward endorsement of libertarianism.

In addition to the *Principles* 28 passage, he also thinks that a key difference between men and brutes is that the former have a conscience and are morally accountable for their actions. Berkeley does explicitly link moral accountability to human freedom in the *Notebooks*[21] and he even asserts that morality consists in volition chiefly. (NB 669) But if the volition be determined, one might wonder whether moral accountability is

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[19] Now one has to worry about the coherence of this claim, since if *nothing* determines the will then, in particular, the *agent* does not determine the will. One is then hard pressed to maintain the claim that the willing is *his*. That, however, is a standard worry with libertarian conceptions of the will, especially the Cartesian form, so I will lay aside that worry for present purposes.

[20] See NB 508.

[21] NB 508. Compare Clark 2005, 370

really appropriate in such cases.[22] The intuitive pull of PAP is operative. Berkeley nonetheless seems to think that one is responsible for one's willings (and their effects) independent of their nature as determined or otherwise. "And if man be free, he is plainly accountable." (Alc VII 18) The foundation of morality (and religion) for Berkeley is the ability of rational agents to freely will in a manner that makes them responsible agents. The claim is obvious to Berkeley because he cannot think of anything that *could* determine or constrain the will beyond the agent him or her self. "I know I act, and what I act I am accountable for." (Alc VII 19) The emphasis here is that the actions in question are *owned* by the individual agent. Berkeley would not argue that should someone physically force me to pull a trigger on a weapon that I would own that act (and hence be morally culpable for the effects of said act). This conception of freedom falls squarely in the tradition of the one that defines free actions as those that satisfy the above mentioned two criteria. The action is the action of the agent, and it is physically possible for the agent to have acted otherwise.

Another reason to think Berkeley has some implicit commitment to a libertarian conception of the will comes from his response to the problem of evil. In the *Three Dialogues* Philonous responds to Hylas' concern that God might be responsible for all evil in the world if He is the author of everything in nature.

> It is true, I have denied there are any other agents beside spirits: but this is very consistent with allowing to thinking rational beings, in the production of motions, the use of limited powers, ultimately indeed derived from God, but immediately under the direction of their wills, which is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their actions. (3D 237)

Berkeley has a problem he does not seem to fully recognize. Just previous to that speech, Philonous says that God is "represented [in the Holy Scriptures] as the sole and immediate Author of all those effects, which some heathens and philosophers are wont to ascribe to Nature, matter, fate, or the like unthinking principle." (3D 236) The assertion here appears inconsistent with Berkeley's claim in the prior passage, where the finite agent is the immediate actor, and God is only "ultimately" responsible for the action. In order to *freely will* it must not be the case that the will is determined, even ultimately, by God. If God controls the hand of a puppeteer which in turn controls the strings of the marionette, evil actions

[22] Thus Galen Strawson argues that it is a consequence of there being no libertarian freedom of the will that no agent can be moral. Strawson 1994, 5-24.

performed by the marionette do not absolve God even if the puppeteer is required to pull the strings. All of this analysis, of course, is completely consistent with Berkeley's Cartesian denial that the will is determined by anything. Tom Stoneham argues that a form of compatibilism can escape the problem, but I am somewhat skeptical.[23] Given that Berkeley so openly pursues a free-will theodicy in response to the problem of evil, I am again drawn to the conclusion that he has a libertarian conception of the free will in mind. On this point I am not alone. Olscamp concludes, "In all of these arguments, Berkeley's own views are constant. Free will, spontaneously free will, is a necessary condition for moral behavior; determinism of whatever variety is false."[24]

If Berkeley did hold a libertarian theory of the free will, then one benefit immediately arises: he can maintain that men differ from brutes in virtue of the fact that the rational wills of men are free and undetermined. Thus, although humans are tied to their senses as we find in brutes[25] and humans are subject to passions just as are other animals, (Alc V 28) human minds are "dignified by a more comprehensive faculty."[26] As a result, men can act contrary their natures because their free faculty of reason includes a conscience. Animals are determined in their behaviors and in what they will, whereas men recognize their animal natures yet can freely choose otherwise. In that distinction we can see why men are moral agents and animals are not.

The Implications of Freedom

Having established that Berkeley (at least at times) believed that the key difference between man and beast is that the former possesses a free rational will, does this theory square with the rest of Berkeley's philosophical system? A series of problems arise almost immediately on the supposition that human persons have robustly (i.e. libertarian) free wills. I will limit my discussion here to two concerns before exploring the rival alternative of trying to preserve compatibilism in his system.

The first problem concerns the sovereignty of Nature and God. If we are agents that freely will, then since volitions are paired with ideas (as their effects), as a consequence we are at least in part responsible for the ideas other minds perceive. Now we have a classic problem. If the natural world is

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[23] Stoneham 2002, 207ff.
[24] Olscamp 1970, 98.
[25] See, for example, Alc I 12 and *Works*, vol. 7, 95.
[26] *Works*, vol. 7, 214. Guardian Essay IX "Happiness."

determined in terms of the ordering of ideas we perceive, then we are *not* really free in terms of what we will *if* our willings are a part of nature. Berkeley is quite adamant in the *Principles* that the effects we perceive as the Laws of Nature are constant and necessary. "... [I]t being visible, that the aforesaid methods of Nature are absolutely necessary, in order to working by the most simple and general rules, and after a steady and consistent manner; which argues both the *wisdom* and *goodness* of God."[27] Thus, if we will freely and every volition has an attendant idea, then we ought to expect that we will not find *necessary* connections in what we perceive. Berkeley is thus committed to the presence of necessary connections in nature (the laws of nature) and a view that entails that some events in nature will not be necessary (the effects of our free actions).

To make matters worse, Berkeley also famously argues that every willing depends entirely on the will of God:

> For it is evident that in affecting other persons, the will of man hath no other object, than barely the motion of the limbs of his body; but that such a motion should be attended by, or excite any idea in the mind of another, depends wholly on the will of the Creator. (P 147)

Not only is there a problem with the necessary order of Nature, we also have to reconcile the utter dependence of human wills on God. Stoneham argues that the *Principles* 147 passage is "a bit of an exaggeration,"[28] and there is some reason to think he might be right, since in the *Alciphron* Berkeley argues that it is logically possible for God to know the actions of free agents. That said, no analysis is provided about the mechanics of this solution. There is room for serious concern here and I have no ready answer on Berkeley's behalf.

The second problem concerns Berkeley's theory of mind. Eventually Berkeley developed the position that minds are collections of active willings or volitions.[29] Spirit is entirely active, but is not to be identified with a particular idea or volition. Instead, the mind involves the ordering of volition-idea pairings. Spirit is a principle distinct from its ideas and volitions. Thus Berkeley writes in the *Notebooks*, "The Spirit, the Mind, is neither a Volition nor an Idea." (NB 849) The key is to not think of the mind as a bundle of distinct volitions (Berkeley considers but rejects a bundle theory of the mind) and instead recognize that the mind involves a kind of ordering. "A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being: as it

[27] P 151. See also P 62, 31.
[28] Stoneham 2002, 187.
[29] I follow in part George Pitcher's analysis in what follows. Pitcher 1977, 184ff.

perceived ideas, it is called the *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates about them, it is called the *will*." (P 27) According to Berkeley spirits should be construed in part as active principles. They are still substances which endure as independent (from all except God) atemporal beings, but they are not substances in the sense of some *perceivable* object. Philonous helps clarify matters in the *Three Dialogues*:

> How often must I repeat, that I know or am conscious of my own being; and that I myself am not my ideas, but somewhat else, a thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates about ideas. I know that I, one and the same self, perceive both colours and sounds.... Farther, I know what I mean, when I affirm that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas, that is, that a spirit knows and perceives ideas. (3D 233-234)

Whether the mind is a traditional substance or not, we know that the nature of the mind involves a principled ordering of idea-volition pairings.[30] If just this rough portion of Berkeley's theory of mind is correct, then invoking the freedom of men to distinguish them from brutes runs into trouble. What is the difference between an ordering of activities like volitions and a "free" ordering of the same? It is not clear there is one. Berkeley tells us that we cannot separate volitions one from another except by their effects, namely the ideas with which they are paired.[31] But there is no reason to suspect that the ideas paired with "free" volitions will differ from those paired with unfree ones. There might be differences in what I *infer* from a perceived idea based on whether or not I judge the attendant volition to be free or not (about whether I hold an agent morally accountable or not, for instance), but that is of no help to us in determining an antecedent distinction. In short, Berkeley has no resources with his professed theory of the mind to explain how free willings differ from determined ones. As a result, from the foregoing analysis Berkeley has no way to distinguish between men and brutes if the will is free.

Perhaps, however, we have erred by relying too heavily on the libertarian strands that appear in Berkeley's thinking. Might Berkeley be able to maintain the distinction between men and brutes in some other fashion while adhering to compatibilism more strictly? Let us explore. If

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[30] For a non-traditional understanding of the nature of mental substances and minds in Berkeley see Daniel (2001b), esp. 61 and Daniel (2008b).

[31] NB 788: "We see no variety or difference betwixt the Volitions, only between their effects." Compare P 27, where Berkeley notes that souls are also only detectable by their effects.

the difference between man and beast is not in the freedom of the will, then given what Berkeley says there are two other initially promising options. The first fails. The second, although flirting with some theological difficulties, might be a defensible option Berkeley could have endorsed.

We might first suppose that men and brutes differ because the former have minds while the latter do not. Although Berkeley only obliquely suggests this possibility once, it is worth briefly exploring.[32] Brutes would then be akin to Cartesian automata, collections of ideas that behave like creatures with minds but in fact only imitate the behaviors of genuine agents. Unfortunately, Berkeley is not in a good position to defend this kind of distinction (even if true), primarily because he claims that volitions are differentiated only by their effects (i.e. the ideas with which they are paired). (NB 788) Thus, if *we* (qua minds) can only learn of the existence of other minds in virtue of the effects they produce, then there is no way to *know* whether brutes have minds or not. But Berkeley does not actually say that brutes lack minds, nor should he. Berkeley has no resources to conclude that brutes in fact do lack minds; he can only say that brutes behave in ways that do not suggest that they have minds. Such a view is equally as compatible with brutes having minds with lesser capabilities as with brutes being automata. Given that he wants the distinction to be clearly demonstrable, Berkeley cannot plausibly argue that the difference between men and brutes depends on the mere possession of a mind or soul.

Most commonly Berkeley writes as if brutes do have minds. Yet if we instead opt to claim that brutes have minds, but lack the mental sophistication we associate with rational faculties, then a new set of complications arises. If, as Berkeley does sometimes suggest, animals differ from humans only by degree (in language use and the ability to manipulate complex ideas), then Berkeley's system is threatened with a loss of theological orthodoxy regarding the special status of human persons. In particular, there initially does not appear to be any compelling reason to suppose that animals are not immortal like humans.

As a theist, Berkeley could draw on ready responses from theologians with which he was familiar. The challenge, however, is to reconcile the standard theological moves that separate human and beast with Berkeley's own professed theory of the difference as being grounded in our rational faculties. As an Anglican, Berkeley adopted the traditional reading of Genesis that gives animals "the breath of life" (1:30) but not souls per se, which are reserved for humans created in the image of God (Genesis

[32] See *Works*, vol. 7, 88.

1:26). When Berkeley claims that every living thing has a soul,[33] the language is loose but not an uncommon shorthand for the breath of life as opposed to an immortal soul. That he sometimes thinks that there is a distinction between souls and the animating principles of other animals is *suggested* occasionally by his discussion of natural immortality:

> It must not be supposed, that they who assert the natural immortality of the soul are of opinion, that it is absolutely incapable of annihilation even by the infinite power of the Creator who first gave it being: but only that it is not liable to be broken or dissolved by the ordinary Laws of Nature or motion. They indeed, who hold the soul of man to be only a thin vital flame, or system of animal spirits, make it perishing and corruptible as the body, since there is nothing more easily dissipated than such a being, which it is naturally impossible should survive the ruin of the tabernacle, wherein it is enclosed.... We have shewn that the soul is indivisible, incorporeal, unextended, and it is consequently incorruptible. Nothing can be plainer, than that the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions which we hourly see befall natural bodies (and which is what we mean by the *course of Nature*) cannot possibly affect an active, simple, uncompounded substance: such a being therefore is indissoluble by the force of Nature, that is to say, *the soul of man is naturally immortal*. (P 141)

Here Berkeley draws a distinction between the substantial soul, which is naturally immortal, and other conceptions of the soul (as a vital flame or animal spirits[34]) which are not. One might think that mere animal souls differ by not being naturally immortal. The "second rate" souls of brutes dissolve upon their bodily death. Unfortunately, Berkeley never actually says as much, which is why I was careful to note that this passage at best is only suggestive. There is no principled bit of philosophy in Berkeley's system that admits for a distinction amongst kinds of immaterial souls in this way. We have, in short, no compelling reason to suppose that the souls of beasts are not immaterial substances similar in kind to those of human persons. Again, the best we have are Berkeley's repeated claims that somehow the rational faculties of the soul do all the work. Given his metaphysic and his claims about animals differing only by degree from us, positing "second rate" souls appears *ad hoc*.

Perhaps Berkeley has a better solution available to him that might

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[33] *Works*, vol. 7, 219.

[34] The reference might be slightly misleading in this context. "Animal spirits" here is most likely a reference to the Cartesian doctrine of animal spirits operative in explanations of mind-body causal interaction and *not* to a special kind of soul or spirit possessed by beasts.

preserve the simplicity of his ontology. The difference between brutes and men, both of whom have souls, is not simply their rationality, but their rational awareness. What distinguishes us is that only the minds of men are sufficiently advanced to *understand* that they as selves are in fact immortal. Thus Berkeley writes that "If it were not for this thought [of immortality], I had rather be an oyster than a man, the most stupid and senseless of animals than a reasonable mind tortured with an extreme innate desire of that perfection which it despairs to obtain."[35] Every living thing has a soul in a minimal sense, but a *self* consists in a conscious, rational faculty aware of its own immortality. In this feature – which may be construed as either a distinction of kind or degree – Berkeley can draw a firm line between animals that display rational behavior and those that are conscious of their own immortality. The latter are men and have souls capable of salvation.

The oyster passage, unfortunately, is hardly a clear indication that Berkeley thinks that there is a principled division between brutes and humans based on reflective knowledge of our own immortality. I thus advance this interpretative possibility with some caution, since the textual evidence is thin. Even so, if this reading of the distinction is right, then Berkeley has an option available to him which need not invoke a libertarian account of the free will. The wills of men are determined, but have special capabilities that differ in kind from those possessed by brutes. We at least have found a reasonable way to accommodate Berkeley's claims about our rational faculties with a form of compatibilism about the nature of human freedom.

The problem, of course, is that availing ourselves of this option leaves Berkeley without explicit resources to answer the problem of evil or explain moral accountability. Furthermore, there are now textual problems to resolve concerning Berkeley's apparent commitment to a libertarian theory of the free will elsewhere. In Berkeley's defense, I suggest it is reasonable to observe that he did not think carefully about the implications of his claims about brutes, instead relying to some degree on the standard views of his day (recall his apparent imitation of Descartes' views about freedom).

At the end of our exploration, we find that Berkeley appears to have available two options to explain the difference between man and beast. Neither of them is particularly attractive. On the one hand, he might ground the difference in our libertarian freedom of the will. The wills of men are not determined while the wills of brutes are. Selecting that theory

[35] *Works*, vol. 7, 222. Guardian Essay IX, "Immortality."

creates problems with respect to the sovereignty of God and Berkeley's metaphysics of mind. On the other hand, he might retain compatibilism and argue that men and beasts differ by the fact that men were created with the reflective ability to understand their own immortality. In that case, however, Berkeley owes us an account of genuine moral agency and we need to find some way to reconcile his libertarian claims about his response to the problem of evil and the undetermined nature of the will. Aside from seriously re-thinking some of Berkeley's other core metaphysical positions, I have no happy solution.

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