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Berkeley’s idealism and theory of signs are linked by his doctrine that mind is the cause by which objects are intelligible. What this means in the context of his claim that minds are spiritual substances has puzzled commentators, many of whom explain Berkeley’s position by suggesting that he draws on Cartesian assumptions. However, such explanations treat mind as an abstraction, something that Berkeley explicitly rejects. I argue instead that God creates finite spiritual substances by creating a system of representation in which objects are related in a way that constitutes a language (i.e. the language of nature). ‘Mind’ is thus the principle on which the meaning of ideas depends, not a Cartesian substance.

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