IDEA – Studia nad strukturą i rozwojem pojęć filozoficznych
XXX/1 Białystok 2018

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SIRIS AND BERKELEY'S LATE SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

Abstract

In the present article, I aim at showing a shift in Berkeley's understanding of society in the late *Siris* (1744). Although the work is primarily devoted to the curative qualities of tar-water and on the speculative level develops a new neoplatonic metaphysic of light, it should also be seen as a work in which Berkeley's mature philosophy is expressed as a whole. Together with the fact that since the thirties Berkeley thought was more inclined towards practical, i.e. economic and social, issues, this might be a premise for interpreting the *Siris* as a work in which a vision of society is presented. The parallelism of nature and society, of macrocosm and microcosm, and the claim that nature is not perfect, but is a dynamic, developing whole, makes it possible to treat society as an imperfect whole developed and perfected by human activity. If such a reading is correct it evidences the fact that in his *Siris* Berkeley abandoned the religious radicalism typical for his early works.

Key words: George Berkeley, *Siris*, social philosophy, metaphysics of light

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Apart from the problems hitherto raised by scholars (Timo Airaksinen, Sebastien Charles, Lisa Downing, Luc Petterschmitt and others[1]) who focused

[1] T. Airaksinen, *Light and Causality in "Siris"*, in: *Berkeley's Lasting Legacy. 300 Years Later*, ed. T. Airaksinen, B. Belfrage, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011; idem, *The Path of Fire: The Meaning and Interpretation of Berkeley's "Siris"*, in: *New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, ed. by S. H. *Daniel, Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2007; idem, Airaksinen, T. The Chain and The Animal: Idealism in Berkeley's "Siris"*, in: S. Gersh, D. Moran (eds.), *Eriugena, Berkeley, and the Idealist Tradition*, Notre Dame IN: University Press of Notre Dame, 2006, pp. 226–227; L. Downing, *Berkeley's Natural Philosophy and Philosophy of Science*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Berkeley*, ed. K. Winkler, Cambridge University Press, 2006; M. Holtz-

their attention on Berkeley's *Siris*, such as metaphysics or philosophy of science, there is one more issue that still seems to be worth considering – the work's social purpose and context.[2]

Although we may not find any direct references to moral philosophy or social thought in *Siris*, there are at least two reasons to pose a question about the connection of this work with Berkeley's social thought. Firstly, it is the context in which the work was created, which was dictated by the philosopher's other works. In essence, both before and after the publication of *Siris*, Berkeley was by and large interested in social issues, which had become the focus of his attention since the publication of the *Alciphron* (1732): with particular regard to *The Querist* (1735-37, 1750 – various editions), and also minor writings that were brought forth by a direct urge to voice his opinion on issues that were socially significant. These include *A Discourse addressed to Magistrates and Men in Authority* (1738), *Two Letters on the occasion of Jacobite Rebellion* (1745), *A Word to the Wise* (1749), and also *Maxims concerning Patriotism* (1750).[3]

The second of the reasons, which features in Berkeley's later works, is his striving to combine the threads which were earlier treated as independent. This is exemplified by a theological interpretation of the conclusions from *A New Theory of Vision* (1709), present in *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733); this interpretation can also be seen in the second edition of the *New Theory of Vision* in which Berkeley refers to sensory phenomena not as the language of *nature* but as the language of nature's *Author*. Another example is the

mann, *Berkeley's Two Panaceas*, „Intellectual History Review" no. 21, 2011; L. Peterschmitt, *Berkeley and Chemistry in the "Siris". The Rebuilding of a Non-existent Theory, New Interpretations of Berkeley's Thought*, in: *Religion and Science in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. S. Parigi, Dortrecht: Springer, 2010.

[2] Recently, the issue of social aspects of Berkeley's later philosophy was exposed in two articles: A. Grzeliński, *From "The Querist" to "Siris" and back: Berkeley's social philosophy 1737–1752*, "Ruch Filozoficzny" 2015, vol. 71, no. 4 and idem, "*The Querist" and the development of George Berkeley's understanding of society*, "Ruch Filozoficzny" 2016, vol. 72, no. 4.

[3] Those works on social issues and economy, included in volumes 6 and 7 of Luce's and Jessop's edition (*The Works of George Berkeley Bishop of* Cloyne, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, London-Edinburgh-Melbourne-Toronto-New York: Nelson, 1948–1957) have been recently translated into Polish and published in the volume *Pisma ekonomiczne i społeczne* (transl. and ed. by A. Grzeliński and M. Szymańska-Lewoszewska, Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2016). All the quotations to Berkeley's works are based on Luce and Jessop edition (referred to as *Works*); I use the following abbreviations: *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (*PHK*), Passive *Obedience* (*PO*), *Siris* (*S*), *Alciphron* (*ALC*), *Maxims concerning Patriotism* (*MP*), *The Querist* (*Q*); in all references I give the number of the work's paragraph (if needed), the number of volume of the Luce and Jessop's edition, and the page number).

speculations within chemistry in the sixth dialogue of the *Alciphron*, where Berkeley identifies soul with "essential oil" and animal spirit. In the work, this identification serves as a foundation of the rejected physiological and naturalistic understanding of soul whereas in the *Siris* the chemical processes are integral parts of the ladder of Creation reaching the invisible light along with God.[4] It documents Berkeley's consistency in developing his conception who, as early as during the 1730's, i.e. since he started his work on the *Alciphron*, endeavoured not only to expand on certain problems that were already argued, but also to incorporate the variety of the elements of his concepts into one unitary form.

In the present article, I would like to demonstrate the change that had taken place between the earlier and later works, given that, as I presume, the beginning of the changes can be traced back to the *Alciphron*. In particular, I would like to prove that a change that consisted in a departure from a moral and religious radicalism was linked to the adoption of a new metaphysics in the *Siris*. In earlier works the phenomenal world is opposed to the intelligible world, which was a manifestation of religious radicalism. Meanwhile, in the last of Berkeley's largest works, gradualist metaphysics goes hand in hand with treating the world as a whole that is filled with life, dynamic and self-perfecting, which provides room for intricate human relations.

The radicalism of Berkeley's early social views

At the beginning of the *Passive Obedience* (1712) Berkeley argues that "there are certain moral rules or laws of nature, which carry with them an eternal and indispensable obligation" (*PO* 4; *Works*, VI, 18) which can be discovered only by "the deductions of reason". However, in order for deductive reasoning to be possible, which enables derivation of detailed laws from a general rule, it is essential to determine the rule itself in the first place. This, in turn, is based on two premises: a) self-love is the "principle of all others the most universal, and the most deeply engraven in our hearts" (*PO* 6; *Works*, VI, 20) and it relates to both caution in life and the desire of salvation; b) the obviousness of the existence of God who is the creator of laws for the sake of mankind, which is guaranteed by the natural light. The principle of self-love in the scope related to

[4] See: T. Airaksinen, *Light and Causality in Siris*, p. 91–120.

prosperity in life is of natural, not moral nature, which Berkeley admits in the *Passive Obedience* 33 where he differentiates between two ways of comprehending the laws of nature: as "a dictate that guides conscious actions of rational beings" (i.e. moral law) and as the "general principle independent of human will" (natural law; *PO* 33; *Works*, VI, 35). Putting them on equal footing is, as he writes, „manifestly false; for this plain reason, because it would thence follow, a man may lawfully commit *any sin* whatsoever to preserve his life, than which nothing can be more absurd" (*PO* 35–36; *Works*, VI, 36).

Therefore, natural law (but not moral law) regards the regular course of nature that is independent of the will of rational beings, in particular being driven by earthly prosperity: avoidance of suffering and pursuit of pleasure. However, caution, thanks to which self-love is not only an impulse to indulge in casual whims, dictates to value remote benefits above momentary pleasures (*PO* 5; *Works*, VI, 19). However, in its moral dimension this "victory of reason over senses" does not refer to preferring the greater future earthly good overbalancing temporary calamities, but to preferring everlasting salvation over earthy life as a whole. Eventually, it is not the balancing of two conditions, the lesser and higher good, that matters, but the contradicting of what cannot be balanced or measured: earthly life and timeless eternity. „But as the whole earth – says Berkeley – and the entire duration of those perishing things contained in it, is altogether inconsiderable, or, in the prophet's expressive style, 'less than nothing' in respect of eternity, who sees not that every reasonable man ought so to frame his actions as that they may most effectually contribute to promote his eternal interest?" (*PO* 6; *Works*, VI, 20).

The point from which the assessment of human actions is made is infinitely remote from earthly life, whereas in contradiction to the relative good (which consists in balancing the earthly good and evil experienced by humans), the good that is promised by God is absolute and the principle that determines the value of deeds gains a moral dimension for its sake (PO 7; *Works*, VI, 20). Therefore, moral law functions in two aspects: it should be respected by humans both for their own sake, as well as on account of the obligation to realize the general good (both are manifestations of obligations towards God). However, on account of inherent weakness of men, reconciliation of both aspects of moral law (striving for one's salvation, as well as the well-being of the "entire human kind", which is the Creator's objective) is possible only because they are mediated in the political sphere, and particularly in respecting the law and the dictate of pas-

sive obedience which, by guaranteeing the possibility to realize common good, has the nature of moral law. Thus, moral law becomes a base for formulating detailed positive laws.[5] Quite contrary to them, perfecting human life on earth and "kind affection", which governs human relations, turns out to be a feeling which needs to be curbed or otherwise its consequences might be on a par with "unbridled lust", or even worse, as it is "apt to dazzle and corrupt the mind with the appearance of goodness and generosity". According to the latter interpretation, the reasoning contained in the *Passive Obedience* is to justify a set of principles of conduct marked by the authority of the Bible. At the very beginning (*PO* 2; *Works*, VI, 17–18) Berkeley argues that his intention is not to rest on the authority of the Holy Scriptures, but on the principles of reason, which are common to all people, but later adds that his objective is justification of religious prohibitions of Christianity, which seem to be utterly absurd in the case of the principle of passive obedience.

In a conceptual dimension, Berkeley's standpoint is based on natural law theory, and not utilitarianism, as some commentators would argue (especially Paul Olscamp in his book[6]). In a practical dimension it becomes a basis for particular social and political projects: the obligation of passive obedience to the

[5] There is a possibility of a "Kantian" interpretation of contradicting the phenomenal world and the intelligible world of morality. According to it, the moral obligation that is discovered by reason defines moral value of deeds which is independent of earthly prosperity. In other words, a timeless moral law materialises itself at the moment when the deed resulting from the obligation is being done, even if the person who performs it "brings himself to poverty death, or disgrace" (*PO* 13; *Works*, VI 23). According to such an interpretation, not only would the attitude of passive obedience guarantee the maintenance of and political order, but it would also propel gradual perfection of the law. Although moral advancement may ultimately be achieved for the price of suffering of the innocent, in the individual dimension it will be rewarded in afterlife. Moral attitude would prove to be not so much an embodiment of blind obedience to mindless authority, but superiority of mind over instinct. In the political dimension, moral perfection would boil down to a better law-making, which would define more accurately such terms as "perjury", "murder", or "adultery", according to the thesis assumed in Berkeley's notebooks (see the following entries of the *Philosophical Commentaries*: "Three sorts of useful knowledge, that of coexistence to be treated of in our Principles of Natural Philosophy, that of Relation in Mathematics, that of definition, or inclusion, or Words (which perhaps differs not from that of Relation) in Morality" (entry 853; *Works*, I, 101); "To demonstrate Morality it seems one need only make a Dictionary of Words & see which included which. At least. This is the greatest part & bulk of the Work" (entry 690, *Works*, I, 84)). However, it is difficult to find such explicit indications in the *Passive Obedience* that would allow such interpretation of moral perfection, a harbinger of later Kantian solution, in a political and moral dimension.

[6] P. Olscamp, *The Moral Philosophy of George* Berkeley, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff 1970, p. 47–84. D. Flage in his *Berkeley* quite convincingly argues that Berkeley's moral doctrine is not utilitarian but tends to natural law theory (Cambridge-Malde: Polity Press, 2014, p. 138–158).

supreme authority, social engineering in which, by means of top-down decisions, the prevailing habits would be modified by "sumptuary laws" or legislative "regulating public diversions by an absolute prohibition of those which have a direct tendency to corrupt our morals" in order that the true comprehension of religion enabled the creation of public spirit (*An Essay towards preventing the Ruin of Great Britain*; *Works*, VI, 78) or abduction of Indian children in order to educate them to become Christian missionaries promoting faith (*A Proposal for a Better Supplying of Churches*; *Works*, VII, 347). If moral law has been proclaimed by God, an effort must be taken to spread it to everyone.[7]

Siris – the new understanding of nature

The standpoint expressed in *Principles* and *Three Dialogues* rests on two following premises:

a) There is a contradistinction of God's efficient (and real) causality (i. e. creativity) and (false) causality referring to the order of phenomena.

b) The intelligible world and the phenomenal world are radically opposed to each other.

By definition, the entirety of nature is, as a Creation, perfect. The evil encountered in the world is either physical in nature, and follows from particularism of one's experience, or moral in nature and results from evil human deeds. The perfection of nature is deduced from the notion of its benevolent Author. Therefore, in the *Principles* Berkeley writes the following: „The very blemishes and defects of Nature are not without their use, in that they make an agreeable fort of variety, and augment the beauty of the rest of the creation, as shades in a picture to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts" (*PHK* 152; *Works*, II, 111). The entirety of nature is not the object of human experience, but a notion, whereas its beauty is treated in a metaphorical sense as the Creator is its only spectator.

[7] A more detailed analysis of Berkeley's religious fundamentalism in his Passive Obedience can be found in B. Belfrage, *The Mystery of Goodness in "Passive Obedience"*, in: *Bloomsbury Companion to Berkeley*, ed. R. Brook, B. Belfrage, London-New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017, p. 149 ff. Matti Häyry in his article *"Passive Obedience" and Berkeley's Moral Philosophy* stresses that the theory advocated by Berkeley offers "a layered view which provides a sketch of a minimalist private morality and very specific instructions on public ethics" ("Berkeley Studies" 2012, no. 23, p. 13) but he would probably agree with Belfrage's conclusions.

The incommensurability of these two orders – conceptual and phenomenal (related to ideas) – becomes the basis for criticism of Shaftesbury's concept in the *Alciphron*; according to the author of *Characteristics,* the experience of natural beauty and enthusiasm would serve as a confirmation of nature's perfection. However, the experienceable beauty that is praised by Shaftesbury bears no relevance to the rational notion of the perfection of nature deduced from the notion of Creator's good. According to Berkeley, enthusiasm, when it is aroused, may be nothing more than momentary exaltation, but it cannot provide a base for morality (which relates to the rational law, and not changeable feelings; heroic virtue and being driven by kind emotions may not be a substitute for law-making). Neither can it replace religion, particularly in reference to revealed religion, with its promise of afterlife, which guarantees motivation for morality and justifies subordination to supreme authority. Moreover, Shaftesbury's programme of basing morality on gradual mitigation of human feelings stands as a contradiction for the principles of reason. Kindness towards the whole mankind is barely possible, which can be but 'a heroic virtue of the chosen ones', and very often proves to be partial (as emphasised by Berkeley in the *Alciphron* (*ALC* III, 2; *Works* III, 116), which is corroborated by Hume in his *Treatise of Human nature* almost at the same time). The partiality of kindness is on the other hand contradicted with God's plan to achieve prosperity by the entire mankind.

However, as we have seen, the notion of "the general well-being of all men, of all nations, of all ages of the world, which God designs" (*PO* 7; *Works*, VI, 21) does not mean maximisation of the good by limiting evil, which is at the root of the utilitarian doctrine , but constitutes a base of rational law of nature. It is deductible by way of *deduction of reason* from the notion of the perfect Creator and is ultimately grounded in the promise of salvation for the just. Hence Alciphron's question 'Is there upon earth a human mind without the idea of order, harmony and proportion?' (*ALC* III, 8, *Works*, III, 123) must remain unanswered as, according to Berkeley, the notions become mixed - such harmony may be contemplated, but it will remain an intellectual notion and not the object of experience. The experience of beauty postulated by Shaftesbury might be its counterpart, but it is only a sudden elation. And even though it may impinge on human passions, it has nothing to do with reason.

Let us recall Berkeley's warning: „Tenderness and benevolence of temper (…) are more dangerous than other passions, insomuch as they are more plausible, and apt to dazzle and corrupt the mind with the appearance of goodness

and generosity" (*PO*, 13; *Works*, VI, 23). More, kindness does not follow from a moral obligation towards God but it is a purely human establishment which does not require religious assent, which may redirect attention from religious standpoint to purely human obligations. Hence kindness, as it belongs in the earthly world, does not corroborate with Berkeley's earlier views to whom all 'horizontal' human relations must be mediated by a 'vertical' obligation towards God.

However, a certain shift in Berkeley's standpoint can be discerned in the criticism of Shaftesbury's concept in *Alciphron*. He points out that moral sense as a power of appreciation of beauty and deformity of human actions, is but an abstract name of various powers, shaping the moral actions of man. The point is that each of them provides different, but always determinate, grounds of such behaviour, so the moral sense detached from conscience, affection, passion, education, reason and custom turns out to be a *je ne sais quoi* (as cited by Berkeley from Shaftesbury) (*ALC* III, 5; *Works*, III, 120). Although from the abovementioned reasons, Berkeley rejects the notion of moral sense, he still admits motives to moral actions other than purely rational. This shift will be even more discernible in later works.

It should be noted that Berkeley's early immaterialism was to provide a concept that would stand as a competition for the secular materialism that is based on scientific standpoint. It led to the separation of metaphysics and the scientific cognition of nature: the former related to real creation (*creatio*) of God in the world and his relation to man, whereas scientific cognition concerned permanent laws to which the phenomena were subordinated. From this point of view, immaterialism was a guarantee that the adoption of scientific achievements will not entail materialist metaphysics and will allow the reconciliation of the development of science with religious standpoint.

In the meantime, in the *Siris* the object of investigations are the phenomena of biology, physiology and chemistry, as well as those which relate to gravity, magnetism, electricity (*S* 235, 243; *Works*, V, 112, 116) the explanation of which would not be possible on the grounds of the principles of mechanical philosophy to which Berkeley referred in his earlier works. Here, Berkeley presents a hypothesis, in which the main role is played by the invisible fire – subordinated to God, but also being a subject of scientific investigations (though indirectly and only through their effects). Hence, Berkeley provides its readers with many references both to the speculative ancient philosophers (like Plato,

Plotinus and the stoics) and to the 17th-century natural philosophers and scientists, such as Homberg, Boerhaave, von Helmont and even Newton). He adopts their views and adjusts them to his general vision of the organic, animal-like universe, enlivened by invisible fire (*S* 152–156, 166, 175, 262, 273–279). The vision stresses the ancient and renaissance parallelism between the macrocosm (that is the universe) and microcosm (the man). As the primary efficient and final cause is the benevolent Reason which acts by the use of the secondary and intermediate cause of the invisible fire enlivening the world, so the principal cause in man is his mind, and the intermediate one – animal spirits enlivening his body. In *Siris* 43 we read for example: "light or solar emanation (…) in respect of the macrocosm is what the animal spirit is to the microcosm" (*S* 4; *Works*, V, 45–46). So, the parallelism can be described as follows:

God → invisible light/spirit → natural effects

Mind → animal spirits → living human body

Contrary to the *Alciphron, animal spirits* stop being treated as part of a mechanical image of nature. As much as for the 17th century physiology of Descartes, animal spirits mean 'a very fine air or wind', they are considered by Berkeley as an animating principle, or invisible fire. Let us go no further into the question of how promising was the project of reconciliation of the metaphysics with scientific investigations of Berkeley's times, or how profoundly Berkeley was acquainted with the discoveries of 17th and 18th-century chemistry that should have been its justification[8]. Nonetheless, adopting the Neo-platonic emanatism and the teleological vision of nature meant that immaterialism was no longer a handy weapon against emerging modern irreligious scientism. The dual nature of fire (divine and corporeal) need not be postulated, as Airaksinen appears to do[9]: rather, Berkeley seems to introduce a new notion of spirituality is extended and is gradable so that it also encompasses the principle of life 'vital flame' (*S* 205; *Works*, V, 101), being „a fine subtle spirit: rendering more gross part of the air „volatile and elastic" (*S* 150; *Works*, V, 81).

[8] See: L. Peterschmitt, *Berkeley and Chemistry in the "Siris". The Rebuilding of a Non-existent Theory*, p. 76 ff.

[9] T. Airaksinen, *The Path of Fire: The Meaning and Interpretation of Berkeley's "Siris"*, p. 274.

Ultimately, the image of nature in *Siris* is much more different from earlier depictions: it stops being only a group of phenomena read as a divine message from God directed to man, but it proves to be an organic entirety which resembles an animal or a plant. Macrocosm, like microcosm, although they are both governed by reason and enlivened by fire or animal spirits, can be temporarily corrupted. And even if nature, as the work of the incomparable Creator is not mortal, like human body is, its immortality is not identical with a perfection in the meaning of the word which can be found in *Principles*, where we read about "the very blemishes and defects of nature" that are but "shades in a picture serving to set off the brighter and more enlightened parts". Now Berkeley writes for example: "This mighty agents is everywhere at hand, ready to break forth into action, if not restrained and governed with the greatest wisdom. Being always restless and in motion, it actuates and enlivens the whole visible mass, is equally fitted to produce and to destroy, distinguishes the various stages of nature, and keeps up the perpetual round of generations and corruptions" (*Siris* 152; *Works*, V, 82). Destruction and corruptions are an indispensable part of the Creation, in which "natural evils will sometimes unavoidably ensue; things will be produced in a slow length of time, and arrive at different degrees of perfection" (*S* 256; *Works*, V, 122).

Nature is no longer conceived in static terms and its dynamism is recognized. In *Principles, Three Dialogues* or *De Motu* the stable and reliable laws of nature together with the immaterialist thesis were a premise for the providential order and the perfection of nature, and the beauty of Creation elevated human soul and convinced man about its perfection. The picture of the world was so overwhelming that it did not allow any hesitations: all imperfections were defects of men, who cannot explain all phenomena according to the well-established laws of nature, who are immoral, advancing temporal advantages over moral perfection (*Passive Obedience*), and, finally, who are too idle and lazy to gain profits by raising crops in the rich soil and to contribute to the wealth of the nation, guaranteed by God to the industrious (as he writes in the *Querist*). Also moral precepts that lead to "the general well-being of all Men, of all Nations, of all Ages of the World" refer to moral perfection and the promise of salvation of those who step on the path of Christian faith, rather than a remedy for earthly calamities. In the opposition to the universal and rational precepts, in *Siris* Berkeley exhorts to practice another way of improving the state of men: careful studies of nature and an immediate and temporary help for those in

need. In various cases tar-water should be used differently. Its universal effectiveness, its being a *panaceum* is nothing more than an assumption and hope. It cures not only the human soul (as the evidence of God's gift given to men), but also the weak and suffering human body. The beginning of this new attitude we can find in *The Querist* designed to help feed the hungry (*Advertisement*).

Berkeley's Late Social Philosophy

The change of the concept of nature and the acknowledgement of the inescapable nature of evil, which must not be redressed radically (either through the formation of a new Christian community in untainted Bermuda (*A Proposal for a Better Supplying of Churches*), or through the implementation of appropriate legal regulations (*Ruin*)), but through a gradual improvement of the social situation, can easily be seen in other works from Berkeley's later oeuvre, particularly in *The Querist*. In the 1750 edition, that is after *Siris*, Berkeley makes the following remarks:

> Whether there be anything perfect under the sun? And, whether it be not with the world as with a particular State, and with a State or body politic as with the human body, which lives and moves under various indispositions, perfect health being seldom or never to be found? (*Q* 343; *Works*, VI, 133).
>
> Whether, nevertheless, men should not in all things aim at perfection? And, therefore, whether any wise and good man would be against applying remedies? But whether it is not natural to wish for a benevolent physician? (*Q* 344; *Works* VI, 133).

Though economics and proper laws given by wise legislature are still the keys to a better future, it is not a lawgiver that proposes the remedies, but a benevolent physician. So Berkeley prescribes not only strict rules of the law, but says he should be a *benevolent* physician. Men deserve his help – in many aspects: religious, moral, but also in earthly matters. And again, although still it is human weakness and inability that is the source of human misery and it is the duty of the physician to improve it, now – and perhaps not earlier – Berkeley admits that "nothing under the sun is perfect".

Also in the third Letter to Thomas Prior (according to the Luce-Jessop edition), describing the forerunners of the plague that could invade the Britannic islands (unusual quantity of insects, epidemic distempers among the cattle, long easterly winds), he adds: "Beside these natural forerunners of a plague or pestilence in the air, it is worth observing that a prognostic may be also made from moral and religious disposition of the inhabitants. Certainly that the digitus Dei doth manifest itself in the plague was not only the opinion of mankind in general, but also in particular of the most eminent physicians throughout all ages down to our own" (*Works*, V, 190–191).

Although Berkeley, still a faithful Christian, is still trying to justify God's sentences by seeing the right punishment for human immorality in them, he feels obliged to give a detailed prescription to ease people and to help them bear the suffering – of course instructing them how to use a preventive medicine in order to avoid the plague.

Thus the main highlights of Berkeley's change in social opinions in his late works, starting with the publication of *The Querist* can be summarised as follows.

a) First, the perspective changes: the earthly world stops being insignificant compared with the promised afterlife. Although Berkeley still believes in Providence that governs the world but it is not as close and within reach and God is no longer 'intimately present to our minds' (*PHK* 149, *Works*, II, 109). God's management over the world, mediated by the chain of being, seems to be more remote. Although the perfection of the entirety of creation derives from the notion of a good Creator, from the perspective of man, temporal, earthly and limited, the perfection is in progress. From this perspective the world is not perfect, therefore evil must be mitigated as it occurs.

b) The understanding of the state changes from mechanical to theological. In *Passive Obedience* all subjects must respond to supreme authority, and the legitimacy of its verdicts is guaranteed by its corroboration with the provisions of moral law. However, as the measures that lead to the ultimate goal, which is the good of the entire community, require knowledge that is inaccessible to all subjects, they should be passively obedient to power. Discerning good and evil individually, which is one-sided and not supported by knowledge, may not lead to good at all. The relationship between supreme power and the subject is mechanical in nature (the obligation of obedience, necessity of punishment for the breach of the law). In *The Querist*, the society is compared to the organic construct the whole of which is hierarchical, and particular social classes should

contribute to the public good, each in its own, proper way, gentlemen and criminals alike (Q 53, 57). Social structure is inviolable and sacred, feeding the poor and clothing the naked is like "feeding the root, the substance whereof will shoot upwards into the branches, and cause the top to flourish" (*Q* 59; W, VI, 109). Or, less metaphorically: "Whether the dirt, and famine, and nakedness of the bulk of our people, might not be remedied even although we had no foreign trade? And whether this should not be our first care, and whether, if this were once provided for, the conveniences of the rich would not soon follow?" (*Q* 106; *Works*, VI, 114). In *Maxims concerning Patriotism* Berkeley remarks: „The patriot aims at his private good in the public. The knave makes the public subservient to his private interest. The former considers himself as part of a whole, the latter considers himself as a whole" (*MP* 27; *Works*, VI, 254).

c) The third of the changes: instead of contriving to change radically, Berkeley opts for a gradual change of morality. Such calamities as famine or epidemic cannot be counteracted once only and radically through legal solutions. If Berkeley suggests such solutions in this period, that would yield miraculous effects, such as the appointment of the national bank (*Project for a National Bank*), its effects (the promotion of diligence, ingenuity and economic development) will also be revealed but gradually.

d) Berkeley's views are characterised by a religious radicalism much less intense than in his earlier works. Another manifestation of this change is a different attitude towards Catholics compared to the hostility towards them expressed in the *Proposal*. In *The Querist*, Berkeley suggest allowing Catholics to study at universities run by Protestants (*Q* 191; *Works*, VI, 120), and in *A Word to the Wise* (1749) he prevails upon them to act together "to promote the common good of our country" (*Works*, VI, 235). This conviction of losing the monopoly for religious truth goes hand in hand with a generally more sceptical attitude that characterises Berkeley in *Siris*. His honest religious enthusiasm that follows from a new method of interpreting God's creation in the world, as well as the vision of Providence that provides the humanity with the panaceum, is largely mitigated by scepticism. Although Berkeley is brimmed with hope for a commonly accessible remedy, he repeatedly advocates caution and the need to rely on subsequent experiments and the verdict of time. He is similarly cautious about formulating conclusions related to the phenomena of electricity, magnetism, etc. and the possibility to implement the hypothesis of the existence of invisible fire equated with the substance of light. Hence the search for support

in the ancient lore, but also admitting that some old concepts are right in terms of religion. Certainly, both in relation to the understanding of nature and religiousness, Berkeley would not write what he had written in the *Principles*: "If by Nature is meant some being distinct from God, as well from the Laws of Nature, and things perceived by sense, I must confess that word is to me an empty sound, without any intelligible meaning annexed to it. Nature in this acceptation is a vain chimera introduced by those heathens, who had not just notions of the omnipresence and infinite perfection of God" (*PHK* 150; *Works*, II, 109–110).

e) In the conceptual dimension, the relationship between natural good (human prosperity) and the moral good also changes. The dictate of active attitude towards the improvement of the society's earthly existence gains a moral dimension, which stands in contradiction with an earlier dictate of a *passive* obedience, which followed from the impossibility of the cognition of positive moral rules. In the *Passive Obedience*, following the dictate of one's natural good (prosperity) gained a moral dimension thanks to religion in the sense that it was only the vision of afterlife that provided an impulse for respecting the moral law that follows from religious dictates. Moral law can be deduced from the notion of God and read from the Holy Scriptures. Thus the moral egoism (need for salvation) intertwined with the concept of natural law and provided an impulse for action. On the other hand, in the last period of his writing, the Irish philosopher seems to approach the utilitarian standpoint. In the new social and moral conception he advocates the increase of natural wealth for the largest possible number of people (by feeding the hungry, promoting ingenuity, curing the ill). Individual goods may be compared, and occasionally the lesser evil should be chosen: „Whether, if drunkenness be a necessary evil, men may not as well drink the growth of their country?" – as Berkeley asks in *The Querist* (*Q* 113; *Works*, VI, 114), although he would not have asked that question in *Alciphron*, criticising Mandeville's concept.

Conclusions

In the world where nothing is perfect under the sun, there is no room for the realization of the absolute good. Experience and social practice demonstrate that the notions of reason all have in common one feature – they cannot be im-

plemented by way of one verdict. A plague of drunkenness cannot be forestalled by one prohibition act, the realization of the plan to extricate Ireland from the collapse by new financial institutions is not possible without a change in behaviour and habits, and last but not least, the principle of passive obedience based on the deductions of reason requires correction on account of the daily political practice, which, in the face of daily disputes between parties, requires moderation (*MP* 28, 37; *Works*, VI, 252–255). Hence, the place of earlier unwavering verdicts of reason is occupied by short-term actions that aim at the provision of good, in which all members of the society are involved. It is true that the comprehension of the common good is not accessible to everyone. However, the actions, both on a political and social plane, aim at the mitigation of a given evil, and not striving for the absolute good which is unachievable in this world.

Discussions on moral and social philosophy are naturally concentrated on the earlier works, i.e. the *Passive Obedience* and the *Alciphron*. However, it is hard to contradict that the description of the economic situation and the plan to establish a national bank must have been underlain by a certain notion of the society. In the case of *Siris* the situation is similar. Regardless of the vastness of the work's subject matter, which attracts its readers by deliberations on tar water, physics, chemistry and biology, as well as metaphysical speculations, its practical purpose must be borne in mind. In the last paragraph of *Siris* Berkeley looks back at his previous achievements and quoting Cicero's words he seems to acknowledge his earlier mistakes: "He that would make a real progress in knowledge must dedicate his age as well as youth, the later growth as well as first fruits, at the altar of Truth. *Cujusvis est errare, nullius nisi insipientis in errore perseverare*" (*S* 368; *Works*, V, 164). The significance of this entry, which is very personal end finishes off the deliberations quite unexpectedly, may be comprehended if compared to two opening mottos from *Siris* taken from the Epistles of Horace: "Let us, both small and great, push forward in this work, in this pursuit: if to our country, if to ourselves we would live dear" and from the New Testament: "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people" (*Works*, V, 1).

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