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BERKELEY, BERGSON AND QUALIA: AN ATTEMPT TO OVERCOME KANTIAN'S LEGACY IN CONTEMPORARY PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Berkeley, Bergson i qualia: próba przezwyciężenia kantowskiego dziedzictwa w filozofii współczesnej

Słowa kluczowe: Berkeley, Bergson, Kant, filozofia umysłu, qualia

Key words: Berkeley, Bergson, Kant, philosophy of mind, qualia

Streszczenie

Artykuł stanowi próbę wyjaśnienia przyczyn marginalizacji przez filozoficzny mainstream dwóch filozofów – George'a Berkeleja i Henry'ego Bergsona – oraz jednego problemu, mianowicie problemu qualiorum, dyskutowanego obecnie w kontekście statusu fizykalizmu. Zgodnie z główną tezą artykułu przyczyn tej marginalizacji należy doszukiwać się w antykantowskim przesłaniu tych dwóch filozofów oraz problematyki qualiorum. Celem artykułu jest rehabilitacja dziedzictwa filozofii Berkeleja oraz Bergsona w filozofii współczesnej poprzez wykazanie, że jest ona relevantna dla problematyki qualiorum.

Abstract

The article is an attempt to explain the causes of the marginalization by the philosophical mainstream of two philosophers – George Berkeley and Henry Bergson – and one problem, namely the problem of qualia discussed in contemporary philosophy of mind in the context of physicalism. According to the thesis of the article, the main causes of this marginalization is due to the anti-Kantian spirit of Berkeley, Bergson, and qualia. The aim of the article is to vindicate Berkeley's and Bergson's philosophy in contemporary discourse by showing that they are relevant to the problem of qualia.

Introduction

The title of this article may seem perplexing to some. What might have in common the Irish founder of modern idealism known primarily for his famous “esse est percipi” with the French vitalist exalting the

notion of “intuition” as the fundamental cognitive power of human beings, and the notion of “qualia”, which is central for many discussions in analytical philosophy of mind at least since the 1970s? The question is justified. Indeed, both philosophers are rarely associated with each other. Furthermore, their names are almost never mentioned by philosophers engaged in discussions revolving around the notion of “qualia” in analytical philosophy of mind.

Another thing implicitly suggested in the title of this paper may be perplexing to some. Namely, why Berkeley, Bergson and qualia, even if we agree that they have something common, should be considered as having in common a pronounced opposition to “Kantian’s legacy in contemporary philosophy”? This point also is not clear. Only Bergson had explicitly criticized in a systematic way Kant’s philosophy. Berkeley for an obvious reason – he died before Kant was born – could not get acquainted with his works. We can thus only speculate what his attitude would be toward the founder of transcendental idealism. On the other hand, Kant, like Berkeley and Bergson, is rarely mentioned in the context of discussions revolving around the notion of “qualia”.

Therefore, it seems that I owe to the reader an explanation why I believe that Berkeley, Bergson and qualia not only have something in common, but that the thing they have in common is anti-Kantian in spirit. The matter is complex, since it involves three or even four separate issues, so I will proceed in order, fulfilling the task step by step. In the main section of this article, after some preliminary considerations introducing the underlying *idee fixe*, which structure the main line of my argumentation, I will try to highlight the hidden affinity between Berkeley’s and Bergson’s philosophical projects. The conclusion of this part will be that both Berkeley’s metaphysical principle and Bergson’s concept of intuition have found in contemporary philosophy their clearest articulation in the notion of “qualia”. If I am right, what Berkeley and Bergson have in common is that the notion of “qualia” plays a central role in their philosophy. Therefore, if both philosophers are related to each other via the notion of “qualia”, and their philosophy – as I assume in this article – stand in a fundamental opposition to the spirit of Kant’s philosophy, it implies that there must be a tension, or maybe even a contradiction, between the philosophical principles accepted by Kant and what the notion of “qualia” implies when it is introduced into the philosophical discourse.

In the remainder of this article, I shall suggest that substituting Kant with Berkeley and Bergson in contemporary philosophy of mind would be beneficial to encourage the vindication of the importance of qualia for perennial philosophical issues. In order to show this, I will reconstruct roughly the main basis of a new argumentative strategy inspired by their philosophical ideas, where the notion of “qualia” play a fundamentally central role. The conclusion of this part, which will also be the moral of the story, is that those who are interested in the discussions revolving around the notion of “qualia” but are disappointed with how contemporary philosophy of mind treat this subject, should seriously examined Berkeley’s and Bergson’s philosophy if they want to provide a new, refreshing turn to those discussions. Indeed, the main purpose I want to achieve in this article is to rehabilitate Berkeley’s and Bergson’s thought, which had been unfortunately constantly marginalized by the official philosophical mainstream, by leveraging the debate about qualia as a starting point to vindicate their precious legacy in contemporary philosophy.

1. Berkeley, Bergson and qualia: preliminary to an anti-Kantian plot

1.1. Introductory considerations

Before I proceed to enumerate the substantial similarities occurring between Berkeley, Bergson and the advocates of qualia in contemporary philosophy of mind, I would like to focus at first on one of their commonalities, which might seem superficial, but in fact is extremely significative. The commonality I am referring to is the fact that Berkeley, Bergson and the advocates of qualia are for some mysterious reasons, that I hope to elucidate further, constantly marginalized in the philosophical discourse, as if their views did not deserve a serious examination from philosophers worthy of the name. My working hypothesis is that if Berkeley, Bergson and qualia are somehow rejected by the philosophical mainstream they must have something in common, which is the cause of this rejection. The questions are: what is this and why it triggers the hostility of the philosophical mainstream?

Obviously, these questions are legitimate questions, only if we accept the assumption that Berkeley, Bergson and qualia are rejected by the philosophical mainstream. Since this is a controversial assumption, one might be inclined to dismiss it and neglect the questions that its acceptance seems to impose.

Indeed, one may be even surprised to read that Berkeley, Bergson and the advocates of qualia are marginalized. Is it not true that both Berkeley and Bergson are included as major figures of their time in all respectable manuals of philosophy? Is it not true that the name of Berkeley is discussed, often with reverence due to thinkers considered as great philosophers, in the works of such giants of Western philosophy as Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill, Edmund Husserl, Karl Popper or Alfred J. Ayer? Is it not true that Bergson had been taken seriously by such different philosophers as Bertrand Russell, one of the originator of analytical philosophy, Jacques Maritain, the greatest Catholic philosopher of the twentieth century, Giles Deleuze, a profound thinker associated with what we can label in slightly simplified terms the “Postmodernist school”, and that Bergson’s philosophy may have been described in 1913 by an unbiased observer as the “[...] most influential French philosophy of the twentieth century” (Lovejoy 1913: 465)? Is it not true finally that, the discussions revolving around the notion of “qualia” are central to contemporary philosophy of mind, that in the context of those discussions were written maybe the most fascinating philosophical essays of the second half of the twentieth century such as “What is like to be a bat?” or “What Mary didn’t know?”, and that those discussions are related to philosophical issues of fundamental importance like the validity of physicalism, the plausibility of panpsychism or the prospects for elaborating the so-called “Theory of Everything”?

These are undeniable facts, but they do not imply that my working hypothesis is false, at least in the case of Berkeley and Bergson, since we cannot confuse any kind of presence in the *milieu* of philosophers with real impact on the shape of the philosophical discourse. The fact that a given philosopher figure in academic textbooks or had been mentioned in a particular period as important doesn’t imply that he is considered as relevant by the philosophical community today. It doesn’t even imply that he was relevant in those days. It only shows what it shows, namely that his name was mentioned in debates and polemics in a particular period – and this kind of ephemeral popularity is noth-

ing in terms of philosophical impact if it is not backed with something more substantial. For instance, Berkeley was present in philosophical controversies of his time, but most often his opponents mentioned his name only to ridicule him as a “solipsist” or a “subjective idealist. Jackson’s alleged refutation of Berkeley, which had become iconic, illustrates vividly the superficiality and the intellectual poverty of those controversies: “After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley’s ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that everything in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, »I refute it thus«” (Boswell 2008: 381).

What is even more telling is that those caricatures did not disappear with time. As Margareth Wilson puts it: “of all the major modern philosophical systems the views of George Berkeley have probably met with the most resistance, ridicule, and distortion” (Wilson 1999: 294). All the great philosophers that I mentioned above, including his admirers John Stuart Mill and Karl Popper, considered him, like Johnson, as a subjective idealist who preaches “[...] that everything in the universe is merely ideal” (Boswell 2008: 381). In reality, Berkeley holds the exact opposite. I do not have enough space to elaborate on this point. Thus, I will confine myself to remarking that the purpose of Berkeley was to demonstrate that if we deny the existence of God we are committed to the acceptance of subjective idealism. However, as it is obvious that God plays a central role in his philosophy, we cannot accuse him of being himself a subjective idealist. Indeed, he was a convinced realist who tried to persuade other realists doubting the existence of God that if they reject the existence of God, they also must reject realism and endorse an absurdity, namely subjective idealism. His motivation was principally apologetical, as it clearly appears in the last sentence of the following passage: “The question between the materialists and me is not, whether things have a real existence out of the mind of this or that person, but whether they have an absolute existence, distinct from being perceived by God, and exterior to all minds. This indeed some heathens and philosophers have affirmed, but whoever entertains notions of the Deity suitable to the Holy Scriptures, will be of another opinion” (Berkeley 1996: 303).

Similar remarks apply even more forcefully to Bergson. It is true that at one point he was at the center of many philosophical controversies. But his popularity was much more an effect of fashion or a short-handed intellectual trend, than a manifestation of a long-standing philosophical impact. It is obvious that nobody could seriously write in 1933, 1953 or 1973, as Lovejoy did in 1913, that his philosophy is “[...] the most influential French philosophy of the twentieth century” (Lovejoy 1913: 465). The popularity he enjoyed was unfortunately the popularity of an actor or of a singer. As in the case of Berkeley, what was he known for on wide-scale public opinion was not a result of a systematic examination of his writings, but a juxtaposition of superficial readings woven with bombastic slogans and intriguing keywords: intuitionism, vitalism, irrationalism, spiritualism. Those etiquettes are not necessarily misleading, but we know many vitalists or spiritualists from the history of philosophy, whereas there was only one Bergson.

When it comes to the reception of Bergson in contemporary philosophy, one must say that nothing has fundamentally changed since. Even if we agree with a contemporary scholar who in a recent article writes “After decades of relative obscurity, recent years are seeing a resurgence of interest in the works of Henri Bergson [...] he is now increasingly being acknowledged as the creator of a profound system in its own right” (Kleinherenbrink 2014: 203), it still remains that the solutions provided by him to philosophical problems are not regarded as relevant in contemporary philosophy. He is maybe considered now in some minor circles, or by archivists in search of philosophical sensations as an interesting philosopher with original views, but his thought is certainly not taken seriously by anyone who counts today in the domain of philosophy.

To conclude this point, I will add that to assess the real impact of a given philosopher we must ask if his philosophy became the foundation of a new philosophical school or movement. With this criterion at hand, we are in a position to affirm that Platon, Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger had a great impact on the philosophical discourse, since we know that there was many great Platonists, Aristotelians, Thomists, Cartesians, Kantians, Hegelians, and phenomenologists. But we can also affirm that Berkeley and Bergson do not belong to this group of impactful philosophers, since there is no other famous “Berkeleyan” apart Berkeley, and there is no other great

“Bergsonian” apart Bergson. It obviously doesn’t imply that they do not belong to the group of great philosophers. Indeed, I think that for reasons, which I will try to elucidate further, they had been marginalized despite their greatness.

The case with qualia is a bit more problematic, but still, I do not think it falsifies my working hypothesis. On the one hand, it is true, as I said above, that the notion of “qualia” is at the center of the most important debates in contemporary philosophy of mind. Such prominent philosophers as John Searle, Daniel Dennett, David Chalmers, Galen Strawson and many others have been engaged in those debates. Hundreds of articles are written on this topic every year all over the world. Literally anyone who knows something about contemporary philosophy of mind, heard about qualia. It seems therefore preposterous to suggest that qualia are not taken seriously in philosophy today.

But when we take a closer look at those debates, some significant details might shake our first impression. First, advocates of qualia in contemporary philosophy of mind are often referred to as “qualia-freak”. For instance, Frank Jackson begins his famous article “Epiphenomenal qualia” with the following declaration: “I am what is sometimes known as a »qualia-freak«. I think that there are certain features of the bodily sensations [...] which no amount of purely physical information includes” (Jackson 1982: 127). This expression employed to characterize advocates of qualia is without doubt a pejorative term. It suggests explicitly that those who have a particular interest for qualia, are freaks – and it is not good to be a freak. Why would the advocates of qualia be characterized in this manner, if qualia were really at the center of debates in contemporary philosophy of mind?

The beginning of the answer to this question can be found in the second sentence of the passage quoted above. Jackson elucidates here what it means for him to be a “qualia-freak”. Namely, it is somebody who believes that qualia are entities, “[...] which no amount of purely physical information includes”, and thinks that as such qualia constitutes a treat for physicalism, the mainstream view in contemporary philosophy of mind. Therefore, a “qualia-freak” is a freak, because he believes that physicalism is false – that is, for a reason which has nothing to do with qualia.

What should we conclude from this? That the issue of qualia is not discussed in contemporary philosophy of mind as a problem *per se*,

but in the context of the plausibility of physicalism. The question is not: “What are qualia and why are they important?” but “Does the existence of qualia is compatible with physicalism?”. As Chalmers, the philosopher responsible to a large extent for the actual shape of the discussion about qualia in contemporary philosophy of mind, puts it, the most important problem is what he labeled “the hard problem of consciousness”, which is the problem of explaining physical processes in the brain produce consciousness.

In other words, this is not a problem about qualia, but about the explanatory potential of physicalism. Chalmers doesn’t want to know more about qualia. He wants to know how to explain their existence in physical terms. Qualia figure in the dialectic of this problem only as a pretext to consider the capacity of physicalism to serve as a metaphysical foundation for the so-called “Theory of Everything” i.e. the ultimate scientific explanation of the world. The real “qualia-freaks” who want to discuss about qualia as such, and not about the alleged incompatibility of qualia with physicalism do not take part in the central debates in contemporary philosophy of mind, since in order to be accepted as a participant in those debates, one have to be a physicalist who considers qualia as a problem for physicalism, not as a problem *per se*.

The consequences of discussing qualia exclusively in the context of physicalism are disastrous for anyone who is more interested in qualia than in physicalism. Firstly, as it is assumed that qualia in general constitutes a treat for physicalism, one can take any exemplification of this kind of entity to discuss the compatibility-problem. As Chalmers puts it, “[...] we will not be involved this closely with the rich varieties of conscious experience. In addressing the philosophical mysteries associated with conscious experience, a simple color sensation raises the problems as deeply as one’s experience of a Bach chorale” (Chalmers 1996: 11). But in the conclusion of the chapter exposing his theory of consciousness he openly admits “I have used this framework mostly to discuss simple perceptual experiences, such as color experiences. It is not obvious how one would extend it to deal with more subtle experiences, such as complex emotional experiences, for example” (Ibidem: 309).

The first passage is clearly in tension with the second passage. Indeed, the experience of a Bach chorale is certainly a complex emotional experience. Therefore, it seems that if “[...] In addressing the philosophical mysteries associated with conscious experience, a simple color

sensation raises the problems as deeply as one's experience of a Bach chorale" (Ibidem: 11), Chalmers should not doubt whether his theory applies also to complex emotional experiences. But, with his characteristic intellectual honesty, he raises this doubt in the second passage mentioned above, and this doubt invalidates the ambitious declaration of the first passage.

By saying this, I do not only want to point out Chalmers's inconsistency – assuming that we are dealing here with a real inconsistency – but also to identify an attitude toward qualia in the physicalist camp, which amount in my opinion to a complete neglect of what is really fascinating in qualia from the point of view of a "qualia-freak". Indeed, physicalists in their investigations focus usually on the simplest qualia, like the sensation of redness or the sensation of pain, but the complex experiences mentioned by Chalmers seem to be much more interesting. They include among others, ethical experiences, aesthetical experiences, religious experiences, mystical experiences, and so forth. This type of experience also occurs in our life. We do not only have trivial experiences, such as headaches and color sensations. Sometimes we also experience goodness, beauty and God – and it is totally irrelevant to the issue I raise here whether those entities exist in the "objective reality" or are mere illusions. The fact remains that we have such experiences.

Precisely this type of experience is responsible for our conviction that there is something noble and mysterious in consciousness, which make us hard to believe that consciousness is reducible to brain states described in physical terms. To illustrate what I am suggesting here, let us imagine a possible world inhabited by conscious beings analogous to us with the difference that they only experience pain and redness. Would they really believe that, as Chalmers puts it, "consciousness is the biggest mystery" (Ibidem, ix)? I seriously doubt it. Obviously, I cannot prove I am right, since this is a delicate matter, but what I want to emphasize is that physicalists usually assume for the sake of simplicity that there is no categorical difference between, let say, an experience of pain and an experience of beauty. I think that this is a mistake to assume this without further argumentation, but I also think that it is an inevitable mistake to make when we consider qualia not as a problem *per se*, but as a problem for physicalism.

However, the issue is much deeper than that, since the attitude physicalists adopt toward qualia not only lead them to neglect many

different categories of qualia, which are probably the most interesting, but also to distort the very notion of “qualia”, and in the most extreme cases, even to deny the existence of qualia *tout court*. Why? Well, in the second half of the twentieth century many powerful arguments had been formulated in order to show that the existence of qualia is incompatible with physicalism: the modal argument presented by Kripke, the knowledge argument formulated by Frank Jackson, and the zombie argument defended by David Chalmers. The general attitude of physicalists toward these arguments is one of a compromise. The most often adapted strategy is on the one hand, to agree that the existence of qualia is intuitively obvious, on the other hand concede that their existence undermines the ontology proposed by physicalism, and to conclude from these two assumptions that in order to make compatible the existence of qualia with physicalism one have to replace the original notion of “qualia”, with a substitutive notion, which retains what is intuitive in the original notion, but remains compatible with physicalism.

The problem with this strategy is that the supposed substitutive notion proposed by physicalists is so far from the proper meaning of qualia that physicalists are accused by “qualia-freaks” of tacitly eliminating the very notion of qualia under the guise of construing a viable substitution for the original notion. Indeed, according to the intuitive notion, qualia have two essential features. The first is known in the literature as the revelation-thesis. According to the revelation-thesis the nature of qualia is revealed to us in experience which means that simply by having an experience I know the essence of this experience. As Daniel Stoljar puts it, if the revelation-thesis is true “[...] having an experience puts you in a remarkable epistemic position: you know or are in a position to know the essence or nature of the experience” (Stoljar 2006: 115). The second feature is known in the literature as the no appearance/reality distinction thesis. According to this thesis, the reality of qualia consist in appearances themselves. As Terry Horgan puts it, “[...] in the case of phenomenal consciousness there is no gap between appearance and reality, because the appearance just is the reality: how the phenomenal character seems, to the agent, is how it is” (Horgan 2012: 406).

Physicalists must deny that these two features constitute the essence of qualia, if they want to propose a notion of qualia which would

be compatible with physicalism. Therefore, from the point of view of “qualia-freaks” their overall strategy is an attempt to eliminate the very notion of “qualia”. Indeed, when we look at the historical development of the debate in philosophy of mind we can identify in the physicalist’s camp a growing tendency to disqualify qualia as an object of legitimate scientific enquiry. As Galen Strawson puts it contemporary physicalists “[...] passionately committed to the idea that everything is physical, make the most extraordinary move that has ever been made in the history of human thought. They deny the existence of consciousness: They become eliminativists” (Strawson 2016: 2). I then prove my point regarding qualia. It is true that many philosophers in contemporary philosophy of mind talk about qualia, but when we take a closer look at how they talk about them, it turns out that they mention them principally to get rid of them. So, “qualia-freaks” share the fate of Berkeley and Bergson – they are also constantly marginalized by the philosophical mainstream.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that Kant’s position in the philosophical mainstream is diametrically different. Indeed, he is without a doubt the central figure of modern and contemporary philosophy. Firstly, according to the standard narrative, the system of transcendental idealism constitutes a synthesis of Continental rationalism and British empiricism, and as such represents the culmination and logical conclusion of early modern philosophy. Secondly, Kant’s philosophy is an important reference point for many trends in 19th-century philosophy, including such diverse currents of thought, as the neocriticism of Charles Renouvier and Leon Brunschvicg in France or the neo-Kantianism of the Marburg and Baden school in Germany. Thirdly, the two main branches of twentieth century philosophy, namely continental and analytical philosophy, are strongly influenced by Kant’s ideas through – respectively – phenomenology and logical positivism. In result, many elements of Kant’s system are still considered as relevant today. It is so true, that within every field of philosophy – metaphysics, epistemology, theology and so forth – we can constantly hear that we live in a post-Kantian era.

Now, the following question arises: why Berkeley, Bergson and “qualia-freaks” are treated differently than Kant? As I said at the beginning of this section, my working hypothesis is that Berkeley, Bergson and “qualia-freaks” have something in common, which is the cause

of their rejection by the philosophical mainstream. Now I would like to suggest that what they have in common is anti-Kantian in spirit. If I am right, I would be able to explain at the same time both the marginalization of Berkeley, Bergson and “qualia-freaks”, and Kant’s eminence in the philosophical mainstream. Regarding Kant, my suggestion is that one can explain his influence over philosophy in the last two centuries by the fact that he is the greatest personification of philosophy, as this notion has been defined in Western tradition at least since Plato. Firstly, because he perpetuates Plato’s distinction between essence and appearance vividly exposed in the famous allegory of the cave in the VII book of his dialogue “The Republic”, by introducing the difference between phenomena and noumena or things-in-themselves, which is crucial within his system.

Secondly, because he assumes and defends the contention that reason is the main tool of philosophical investigation. There is an abundance of passages exemplifying this conviction in Kant’s writings so I will only quote one, which is in my opinion the most symptomatic:

If we survey the cognitions of our understanding in their entire range, then we find that what reason quite uniquely prescribes and seeks to bring about concerning it is the systematic in cognition, i.e., its interconnection based on one principle. This unity of reason always presupposes an idea, namely that of the form of a whole of cognition, which precedes the determinate cognition of the parts and contains the conditions for determining a priori the place of each part and its relation to the others. Accordingly, this idea postulates complete unity of the understanding’s cognition, through which this cognition comes to be not merely a contingent aggregate but a system interconnected in accordance with necessary laws. One cannot properly say that this idea is the concept of an object, a but only that of the thoroughgoing unity of these concepts, insofar as the idea serves the understanding as a rule. Such concepts of reason are not created by nature, rather we question nature according to these ideas, and we take our cognition to be defective as long as it is not adequate to them (Kant 1998: 591–592).

It clearly emerges from this passage that according to Kant, reason is the tribunal by which everything else ought be judged, and to which even the internal structure of the world has to be adjusted – if the reality is not a systematic structure, as reason requires it to be, it is the world that has to adapt to reason, and not the other way around.

Although, unlike Plato, he ultimately concludes that it is impossible to reach the thing-in-itself with reason, this conclusion doesn't lead him to reject or, at least, to restrain the authority of reason. He states firmly that in our current epistemic condition we are unable to reach the absolute. In short, my hypothesis is that Kant is omnipresent in the philosophical discourse, since he is the perfect incarnation of what philosophy is according to Western tradition i.e. an attempt to reach the essence of the world through reason – or alternatively – an attempt to explain through reason why we cannot reach the essence of the world.

Regarding Berkeley, Bergson, and qualia, my suggestion is that both philosophers are “qualia-freaks” *avant la lettre*, and that qualia, as they are used by “qualia-freaks” in the philosophical discourse, are incompatible with the principles, which constitute the identity of philosophy in Western tradition at least since Plato. In order to see this, one has just to take a closer look at the two features, which according to “qualia-freaks” constitute the essence of qualia. “The revelation-thesis” stands in contradiction to the conviction shared by the unanimity of philosophers that reason is the only legitimate cognitive power with which one can reach the truth about the world. Indeed, according to the revelation-thesis it is via a kind of direct intuition, without the intermediary of reason, that I reach the truth about different qualia – if I have a quale of redness, I know what redness is, if I have a quale of pain, I know what pain is. The no appearance/reality distinction thesis stands in contradiction to the conviction shared by the unanimity of philosophers that there is an ontological gap between what reality really is and how it appears to us, and that only reason, or “pure reason” emancipated from the ominous influence of the senses, can build a bridge between the domain of deceptive appearances and the domain of the essential reality of the world. Indeed, according to the no appearance/reality distinction thesis, through senses I reach the real essence of different qualia – it is for instance through my senses, not via reason, that I discover the real essence of pain and redness.

Now, if one agrees that these two features belong to qualia, one must conclude that through qualia we reach a certain kind of absolute or – to employ Kantian terminology – the thing-in-itself. It is maybe not a devastating conclusion for the authority of philosophy when we apply it to such trivial qualia as pain or redness, since it seems that there is nothing extraordinarily exciting in the fact that we can know

what redness is in the absolute sense through senses. But if we agree – and there is no apriori reason to reject this assumption – that we can have qualia of much more interesting thing that pain and redness, that we can for instance have experience of goodness, beauty, God which are considered traditionally as subjects belonging exclusively to the domain of different branches of philosophy, we can see more clearly why introducing qualia into the philosophical discourse undermines the authority of philosophy itself. Indeed, if qualia of goodness, beauty or God are possible, it implies that I can know what goodness, beauty or God are just by having qualia of them through an internal experience, which provide me with a direct epistemic access to those entities. Therefore, I do not need philosophy, especially I do not need ethics to teach me about goodness, aesthetics to teach me about beauty or theology/philosophy of religion to teach me about God.

It is worth noting that Kant was clearly aware of the fact that qualia undermines the authority of reason, and therefore he criticized in numerous articles throughout his whole philosophical career claim of different “qualia-freaks” *avant la lettre* to reach essential truths about the world through a kind of intuition or internal experience – for instance, in the “Dreams of a spirit-seer” in the context Emmanuel Swedenborg’ revelations presented in the “Journal of dreams”, in “What does it mean to orient oneself in thinking?” in the context of a polemic with Friedrich Jacobi, and in “On a recently prominent speculative tone in philosophy” in the context of a critical assessment of philosophers who thinks that “philosophy has its secrets that can be felt” (Kant 2002: 436). In this last article Kant has very harsh words for those “qualia-freaks” *avant la lettre*, and he even employs an ironic tone, which is extremely rare in his writings, especially in the late period of his life:

The principle of wishing to philosophize by influence of a higher feeling is the most suitable of all for the tone of superiority; for who will dispute my feeling with me? And if I can now but make it credible that this feeling is not merely subjective in myself, but can be demanded of anyone, and thus also ranks as objective, and a piece of knowledge, not merely in being excogitated as a concept, but as an intuition (apprehension of the object itself): then I have a great advantage over all who must first resort to justification in order to plume themselves on the truth of their claims. I can therefore speak in the tone of a commander, who is exempt from the onus of proving his title to possession

(*beati possidentes*). So long live the philosophy of feeling, which leads us directly to the heart of the matter! Away with ratiocination from concepts, which attempts the task only by the round about method of general attributes, and which, before it yet has a matter which it can grasp immediately, first demands specific forms to which it may subject this matter! (Ibidem: 435–436).

At the present stage of my investigation I have explained why there is an insurmountable tension between qualia on the one hand, and Kant or – in general – philosophy on the other. Now, to complete my demonstration, I have to justify why I believe that the reason, which explains the tension occurring between Berkeley and Bergson on the one hand and Kant or – in general – philosophy on the other is that both are “qualia-freaks”.

1.2. Berkeley and Bergson: two genius “qualia-freaks” avant la lettre

It is relatively easy to show that Berkeley would consider Kant as his philosophical enemy, if he had the opportunity to get acquainted with his writings. Indeed, Berkeley defends the principle “*esse est principi*”, which is the basis of his system, to undermine a position, that according to him is the root of all evil in philosophy, namely skepticism. For him, a skeptic is somebody who claims that “[...] The real essence, the internal qualities, and constitution of every the meanest object, is hid from our view; something there is in every drop of water, every grain of sand, which it is beyond the power of human understanding to fathom or comprehend” (Berkeley 1996: 149). Kant fits perfectly this description, since in the “*Dreams of a spirit-seer*” he writes “[...] of such multifariousness are the problems offered by nature, in its smallest parts, to a reason so limited as the human, that there is certainly no object of nature known to the senses, be it only a drop of water or a grain of sand, which ever could be said to be exhausted by observation or reason” (Kant 1900: 89). So, although Kant would never describe himself as a skeptic, he was according to Berkeley’s definition a skeptic, and therefore his philosophical enemy. Indeed, Berkeley has very harsh words for those who introduce the distinction between essence and appearance in the case of sensible things. In the “*Three dia-*

logues between Hylas and Filonous" his *porte-parole* asks rhetorically: "[...] What treatment then do those philosophers deserve, who would deprive these noble and delightful scenes of all reality? How should those principles be entertained, that lead us to think all the visible beauty of the creation a false imaginary glare?" (Berkeley 1996: 266).

How concretely does this anti-Kantian spirit of Berkeley's philosophy articulate itself in the details of his system? To answer this question let us begin by emphasizing that the principle "esse est percipi" should be interpreted as a metaphysical principle meant to answer two fundamental questions. What does it mean to exist? What exists? The answer to the first question is: to exist is to be perceived. The answer to the second question is: the world consists exclusively of ideas, that is impressions which are directly accessible through external senses. According to Berkeley, these ideas are what they appear to us (the ontological thesis) and are epistemically transparent to us, in the sense that they are exactly what they appear to us (the epistemological thesis). Therefore, Berkeley's world consists of ideas belonging to different sensory modalities in the case of which it is conceptually and metaphysically impossible to introduce the distinction between appearance and essence. In short, Berkeley's world consists of qualia.

Commentators who do not grasp Berkeley's intentions are inclined to say, like Chalmers for instance, that "[...] for Berkeley the appearances constitute reality" (Chalmers 2020: 354). But this is not a correct characterization of Berkeley's position, since for him appearances are the thing-in-themselves; when we experience them, we reach a kind of absolute. In order to characterize properly Berkeley's position it would be than more appropriate to say that for him the noumena, which are what skeptics calls "appearances", constitutes reality. The fact that we know the essence of the elements constituting the "ontological brick-work" of the created world is extremely important for Berkeley, since it serves him as a basis to formulate an argument for God's existence, which has a very uncontroversial premise, namely the existence of qualia.

Divines and philosophers had proved beyond all controversy, from the beauty and usefulness of the several parts of the creation, that it was the workmanship of God. But that setting aside all help of astronomy and natural philosophy, all contemplation of the contrivance,

order, and adjustment of things, an infinite mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare existence of the sensible world, is an advantage peculiar to them only who have made this easy reflexion: that the sensible world is that which we perceive by our several senses; and that nothing is perceived by the senses beside ideas; and that no idea or archetype of an idea can exist otherwise than in a mind (Berkeley 1996: 268).

Immediately after this passage he adds a remark, which must arouses the irritation of every philosopher committed to the principles constituting the philosophical discourse in Western tradition at least since Plato: "With that at your disposal you can now oppose and baffle the most strenuous advocate for atheism, without any laborious search into the sciences, without any sophisticated reasoning, and without tediously long arguments" (Ibidem). Indeed, for a paradigmatic philosopher, like Kant for instance, the suggestion that we can find out about the existence of an infinite mind/God simply by examining the content of our sensory ideas would certainly strike him as ludicrous.

Bergson has many things in common with Berkeley. As him, he was a spiritualist firmly opposed to materialism, which reduce the totality of the world, including human beings, to a mechanical rearrangement of atoms deprived of soul, free will, "higher values" and God. As him he was a combatant of skepticism, which in his time was incarnated by Spencer's agnosticism and neo-Kantian relativism. As him finally he makes use of qualia in order to vindicate an up-dated version of spiritualism against the materialist and skeptical tendencies of the philosophy of his time. His commitment to qualia was even more radical than Berkeley's. The title of his doctoral thesis contains in fact already an elliptical, but very elegant definition of qualia: "Time and free will: an essay on the immediate data of consciousness"; indeed, what Bergson call "immediate data of consciousness" is synonymous with "qualia" in contemporary philosophy in mind.

In the first chapter of his doctoral thesis, Bergson establish a link between the simplest qualia – pain and pleasure – which are, as I said above, the paradigmatical exemplification of qualia examined in contemporary philosophy of mind with one of the most central notion for any kind of spiritualism worthy of this name: free will. I do not have enough space to enter into the details of his argumentation, so I will only quote the most relevant passage for my current subject:

“[...] If pleasure and pain make their appearance in certain privileged beings, it is probably to call forth a resistance to the automatic reaction which would have taken place: either sensation has nothing to do, or it is nascent freedom” (Bergson 2001: 44). There is here a structural similarity between Berkeley and Bergson: the first establish a link between the most trivial qualia and God to corroborate the existence of God, whereas the second establish a link between the most trivial qualia and free will to corroborate the existence of free will.

In his later works, Bergson elaborated on the concept of “intuition”, which was already sketched in his doctoral thesis. It is in conjunction with this concept that his commitment to the notion of “qualia” become striking. Bergson tell us what follows about this concept: “The intuition we refer to bear above all upon internal duration. [...] It is the direct vision of the mind by the mind, – nothing intervening, no refraction through the prism, one of facets is space, and another language. [...] Intuition then signifies first of all, consciousness, but immediate consciousness, a vision, which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, a knowledge which is contact and even coincidence” (Bergson 1946: 35).

As we see, in Bergson hands the notion of “qualia” combined with the concept of “intuition” reach its limits. Intuition not only provides us with experience in the case of which it is impossible to make the distinction between the essence and the appearance of an experience, but also in the case of which it is impossible to make the distinction between the experience and the experiencer – those who know how make good use of intuition become one with the experience they have. The illuminations of intuition are then similar to mystical experiences, and as we know that for Bergson intuition was the main tool of philosophical investigation, which should replace the old-fashioned reason exalted by Kant, we are in a position to affirm almost with certainty that Kant would treat Bergson in the same way as he treated those philosophers who believed “that philosophy has its secrets that can be felt.”

But Bergson knew how to defend himself against Kant’s criticism. Indeed, Kant thought that those who believe that they can reach the absolute directly, without the shallows of reason, must postulate the existence of a suprasensible intuition, and he was convinced that human beings are deprived of such intuition. In response to this criticism Bergson says:

[...] in order to reach intuition it is not necessary to transport ourselves outside the domain of the senses and of consciousness. Kant's error was to believe that it was. After having proved by decisive arguments that no dialectical effort will ever introduce us into the beyond and that an effective metaphysics would necessarily be an intuitive metaphysics, he added that we lack this intuition and that this metaphysics is impossible. It would in fact be so if there were no other time or change than those which Kant perceived [...]. But the time in which we are naturally placed, [...] are a time [...] that our senses and our consciousness have reduced to dust in order to facilitate our action upon things. Undo what they have done, bring our perception back to its origins, and we shall have a new kind of knowledge without having been obliged to have recourse to new faculties (Ibidem: 151).

As in the case of free will, Bergson establishes here a link between the most trivial qualia and intuition, to corroborate the existence of intuition. We can also interpret the following passage as an articulation of the following conditional statement: if metaphysics is possible, intuition exists. Therefore, if we have independent reasons to think that metaphysics is possible, we have a reason to believe that intuition exists.

2. Conclusion: a new argumentative strategy in favor of spiritualism¹

There is no doubt that contemporary physicalists share with Kant the principles constituting the philosophical discourse of Western tradition at least since Plato. Kant would certainly subscribe vividly to this declaration of a contemporary physicalist, in which he expresses beautifully the conviction shared by the unanimity of philosophers that the essence of the world is deeply hidden: "Finding out about the basic forms of reality is hard. Even to formulate a reasonable partial hypothesis about that kind of thing you would need, if human history is anything to go by, something like three hundred years of funding, a lot of cooperation, some incredibly insightful people, considerable social freedom, and a lot of luck. God did not bring us into existence – if in-

¹ I already present in a brief outline the reasoning summarizing the argumentative strategy in the context of a hypothetical connection obtaining between qualia and personalism in a paper entitled "Qualia and persons: how might they be related?", which should be published soon in a monography published by Vernon Press.

deed he did bring us into existence – to find out about the fundamental facts that easily” (Stoljar 2010: 229).

In fact, one only has to replace Kant’s “reason” with “science” in order to get the position of contemporary physicalists; while Kant believed in the authority of reason, contemporary physicalists believed in the authority of science. Rationalism leads Kant to deny or, at least, to make problematic the existence of three objects of traditional metaphysics discussed in the “Critique of pure reason”: God, liberty and the immortal soul. Scientism leads contemporary physicalists to deny or at least make problematic the existence of qualia. But it is obvious that in the case of physicalism we would rather have to do with a *reduction ad absurdum* of physicalism, than with an articulation of a plausible position. Indeed, while it is not ludicrous to hold a position that deny the existence of God, liberty and the immortal soul, it seems crazy to hold a position, which oblige us to deny the existence of such obviously existing things as pain and redness.

In the light of these remarks, I would like to conclude with two points. Firstly, if one has to choose between qualia and physicalism, one should choose qualia, since the existence of qualia is more obvious than the truth of physicalism. This choice should lead one in turn to the rehabilitation of intuition in the philosophical discourse, and indirectly, to the rehabilitation of philosophers who hold that intuition in its various form is a legitimate tool in the domain of philosophical investigation, since we get epistemic access to qualia through a certain kind of nondiscursive intuition, and certainly not through reason – regardless of how long we will think about the sensation of redness, we will never have it, until we experience it.

Secondly, if one must choose between qualia and physicalism, it follows that qualia are incompatible with physicalism and therefore are compatible with its opposite – spiritualism. As I emphasized it several times in the previous section, Berkeley and Bergson employ an argumentative strategy which make use of qualia to corroborate the existence of entities traditionally associated with a spiritualist worldview: God and free will. This argumentative strategy consists in establishing a logical or conceptual connection between something uncontroversial, namely the existence of qualia, and something controversial, namely the existence of God in the case of Berkeley, and the existence of free will in the case of Bergson.

Inspired by Berkeley and Bergson, I propose by way of conclusion to generalize their argumentative strategy, in the guise of the following reasoning: 1) it turned out that the existence of qualia is incompatible with physicalism 2) the existence of qualia is the least controversial thesis among theses traditionally held by spiritualists, like: the existence of God, soul/personhood, teleology, “higher values”, libertarian free will and so forth 3) therefore, independently of the controversy with physicalism, qualia should play the role of a new argumentative starting point for a defense of an up-dated version of spiritualism.

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