

Dear Dr O'Sullivan,

Let me first introduce myself. I am a Berkeley scholar and Professor of Philosophy at the University of York. I am also the current President of the International Berkeley Society. Recently the Society has been encouraging and supporting work on The Problematic Berkeley, and it is a rich seam, as I am sure the TLRWG is well-aware.

As you might expect, I am writing about the issue of the naming of the Berkeley Library at TCD, a building I am familiar with. I do not wish to make a further submission of evidence about Berkeley's life and character, since your colleagues at TCD have provided all the pertinent facts. Rather I would like to make a positive proposal.

Prior to that, however, I would like to remind you that in Berkeley's Will contained explicit instructions about his funeral and burial:

*It is my will that my Body be buried in the church-yard of the parish in which I die:  
Item, that the expense of my funeral do not exceed twenty pounds, and that as much more be given to the poor of the parish where I die:*

We do not know about the donation to the poor of the parish, but we know the other two instructions were not followed. He was buried in Christchurch Cathedral with a grand marble memorial. But the Will does imply that he would not have sought the type of memorialization that comes from having a Library (or a university) named after him. That said, such things have been done and we now face a decision whether to undo them, a decision we can only make with reference to our own understanding of the purpose of memorialization.

Now to my proposal. I am an alumnus of Oriel College, Oxford and have been disappointed by the behaviour of the Governing Body on the matter of the Rhodes statue. It seems to me that they could have avoided much pain had they been open to the sort of suggestion made by the sculptor Anthony Gormley:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/may/29/rhodes-statue-should-be-turned-to-face-wall-says-antony-gormley>

What would be a similar suggestion for the Berkeley Library? George Berkeley was all his adult life committed to the moral education of young people and we may honour that virtue by paying attention to moral education in our times, even if we disagree with him on many specific ethical questions.

So do not change the name - after all it is not named the 'George Berkeley Library'. Instead, commission a statue of Philip, Edward, Anthony and Agnes Berkeley with an explanatory plaque to be placed prominently outside the Library. (Dublin's own Famine Memorial is a very fine piece of art in this vein.)

In this way you do not hide from the past, you do not deny that George Berkeley is one of Trinity's famous sons, but you also own the fact that he, like most though not all of his contemporaries, was complicit in slavery. Furthermore, you provide an opportunity for future generations of students to learn about the wrongs of our shared past and recognise that much of their privilege, and in particular the reputation of their alma mater, cannot be entirely disentangled from colonial history.

It is often lazily assumed that naming a part of an educational establishment after a person is offering that person to the students as a role model. That is palpably not true of actual practice throughout the world, where naming is more often done to thank a benefactor and encourage others.

However, one very good reason to name a building after a person is that learning about that person will be educational. Learning that George Berkeley was a great philosopher, a major influence on the establishment of universities in America, but also a slave-owner, will give students and visitors to the Library a significant educational opportunity to upon moral complexity. Leaving the name of the Library untouched and taking no other action will not achieve that. Nor will renaming it. But owning the problematic aspects of Berkeley's life and times publicly and proactively will.

Yours sincerely,

Tom Stoneham

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