George Berkeley needs little introduction to a philosophical audience. Famed for his immaterialism, his is a vital presence in early modern metaphysics. Held in high regard in his lifetime for work on vision, and in a more bemused regard for his fervid promotion of the medicinal powers of tar water, like many of the big names of his day Berkeley wrote on a wide variety of philosophical topics. He tackled those topics in many formats; the Berkeley oeuvre contains traditional philosophical treatises, poetry, two very different dialogues, travel-writing, homilies, mathematical pamphlets, and magazine essays. Unlike many of his contemporaries at the centre of the canon, he had a wife and children, and directed considerable energy towards domestic matters. He also spent time traveling in Europe and an ill-fated stint in America trying to establish a college in Bermuda and an expansion of Anglican influence in the region.

George Berkeley: A Philosophical Life has been keenly anticipated by Berkeley scholars. As Jones notes, a modern, book-length study of Berkeley that draws on philosophical and biographical sources in combination has not been forthcoming: ‘No attempt has been made for over a hundred years to bring these two kinds of document of Berkeley’s life together across the full length of his career […]’ (p. 3). David Berman’s George Berkeley: Idealism and the Man is perhaps an exception (though it is considerably shorter and, avowedly, has a more metaphysical emphasis). Jones’ introduction acknowledges the difference of approach between his treatment and that of A. A. Luce’s Life of Berkeley (1949), the book which has until now served for most contemporary Berkeleyans as guide to the bishop’s life.

Luce – a towering figure in Berkeley studies – sought to keep the personal and the philosophical separate in his treatment. For Jones, the personal and philosophical are deeply intermixed, and he makes the case that the intellectual biography of a philosopher with Berkeley’s metaphysical and semiotic convictions might justify and even demand a philosophical history informed by personal biography. On a certain understanding of immaterialism and Berkeley’s
theory of signs, we are knowable only by the marks we leave on the world and in the minds of others whose ideas and lives our ideas have impacted (p. 12). In trying to understand a historical figure like Berkeley we use a multitude of those marks he left (including available documents pertaining to his life, his writings about philosophy, and everything in between), and bearing in mind ‘issues of perspective and agency’ (p. 541) that should be recognised as a fundamental part of the Berkeleyan scheme, we try to cobble together a just sense of a spirit with agency and a legacy.

Biographical traditionalists of Luce’s inclination will hopefully take comfort in the way Jones’ text provides a comprehensive home for the incredible body of trivia and ‘Berkeleyana’ that Luce found his way to in his own work. Even if he promoted a different approach to philosophical biography, it is edifying to see that life’s work of collection and investigation integrated into a unified account of Berkeley.

The centrality of the motivation provided by Berkeley’s unique philosophical outlook is mediated by a commitment to the perspectives of people marginalised by Berkeley’s profoundly hierarchical understandings of humanity. Jones interrogates Berkeley’s deeply troubling ideas on the status of enslaved people (especially on his promotion of the consistency of slavery and Christianity), his plans for (potentially forcibly) converting Native Americans, the proper place of women, and the inferiority of native Irish people and other ethnic groups at the margins of his experience. No previous text has taken so seriously the impacts of Berkeley’s attitudes on those subordinated by systems he sought to uphold and extend. A mixture of complex perspectives on the man emerge as previously marginal voices like those of Eliza Frinsham Berkeley and Anne Forster Berkeley are given more weight. Equally, new details on Berkeley’s children in the aftermath of his death are fascinating for much more than the new insights they give us on Berkeley’s attitudes to education.

In terms of structure, the biography intersperses thematic chapters among more chronological and episodic ones. In terms of influence, it is conversant with many of the key recent interpreters of Berkeley; Atherton, Belfrage, Berman, Downing, Kendrick, Pearce, Stoneham, Winkler, and others animate the traditional landscape carefully set down by Luce and Jessop. Jones’ text is also interwoven with comparative insights from Alexander Pope, Jonathan Swift, Catherine Talbot, and numerous other figures of contemporary cultural and literary significance. As Jones shows, Berkeley’s Grand Tour and early London experiences represent a ‘promiscuously sociable period’ (p. 195) in
which he explored different versions of his philosophical persona, writing sarcastic and polemical pieces for *The Guardian*, and publishing a scientific report on Vesuvius in the Royal Society’s *Philosophical Transactions*.

Readers will be surprised by the breadth of Berkeley’s interests and pursuits. In the introduction to Margaret Atherton’s key text on Berkeley’s philosophy and psychology of vision, she implores the reader not to follow the historical trend of interpreting Berkeley’s broader works primarily as footnotes to the *Principles*. Jones’ biography, though methodologically motivated by features of Berkeley’s immaterialism, sings in its breadth of concern. Unlike treatments which consider Berkeley primarily as the mouthpiece of a reasonably unpopular metaphysical doctrine, Jones’ portrait is of a (sometimes grimly) practical man pursuing a host of concrete objectives.

Among the anecdotes recounted in the book is his friend Percival’s reporting to Berkeley on the reception of his *Principles* in London, initial examples of which conveyed the view that Berkeley’s philosophical ideas were to be regarded alongside those of Malebranche and Norris as hopelessly abstruse and *speculative* (a word Berkeley always uses disdainfully). Given his self-understanding as a truly public-focused philosopher, Berkeley recoiled at this classification, and Jones’ breadth of attention in his treatment provides a grand argument against this way of understanding his intellectual project. As Jones points out, the consequences of this are often harrowing – American slavery is defended and theologically re-configured, slavery of native Irish people is proposed with enthusiasm, and kidnapping of Native Americans is mooted – the chapter ‘Others’ (pp. 209-243) is of particular significance.

A former love interest describes Berkeley as a man with ‘an imagination too lively to be trusted to itself, the treasures of it were inexhaustible, but for want of commerce with mankind he made that rich oar into bright but useless medals which wd otherwise have been stamp’d into current coin, fit for the use & service of mankind’ (p. 292). Another achievement of the book is showcasing a continuity of Berkeley’s ‘lively imagination’ in more unusual applications through earlier works and projects, long before its best-known instantiation in *Siris*. His detailed excerpting of Berkeley’s fastidious notetaking on Tarantism (pp. 274-83) while traveling in Italy is but one fascinating example.

Anne Berkeley emerges as a fascinating character and the seeming mutual distaste between her and her daughter-in-law (Eliza Frinsham Berkeley, who married George Jnr) gives a new sense of the philosophical intensity and theological dogmatism that
surrounded Berkeley, even in domestic life. More broadly, the chapters ‘Love and Marriage’, ‘Early Hours as a Regimen’ and ‘Afterlife’ offer many new insights into the personal and philosophical habits of an early modern philosopher whose family life and vocation make him an exception to the rule in his milieu in the history of the canon. In addition to George Jnr, two other Berkeley children (Julia and Henry) survived to adulthood. Their sad fate, both ultimately spending some time ‘living incarcerated on account of their mental illness’ (p. 521) in 1795, is also striking.

The domestic insights are not without philosophical implications. Berkeley’s description of his own children as ‘a great joy [the chief of the good things in this world]’ (p. 305) is moving. And yet, these familial insights show a warped consistency in Berkeley for the kind of love towards a late child that he regarded as verging on religious impropriety (to vainly have wished him alive when God wanted him home – see the beautiful letter to Percival excerpted on p. 307) with an enthusiastic and venal attitude to child slavery and the kidnapping of different (and often unusually local) ethnic groups.

Jones claims to merely ‘modestly extend’ (p. 2) our knowledge of Berkeley, but this is far from the case, especially in this particular intellectual climate. The extensions offered from the platforms built by the biographical legacies of his predecessors are many, and their integration into a picture of a complex thinker is masterful. As a final further example, Jones’ discovery that Berkeley excerpts Damaris Masham (in addition to Mary Astell) in The Ladies Library provides helpful material for contemporary scholars interested in the way Berkeley may have been influenced by women thinkers.

Jones’ portrait is of a man with an obsession with hierarchy that guided his most notorious outlooks, and of one with the kind of experience (of travel, cultural diversity, proximity to abject poverty, the sophistication of competing kinds of social organisation) that put him in an almost uniquely good position to attain nuanced and bold views that Jones shows us were often available nearby. In a period in which historians of philosophy are grappling with the personal and philosophical legacies of their intellectual icons – Berkeley’s position in the institutions of Dublin is now under tense scrutiny – Jones has given us a text worthy of decision-making in that direction.

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