SPACE AND VISION: AN ATTEMPT TO DEDUCE ALL OUR KNOWLEDGE OF SPACE FROM THE SENSE OF SIGHT

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AN ATTEMPT TO DEDUCE ALL OUR KNOWLEDGE OF SPACE FROM THE SENSE OF SIGHT,

WITH

A NOTE ON THE ASSOCIATION PSYCHOLOGY.

BY

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PREFACE.

THE theory advocated in the following pages first occurred to me about ten years ago, when reading the counter-theory of Brown. Its leading features were then communicated by me to one or two friends, who are still connected with the University of Dublin. The subsequent publication of Professor Abbott's work on Sight and Touch, led me to entertain my own opinions more strongly, though it will be seen that in some important respects my conclusions differ from his. The reader will see that I have borrowed several of his facts and arguments in refuting the common theory; but I think he will also recognise something of my own. As a repository of facts, indeed, Mr. Abbott's book will be indispensable to any student of the subject, however widely he may differ from the author in his explanation of them; and I venture to think that had these facts been studied with equal care by Messrs. Mill and Bain, they might have been led to cancel a good many pages of their exposition. At all events, the question has now reached a stage which renders a minute examination of the actual phenomena absolutely necessary. There are two or more theories before the world which sufficiently explain the broad facts of the case. It is by the accounts they render of the less obvious and striking phenomena that such theories must be tested. It is not in ordinary reflexion and refraction that we need expect to find an *experimentum crucis* between the

Emission and Wave Theories of Light, nor in a thunder-storm that we need look for a test of the Single and Double-fluid hypotheses in Electricity. The same observation will apply to theories in Psychology; and the writer who confines himself to the explanation of mere generalities will never establish his theory so long as there is another in the field. I should, therefore, have desired to make my own explanations more special than they are; but finding I could not devote enough time to the subject to enable me to reconsider and rewrite it completely, I have contented myself with making a few corrections and insertions in a manuscript that has been lying by me for some years. The question is one with which Trinity College, Dublin, is peculiarly identified, through Bishop Berkeley and Professor Abbott; and I trust she will not suffer it silently to fall into the hands of inquirers of other nations. Berkeley's theory of vision led directly to his now-celebrated Idealism; and if there is any mode of escaping from that subtle doctrine, I believe it must be discovered in the same field.

There is a current doctrine on this topic which is so closely related to the subject of this Essay, that I may be excused for touching briefly on it here, viz.: That tactual sensations and resistance are the great tests of material existence and reality. I find this doctrine maintained by two thinkers of such opposite schools as Messrs. Mill and Mansel. It seems to have originated in a confusion between vulgar and the philosophical conception of matter. The vulgar include in their idea cohesion of the particles, and can hardly be persuaded to regard liquids and gases as material, until they see them enclosed in some solid body which gives them a kind of artificial coherence. Philosophers took up the same idea with little examination, and thought the Newtonian theories of gravitation and inertia afforded a

strong confirmation of it. But if by matter we mean the Real in Space—that which exists therein and affects our senses—it is now certain that a great part of the material universe consists of imponderable and penetrable fluids, which would probably offer no resistance to the finest sensitive or muscular apparatus. This I take to be the proper philosophical idea of matter, and, in this sense of the term, sight is quite as competent to reveal to us the existence of matter as touch or the motor nerves. In this respect I think Kant, whose tests of material substance are permanence and action, is considerably in advance of more recent writers. Visible unresisting objects are no doubt often regarded as unreal; but this is not the case when they continue to exist permanently, and affect our senses of hearing or smell: otherwise smoke would appear as unreal as a ghost. However, if anyone desires to confine the term "matter" to tangible bodies, he is at liberty to do so. I only contend that the eye reveals to us one spacial reality, namely, the nervous organism connected with it, and that we can thence reach other spacial realities outside us by a legitimate inference. If so, whether the existence of *matter* is proved or no, Berkeley's Idealism is refuted.

I hope the concluding note on Idealistic Associationism will not be considered out of place.