

# BERKELEY REVISITED: THE HARD PROBLEM CONSIDERED EASY

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The philosophical mind-body problem, which David Chalmers has named the 'Hard Problem', concerns the nature of the mind and the body. Physicalist approaches, which claim that the mind can be reduced to physical phenomena, have been explored intensively in recent years but have brought no consensual solution. On the other hand, dualistic approaches, which hold that the universe comprises two fundamentally different kinds of existence — mental and physical — have also been scrutinised since René Descartes (“Dialogues on Method”, 1643), but without consensual success. Mentalism has received little attention, yet it offers an elegantly simple solution to the hard problem. This doctrine holds that only the mental world really exists, and that the physical world is a fiction.

This paper revisits Berkeley's theory, historically known as 'subjective idealism' (first put forward in "A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge", 1710). It is re-interpreted here from the perspective of modern linguistic philosophy. On this view, the physical world is considered as a convenient fiction, embodied in a language-game which contains the discourse of the physical sciences.

Mentalism is sometimes falsely thought to be the same as solipsism. Solipsism is the crazy belief that you are the only sentient being that exists. This is a pathological form of mentalism in which no attempt is made to explain the world.

In the sane form of mentalism that George Berkeley advocated, it is recognised that there are constraints on what we can do and perceive. For instance, if you try to walk through a wall, you perceive a resistance. Berkeley posited an external mental agency that imposes those constraints. Because of the cultural norms at the time, he called this agency ‘God’, but there is no imputation to it of the traditional religious attributes such as beneficence.

This external mental agency (‘God’) maintains within itself persistent ideas of what we call objects. This is what gives us the impression that we are surrounded by persisting objects, even though the physical world does not really exist.

There is an obvious tension between asserting that reality is mental, and respecting the predictive and explanatory success of the physical sciences. There are two strands to this tension. First, there is a feeling that science has explained almost everything, and needs only to tidy up some loose ends, and that the mind is another detail waiting to be cleaned up. But, although the domain of physical investigation is certainly boundless, there is also an infinitely rich realm where physical science has no grip: that of qualitative experience. It is mere sophistry to say that the domain of the physical sciences is 'bigger' than the realm of subjective experiences, and it might be that science has grappled with only a small corner of reality. The second strand of tension is a concern that mentalism flatly contradicts basic and crucial premisses of everyday life, and that a genuine subjective idealist cannot live a normal, sane life. That concern can be addressed by separating clearly the different language-games that are

employed in scientific discourse, mundane discourse, and philosophy. This is a solution that Berkeley hinted at but did not develop. Statements that are made within any given discourse (such as physics) can be held to be true, without any commitment to the ontological status of what is denoted by the statement. Such statements function like metaphors. On this view, physical facts can be accepted as true without contradicting mentalism, because those statements are safely contained within a language-game, which is carried on as if the physical world were real. Physical statements are true because they correspond (in the Searlean sense) with reality, but the reality with which they agree is quite different from the reality they denote. The reality they correspond with is made up of facts about the mental forces (which Berkeley called God) that generate our perceptions.

To obtain a clearer view of the ontology of the mental and physical worlds, we must look at the analysis of language into its constituent language-games, which we will do below. First, I will try to motivate this discussion by sketching why we need to consider mental monism.

## **2. THE LIMITS OF PHYSICALIST SCIENCE**

Despite astounding successes in all other branches of knowledge, science has not delivered the goods on consciousness. Despite massive progress in the related fields of cognitive science on the one hand, and neuropsychology on the other, it does not seem that science is even tackling what David Chalmers has called the ‘hard problem’: what is the nature of consciousness?

One has only to look at how physics works to see that a physicalist science is logically incapable of accounting for consciousness. Physics is based on fundamental entities, such as sub-microscopic particles, which are defined completely and exclusively in terms of their relations to another fundamental physical entities. The contents of consciousness (such as a visual experience of redness) are not defined in this way. Instead, they are forced upon us as presentations: they are given, not constructed. Therefore, the contents of consciousness can never appear as terms in a theory that is derived from physical concepts.

The inability of physics ever to account for consciousness is, on this view, a simple tautology.

As S. Torrance pointed out in an earlier paper in this conference, any theory that accounts for experience in terms of some non-experiential substrate will inevitably run up against the Chalmerian ‘hard problem’. Whether the substrate is matter, or a spiritual substance, or information, we still face the same question: why is that substrate accompanied by qualia?

Even a dual-aspect theory such as that of David Chalmers, is derailed by the same barrier. Saying that mental (or phenomenal, or proto-phenomenal) qualities constitute an ‘inner’ aspect of the basic constituents of the reality, while the physical properties form an ‘outer’ aspect, does not escape the hard problem. We are still compelled to ask why the basic units of reality have these two aspects.

The only escape from the hard problem is to assert monism: that the mind alone is the primary reality, and that what we call the ‘physical world’ is really a theoretical construct or fiction.

## **3. REFORMULATING MENTAL MONISM**

### 3.1 THE LANGUAGE-GAME OF EVERYDAY SPEECH

Everyday speech is incontrovertible in so far as it reliably produces its required effects in the minds of listeners. It does its job as well as any other workaday tool, like tables and chairs, and knives and forks. Some philosophers have, however, attached a metaphysical significance to the utterances of everyday speech and have then assumed that those extraneous metaphysical attachments are likewise incontrovertible. The Oxford philosopher J.L. Austin famously did this in the 1950s, but many people have done the same thing under different guises since then.

The metaphysicians of everyday speech assume that these utterances continue to play a communicative role even when removed from the context in which they originate. In fact, they do not. Let us take an example: when my friend walks in from the street, I ask her about the weather, and she answers, “It’s raining”, and I then put on my raincoat and go outside, where I find that it is indeed raining but the coat keeps my clothes dry. Here, the utterance “It’s raining” does its job of giving me correct information, just as the raincoat does its job of keeping me dry. Using Wittgenstein’s terms, *within* this ‘way of life’ utterances form a ‘language-game’, and the *only* job done by this utterance in that language-game is to give me information about certain actual and counterfactual sensory experiences, such as the tactile feeling of wetness that I would get if I were to go out without my raincoat. Therefore, within that language-game, the utterance is true if and only if those sensory states of affairs hold. Following John Searle’s version of the representation theory of meaning, we can say that, within that language-game, the meaning of the utterance “It’s raining” comprises just those mental facts.

Austin and those who have gone down the same road take the utterance “It’s raining” out of its everyday language-game, where it was undoubtedly true, and deposit it in the metaphysicians’ language-game, without reviewing what its truth-conditions would be in that new language-game. They are saying that, if “It’s raining” is true in everyday speech, the rainwater must have a real existence in the ontological sense. The mention of ‘real existence’ is, however, part of another language game, namely that of philosophy.

The error that is being made here is more striking when we transplant figurative expressions out of context. In everyday speech, I can truthfully say, “I flew off my handle”, or “I am in two minds whether to go to the cinema”, or “I don’t feel myself today”. It would be obviously absurd to take these out of context and claim that my ‘handle’ has a real existence.

In a philosophical paper such as this, however, we are taking a big jump out of the everyday language-game altogether. This paper exists in a meta-language-game, and it treats everyday speech as an object language-game. This language-game of everyday speech can also accommodate meta-linguism, for it contains both object language and meta-language. Within the language-game of everyday speech, Tarski’s account of truth holds: “It’s raining” is true if and only if it is raining. Outside it, however, in the philosophical language-game, the truth conditions are susceptible to another mode of description, namely: “It’s raining” is true if and only if all the actual and counterfactual facts of our mental experiences support that statement.

### 3.2 THE LANGUAGE-GAME OF PHYSICS

In order to frame predictive and explanatory models, physics has found it necessary to go beyond everyday speech and build up, over the past three centuries, a new language-game. It has brought into play new terms, and new uses of old terms — such as “atom”, “force”,

“energy”. A physical model consists of a story told in these new terms. In order to make practical use of a physical model, however, a translation must be made between certain propositions in the physicist’s language-game and propositions (about measuring instruments) in the language-game of everyday speech. Within the physicists’ language-game, a proposition’s truth-conditions consist in its logical relations with other propositions within the game.

Within the broader language-game, however, physical propositions have a derived truth-condition, which is obtained by the linkage between physical and everyday statements about measuring instruments.

### **3.3 THE USE OF FICTIONS**

A useful paradigm for the handling of multiple language-games can be found in discussions of literary fictions. As an example, imagine a seminar on “Gulliver’s Travels” by Jonathan Swift (a contemporary and compatriot of Berkeley). Within this context, people may truthfully make assertions about Gulliver’s life and the lands that he visited. If a newcomer were to interrupt the seminar, pointing out that “Gulliver could not possibly have landed in Brobdignag or anywhere else, because Gulliver did not really exist”, then that would be seen as an absurd category error. The tutor might answer, “It is true that Gulliver didn’t really exist, but for the purposes of this seminar we are talking as if he did. Hence we can state that Gulliver did go to Brobdignag, and the truth conditions for this statement are the sentences in Swift’s book that entail that statement.” The newcomer had extracted statements that are true within the language-game of the fiction and placed them in the broader language-game of everyday speech, where they are false. Normally, however, people find no difficulty in respecting the separation of the two language-games: they do not get confused between literary fictions and real life.

Next door to the seminar on “Gulliver’s Travels” there is a seminar on particle physics. The newcomer wanders in and again interrupts, saying “The electron cannot possibly travel around the nucleus of the atom or anywhere else, because it does not really exist — it is a mathematical fiction.” What does the tutor say now?

### **3.4 THE MENTAL AND THE PHYSICAL: RESOLVING THE HARD PROBLEM**

The world that is described by physics consists of entities and operations that are defined wholly by their logical relations with other entities and operations within that world. Terms that denote things that are defined by their intrinsic qualities, as opposed to being defined by logical relations, do not and cannot feature in the language of physics. Hence qualitative mental experiences can, by definition, never exist in the physical world.

The mind-body problem stems from the fact that we know from direct experience that our qualitative mental experiences have a real existence, but we also commonly believe that the physical world too has a real existence — and, moreover, we have the impression from everyday life that the mental world interacts with the physical world in so far as volitions produce muscular movements, and the sensory organs produce mental experiences. The problem is to give an account of how these fundamentally different kinds of existents can ever interact. Chalmers has applied the somewhat loaded term “easy” to problems that lie within

physics, in the sense that the solution of such problems involves only entities and operations that are defined wholly by their logical relations; and the term “hard” to problems that cannot be solved in that manner. The mind-body problem is thus a hard problem in that sense.

Berkeley’s philosophy resolves the problem at a stroke. The physical world simply does not exist, and the discourse of physics is a language-game that depicts a fictional world. (To be sure, Berkeley did not use the term “language-game”, but what he was trying to say can best be expressed using this term, which Wittgenstein introduced 250 years later.) Our impression of being immersed in the physical world is an illusion produced by the object-oriented patterns of sensory experiences. On this view, the so-called Hard Problem is thus quite easy. In its place, of course, a host of other, hard problems arise — but these are ‘hard’ with a small “h” because their solutions lie within the mental world and are not required to span the mental and physical worlds.

### **3.5 SUCCESS AND FAILURE OF REFERENCE**

Terms denoting mental experiences can be given ostensive definitions easily, because we have ready access to the experiences in our minds and can therefore secure reference to them. This is not true of terms denoting physical things. We have no access to such things within our minds, therefore we cannot secure a reference to them. Physical constructs are defined ultimately in terms of physical fundamentals, such as time, space, and mass. Those fundamentals have no further definition, and do not occur in the contents of the mind. They are therefore devoid of reference: they are, as it were, tokens in a language game, whose only defining attributes are their relations to other such tokens.

In the case of a true game, such as chess, that is the end of the story. A pawn has no significance beyond its relations to the other pieces on the chess board. The physical sciences, however, have some extra weight, in so far as they can collectively predict empirical observations. What we find, in fact, is an association of a certain class of propositions with experiences: namely those concerning physiologically detectable facts in our immediate environment. For instance, this physical piece of paper has four right-angled corners, and when I look at it I experience visual sensations that (for obvious historical reasons) go under the same name, of right-angled corners. Propositions about three-dimensional forms that produce images on the retina, or about hot or cold materials in contact with our skin, and so on, are subject to a conventional mapping into the domain of mental experience.

What this means, I suggest, is that statements about physiologically discernible facts refer to facts about those mental experiences. This applies only to the statements, not to the terms.

This is a notoriously difficult conceptual point to navigate around. Many philosophers in the past have foundered here because they propounded some simplistic formula to describe the relationship between the physical propositions and the associated sense data. I think it will be some years before we get it right. What is clear, though, is that the physical statements we are talking about here do refer to sense data, whereas other physical statements, about physiologically indiscernibles, have no reference at all.

If you slap your hand on a desk and say, “The word ‘table’ refers to this solid object”, then all you have succeeded in referring to is a constellation of visual, tactual, and auditory sense-data and their relations.

It is often suggested that we can establish a reference to the physical world as ‘the substrate that causes our experiences’, but that presupposes a reference to physical causation, which begs the question of how we would secure a reference to causation. The only other notion of cause we have is that of volition, but to propose that there is a substrate willing our experiences into being would entail that the substrate is mental.

### 3.6 THE SUBJECT OF EXPERIENCE AND VOLITION

The biggest lacuna in Berkeley’s scheme is where we would expect to find the concept of the subject, or ‘spirit’ in Berkeley’s terms. The contents of conscious experience are held to be the paradigmatic case of existence: hence, as physical matter is not a conscious experience, it does not really exist. If we were to follow that line of thinking further, however, we would reach the conclusion that a subject who has experiences or volitions has no real existence, since he/she/it is not itself a conscious experience. Berkeley’s answer was that, although the subject has, properly speaking, no experience of itself, it nonetheless has a ‘notion’ of itself. On the face of it, this is a major breach in Berkeley’s logic, for if we could have a notion of an unperceived subject, then we could likewise have a notion of unperceived matter, in which case, we must let the whole of physics in through the back door, as it were. That Berkeley himself saw that this was an unconvincing answer is evident in the insubstantial replies that Philonous gives Hylas on this point. The opposite direction, which David Hume embraced but Berkeley did not countenance, is to claim that there is no subject, only a fleeting stream of experiences.

There is another possible answer that Berkeley considers but rejects: this involves dropping the absolute distinction that Berkeley makes between experiences on the one hand and acts of experiencing or willing on the other. On Berkeley’s view, an experience is an inert something that is generated in your mind either by yourself or by some other agent. Instead of that view, we could conceive of your experience as being a logical product of acts of willing by yourself and others. One way of doing so is to view each act of perception as (a) a volitional selection by yourself of a cognition classification of (b) another agent’s volitional act. (Let us consider a concrete analogy to bring this abstraction down to earth. In different linguistic communities, the sounds made by non-human animals are perceived as different phonemes. For instance, an anglophone hears a duck “quack” and a dog “bark”. Here, the anglophone selects an auditory cognition (“quack” or “bark”) of the animal’s act of making a noise. The quack or the bark has no external existence: nor is it an inert something, as Berkeley thought.) My suggestion is that this model applies to all perception in general thus: first, a volitional act is performed by a spirit, possibly God, and then the perceiver chooses some cognition of it.

This brings us to a philosophy rather like that of Arthur Schopenhauer, who was a great admirer of Berkeley.

For the sake of completeness, I will sketch a further consideration of this model. Acts of willing can be nested in another act of willing. You can decide to carry out a course of action, each step of which constitutes a smaller act of willing. Logically, there is no limit to the chronological extent of the course of action: it might span decades. My suggestion here is that a spirit is essentially a cluster of extended series of volitional acts, with each cluster itself being an act of willing.

On this model, all experiences are reduced to acts of willing. We might view this as a further evolution of Berkeleyism, in which we replace a complex scheme of spirits, experiences, and acts of experiencing and willing with a simple system of acts of willing only.

#### 4. APPLICATION OF MENTALISM TO PARAPSYCHOLOGY

Solving Chalmers' Hard Problem is the primary gain of mentalism. Paradoxically, however, it is not the feature most likely to attract serious interest. This is because faith in promissory physicalism is so strong that mere philosophical arguments are unlikely ever to win support for mentalism. A secondary gain, which has more political leverage, is the possibility of founding a theory for parapsychological phenomena such as telepathy.

##### 4.1 TELEPATHY

As soon as we drop the identification of the mind with the brain (or with anything in the brain, such as an informatic process), then we also drop the localisation of the mind. A mind is nowhere in physical space: it has no spatial coordinates, and two minds cannot be said to be near to, or far from, each other — even though any two brains will inevitably have some definite distance between them. Two things follow from this, which are pertinent to paranormal phenomena.

First, any channel of communication between two minds that is not tied to a physical process between the associated brains will be independent of how far away those brains are: as there is no concept of inter-mental space, there is no such thing as inter-mental distance.

Second, the physical correlates of mental events are spatially non-specific. To see this, suppose that a mental event  $\mu$  is correlated by some psychophysical bridging law  $L$  to the physical event  $\phi = L(\mu)$ . The description of the physical event  $\phi$  cannot specify its spatial location, for the following reason. First, note that  $\phi$  cannot be defined by an absolute spatial position because absolute space is simply not a physical concept.<sup>1</sup> So, the definition of its spatial location would have to relate to the location of the mental event  $\mu$ , but that is impossible because, as we have seen, mental events are non-spatial. Hence, for any given mental event  $\mu$ , the physical correlate  $\phi$  could be anywhere in the universe.

Now, one of the persistent and baffling features of reported telepathy is that the success rate of telepathic transmission is unaffected by the distance between the transmitter and receiver. If telepathy were achieved by the emission of, say, electromagnetic energy, then the transmission would be constrained by the inverse-square law and its efficiency would fall off with the distance between the two brains. If, however, it is achieved through a non-physical channel between two minds, where there is no inter-mental distance, then we would indeed expect it to be independent of the remoteness of the brains.

Another feature of telepathy that would be baffling if we were seeking a physical explanation is the 'addressing' of the transmission (to borrow a term from computer science). Does the

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<sup>1</sup>In fact, this was one of Berkeley's successful criticisms of the physics of his illustrious contemporary, Sir Isaac Newton.

sender target the transmission toward the receiver and, if so, how? If the human brain is somehow acting as a directional aerial for telepathic transmissions, then the orientation of the sender's head would be crucial to the success of transmission. As far as I am aware, the literature does not support the hypothesis that the orientation of the sender's body has any relevance, nor even that it makes any difference whether the sender knows where the receiver is. Or, does the transmission itself contain some signal that identifies whom it is aimed at? After all, if telepathy is a natural phenomenon, then we might expect the world to be awash with telepathic messages flying between people: if so, how does a particular receiver know which messages are intended for her? Consider an analogy from electromagnetic transmission: if you want your radio to tune in to the broadcasts from a particular transmitter, you adjust your aerial to pick electromagnetic waves of a certain wavelength. What is the telepathic equivalent of tuning into a radio wavelength? And how could a telepathic receiver know in advance what to tune into?

In experiments on remote staring, as reported by Marilyn Schlitz in this conference, the telepathic transmission even seems to go down the cable of a closed-circuit television camera.

The Berkeleian model suggests a possible explanation. Given that the physical correlate of a mental event is spatially non-specific, the correlate of a given thought could be in any brain, anywhere. This suggests the following communications protocol for telepathy. Suppose the brain contains an 'uploading area'  $\phi_1$  and a 'downloading area'  $\phi_2$ , and suppose that the human mind is continually inspecting the contents of the uploading area and conveying it into a mental buffer  $\mu_0$ , and also continually setting the state of the downloading area to whatever is currently in that mental buffer  $\mu_0$ . To transmit telepathically, the sender's brain places into  $\phi_1$  some ideas that are specific to the occasion (for instance, ideas about the experiment, or about the intended recipient), associated with the particular data that are to be transmitted. Those ideas will then be deposited via  $\mu_0$  into  $\phi_2$ , wherever it might be in physical space. The receiver will be examining the contents of  $\phi_2$  and, as soon as it detects the presence of ideas specific to the occasion, it will retrieve the associated data and deliver it into the conscious mind of that individual (or, according to Schlitz's results, to the subconscious mind only).

Obviously this is a sketchy theory and includes no neurophysiological detail but, from an informatic point of view, something equivalent to this is plausible once we assume a Berkeleian model of telepathy.

This theory entails certain testable predictions. Consider, for instance, an experiment to transmit a visual image, as in the routine Zenner cards. If the image to be transmitted incorporates a significant amount of material that is already known and expected by the receiver, then it should be easier for the receiver to detect the transmitted material in the download area  $\phi_2$ .

## 4.2 JUST-IN-TIME MODEL GENERATION

Let us now move from thought transference to parapsychological phenomena that seem to change the physical world directly.

In the conventional scientific view, there is an objective world already existing independently of our observations and which, in fact, generate our observations. On the Berkeleian view, this is still true, but here a certain degree of flexibility may be possible. For Berkeley, the objective

world was situated in God's mind and consisted in some divine thought structure. There may, however, be a certain economy of God's thoughts. Why should God give any thought to those regions of space where there are no sentient beings? Or to those parts and aspects of the world around us that no sentient being is going to observe? Is God really going to think about every quark and lepton in the universe, even those that will have no perceptible effect for any finite mind?

Most of the facts of the physical world are never observed. On the physicalist perspective, this is of no great significance. In the Berkleian view, however, it raises the question of whether 'God' bothers to think about all the bits of the universe that have not yet been observed. On grounds of economy, we should assume that God thinks about only as many of the physical facts as he needs to generate the conscious observations.

The principle of Just-in-Time Model Generation states that facts about the physical world become true only when they are observed, or when they are entailed by observed facts.

Formally, we can express it as follows. Let  $P(t_1)$  be the set of physical facts observed up to time  $t_1$ , and let  $Q_i$  be a possible set of antecedent physical facts that entails  $P(t_1)$ . Then  $Q = \{Q_i\}$  is the set of possible histories consistent with the observations  $P(t_1)$ . According to the principle of Just-in-Time Model Generation, the choice of which  $Q_i$  is to be realised is left open at time  $t_1$ . (This principle is motivated purely by the logic of mentalism, but it does have a suggestive similarity to quantum physics. But the principle applies equally to macroscopic events that are not subject to quantum indeterminacy.)

'Synchronicity' is a phenomenon reported by Carl Jung, as meaningful coincidences that are causally unrelated, but which are psychically related to a mental state that you have at that time. 'Manifesting' is a phenomenon in which visualisation is used to produce some outcome in the external world. The events constituting the significant or desired outcome may have physical causes antecedent to the associated mental state.

Can mentalism account for them? Well, let  $P_a(t_2)$  and  $P_b(t_2)$  be two possibilities for the physical facts observed by time  $t_2$ , both of which are consistent with the facts  $P(t_1)$  that were observed at time  $t_1$ . Of these, suppose that  $P_b$  is the desired outcome. Now, out of the histories  $Q = \{Q_i\}$  that support  $P(t_1)$ , there are subsets  $Q_a, Q_b \subseteq Q$  that also entail  $P_a(t_2)$  and  $P_b(t_2)$  respectively, e.g.  $Q_a = \{Q_i : Q_i \Rightarrow P_a(t_2)\}$ . Under mentalism, we can speculate that a mind could, at time  $t_1$ , somehow cause  $Q_b$  rather than  $Q_a$  to be realised. Note that each  $Q_i$  will include physical facts that refer to times earlier than time  $t_1$ . From a physicalist perspective it looks as if the mind at  $t_1$  is changing the past! From the mentalist perspective, though, that unpalatable conclusion does not arise.

### 4.3 A NEW PRINCIPLE OF COMPLEMENTARITY

Using the principal of Just-in-Time Model Generation, we could suppose that different causal laws could co-exist in the world. For instance, one could postulate a causal scheme based on, say, the flow of chi energy, as is employed in acupuncture and feng shui. By selecting appropriate unobserved histories  $Q_i$ , an agent could implement this alternative system of causal laws without violating the ordinary laws of physics.

We could describe this as a new principle of complementarity: when we carry out experiments that test physical laws, we find that they hold; but when we carry out experiments to test the laws of chi energy, we find that they hold. In other words, performing an experiment that is designed to find a physical explanation for something like acupuncture may simply destroy the effect.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

I have no conclusions, only some suggestions.

I suggest that we should look at mentalism as a contender for the correct understanding of the nature of consciousness.

To motivate this, I suggest that we should investigate how mentalism could provide the foundations for a theoretical account of parapsychological phenomena without contravening established scientific knowledge. If this gets us anywhere, then one of the spin-offs could be a systematic basis on which to conduct experiments in parapsychology: a Popperian programme of deriving falsifiable hypotheses from a general theory, instead of the present *ad hoc* approach.

## 6. POSTSCRIPT: THE POLITICS OF ONTOLOGY

Academic studies take place in a real world, where certain approaches and positions are deemed unworthy of serious, funded research. Mentalism is seen as being beyond the fringes of philosophy, and reports of paranormal events are, in Charles Fort's celebrated expression, the damned data of science. Yet, in the space of possible theories, mentalism is close to such ideas as pan-experientialism in the mainstream philosophy of consciousness and paranormal phenomena are no weirder than the predictions of exotic physics. What is it about mentalism that puts people off?

It is true that it could be thought of as weird and bizarre. But that does not explain the vigour and confidence of the opposition to it. After all, modern physics has been weird and bizarre for almost a century, ever since Einstein published his theory of relativity.

Nor is it because of its associations with religion, or the fact that Berkeley used the 'G-word'. Those associations can be forgiven and forgotten, just as it is forgotten that Newton spent a lot of his time in studies of the occult.

I believe the underlying reason for hostility to mentalism is that it is not yet of any use. It does not yet have any predictive or explanatory power. Only when a new scientific discipline has been built on mentalism, even to a rudimentary level, will mentalism become respectable. The most promising way forward seems to be to try to develop detailed and testable theories about parapsychological phenomena.