

The Principles of Human Knowledge

George Berkeley

Copyright © Jonathan Bennett

[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.

First launched: July 2004

Last amended: November 2007

Contents

Introduction	1
Sections 1–50	11
Sections 51–99	25
Sections 100–156	39

Sections 51–99

51. Seventhly, from what I have said you will want to protest:

It seems absurd to take away natural causes, and attribute everything to the immediate operation of spirits! According to your principles, we must no longer say that fire heats or water cools, but that a spirit heats, and so forth. If someone actually talked like that, wouldn't he be laughed at, and rightly so?

Yes, he would. In matters like this we ought to think with the learned and speak with the vulgar [= 'with the common people']. There is nothing disreputable about this; learned people already *do* 'speak with the vulgar' in many respects. People who are perfectly convinced of the truth of the Copernican system in astronomy still say that 'the sun rises', 'the sun sets', 'the sun is high in the sky'; and it would surely seem ridiculous to speak in any other way. Think about this a little and you will see that the acceptance of my doctrines wouldn't even slightly disturb or alter the common use of language.

52. In the ordinary affairs of life, we can go on using any turns of phrase—even ones that are false when taken in a really strict sense—so long as they arouse in us appropriate thoughts or feelings or dispositions to act in ways that are good for us. Indeed, this is unavoidable, because the standards for *proper* speech are set by what is *customary*, so that language has to be shaped by commonly held opinions, which are not always the truest. So even in the strictest philosophic reasonings we cannot alter the outlines of the English language so completely that we never provide fault-finders with an opportunity to accuse us of difficulties and inconsistencies in what we say. But a fair and honest reader will gather what is meant by a discourse from its over-all

tendency and from how its parts hang together, making allowances for those inaccurate turns of phrase that common use has made inevitable.

53. As for the thesis that there are no corporeal causes—that is, no bodies that have causal powers—this used to be maintained by some of the schoolmen, and also more recently by some modern philosophers such as Malebranche. Those moderns did believe that matter exists, but they insisted that God alone is the immediate cause of everything. They saw that none of the *objects of sense* has any power or activity included in it, from which they inferred that the same holds for the *bodies that they thought to exist outside the mind*. Yet they went on believing in such bodies! That is, they believed in a vast multitude of created things that were admittedly incapable of producing any effects in nature, so that there was no point in God's creating them since he could have done everything just as well without them. Even if this were possible, it would still be a very puzzling and extravagant supposition.

54. In the **eighth** place, some may think that the existence of matter, or of external things, is shown by the fact that all mankind believe in it. Must we suppose the whole world to be mistaken?—the objection runs—and if so, how can we explain such a wide-spread and predominant error? I answer, first, that when we look into it carefully we may find that the existence of matter or of things outside the mind is not really believed in by as many people as the objector imagines. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to believe something that involves a contradiction, or has no meaning in it; and I invite you to consider impartially whether 'matter' and 'things outside the mind' aren't of that sort. In one sense indeed, men may be said to 'believe that matter exists': that is, they *act as if* the immediate cause of their sensations,

which affects them every moment and is so nearly present to them, were some unsensing and unthinking being. But that they should clearly have any meaning for those words, and make out of them *a settled theoretical opinion*, is what I cannot conceive. This isn't the only case where men deceive themselves by imagining they believe propositions that they have often heard but basically have no meaning in them.

55. But in any case (and this is my •second reply), even if some proposition is firmly believed by nearly everyone, that is a weak argument for its truth to anyone who considers what a vast number of prejudices and false opinions are everywhere accepted with the utmost tenacity by unreflecting people—i.e. by the great majority of people. There was a time when •everyone•, even learned men, regarded as monstrous absurdities the view that there are there are lands on the opposite side of the globe, and the view that the earth moves. •The learned now know better, but• when we consider what a small proportion of mankind *they* are, we can expect that even now those notions (•of the earth's moving and of there being lands on the far side of it•) are not widely accepted in the world.

56. But I am challenged to explain this prejudice •that there is matter outside the mind•, and to account for its popularity. I now do so. Men became aware that they perceived various ideas of which they themselves were not the authors, because these ideas weren't caused from within, and didn't depend on the operation of their wills. This led them to think that those ideas—those objects of perception—had an existence independent of the mind and outside it; and it never entered their heads that a contradiction was involved in those words. But philosophers plainly saw that the immediate objects of perception don't exist outside the mind, and this led them to correct, *up to a point*, the mistake of the

common man. In doing this, though, they ran into another mistake that seems equally absurd, namely: that certain objects really exist outside the mind, having an existence distinct from being perceived, and our ideas are only images or resemblances of these objects, imprinted by the objects on the mind. And this view of the philosophers has the same source as the common man's mistake: they realized that they weren't the authors of their own sensations, which they clearly knew were imprinted from outside and must therefore have some cause distinct from the minds on which they were imprinted.

57. Why did they suppose that the ideas of sense are caused in us by things they resemble, rather than attributing them to •the causal action of• spirit, which is the only kind of thing that can act? •For three reasons. . . First, the philosophers weren't aware of the inconsistency of supposing that

- things like our ideas exist outside minds, and that
- things like our ideas have power or activity.

Second, the supreme spirit that causes those ideas in our minds isn't presented to us by any particular finite collection of perceptible ideas, in the way that human agents are marked out by their size, skin-colour, limbs, and motions. Third, the supreme spirit's operations are regular and uniform. Whenever the course of nature is interrupted by a miracle, men are ready to admit that a superior being is at work; but when we see the course of events continue in the ordinary way, we aren't prompted to reflect on this. Although the order and interlinking of events is evidence for the greatest wisdom, power, and goodness in their creator, it is so constant and familiar to us that we don't think of the events as the immediate effects of a free spirit—especially since inconstancy and changeability in acting, though really an imperfection, is looked on as a sign of freedom. [That completes Berkeley's 'eighth' objection. There is no ninth.]

58. Tenthly, this will be objected:

The views you advance are inconsistent with various sound truths in science and mathematics. For example, *the motion of the earth* is now universally accepted by astronomers as a truth grounded in the clearest and most convincing reasons; but on your principles there can be no such motion. For motion is only an idea; so it doesn't exist except as perceived; but the motion of the earth is not perceived by sense.

I answer that the doctrine that the earth moves, if rightly understood, will be found to agree with my principles. The question 'Does the earth move?' amounts in reality to just this:

Do we have reason to conclude from what astronomers have observed that *if we were* placed in such and such circumstances, at such or such a position and distance both from the earth and sun, we *would* see the earth moving among the choir of the planets and appearing in all respects like one of them?

·The answer is Yes·. This is a conclusion we can reasonably draw from the phenomena through the established rules of nature, which we have no reason to mistrust.

59. From the experience we have had of the order and succession of ideas in our minds, we can often make something better than uncertain conjectures—indeed, *sure and well-grounded predictions*—concerning the ideas we •shall have if we •do engage in this or that complex sequence of actions; and these predictions enable us to judge correctly what •would have appeared to us if things •had been ·in such and such specific ways· very different from those we are in at present. That is what *the knowledge of nature* consists in—an account that preserves the usefulness and certainty of such knowledge without conflicting with what I have said. It will be easy to re-apply this ·line of thought· to any other

objections of the same sort concerning the size of the stars or any other discoveries in astronomy or nature.

60. In the **eleventh** place, you will want to ask [the question runs to the end of the section]: 'What purpose is served by the intricate organization of plants, and the wonderful mechanism in the parts of animals? All those internal parts so elegantly contrived and put together, because they are ideas, have no power, no capacity to operate in any way; nor are they *necessarily* connected with the effects that are attributed to them. So couldn't plants grow and send out leaves and blossoms, and animals move as they now do, just as well •without all those inner parts as •with them? If every effect is produced by the immediate action of a spirit, everything that is fine and skillfully put together in the works of man or of nature seems to be made in vain. According to this doctrine, a skilled watchmaker who makes the spring and wheels and other parts of a watch, putting them together in the way that he knows will produce the movements that he wants the hands to make, should think that he is wasting his time and that it is an intelligence—·namely, God's·—that steers the hands of the watch so that they tell the time. If so, why shouldn't that intelligence do it without *his* having to take the trouble to make the parts and put them together? Why doesn't an empty watch-case serve as well as one containing a mechanism? Also, why is it that whenever a watch doesn't go right there is some corresponding fault to be found in its mechanism, and when the fault is repaired the watch works properly again? The same questions arise regarding the clockwork of nature, much of which is so wonderfully fine and subtle that it could hardly be detected by the best microscope.'

61. ·Here are three preliminaries to my main answer to this·. First, even if my principles do fail to solve some difficulties

concerning how providence manages the world, and what uses it assigns to the various parts of nature, this objection couldn't carry much weight against the truth and certainty of those things that can be conclusively proved *a priori*. Secondly, the commonly accepted principles suffer from similar difficulties; for we can challenge *their* adherents to explain why God should take those round-about methods of getting results by instruments and machines, when everyone knows that he could have achieved them by the mere command of his will, without all that apparatus. Indeed (thirdly), if we think about it hard we shall find that this objection tells with *greater* force against those who believe in those machines outside the mind; for it has been made evident that solidity, bulk, shape, motion and the like have no activity or efficacy in them, and so cannot produce any one effect in nature. See **25**. So anyone who supposes them to exist (allowing the supposition to be possible) when they aren't perceived does this obviously to no purpose; for the only use that is assigned to them, as they exist unperceived, is to produce those perceivable effects that can't in truth be ascribed to anything but spirit.

62. But to come nearer to the difficulty, it must be observed that though the making of all those parts and organs isn't absolutely necessary for producing any effect, it is necessary for producing things in a constant, regular way according to the laws of nature. There are certain general laws that run through the whole chain of natural effects; we learn these by the observation and study of nature, and apply them in making artificial things for the use and ornament of life, as well as in explaining the various phenomena. Such an explanation consists only in showing how a particular phenomenon conforms to the general laws of nature, or (the same thing) in revealing the uniformity that there is in the production of natural effects. You can see this if you attend

to particular explanations that scientists have offered for phenomena. I showed in **31** that the supreme agent's regular constant methods of working have a great and obvious usefulness to us. And it is no less obvious that a particular size, shape, motion, and structure, though not absolutely necessary for any effect, are necessary for the effect to be produced according to the standing mechanical laws of nature. Thus, for instance, it can't be denied that God (the intelligence that sustains and rules the ordinary course of things) could produce a miracle if he wanted to, causing all the movements on the dial of a watch without anyone's supplying it with a working mechanism; but if he is to act in conformity with the rules of mechanism, established and maintained by him for wise ends, it is necessary that those actions of the watchmaker in which he makes and then adjusts the machinery precede the movements of the hands on the dial; and also that any disorder in those movement be accompanied by the perception of some corresponding disorder in the machinery, the correction of which cures the disorder.

63. It may indeed sometimes be necessary that the author of nature display his overruling power in producing some appearance that doesn't fit his ordinary pattern of events. Such exceptions from the general rules of nature are just what's needed to surprise and awe men into an acknowledgment of the divine being; but then they aren't to be used often, for if they were they would fail to have that effect. Besides, God seems to prefer •convincing our reason about what he is like through the works of nature, which reveal so much harmony and ingenuity in their structure and are such plain indications of wisdom and good-will in their author, to •astonishing us by anomalous and surprising events into believing that he exists.

64. The objection brought in **60** really amounts only to the following. Ideas aren't produced anyhow and at random; there is a certain order and connection amongst them, like the order of causes and effects; and they come in various combinations that are put together in a very regular manner as though by design. These combinations seem like instruments in the hand of nature. Hidden behind the scenes, so to speak, they secretly operate in producing the appearances that are seen on the world's stage, though they themselves are detected only by the scientist who looks for them. But since one idea can't cause another, what is the purpose of this order and connection? Since those 'instruments in the hand of nature' are mere powerless perceptions in the mind, and so can't help in the production of natural effects, I am being asked why they exist at all. That is to ask why it is that when we closely inspect God's works he causes us to observe such a great variety of ideas, inter-related in ways that are so regular and look so much like the result of a designer's skill. It isn't credible that he would to no purpose put himself to the expense (so to speak) of all that skillful design and regularity.

65. My answer to all this has two parts. First, the connection of ideas doesn't imply the relation of cause and effect, but only of a mark or sign with the thing signified. The fire I see is not the •cause of the pain I suffer when I come too close, but a •sign that warns me of that pain. Similarly, the noise that I hear is not an •effect of a collision of nearby bodies, but a •sign of it. Secondly, the reason why ideas are formed into machines, i.e. regular combinations that manifest a designer's skill, is the same as the reason why letters are combined into words. If a few basic ideas are to signify a great number of effects and actions, there must be different ways of combining them; if these combinations are to be usable by *everyone*, they must be contrived wisely •so

that they can carry vast amounts of information yet still be understood by us; and if they are to be *always* available and helpful, they must be governed by rules •that don't change from time to time•. In this way we are given a great deal of information about what to expect from such and such actions, and how to go about arousing such and such ideas. And really that is all that is clearly meant when people say that by finding out the shape, texture, and structure of the inner parts of bodies, whether natural or artificial, we can discover what the thing is really like and how it can be used.

66. Hence it is evident that things that are •the wholly inexplicable source of great absurdities when they are regarded as causes that help to produce effects can be •very naturally explained, and have a proper and obvious use assigned them when they are considered only as marks or signs for our information. What the scientist ought to be doing is to detect and decipher those signs (this language, so to speak) instituted by the author of nature, not claiming to explain things in terms of corporeal causes—a claim that seems to have too much estranged the minds of men from •God•, that active principle, that supreme and wise spirit, 'in whom we live, move, and have our being'.

67. In the **twelfth** place, this may be objected:

It is clear from what you have said that there can be no such thing as an inert, senseless, extended, solid, shaped, movable substance existing outside the mind, which is how philosophers describe matter. But suppose someone leaves out of his idea of *matter* the positive ideas of extension, shape, solidity, and motion, and says that all he means by that word is *an inert senseless substance that exists outside the mind (or unperceived) and is the occasion of our ideas*, meaning •by 'occasion'• that God is pleased to cause

ideas in us when matter is present. There seems to be no reason why matter in *this* sense of the word should not exist.

In answer to this I say first that it seems no less absurd to suppose a substance without qualities than it is to suppose qualities without a substance. Anyway, secondly, if this unknown substance exists *where* does it do so? We agree that it doesn't exist in the mind; and it is equally certain that it doesn't exist in some *place*, for all (place or) extension exists only in the mind, as I have already proved. So it exists nowhere at all!

68. Let us examine a little the description of matter that is given to us here. [This next sentence reflects the fact that 'substance' comes from Latin meaning 'stand under'.] It neither acts, nor perceives, nor is perceived, for that is all it means to say that it is an inert, senseless, unknown substance—which is a definition entirely made up of negatives (except for the relative notion of its standing under or supporting, but notice that it supports ·no qualities, and therefore supports· nothing at all), so that it comes as close as you like to being the description of a nonentity. 'But', you say, 'it is the unknown *occasion* at the presence of which ideas are caused in us by the will of God.' I would like to know how anything can be *present* to us if it isn't perceivable by sense or reflection, isn't capable of producing any idea in our minds, isn't at all extended, has no form, and exists in no place! The words 'to be present', as used here, have to be taken in some abstract and strange meaning that I cannot grasp.

69. Again, let us examine what is meant by 'occasion'. So far as I can gather from the common use of language, that word signifies either •the agent that produces some effect, or •something that is observed to accompany or go before ·a kind of event· in the ordinary course of things. But when it is

applied to matter as described in **67**, the word 'occasion' cannot be taken in either of those senses. For matter is said to be passive and inert, and so it cannot be an agent or cause. It is also unperceivable, because devoid of all perceptible qualities, and so it cannot be the occasion of our perceptions in the latter sense—as when burning my finger is said to be the occasion of the pain that goes with it. So what can be meant by calling matter an 'occasion'? this term is used either with no meaning or with some meaning very distant from its commonly accepted one.

70. Perhaps you will say this:

Although matter is not perceived by us, it is perceived by God, and *to him* it is the occasion of causing ideas in our minds. We do observe that our sensations are imprinted on our minds in an orderly and constant manner, which makes it reasonable for us to suppose there are certain constant and regular *occasions* of their being produced. That is, there are certain permanent and distinct portions of matter corresponding to our ideas; they don't cause the ideas in our minds or any other way immediately affect us, because they are altogether passive and unperceivable by us; but God can and does perceive them, and lets them serve as *occasions* to remind him when and what ideas to imprint on our minds, so that things may go on in a constant, uniform manner.

71. In answer to this, I remark that on *this* account of matter we are no longer discussing the existence of a thing distinct from spirit and idea, from perceiving and being perceived. ·For matter is now being said to be perceived by God, and so· our concern now is with the question of whether there are certain *ideas* (of I know not what sort) in the mind of God that are marks or notes that direct him how to produce

sensations in our minds in a constant and regular method—in much the way that the notes of music ·in a score· direct a musician to produce a tune, though the listeners don't perceive the ·written· notes and may be entirely ignorant of them. But this notion of matter seems too extravagant to deserve a refutation. And anyway it doesn't count against what I have been defending, namely the thesis that there is no senseless *unperceived* substance.

72. The constant, uniform way that our sensations run will, if we follow the light of reason, lead us to infer the goodness and wisdom of the spirit who causes them in our minds. But I cannot see anything else that we can reasonably infer. To me, I say, it is obvious that the existence of an infinitely wise, good, and powerful spirit is quite enough to explain all the appearances of nature. As for inert, senseless *matter*: nothing that I perceive has the slightest connection with it, or leads to the thoughts of it. I challenge anyone to •use it to explain any natural phenomenon, however small, or •show any sort of reason, even one yielding only a very low probability, that he has for believing in its existence, or even •provide a tolerable sense or meaning for that supposition. ·The last point isn't met by saying that matter is at least an occasion·. For, as to its being an occasion, I think I have shown plainly that with regard to us it is no occasion; so if it is an occasion to anyone it must be to God—his occasion for causing ideas in us—and we have just seen what this amounts to.

73. It is worthwhile to reflect a little on the motives that induced men to suppose the existence of material substance. As we watch those motives or reasons gradually weaken and die, we can correspondingly weaken the assent that was based on them. •First, it was thought that colour, shape, motion, and the other perceptible qualities really do exist

outside the mind; and this led them to think they needed to suppose some unthinking substratum or substance in which the qualities exist, since they couldn't be conceived to exist by themselves. •Secondly, some time later men became convinced that colours, sounds, and the rest of the perceptible secondary qualities have no existence outside the mind; so they stripped those qualities off this substratum or material substance, leaving only the primary ones, shape, motion, and such like, which they still conceived to exist outside the mind and consequently to need a material support. But I have shown that none even of the primary qualities can possibly exist otherwise than in a spirit or mind that perceives them, so we are left with no remaining reason to suppose the existence of matter. Indeed it is utterly impossible that any such thing should exist, so long as 'matter' is taken to stand for an unthinking substratum of qualities, in which they exist outside the mind.

74. The materialists themselves conceded that matter was thought of only as a support for qualities. With that reason having collapsed, one might expect that the mind would naturally and without reluctance give up the belief that was based on it alone. Yet the prejudice is riveted so deeply in our thoughts that we can hardly tell how to part with it, and this inclines us, since *the thing itself* is indefensible, at least to retain *the name*, which we use to convey I know not what abstracted and indefinite notions of *being* or *occasion*, though without any show of reason, at least so far as I can see. Looking at it from our side: what do we perceive among all the ideas, sensations and notions that are imprinted on our minds by sense or reflection from which we can infer the existence of an inert, thoughtless, unperceived *occasion*? Looking at it from the side of ·God·, the all-sufficient spirit: why should we believe or even suspect that he is directed by an inert *occasion* to cause ideas in our minds?

75. We have here a very extraordinary and lamentable example of the force of prejudice. Against all the evidence of reason, people remain devoted to a stupid, thoughtless *something* that they insert in such a way as to screen themselves off, so to speak, from the providence of God, and move him further away from the affairs of the world. But even if •they do all they can to secure the belief in matter, even if •when reason forsakes them they try to support their opinion by the bare possibility of the thing, and even if •they defend that poor possibility by an uninhibited use of imagination with no guidance from reason—*still* the most they get out of this is that *there are certain unknown ideas in the mind of God*; for this is what is meant (if indeed anything is meant) by ‘occasion with regard to God’. And this, at the bottom line, is no longer contending for the thing but only for the name.

76. I shan’t argue about whether there are such ideas in the mind of God, and whether they may be called ‘matter’. But if you stick to the notion of an unthinking substance, or support of extension, motion, and other perceptible qualities, then to me it is most evidently impossible there should be any such thing, because it is a plain contradiction that those qualities should exist in or be supported by an unperceiving substance.

77. You may say this:

Still, granting that there is no thoughtless support of extension and of the other •qualities we perceive, perhaps there’s an inert unperceiving substance or substratum of some •other qualities that are as incomprehensible to us as colours are to a man born blind, because we don’t have a sense adapted to them. If we had a new sense, perhaps we would no more doubt of their existence than a blind man doubts the existence of light and colours when he regains his sight.

I answer first that if what you mean by ‘matter’ is only *the unknown support of unknown qualities*, it doesn’t matter whether there is such a thing, since it no way concerns us; and I don’t see what good it will do us to dispute about we know not what, and we know not why.

78. But secondly, if we had a new sense it could only provide us with new ideas or sensations; and then we would have the same reason against *their* existing in an unperceiving substance that I have already offered with relation to shape, motion, colour, and the like. Qualities, as I have shown, are nothing but sensations or ideas, which exist only in a mind perceiving them; and this is true not only of the ideas we are acquainted with at present but likewise of all possible ideas whatsoever.

79. You will insist:

What if I have no reason to believe in the existence of matter? What if I can’t find any use for it, or explain anything by it, or even conceive what is meant by that word? It is still not a contradiction to say ‘Matter exists, and it is in general a substance, or occasion of ideas’; though admittedly there may be great difficulties in unfolding the meaning of those words, or standing by any particular account of what they mean.

I answer that when words are used without a meaning you may put them together as you please without danger of running into a contradiction. You may say, for example, that ‘Twice two is equal to seven’, so long as you declare that you don’t intend those words in their usual meanings, but for marks of you know not what. And by the same reason you may say ‘There is an inert thoughtless substance without qualities, which is the occasion of our ideas’. We shall understand just as much by one proposition as by the other.

80. In the last place, you will say:

What if we give up the cause of material substance, and say only that *matter* is an unknown *something*, neither substance nor quality, neither spirit nor idea, inert, thoughtless, indivisible, immovable, unextended, existing in no place? Whatever arguments may be brought against substance or occasion, or any other positive notion of matter, are of no effect so long as this negative definition of ‘matter’ is kept to.

I answer that you may, if you see fit, use ‘matter’ in the same sense that other men use ‘nothing’, thus making those terms equivalent. For, after all, this is what appears to me to be the result of that definition: when I attentively consider its parts, either all together or one at a time, I don’t find there is any kind of effect or impression made on my mind different from what is caused by the term ‘nothing’.

81. You may reply that this definition includes something that sufficiently distinguishes it from ‘nothing’, namely the positive, abstract idea of quiddity [= ‘being-the-kind-of-thing-it-is’], entity, or existence. I admit that those who claim to be able to form abstract general ideas do talk as if they had such an idea; they call it the most abstract and general notion of all, while I call it the most incomprehensible. I see no reason to deny that there is a great variety of spirits, of different orders and capacities, whose abilities are far greater and more numerous than those the author of my being has bestowed on me. And for me to claim, on the basis of my own few, niggardly, narrow inlets of perception, what ideas the inexhaustible power of the supreme spirit may imprint on them would certainly be the utmost folly and presumption. For all I know, there may be innumerable sorts of ideas or sensations that differ from one another, and from any that I have perceived, as much as colours differ from sounds. But however ready I am to acknowledge how little I grasp of

the endless variety of spirits and ideas that might possibly exist, when someone claims to have a notion of *entity* or *existence*—abstracted from spirit and idea, from perceiving and being perceived—I suspect him of a downright inconsistency and of trifling with words. And now we should consider the objections that may be made on religious grounds.

82. Some people think this:

Although the arguments for the real existence of bodies that are drawn from reason don’t amount to demonstrations, yet the holy scriptures are so clear about this that they will sufficiently convince every good Christian that bodies do really exist and are something more than mere ideas. The scriptures relate innumerable facts that obviously involve the reality of timber, stone, mountains, rivers, cities, and human bodies.

I answer that any writing at all, religious or secular, which uses ‘timber’, ‘stone’ and such words in their common meanings, or so as to have *some* meaning, runs no risk of having its truth called into question by my doctrine. That all those things really exist, that there are bodies—and even *corporeal substances* when this phrase is taken in its ordinary-language sense—has been shown to be agreeable to my principles: and the difference between things and ideas, realities and chimeras, has been clearly explained. I don’t think that either what philosophers call *matter*, or the existence of objects outside the mind, is mentioned anywhere in scripture.

83. Whether or not there are external things, everyone agrees that the proper use of words is in signalling our •conceptions, or •things only as they are known and perceived by us; and from this it plainly follows that in the doctrines I have laid down there is nothing inconsistent with

the correct meaningful use of language, and that discourse of any kind whatsoever, as long as it is intelligible, remains undisturbed. But all this seems so obvious from what I have already said that there is no need for me to go on about it.

84. But this will be urged:

Miracles, at least, become much less striking and important on your principles. What must we think of Moses' rod? Rather than its really being turned into a serpent, was there only a change of ideas in the minds of the spectators? Are we to suppose that all our saviour did at the marriage-feast in Cana was to influence the sight, smell, and taste of the guests in such a way as to create in them the appearance or mere idea of wine? The same may be said of all other miracles. On your principles they must all be regarded as merely cheats, or illusions of the imagination.

To this I reply that the rod was changed into a real serpent, and the water into real wine. That this doesn't in the least contradict what I have elsewhere said will be evident from **34–5**. But this business of *real* and *imaginary* has been already so plainly and fully explained, and so often referred to, and the difficulties about it are so easily answered by what I have already said, that it would be an insult to your understanding to explain it all over again here. I shall only observe that if at table all who were present could see, smell, taste and drink wine, and feel the effects of it, that leaves me with no doubt as to its reality. So that in the final analysis the worry about real miracles isn't raised by my principles but is raised by the received principles [= by materialism], so that it counts for rather than against my position.

85. I have finished with the objections announced in **34**, which I tried to present as clearly and with as much force and weight as I could. My next task is to consider the conse-

quences of my principles. Some of these come to the surface immediately, for example that several difficult and obscure questions on which much speculation has been wasted, are on my principles entirely banished from philosophy. Can corporeal substance think? Is matter infinitely divisible? How does matter act on spirit? These and similar questions have endlessly led philosophers astray in all ages; but because they depend on the existence of matter they don't arise on my principles. Many other advantages, concerning religion as well as the sciences, can easily be deduced from what I have laid down. But this will appear more plainly in what follows from here to the end of the work.

86. From the principles I have laid down, it follows that human knowledge can naturally be classified under two headings—knowledge of *ideas*, and of *spirits*. I shall take these separately. First, as to *ideas* or unthinking things, our knowledge of these has been very much obscured and confused, and we have been led into very dangerous errors, by supposing a two-fold existence of the objects of sense, •one intelligible, or in the mind, •the other real and outside the mind. The latter has been thought to give unthinking things a natural existence of their own, distinct from being perceived by spirits. This, which I think I have shown to be a most groundless and absurd notion, is the very root of scepticism: as long as men thought that real things existed outside the mind, and that their knowledge was real only to the extent that it conformed to real things, it followed that they couldn't be certain that they had any real knowledge at all. For how can it be known that the things that are perceived conform to those that aren't perceived, i.e. that exist outside the mind?

87. Colour, shape, motion, extension, and the like, considered only as so many sensations in the mind, are perfectly

known, because there is nothing in them that isn't perceived. But if they are looked on as signs or images that are meant to copy things existing outside the mind, then we are all involved in scepticism through a line of thought that goes like this:

We see only the appearances of things, not their real qualities. We can't possibly know what a thing's size, shape or motion is, really and absolutely, in itself; all we can know is how its size etc. relate to our senses. Our ideas can vary while things remain the same, and which of our ideas—whether indeed *any* of them—represent the true quality really existing in the thing is something we have no way to discover. For all we know, everything that we see, hear, and feel may be only phantom and empty chimera, and not at all agree with the real things existing in the real world.

All this scepticism follows from supposing a difference between things and ideas, and that the former exist outside the mind, or unperceived. It would be easy to expand on this topic and show how the arguments advanced by sceptics in all ages depend on the supposition of external objects.

88. So long as we credit unthinking things with having a real existence distinct from their being perceived, we can't possibly know for sure •what the nature is of any real unthinking being, or even •that it exists. And so we see philosophers distrust their senses, and doubt the existence of heaven and earth, of everything they see or feel, even of their own bodies. And after all their labour and struggle of thought, they are forced to admit that we cannot get any self-evident or conclusively proved knowledge of the existence of perceptible things. But all this doubtfulness, which so bewilders and confuses the mind and makes philosophy ridiculous in the eyes of the world, vanishes if we give our words meanings, and don't distract ourselves with the terms 'absolute', 'ex-

ternal', 'exist', and such like, signifying we know not what. I can as well doubt my own existence as the existence of things that I actually perceive by sense. For it is an obvious contradiction to suppose that any perceptible object should •be immediately perceived by sight or touch and at the same time •have no existence in nature, because the very existence of an unthinking being *consists in* being perceived.

89. If we are to erect a firm system of sound and real knowledge that can withstand the assaults of scepticism, nothing is more important, it seems, than to provide it with a beginning in a distinct account of what is meant by

'thing', 'reality', 'existence':

for it will be pointless to dispute concerning things' real existence,

or claim to have any knowledge of it, when we haven't fixed the meaning of those words. 'Thing' or 'being' is the most general name of all; it applies to two entirely distinct and unlike kinds of item, which have nothing in common but the name; they are *spirits* and *ideas*. The former are active, indivisible substances: the latter are inert, fleeting, dependent beings, which don't exist by themselves, but are supported by—or exist in—minds or spiritual substances. We comprehend our own existence by inward feeling or reflection, and that of other spirits by reason. We may be said to have some knowledge or notion of our own minds, of spirits and active beings, although we don't in a strict sense have *ideas* of them. Similarly we know and have a notion of •relations between things or ideas, which relations are distinct from the •ideas or things related, because the •ideas may be perceived by us without our perceiving the relations. To me it seems that we can know about and talk about *ideas*, *spirits*, and *relations*, and that it would be improper to extend the term 'idea' to signify everything we know or have any notion of.

90. Ideas imprinted on the senses are real things, or do really exist. I don't deny that; but I deny that they can exist outside the minds that perceive them, and that they resemble anything existing outside the mind—since the very being of a sensation or idea consists in being perceived, and the only thing an idea can resemble is an idea. The things perceived by sense can be called 'external' with regard to their origin, because they aren't generated from within by the mind itself, but imprinted from outside by a spirit other than the one that perceives them. Perceptible objects can also be said to be 'outside the mind' in another sense, namely, when they exist in some other mind. Thus when I shut my eyes, the things I saw may still exist, but it must be in another mind.

91. It would be a mistake to think that what I am saying here detracts in the least from the reality of things. It is acknowledged on the generally accepted principles [= materialism] that all perceptible qualities—extension, motion, and the rest—need a support because they can't exist by themselves. But the objects perceived by sense are admitted to be nothing but combinations of those qualities, and so *they* can't exist by themselves. Up to this point we all agree. So that when I deny that the things perceived by sense exist independently of a substance or support in which they may exist, I take nothing away from the received opinion of their reality, and am not guilty of any new doctrine in that respect. The only difference between myself and other philosophers is that according to me the unthinking beings perceived by sense have no existence distinct from being perceived, and cannot therefore exist in any substance other than those *unextended*, *indivisible* substances, *spirits*, which act and think and perceive them; whereas the common run of philosophers hold that the perceptible qualities exist in an inert, extended, unperceiving substance that they call 'matter', to which they attribute a natural existence outside all thinking beings—i.e.

distinct from being perceived by any mind whatsoever, even the eternal mind of the creator. The only ideas they suppose to be in God's mind are ideas of the corporeal substances he has created, if indeed they allow that those substances *were* created.

92. Following on from that last remark: Just as the doctrine of matter or corporeal substance has—as I have shown—been the main pillar and support of *scepticism*, so likewise all the impious schemes of *atheism and irreligion* have been erected on that same foundation. Indeed, it has been thought so difficult to conceive matter produced out of nothing that the most celebrated among the ancient philosophers, even of those who maintained the existence of a God, have thought matter to be uncreated and coeternal with God. I needn't tell the story of how great a friend *material substance* has been to atheists in all ages. All their monstrous systems depend on it so obviously and so necessarily that once this cornerstone is removed the whole structure of *atheism* collapses; so that it is no longer worthwhile to attend separately to the absurdities of each wretched sect of atheists.

93. It is very natural that impious and profane people should readily accept systems that favour their inclinations, by mocking immaterial substance and supposing the soul to be divisible and subject to decay as the body is; systems that exclude all freedom, intelligence, and design from the formation of things, and instead make a self-existent, stupid, unthinking substance the root and origin of all things. It is also natural that they should listen to those who deny a Providence, or a superior mind surveying the affairs of the world, attributing the whole series of events either to blind chance or fatal necessity, arising from collisions of bodies. [Here 'fatal necessity' means 'necessity such that whatever does happen was always bound to happen and could in theory have been predicted'.]

And when on the other hand men with better principles see the enemies of religion putting so much stress on unthinking matter, all of them working so hard and ingeniously to reduce everything to it, I think they should rejoice to see them deprived of their grand support, and driven from their only fortress. Without that fortress of materialism, Epicureans, Hobbists and the like haven't so much as the shadow of something to say, and winning the argument against them becomes the most cheap and easy triumph in the world.

94. The existence of matter, or unperceived bodies, has been the main support not only of atheists and fatalists but also of idolatry in all its various forms. If men would only consider that the sun, moon, and stars, and every other object of the senses are nothing but sensations in their minds, having no existence except in being perceived, no doubt they would never fall down and worship their own ideas! Rather, they would do homage to God, that eternal invisible mind that produces and sustains all things.

95. The same absurd principle of materialism, by mingling itself with the principles of our faith, has given considerable difficulties to Christians. Think how many scruples and objections have been raised by Socinians and others concerning the resurrection! Don't the most plausible of them depend on the supposition that *sameness* of a body comes not from its *form* (i.e. what is perceived by sense) but from the *material substance* that remains the same in different forms? All the dispute is about the identity of this material substance; take it away, and mean by 'body' what every plain ordinary person means by it—namely that which is immediately seen and felt, which is only a combination of perceptible qualities or ideas—and then the seemingly most unanswerable objections of the Socinians etc. come to nothing.

96. When matter is expelled out of nature, it drags with it so many sceptical and impious notions, such an incredible number of disputes and puzzling questions that have been thorns in the sides of theologians as well as philosophers, and made so much fruitless work for mankind, that if the arguments that I have produced against it are not found to be perfectly conclusive (which I think they obviously *are*), I am sure all the friends of knowledge, peace, and religion have reason to wish they *were*.

97. Knowledge relating to ideas has suffered errors and difficulties not only from the belief in the external existence of the objects of perception but also from the doctrine of abstract ideas (as expounded in my Introduction). The plainest things in the world, those we are most intimately acquainted with and perfectly know, appear strangely difficult and incomprehensible when they are considered in an abstract way. Everybody knows what *time*, *place*, and *motion* are in particular cases; but when they are passed through the hands of a metaphysician they become too abstract and rarefied to be grasped by men of ordinary sense. Tell your servant to meet you at such a time, in such a place, and he will never spend time thinking about the meanings of those words; he has no difficulty at all in understanding that particular time and place, or the movements he has to make to get there. But if *time* is separated from all the particular actions and ideas that diversify the day, and is taken merely to be *the continuation of existence or duration* in the abstract, then even a philosopher may be at a loss to understand it.

98. Whenever I try to form a simple idea of *time*, abstracted from the succession of ideas in my mind—time that flows uniformly and is gone through by all beings—I am lost and entangled in inextricable difficulties. I have no notion of it at all. But I hear others say that *it is infinitely divisible*, and

speak of it in a manner that leads me to entertain strange thoughts about my existence. That is because ·I have no awareness of having passed through an infinity of periods of time, so that· the doctrine that time is infinitely divisible absolutely requires me to think either •that I exist through innumerable ages without a thought, or else •that I am annihilated every moment of my life; and these seem equally absurd. Time is therefore nothing when it is abstracted from the succession of ideas in our minds; and from this it follows that the *duration* of any finite spirit must be estimated by the number of ideas or actions succeeding each other in that spirit or mind. This plainly implies that *the soul always thinks*; and indeed anyone who tries in his thoughts to separate or abstract the *existence* of a spirit from its *thinking* will, I believe, find it no easy task!

99. Similarly, when we try to abstract *extension* and *motion* from all other qualities and consider them by themselves, we immediately lose sight of them, and are led to wild conclusions. These all depend on a twofold abstraction: first, it is supposed that •*extension*, for example, can be abstracted from all other perceptible qualities; and secondly, that •the existence of extension can be abstracted from its being perceived. But if you think hard and take care to understand what you say, I think you will agree •that all perceptible qualities are sensations, and all are real; •that where extension is, colour is too—namely in your mind—and •that if they are copies from patterns it must be patterns existing in some other mind; and •that the objects of sense are nothing but those sensations combined, blended, or (if I may put it this way) *concreted* together—none of which can be supposed to exist unperceived. [Berkeley is making a mild pun here: ‘concreted together’ = ‘fused together’, and ‘concrete’ = ‘opposite of “abstract”’.]