

Treatise of Human Nature

Book I: The Understanding

David Hume

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[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. Longer omissions are reported on, between [brackets], in normal-sized type.

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Part iii: Knowledge and probability

Section 1: Knowledge

There are (as I said in section 5_i) seven different kinds of philosophical relation:

- resemblance
- identity
- relations of time and place
- proportion in quantity or number
- degrees in any quality
- contrariety
- causation.

These relations can be divided into two classes. •In one class are the ones that depend entirely on the ideas that we compare together, so that the relation can change only if the ideas change. •In the other class are relations that can be changed without any change in the ideas. •The idea of a triangle shows us the relation of *equality* that its three angles have to two right angles, and this relation is invariable as long as our idea remains the same. On the other side, the relations of *contiguity* and *distance* between two objects can be changed merely by moving the objects, without any change *in* them or in their ideas; and how things move depends on a hundred different events that can't be foreseen by the mind. Similarly with *identity*: two objects can be numerically different from each other—that is, can really be *two*—even though they perfectly resemble each other, and even if they appear at different times in the very same place. And with *causation*: the power by which one object produces another can never be discovered merely from the ideas of the objects; so it is evident that cause and effect are relations that we learn about from experience and not from any abstract rea-

soning or reflection. Not even the simplest phenomenon can be explained purely in terms of the qualities of the objects as they appear to us, or be foreseen by us without the help of our memory and experience.

It seems, then, that of these seven philosophical relations there remain only four that can be the objects of knowledge and certainty because they depend solely on ideas. . These four are *resemblance*, *contrariety*, *degrees in quality*, and *proportions in quantity or number*. Three of these relations are discoverable at first sight, and belong in the province of intuition rather than of demonstration. [In Hume's day, 'intuition' stood for 'seeing something, straight off, as self-evidently true'; while 'demonstration' is the procedure of proving something by rigorously valid argument, *each step in which* is warranted by intuition.] When two objects *resemble* each other, the resemblance will immediately strike the eye, or rather the mind, and seldom needs a second look. Similarly with *contrariety*: no-one can doubt for a moment that existence and non-existence destroy each other and are perfectly incompatible and contrary. And with the *degrees of any quality*: although it is impossible to judge exactly concerning degrees of a quality—such as colour, taste, heat, cold—when the difference between them is very small, it is easy to decide which is the more intense when their difference is considerable. And we pronounce this decision at first sight, without any enquiry or reasoning.

We can proceed in the same way in fixing the proportions of quantities or numbers: where the difference is very great and remarkable, we can see at a glance which figure or number is the larger of two. As to equality or any exact proportion—that is, any judgment about *exactly* how much larger one item is than another—a single look will yield us only a guess, except with very small numbers or very limited portions of extension, which can be taken in all at once and where we perceive that we can't fall into any considerable

error. In all other cases we must settle for approximations, or else proceed in a more artificial manner.

I have already observed, near the middle of 4_{ii}, that geometry, or the technique by which we fix the proportions of figures, never achieves perfect precision and exactness (though its results are much more general and exact than the loose judgments of the senses and imagination). Its first principles are drawn from the general appearance of the objects, and when we know something of the prodigious minuteness of which Nature is susceptible we can't feel secure about general appearances! Our ideas seem to give us a perfect assurance that no two straight lines can have a common segment; but if you attend to the ideas that we have when we think this you'll find that they always suppose the two lines to be inclining *perceptibly* towards one another, so that the angle between them is fairly large. When the angle they form is extremely small we have no standard of *straight line* precise enough to assure us of the truth of this proposition. It is the same with most of the primary decisions [Hume's phrase] of mathematics.

There remain, therefore, algebra and arithmetic as the only sciences in which we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy while preserving perfect exactness and certainty. We have a precise standard by which to judge concerning the equality and proportion of numbers; and on the basis of that standard we can determine the relations between numbers without any possibility of error. When two numbers are brought together so that each always has a unit answering to every unit of the other, we pronounce them 'equal'. The reason why geometry doesn't quite qualify as a perfect and infallible science is that it doesn't have a comparable standard of equality in size.

But it may be as well here to remove a difficulty that could arise from my asserting that, though geometry falls

short of the perfect precision and certainty that arithmetic and algebra have, it still excels the imperfect judgments of our senses and imagination. The reason why I attribute *any* defect to geometry is that its first basic principles are derived merely from appearances; and you might think that this defect must follow it all the way through, preventing it from ever being able to compare objects or ideas more exactly than we can by relying purely on our eye or imagination. I accept that this defect follows it far enough to prevent it from ever aspiring to full exactness or certainty: but since its basic principles depend on the easiest and least deceitful appearances, they give to their consequences a degree of exactness that the consequences couldn't have if they were taken singly. It is impossible to *see by looking* that the angles of a thousand-sided figure are equal to 1996 right angles, or to guess at anything remotely like this result; but when the eye determines that straight lines cannot coincide, and that we can't draw more than one straight line between two given points, its mistakes can never be of any consequence. And this is the nature and use of geometry, to take us back to appearances which, because of their simplicity, can't lead us into any considerable error.

I shall take this opportunity to offer a second observation about our demonstrative reasonings. . . . It is usual with mathematicians to claim that the ideas that are *their* objects are so refined and spiritual that they can't be conceived in the imagination but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view of which only the higher faculties of the soul are capable. The same notion runs through most parts of philosophy, and is principally made use of to explain our abstract ideas, and to show how we can form an idea of a triangle, for instance, which is to be neither isosceles nor scalar, nor confined to any particular length or proportion of sides. It is easy to see why philosophers are so fond of this

notion of ‘spiritual and refined’ perceptions, since it helps them to cover up many of their absurdities, and lets them refuse to submit to the decisions of clear ideas by appealing to ideas that are obscure and uncertain ‘though ‘spiritual and refined’! To destroy this trick we need only to reflect on the principle I have stressed so often, that *all our ideas are copied from our impressions*. From that we can immediately conclude that since all impressions are clear and precise, the ideas copied from them must be clear and precise too, so that it’s our own fault if they ever contain anything dark and intricate. An idea is by its very nature weaker and fainter than an impression; but being in every other respect the same, it can’t bring with it any very great mystery. If its weakness makes it obscure, it is our business to remedy that defect as much as possible by keeping the idea steady and precise; and till we have done *that* it’s pointless for us to engage in reasoning and philosophy.

Section 2: Probability, and the idea of cause and effect

I think that’s all I need to say about those four relations that are the foundation of science; but there is more to be said in detail about the other three—the ones that don’t depend on the ideas, and can be absent or present even while the ideas remain the same. These three relations are *identity*, *situations in time and place*, and *causation*.

All kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a comparison, and a discovery of the relations—constant or changing—that two or more objects have to one another. [In Hume’s time, ‘comparing’ two things could be simply *bringing them together in a single thought*, not necessarily thinking about their being alike. The present section seems to use the word sometimes in that broader, weaker sense

of ‘compare’ and sometimes in the narrower sense that is common to-day.] We can make such a comparison when both the objects are present to the senses, or when neither is present, or when only one is. When both the objects are present to the senses along with the relation that holds between them, we call this ‘perception’ rather than ‘reasoning’: in this case there is no exercise of thought, no action properly so-called, but only a passive allowing in of the impressions through the organs of sensation. According to this way of thinking, we ought not to classify as ‘reasoning’ any observations we make about identity or relations of time and place; for in none of those does the mind go beyond what is immediately present to the senses, whether to discover the real existence of other objects or to discover the relations between them. Only *causation* produces a connection that can assure us, on the basis of the existence or action of one object, that some *other* existence or action followed or preceded it. And the other two relations—identity, and location in time and space—can be used in reasoning only to the extent that they affect or are affected by causation. •There is nothing in any objects to persuade us that they are either always distant or always close; and when from experience and observation we discover that their spatial relation doesn’t change, we always conclude that some secret cause is separating or uniting them. The same reasoning extends to identity. •We readily suppose that an object can continue individually the same—that is, can continue to be that very same object—even if in our perception it comes and goes; we attribute to it an *identity*, despite the interruption of the perception, as long as we conclude that if we *had* kept our eye or hand constantly on it it *would* have given us an invariable and uninterrupted perception. But this conclusion about what *would* have happened goes beyond the impressions of our senses and has to be based on the connection of cause and effect; and

we need cause and effect if we are to be sure that the object has not been switched on us, however much the new object may resemble the one that formerly appeared to the senses. Whenever we discover such a perfect resemblance, we consider whether it is common in that *kind* of object; whether possibly or probably any cause could be at work producing the switch and the resemblance; and our judgment about the identity of the object is based on the answers to these questions concerning causes and effects.

So we find that of the three relations that don't depend purely on the ideas, the only one that can be traced beyond our senses, and that informs us of existences and objects that we don't see or feel, is *causation*. So I shall try to explain this relation fully before we leave the subject of the understanding. This explanation will occupy most of the remainder of Part iii of this work.

To begin in an orderly fashion, we must consider the idea of causation and see from what origin it is derived. It is impossible •to reason soundly without understanding perfectly the idea about which we reason; and it is impossible •to understand an idea perfectly without tracing it back to its origin and examining the primary impression from which it arises. •The examination of the impression gives clearness to the idea, and •the examination of the idea gives a similar clearness to all our reasoning.

Take any pair of objects that we call *cause* and *effect*, and turn them on all sides in order to find the impression that produces this prodigiously important idea. I see straight off that I mustn't search for it in any of the particular qualities of the objects: whichever of these qualities I pick on, I find some object that *doesn't* have it and yet *does* fall under the label of 'cause' or 'effect'. And indeed everything that exists, whether externally or internally, can be considered as either a 'cause' or an 'effect', though it is plain that no one *quality*

universally belongs to all beings and gives them a title to that label.

So the idea of causation, since it doesn't come from any •quality, must be derived from some •relation among objects; and that relation is what we must now try to discover. **The first thing** I find is that only *contiguous* pairs of objects [= 'immediate neighbours'] are considered as cause-effect related, and that nothing can •operate at a time or in a place other than—even if extremely close to—the time and place that it •exists in. It sometimes seems that one object acts on another that is at a distance from it, but they are commonly found on examination to be linked by a chain of causes, with each link contiguous to the next, and the end links contiguous to the distant objects; and in any particular case where we can't discover such a chain we still presume it to exist. So we can take it that contiguity is essential to causation; at least we can suppose it to be so, according to the general opinion, until we can find a better occasion—in section 5_{iv}—to clear up this matter by examining what objects are and what are not capable of being brought together and conjoined.

The second relation that I shall claim to be essential to causes and effects is not so universally acknowledged •as contiguity, being a subject of some controversy. It is the relation of the cause's *priority in time* to the effect. Some claim that it is not absolutely necessary for a cause to precede its effect, and that any object or action can in the very first moment of its existence exert its productive quality, giving rise to another object or action that is absolutely simultaneous with it. But experience in most instances seems to contradict this opinion, and anyway we can may establish •the essentialness of• the relation of priority by a kind of inference or reasoning, •as follows•. It is an established maxim, both in physics and the human sciences, that

an object O_1 that exists for some time in its complete state without producing another object O_2 is not the sole cause of O_2 when it *does* occur, but is assisted by some other factor that pushes O_1 from its state of inactivity and makes it exert the energy which it secretly possessed.

Now if any cause could be absolutely simultaneous with its effect, it is certain, according to this maxim, that all causes must be simultaneous with their effects; for any one of them that holds back its operation for a single moment doesn't exert itself at the very time at which it might have operated, and so it is not the whole cause of the effect. The consequence of this would be nothing less than the destruction of the succession of causes that we observe in the world—indeed, the utter annihilation of time. For if one cause were simultaneous with its effect, and this effect with *its* effect, and so on, there would plainly be no such thing as succession, and all objects would be coexistent.

If you find this argument satisfactory, good! If not, I ask you to allow me the same liberty that I took in the preceding case, of *supposing* it to be satisfactory. You will find that the affair is of no great importance.

Having thus discovered or supposed the two relations of *contiguity* and *succession* to be essential to causes and effects, I find myself stopped short: this is as far as I can go if I attend only to single instances of cause and effect. When bodies collide, we think that the motion in one causes motion in the other; but when we consider these objects with the utmost attention, we find only that one body *comes up* to the other, and that the former's motion *precedes* the latter's, though without any interval that we can perceive. It does no good for us to rack ourselves with further thought and reflection on this individual case: we have said all we can about it.

You might want to stop looking at particular cases and define 'cause' as 'something that is productive of something else'; but this doesn't say anything. For what would you mean by 'production'? Could you define it except in terms of causation? If you can, please produce the definition. If you can't, you are here going in a circle, producing merely *one synonymous term* instead of a *definition*.

Shall we then rest contented with •*contiguity* and •*succession* as providing a complete idea of causation? By no means! One object can be contiguous and prior to another without being thought to be its cause. There is also a •*necessary connection* to be taken into account, and that relation is much more important than either of the others.

So I return to the particular case—for example, the collision—and look at it from all angles trying to discover the nature of this necessary connection by finding the impression(s) from which the idea of it could be derived. When I cast my eye on the known •qualities of objects, I immediately find that the relation of cause and effect doesn't depend in the least on them. When I consider the •relations between them I can find only contiguity and succession, which I have already regarded as imperfect and unsatisfactory. Should I despair of success, and accept that what I have here is an idea that is not preceded by any similar impression? That would be strong evidence of light-mindedness and instability, given that the contrary principle has already been so firmly established as to admit of no further doubt—at least until we have more fully examined the present difficulty.

So we must proceed like someone who, having searched for something and not found it where he expected, beats about all the neighbouring fields with no definite view or plan, hoping that sheer good luck will eventually guide him to what he is looking for. We have to leave the direct survey of this question about the nature of the necessary connection

that enters into our idea of cause and effect (·returning to it at the start of section 14·), and try instead to find some other questions the answering of which may afford a hint on how to clear up the present difficulty. I shall examine two such questions [the second question is here considerably expanded from Hume's formulation of it]:

What is our reason for holding it to be necessary that everything whose existence has a beginning also has a cause?

Why do we conclude that causes of kind K_1 must necessarily have effects of kind K_2 , and what is going on when from the occurrence of a K_1 we infer that a K_2 will occur, and how does it happen that we believe the predictions generated by such inferences?

Before going further, I should remark that although the ideas of cause and effect are derived from impressions of reflection as well as of sensation, for brevity's sake I usually mention only the latter as the origin of these ideas. Whenever I say anything about impressions of sensation, please take it to be said about impressions of reflection as well. Passions are connected with their objects and with one another just as much as external bodies are connected together. So the same relation of cause and effect that belongs in the external world belongs in the mind as well.

Section 3: Why a cause is always necessary

To begin with the first question, about the necessity of a cause ·of coming into existence·: It is a general maxim in philosophy that whatever begins to exist must be caused to do so. This is commonly taken for granted in all reasonings, without any proof being given or asked for. It is supposed to be based on *intuition*, and to be one of those ·immediately

self-evident· maxims that men can't really doubt in their hearts, even if they deny them with their lips. But if we examine this maxim in terms of the idea of knowledge that I have explained, we shan't discover in it any mark of any such intuitive certainty. Quite the contrary: we'll find that it is of a nature quite foreign to what can be known intuitively.

All certainty arises from the comparison of ideas, and from the discovery of such relations as don't change so long as the ideas don't change. These relations are *resemblance*, *proportions in quantity and number*, *degrees of any quality*, and *contrariety*, none of which is involved in the proposition *Whatever has a beginning has also a cause of existence*. So that proposition is not intuitively certain. At any rate, if you want to maintain that it is intuitively certain you must deny that these four are the only infallible relations, and must find some *other* infallible relation to be involved in the proposition we are examining. When you do that, we can look at it! Anyway, here is an argument that proves at one blow that our proposition is not intuitively *or demonstrably* certain. To demonstrate that **(1)** there must be a cause for every new coming-into-existence and for every alteration of something already in existence, we would have to show that **(2)** it is entirely impossible for anything to begin to exist without some productive force ·making it do so·; so if **(2)** can't be proved, we have no hope of ever being able to prove **(1)**. And **(2)** is utterly incapable of demonstrative proof, as we can assure satisfy ourselves by considering that as ·all *distinct* ideas are separable from each other, and as ·the ideas of ·a given· cause and ·of its· effect are evidently *distinct*, we can easily conceive an object coming into existence without bringing in the *distinct* idea of a cause or productive principle_c. So the separation of the idea of a *cause* from that of a *beginning of existence* is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these items is possible to the

extent that it doesn't imply any contradiction or absurdity; and so it can't be refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas, without which it is impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause.

Accordingly, when we look into the demonstrations that have been adduced to show the necessity of a cause we shall find them all to be fallacious and sophistical. I shall show this with respect to the three main ones. Some philosophers (including Mr Hobbes) argue like this: all the points of time and place in which we can suppose any object to come into existence are in themselves equal; and unless there is some cause that is special to one time and to one place, and by that means determines and fixes the coming- into-existence, the 'Where?' question must remain eternally unanswered, and the object can't come into existence because there is nothing to fix where and when it will do so. But I ask: Is it any harder to suppose *the time and place* to be fixed without a cause than to suppose the *coming into existence of the object* to be determined without a cause? The first question that comes up on this subject is always *Will the object come into existence or not?*, and the second is *When and where will it come into existence?* If the removal of a cause is intuitively absurd in the one case, it must be so in the other; and if the absurdity isn't clear without a proof in the one case, it will equally require a proof in the other. So there can be no question of showing the absurdity of one supposition and *inferring* from that the absurdity of the other; for they are both on the same footing and must stand or fall by the same reasoning.

The second argument that is used on this topic (by Dr Clarke and others) runs into similar trouble. It goes like this:

Everything must have a cause; for if anything lacked a cause it would produce itself, i.e. exist before it existed, which is impossible.

But this reasoning is plainly invalid, because it assumes that something's *lacking* any cause involves it *having* a cause, namely itself. No doubt the notion of a thing's bringing itself into existence is an evident contradiction. But to say that something comes into existence without a cause is not to say that it is itself its own cause! On the contrary, in excluding all external causes the statement excludes the thing itself that comes into existence. An object that exists absolutely without any cause is certainly not its own cause; and when you assert that the one follows from the other you are taking for granted the very point that is in question Exactly the same trouble infects the third argument that has been used by Mr Locke to demonstrate the necessity of a cause:

Whatever is produced without any cause is *produced by nothing*, i.e. has nothing for its cause. But *nothing* can never be a cause, any more than it can be something, or be equal to two right angles. By the same intuition that we perceive that nothing is not equal to two right angles, and that nothing is not something, we perceive that nothing can never be a cause; and this forces us to see that every object has a real cause of its existence.

I don't think I need employ many words in showing the weakness of this argument, after what I have said of the other two. All three are based on the same fallacy, and are derived from the same turn of thought. I need only to point out that when we exclude all causes we really do exclude them: we don't suppose that *nothing* or *the object itself* causes of the object to come into existence; so we can't argue from the absurdity of those suppositions to the absurdity excluding all causes. . . . Even more frivolously, some say that every effect must have a cause because having-a-cause it is implied in the very idea of *effect*. It is true that every effect must have a cause, because 'effect' is a relative term of which 'cause' is

the correlative. But this doesn't prove that everything real must be preceded by a cause, any more than it follows from 'Every husband must have a wife' that every man must be married. The right question to be asking is: Must every item that begins to exist owe its existence to a cause? I hope that by the foregoing arguments I have shown well enough that the answer Yes is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain.

So the opinion of the necessity of a cause for every new production isn't based on *a priori* knowledge or scientific reasoning, and must therefore arise from observation and experience. The natural next question is: *how* does it arise from experience? But I shall postpone that for a while, because I find it more convenient to sink this question in two others:

- Why do we conclude that such-and-such particular causes must necessarily have such-and-such particular effects?
- Why do we form an inference from cause to effect?

It may turn out eventually that a single answer will serve for both questions.

Section 4: The component parts of our reasonings about cause and effect

Although the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects carries its view beyond the objects that it sees or remembers, it must never lose sight of them entirely; it mustn't reason merely on its own ideas, without some mixture of impressions (or at least of ideas of the memory, which are equivalent to impressions). When we infer effects from causes, we must establish the existence of the causes; which we have only two ways of doing. We can do it either by •an immediate

perception of our memory or senses, or by •an inference from other causes; but then we must ascertain the existence of *these* in the same way, either by a present impression or memory or by an inference from *their* causes, and so on backwards until we arrive at some object that we see or remember. We can't carry on our inferences *ad infinitum*; and the only thing that can stop them is an impression of the memory or senses. Beyond that there is no room for doubt or enquiry.

For an example, choose any point of history, and consider why we either believe or reject it. Thus, we believe that *Caesar was killed in the senate-house on the ides of March*, because this is established on the unanimous testimony of historians, who agree in assigning this precise time and place to that event. Here are certain words that we see or remember, words that we remember to have been used as the signs of certain ideas; and these ideas—the ones in the minds of writers of the history books—were those of people who •were immediately present at assassination and received their ideas directly from it, or who •got their ideas from the testimony of others, who relied on yet earlier testimony, and so on backwards until the slope stops at those who saw the assassination. It is obvious that all this chain of argument or connection of causes and effects is initially based on words that are seen or remembered, and that without the authority of either the memory or senses our whole reasoning would be chimerical and without foundation: every link of the chain would hang on another; but there would be nothing fixed to one end of it that could support the whole chain, and so there would be no belief. And this is actually the case with all hypothetical arguments, or reasonings from a supposition, for in them there is no present impression and no belief about a matter of fact.

You may want to object: 'We can reason from our past conclusions or principles without having recourse to the impressions from which they first arose.' This is true, but not a sound objection; for even if those impressions *were* entirely wiped from the memory, the belief they produced may still remain. All reasonings about causes and effects *are* originally derived from some impression; just as one's confidence in a demonstration always comes from a comparison of ideas, though the confidence may continue after the comparison has been forgotten.

Section 5: The impressions of the senses and memory

In this kind of reasoning from causation, then, we use materials that are of a mixed and heterogeneous nature: however interconnected they are, they are still essentially different from each other. All our arguments about causes and effects consist of •an impression of the memory or senses, and of •the idea of the real object or event that •we think• caused or was caused by the object of the impression. So we have here three things to explain: •the original impression, •the transition •from that• to the idea of the connected cause or effect, and •the nature and qualities of that idea.

As for the impressions that arise from the senses: in my opinion their ultimate cause is utterly inexplicable by human reason; we will never be able to decide with certainty whether •they arise immediately from the object, or •are produced by the creative power of the mind, or •are caused by God. But this question doesn't affect our present purpose. We can draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they are true or false, whether they represent Nature justly or are mere illusions of the senses.

When we search for the feature that distinguishes memory from imagination, we see straight off that it can't lie in the simple ideas they present to us; for both these faculties borrow their simple ideas from •impressions, and can't ever get beyond •those original perceptions. Nor are memory and imagination distinguished from one another by how their complex ideas are arranged. It is indeed a special property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas—or, more strictly speaking, to preserve its ideas in the order of the original corresponding impressions—whereas the imagination transposes and changes its ideas as it pleases. But this difference is not sufficient to tell us whether in any given case we have memory or imagination; for it is impossible to *bring back* the past impressions in order to compare them with our present ideas and see whether the arrangements are exactly alike. So the memory is not known by •the nature of its simple ideas or •the order of its complex ones; so the difference between it and imagination must lie in •memory's greater force and liveliness. You can indulge your fancy by *imagining* a past scene of adventures; and you couldn't distinguish this from a *memory* of those events if it weren't that the ideas of the imagination are fainter and more obscure.

It often happens that when two men have been involved in a course of events, one remembers it much better than the other and has great trouble getting his companion to recollect it. He recites various details—the time, the place, who was there, what they said, what they did—all with no result, until finally he hits on some lucky circumstance that revives the whole affair and gives his friend a perfect memory of everything. Here the person who forgets receives all his ideas •of the event• at first from what his friend says; he has the right ideas of the circumstances of time and place •and so on•, though to him they are mere fictions of the imagina-

tion. But as soon as the detail is mentioned that triggers his memory, those very same ideas now appear in a new light, and in a way *feel* different from how they did before. Without altering in any way except in how they feel, they immediately become ideas ·not of imagination but· of memory, and are assented to.

Since the imagination can represent all the same objects that the memory can offer to us, and since those ·two· faculties are distinguished only by how the ideas they present *feel*, we ought to consider what the nature is of that feeling. I think everyone will readily agree with me that the ideas of the memory are *stronger and livelier* than those of the imagination.

A painter wanting to represent a passion or emotion of some kind would try to get a sight of a person in the grip of that emotion, in order to enliven his ideas of it and give them more force and liveliness than is found in ideas that are mere fictions of the imagination. The more recent this memory is, the clearer is the idea; and when after a long time he wants to think again about that passion, he always finds his idea of it to be much decayed if not wholly obliterated. We are frequently in doubt about ideas of the memory when they become very weak and feeble; and can't decide whether an image comes from the imagination or from the memory when it is not drawn in colours that are lively enough to point ·certainly· to the latter faculty. . . .

As an idea of the memory can by losing its force and liveliness degenerate so far that it is taken to be an idea of the imagination, so on the other hand an idea of the imagination can acquire such force and liveliness that it passes for an idea of the memory and has a counterfeit effect on belief and judgment. We see this in liars who by frequently repeating their lies eventually come to believe them, 'remembering' them as realities. In this case, as in many others, ·custom

and habit have the same influence on the mind as ·Nature does, and implant the idea with the same force and vigour.

It appears, then, that the ·belief or assent that always accompanies the memory and senses is nothing but the ·liveliness of the perceptions they present, and that this is all that distinguishes them from the imagination. In such cases, *believing is feeling an immediate impression of the senses* or a repetition of that impression in memory. It is simply *the force and liveliness of the perception* that constitutes the basic act of judgment, laying the foundation for the reasoning that we build on it when we track the relation of cause and effect.

Section 6: The inference from the impression to the idea

It is easy to see that when we think our way along this relation, the inference we make from cause to effect is *not* based merely on probing these particular objects and learning enough about their inner natures to see why one depends on the other. If we consider these objects in themselves and never look beyond the ideas we form of them, we shall find that none of them implies the existence of anything else. Such an inference—·based purely on the ideas·—would amount to *knowledge*, and would imply the absolute contradiction and impossibility of conceiving anything different, ·that is, of conceiving the predicted effect *not* to follow·. But clearly there can't be any impossibility of that kind, because all distinct ideas are separable. Whenever we pass ·inferentially· from a present impression to the idea of some other object, we *could* have separated the idea from the impression and have substituted any other idea in place of it.

So it is purely by experience that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another. The experience goes like this. We remember having had frequent instances of the existence of one sort of object, and also remember that individuals of another sort have always gone along with them, regularly occurring just after them and very close by. Thus we remember seeing the sort of object we call 'flame' and feeling the sort of sensation that we call 'heat'. We recall also their constant conjunction in all past instances—always flame-then-heat. Without more ado we call the one 'cause' and the other 'effect', and infer the existence of the heat from that of the flame. In all the instances from which we learn the conjunction of particular causes and effects, both the causes and effects have been perceived by the senses and are remembered; but whenever we reason about them, only one is perceived or remembered, and the other is supplied on the basis of our past experience.

Thus, in moving on through our topic we have suddenly come upon a new relation between cause and effect—finding this when we least expected it and were entirely employed on another subject. This relation is the *constant conjunction* of cause with effect. *Contiguity* and *succession* are not sufficient to make us regard two objects as cause and effect unless we see that these two relations are preserved in a number of instances. Now we can see the advantage of leaving the direct survey of the cause-effect relation in order to discover the nature of the *necessary connection* that is such an essential part of it. Perhaps by this means we may at last arrive at our goal! But, to tell the truth, this newly discovered relation of *constant conjunction* doesn't seem to take us far along our way. Here is an expansion of that pessimistic thought:

The fact of constant conjunction implies only that similar objects have always been placed in similar

relations of contiguity and succession; and it seems evident that *this* can't reveal any new idea; it can make our ideas more numerous, but can't make them richer. What we don't learn from one object we can't learn from a hundred that are all of the same kind and are perfectly alike in every detail. Our senses show us in one instance two bodies (or motions or qualities) in certain relations of succession and contiguity, and our memory presents us with a multitude of cases where we have found similar bodies (or motions or qualities) related in the same ways. The mere repetition of a past impression—even to infinity—won't give rise any new original idea such as that of a necessary connection; and the sheer *number* of impressions has in this case no more effect than if we confined ourselves to one only.

But although this reasoning seems sound and obvious, it would be folly for us to despair too soon. So I shall continue the thread of my discourse: having found that after the discovery of the constant conjunction of any objects we always draw an inference from one object to another, I shall now examine *the nature of that inference*, and of the transition from the impression to the idea. Perhaps we shall eventually find that the necessary connection depends on the inference rather than the inference's depending on the necessary connection! It appears that the transition from an impression that is present to the memory or senses (and said to be of a 'cause') to the idea of an object (which is said to be an 'effect') is founded on past experience, and on our memory of their constant conjunction. So the next question is: *how* does experience produce the idea of the effect? Is it done by the understanding or by the imagination? Are we caused to make the transition by our reason or by some non-reasoned association and relation of perceptions? I shall

start with the former suggestion, giving it about a couple of pages.

If reason did the work, it would have to be relying on the principle that

Instances of which we haven't had experience must resemble those of which we have; the course of Nature continues always uniformly the same.

In order to clear this matter up, therefore, let us consider all the arguments that might be given to support such a proposition. They will have to be based either on •absolutely certain knowledge or on •probability; so let us look into each of these degrees of certainty, to see whether either provides us with a sound conclusion along these lines.

My previous line of reasoning will easily convince us that no demonstrative arguments could prove that instances of which we have had no experience resemble those of which we have had experience. We can at least *conceive* a change in the course of Nature; which proves that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of anything is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and can all on its own refute any claimed demonstration against it.

Probability doesn't concern the relations of ideas as such, but rather the relations among objects; so it must be based in some way on the impressions of our memory and senses, and in some way on our ideas. If our probable reasonings didn't have any •impressions mixed into them, their conclusions would be entirely chimerical: and if there were there no •ideas in mixture, the action of the mind in observing the relation—that is, in taking in that such-and-such makes so-and-so *probable*—would strictly speaking be sensation, not reasoning. In all probable reasonings, therefore, there is •something present to the mind that is either seen or remembered, and from this we infer •something connected with it that is not seen nor remembered.

The only connection or relation of objects that can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses is that of cause and effect, because it is the only one on which we can base a sound inference from one object to another. The idea of cause and effect is derived from experience, which informs us that certain specific kinds of objects have always been constantly conjoined with each other; and as an object of one of these kinds is supposed to be immediately present through an impression of it, we on that basis expect there to be an object of the other kind. According to this account of things—which I think is entirely unquestionable—•probability is *based on* •the presumption that the objects of which we have had experience resemble those of which we have had none; so •this presumption can't possibly *arise from* •probability. One principle can't be both the cause and the effect of another. This may be the only proposition about the causal relation that is either intuitively or demonstratively certain!

You may think you can elude this argument. You may want to claim that all conclusions from causes and effects are built on solid reasoning, saying this without going into the question of whether our reasoning on this subject is derived from demonstration or from probability. Well, please produce this reasoning so that we can examine it. You may say that after experience of the constant conjunction of certain kinds of objects we reason as follows:

This kind of object is always found to produce an object of that kind. It couldn't have this effect if it weren't endowed with a power of production. The power necessarily implies the effect; and therefore there is a valid basis for drawing a conclusion from the existence of one object to the existence of another. The •past production implies a •power; the •power implies a •new production; and the new production is

what we infer from the power and the past production. It would be easy for me to show the weakness of this reasoning •if I were willing to appeal to the observations I have already made, that the idea of *production* is the same as the idea of *causation*, and that no existence certainly and demonstratively implies a power in any other object; or •if it were proper to bring in here things I shall have occasion to say later about the idea we form of power and efficacy. But these approaches might seem •to weaken my system by resting one part of it on another, or •to create confusion in my reasoning •by taking things out of order•; so I shall try to maintain my present thesis without either of those kinds of help.

Let it be temporarily granted, then, that the production of one object by another in any one instance implies a power, and that this power is *connected* with its effect. But it has already been proved that the power doesn't lie in the perceptible qualities of the cause, yet all we have present to us are its perceptible qualities. So I ask: why, in other instances where those qualities have appeared, do you presume that the same power is also there? Your appeal to past experience gives you no help with this. The most *it* can prove is that *that very object* which produced a certain other object was *at that very instant* endowed with a power to do this; but it can't prove that the same power must continue in the same object (collection of perceptible qualities) •at other times•, much less that a similar power is always conjoined with similar perceptible qualities •in other objects•. You might say: 'We have experience that the same power continues •through time• to be united with the same object, and that similar objects are endowed with similar powers'; but then I renew my question about why from this experience we form any conclusion that goes beyond the past instances of which we have had experience. If you answer this in the same way

that you did the previous question, your answer will raise a new question of the same kind, and so on ad infinitum; which clearly proves that this line of reasoning had no solid foundation.

Thus, not only does •our reason fail to reveal to us the ultimate connection of causes and effects, but even after experience has informed us of their constant conjunction we can't through •our reason satisfy ourselves concerning why we should extend that experience beyond the particular instances that we have observed. We suppose, but can never prove, that objects of which we have had experience must resemble the ones that lie beyond the reach of our discovery.

I have called attention to •certain relations that make us pass from one object to another even when no *reason* leads us to make that transition; and we can accept as a general rule that *wherever the mind constantly and uniformly makes a transition without any reason, it is influenced by •these relations*. That is exactly what we have in the present case. Reason can never show us a connection of one object with another, even with the help of experience and the observation of the objects' constant conjunction in all past instances. So when the mind passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea of or belief in another, it isn't driven by reason but by certain forces that link the ideas of these objects and unite them in our imagination. If among •ideas in the •imagination there were no more unity than the •understanding can find among •objects, we could never draw any inference from causes to effects, or believe in any matter of fact. The inference, therefore, depends solely on the •unreasoned• union of ideas.

The principles_c of union among ideas come down to three general ones, I maintain; and I have said that the idea or impression of any object naturally introduces the idea of any other object that is •resembling, •contiguous to, or

•connected with it. These are neither the infallible nor the sole causes of union among ideas. They are not infallible causes, because someone may fix his attention for a while on one object, without looking further. They are not the sole causes, because some of our transitions from impressions to ideas owe nothing to these three relations: our thought has a very irregular motion in running along its objects, and can leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order. But though I concede this weakness in these three relations (‘not infallible’), and this irregularity in the imagination (‘not the sole causes’), I still contend that the only *general* factors that associate ideas are •resemblance, •contiguity, and •causation.

Ideas are indeed subject to a uniting force that may at first sight seem different from any of these, but will be found ultimately to depend on the same origin. When every individual of some kind of objects is found by experience to be constantly united with an individual of another kind, the appearance of any new individual of either kind naturally conveys our thought to its usual attendant. Thus, because a particular idea is commonly attached to a particular word, nothing is required but the hearing of that word to produce the corresponding idea; and this transition will be one that the mind is hardly able to prevent, however hard it tries. In this case it is not absolutely necessary that on hearing the sound we should reflect on past experience and consider what idea has usually been connected with the sound. The imagination, unaided, takes the place of this reflection; it is so accustomed to pass from the word to the idea that it doesn’t delay for a moment between hearing the word and conceiving the idea.

But though I acknowledge this to be a true principle_c of association among ideas, I contend that it is the very same

as that between the ideas of cause and effect, and is an essential part of all our causal reasonings. The only notion of cause and effect that we have is that of *certain objects that have been always conjoined together, and in all past instances have been found inseparable*. We can’t penetrate into the reason for that conjunction. We only observe the fact itself: from constant conjunction, objects acquire a union in the imagination. When the impression of one becomes present to us, we immediately form an idea of whatever usually accompanies it; and consequently we can lay this down as one part of the definition of *opinion* or *belief*, that it is *an idea related to or associated with a present impression*.

Thus, though causation is a •philosophical relation—because it involves contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction—it’s only in its role as a •natural relation that it produces a union among our ideas and enables us to reason on it and draw inferences from it. [See note on page 117.]

Section 7: The nature of the idea or belief

The •idea of an object is an essential *part* of the •belief in it—of the belief that it exists—but not the *whole*. We •conceive many things that we don’t •believe. Let us now investigate more fully the nature of belief, or the qualities of the ideas that we assent to.

Obviously, all reasonings from causes or effects end in conclusions about matters of fact—that is, about the existence of objects or of their qualities. It is also obvious that the •idea of existence is not different from the •idea of any object, and that when after •simply conceiving something we want to •conceive it as existent, this actually doesn’t add to or alter anything in the first idea. For example, when we affirm that *God is existent* we simply form the idea of such

a being as he is represented to us, and the existence we attribute to him is *not* conceived by a particular idea which we join to the idea of his other qualities and could again separate and distinguish from them. But I go further than this. I say not only that •the conception of the existence of an object adds nothing to •the simple conception of it, but also that •the belief in its the existence doesn't add any new ideas either. When I

think of God, then
think of God as existent, then
believe God to be existent,

my idea of him neither grows nor shrinks. Still, a simple conception of the existence of an object certainly differs greatly from a belief in it; and as this difference doesn't consist in the parts or structure of the relevant idea, it follows that it must consist in *how* we conceive it.

Suppose that someone in conversation says things to which I don't assent—that Caesar died in his bed, that silver is more fusible than lead, that mercury is heavier than gold. It is obvious that despite my incredulity I clearly understand his meaning, and form all the same ideas as he does. My imagination has the same powers as his: he can't conceive any idea that I can't conceive, or conjoin any ideas that I can't conjoin. So I ask: what makes the difference between believing a proposition and disbelieving it? The answer is easy with regard to •propositions that are proved by intuition or demonstration. In that case, the person who assents not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition but is forced—either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas—to conceive them in just that way. Whatever is absurd is unintelligible, and the imagination *cannot* conceive anything contrary to a demonstration. But in •reasonings from causation, and about matters of fact, this sort of ne-

cessity isn't present and the imagination is *free* to conceive both sides of the question; so I ask again, what makes the difference between incredulity and belief? . . . Here is a bad answer:

A person who doesn't assent to a proposition that you advance first conceives the object in the same way as you, and then immediately goes on to conceive it in a different way and to have different ideas of it; and this different conception is his disbelief.

This answer is unsatisfactory—not because it contains any falsehood but because it doesn't reveal the whole truth. Whenever we dissent from what someone says, we do indeed conceive both sides of the question, and that is the truth in the 'bad answer'; but we can *believe* only one side, so it evidently follows that *belief* must make some difference between the conception to which we assent and the one from which we dissent. We may mingle, unite, separate, run together, and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways; but until there appears some principle_c that fixes one of these different combinations as the one we believe, we have in reality no opinion. And this principle_c, as it plainly adds nothing to our previous ideas, can only change *how* we conceive them. All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and liveliness. Our ideas are copied from our impressions and represent them in every detail. When you want somehow to vary your idea of *a particular object*, all you can do is to make it more or less strong and lively. If you change it in any other way it will come to represent *a different object* or impression. (Similarly with colours. A particular shade of a colour may acquire a new degree of liveliness or brightness without any other variation; but if you produce any other change it is no longer the same shade or colour.) Therefore, as belief merely affects

how we conceive any object, all it can do—the only kind of variation that won't change the subject, so to speak—is to make our ideas stronger and livelier. So an opinion or belief can most accurately be defined as: *a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression*.⁵

Here are the main points of the arguments that lead us to this conclusion. When we infer the existence of one object from the existence of others, some object must always be present either to the memory or senses to serve as the foundation of our reasoning (the alternative being a regress ad infinitum). Reason can never satisfy us that the existence of any one object ever implies the existence of another; so when we pass from an impression of one to an idea of or belief in another, we are driven not by reason but by custom, or an associative force. But belief is something more than a simple idea. It is a particular manner of forming an idea; and as an idea can be varied—without being turned into *another* idea—only by a variation of its degree of force and liveliness, it follows from all this that belief is *a lively idea produced by*

a relation to a present impression, which is the definition I gave.

This operation of the mind that forms the belief in any matter of fact seems to have been until now one of the greatest mysteries of philosophy, though no-one has so much as suspected that there was any difficulty in explaining it. For my part, I have to admit that I find a considerable difficulty in this, and that even when I think I understand the subject perfectly I am at a loss for words in which to express my meaning. A line of thought that seems to me to be very cogent leads me to conclude that an •opinion or belief is nothing but an idea that differs from a •fiction not in the nature or the order of its parts but in how it is conceived. But when I want to explain this 'how', I can hardly find any word that fully serves the purpose, and am obliged to appeal to your *feeling* in order to give you a perfect notion of this operation of the mind. An •idea assented to *feels* different from a •fictitious idea that the imagination alone presents to us; and I try to explain this difference of feeling by calling it

⁵I take this opportunity to comment on a very remarkable error which, because it is frequently taught in the schools [= 'Aristotelian philosophy departments'], has become a kind of established maxim and is accepted by all logicians. This error consists in the division of the acts of the understanding into

conception, judgment, and reasoning, and in the definitions given of them. •Conception is defined as the simple survey of one or more ideas, •judgment as the separating or uniting of different ideas, and •reasoning as the separating or uniting of different ideas by the interposition of others which show how they are related to one another. But these distinctions and definitions are seriously faulty. (1) It is far from being true that in every judgment that we form we unite two different ideas. In the proposition *God is*—or indeed any other proposition about existence—the idea of *existence* is not a distinct idea that we unite with that of the thing that is said to exist, forming a compound idea by the union. (2) Just as we can thus form a proposition containing only one idea—as the idea of God is the only idea in the proposition *God exists*—so we can exercise our reason employing only two ideas, not bringing in a third to serve as an intermediary between them. We infer a cause *immediately* from its effect; and this inference is not only a true example of reasoning, but is the strongest of all, and is more convincing than when we interpose another idea to connect the two extremes. What we can in general affirm regarding these three acts of the understanding is that properly understood they all come down to the first of the three, and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects. Whether we consider a single object or several, whether we dwell on these objects or run from them to others, and in whatever form or order we survey them, the act of the mind doesn't go beyond a simple conception, and the only remarkable difference that sometimes occurs is when we join *belief* to the conception and are convinced of the truth of what we conceive. Belief is an act of the mind that has never yet been explained by any philosopher; so I am at liberty to propose my hypothesis about it, which is that belief is only a strong and steady conception of an idea—one that approaches in some degree to an immediate impression.

'a superior force', or 'liveliness', or 'solidity', or 'firmness', or 'steadiness'. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express the act of the mind that makes realities more *present* to us than fictions, causes them to *weigh more* in thought, and gives them a *superior influence* on the passions and the imagination. Provided we agree about the thing, we needn't argue about the labels. . . . I admit that it is impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception that marks off belief. We can use words that express something near it. But its true and proper name is 'belief', which is a term that everyone sufficiently understands in common life. And in philosophy we can go no further than to say that it is something felt by the mind which distinguishes the ideas of *the judgment* from the fictions of *the imagination*. It gives them more force and influence, makes them appear of greater importance, anchors them in the mind, and makes them the governing forces of all our actions.

This definition will also be found to fit perfectly with everyone's feeling and experience. Nothing is more obvious than that the ideas to which we assent are more strong, firm, and vivid, than the loose dreams of a castle-builder. If one person sits down to read a book as a romance, and another reads the same book as a true history, they plainly receive the same ideas in the same order; and they attach the very same sense to what their author writes, despite the incredulity of one and the belief of the other. His words produce the same ideas in both, but his testimony doesn't have the same influence on them. The believing reader has a livelier conception of all the incidents. He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons; he represents to himself their actions and characters, their friendships and enmities; he even goes so far as to form a notion of their features and manners. While the disbelieving reader, who gives no credit

to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars, and can't be much entertained by it unless he is held by the style and ingenuity of the composition.

Section 8: The causes of belief

Having thus explained the nature of belief, and shown that it consists in a lively idea related to a present impression, I now enquire into what forces produce belief—that is, what gives the idea its liveliness.

I would like to have it established as a general maxim in the science of human nature that when an impression becomes present to us it not only carries the mind to such ideas as are related to it but also passes on to those ideas a share of its force and liveliness. All the operations of the mind depend to a large extent on its state at the time when it performs them; and the action will always have more or less vigour and liveliness according to whether the energy-level is high or low and the attention more or less fixed. So when an object is presented which elevates and enlivens the thought, every action the mind performs will be stronger and more vivid as long as that state continues. Now, it is obvious that how long the state continues depends entirely on what the mind is thinking about, and that any new object of thought naturally draws the energies in a new direction and changes the mind's state; while on the other hand when the mind fixes constantly on the same object, or passes easily along related objects without being aware that they are different, the state lasts much longer. So it comes about that when the mind is enlivened by a present impression it proceeds to form a livelier idea of the related objects, by a natural transition of the state—the level of liveliness—from

one to the other. The change of the objects is so easy that the mind is hardly aware of it, and applies itself to the conception of the related idea with all the force and liveliness it acquired from the present impression.

It would be nice if we could satisfy ourselves that I am right about this just by considering what it is for things to be naturally related, and the ease of transition that is essential to this. But I have to say that we can't, and that my confidence in my account comes mainly from experience. As the first experience that is relevant to our topic, I note that when we see a picture of an absent friend our idea of him is plainly enlivened by the resemblance of the picture to the friend, and that every passion that the idea of our friend gives us—whether of joy or of sorrow—acquires new force and vigour because we see the picture. This effect comes from the joint operation of a relation and a present impression. The relation: if the picture isn't at all like the friend, or at least wasn't intended to be a picture of him, it doesn't so much as carry our thought to him. And the present impression: if the picture is absent as well as the friend, the mind may pass from the thought of the picture to that of the friend, but in this case it feels its idea of the friend to be weakened rather than enlivened by that transition. We enjoy *seeing* a picture of our friend when it is set before us; but when the picture is removed, we prefer thinking about him *directly* to thinking about him as reflected in a picture which is as distant and dark to us as he is.

The ceremonies of the Roman Catholic religion may be considered as events of this sort. The devotees of that strange superstition usually plead, in excuse of the weird rituals they are scolded for, that they feel the good effect of those external movements, postures and actions in enlivening their devotion and their fervour, which would decay if they were directed entirely to distant and immaterial objects. They say:

We represent the objects of our faith in perceptible symbols and images, and make them more *present* to us by the immediate presence of these symbols than we could make them merely by an intellectual view and contemplation. Perceptible objects always have a greater influence on the imagination than anything else, and they readily pass this influence along to the ideas to which the objects are related and which they resemble.

I shall only infer from these practices and this defence of them that the effect of resemblance in enlivening the idea is very common; and as in every case a resemblance and a present impression must work together, we are abundantly supplied with phenomena to prove the reality of the idea-enlivening force of which I have spoken.

We may reinforce these phenomena by bringing in others of a different kind, noting the effects of *contiguity* as well as of *resemblance*. Distance certainly lessens the intensity of every idea; and when we are getting near to an object, even though it isn't yet present to our senses, it operates on our mind with an influence that imitates that of an immediate impression. *Thinking* about an object readily carries the mind to things that are contiguous to it; but only the object's actual *presence* carries the mind to an idea of contiguous objects with a superior liveliness. Here is an example of what happens where there isn't a relevant present impression. When I am a few miles from home, whatever relates to it touches me more nearly than when I am six hundred miles away, though even at that distance reflecting on anything in the neighbourhood of my friends and family naturally produces an idea of them. But as in this latter case both the relevant objects of the mind are *ideas*, the easy transition between them can't give a heightened liveliness to any of them, because there is no immediate *impression* at work.

No-one can doubt that •causation has the same influence as do •resemblance and •contiguity. Superstitious people are fond of the relics of saints and holy men, for the same reason that they want symbols and images, in order to enliven their devotion and give them a stronger and more intimate conception of the exemplary lives they want to imitate. It is clear that one of the best relics a devotee could get would be something made by the saint and thus causally related to him; and if his clothes and furniture are ever considered as especially desirable in the same way, that is because they were once at his disposal and were moved and affected by him, which makes them partial effects of the saint, and connected with him by a shorter chain of consequences than any of the ones from which we learn that he really existed. This phenomenon clearly proves that a present impression with a relation of causation can enliven any idea, and consequently produce belief or assent; which fits my definition of 'belief'.

But we needn't search out *other* arguments to prove that a present impression with a relation or transition of the imagination can enliven an idea, because this very example—our reasonings from cause and effect— suffice for that purpose all on its own! Here are three certainties:

- We must have an idea of every matter of fact that we believe.
- This idea arises only from a relation to a present impression.
- The belief adds nothing to the idea, but only changes how we conceive it, making it stronger and livelier.

The present conclusion about the influence of a natural-relation follows immediately from these steps, and every step appears to me sure and infallible. All that this operation of the mind contains is: •a present impression, •a lively idea, and •a relation or association in the imagination between the two.

. . . . It is the present impression that is to be considered as the true cause of the idea, and of the belief that comes with it. So we should consult our experience in order to learn what special qualities the impression has that enable it to produce such an extraordinary effect.

•First kind of experience: the present impression doesn't have this effect through its own power and efficacy, considered alone as a single perception and limited to the present moment. I find that an impression from which I can draw no conclusion when it first appears can later become a basis for a belief, after I have had experience of its usual consequences. For such a transition to occur, we must in every case have observed the same sort of impression in past instances, and have found that there is some other sort of impression with which it is constantly conjoined. This is confirmed by such a multitude of events that there can't be the slightest doubt about it.

From a •second kind of experience I conclude that the belief that comes with the present impression, and is produced by a number of past impressions and pairs of events, arises *immediately*, without any new operation of the reason or imagination. I can be sure of this, because I never am conscious of any such operation in myself and don't find anything in the situation to operate *on*. When something comes from a past repetition without any new reasoning or conclusion, our word for it is 'custom'; so we can take it as certainly established every belief that follows on a present impression is derived solely from custom. When we are *accustomed* to see two impressions conjoined, the appearance or idea of one immediately carries us to the idea of the other.

Being fully satisfied about this, I make a •third appeal to experience in order to learn whether the production of this phenomenon of *belief* needs anything more, in addition to the customary transition. So I change the first impression

into an idea; and then I note that though the customary transition to the correlative idea still remains, there isn't any real belief or conviction. So a present impression is absolutely required for this whole operation; and when I go on to compare an impression with an idea, and find that they differ *only* in their degrees of force and liveliness, I reach the bottom-line conclusion that belief is a more vivid and intense conception of an idea, coming from its relation to a present impression.

Thus, all probable reasoning is nothing but a kind of sensation. We must follow our taste and sentiment not only in poetry and music but also in philosophy. When I am convinced of some principle, it is only an idea that strikes me more strongly. When I prefer one set of arguments to another set, all I do is to decide on the basis of how they *feel* which is the more powerful [Hume's exact words: 'I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence']. Objects have no discoverable connection with one another, and the only factor that lets us draw any inference from the appearance of one object to the existence of another is *custom* operating on the imagination.

It is worth noting that the past experience on which all our judgments about cause and effect depend can operate on our mind so imperceptibly that we don't notice it, and it may even be that we don't fully know it. A person who stops short in his journey when he comes to a river in his way foresees the consequences of going forward; and his knowledge of these consequences comes from past experience which informs him of certain linkages of causes and effects. But does he *reflect on* any past experience, and *call to mind* instances that he has seen or heard of, in order to discover how water effects animal bodies? Surely not! *That* isn't how he proceeds in his reasoning. ·In his mind· the idea of ·water is so closely connected with that of ·sinking, and the idea of

·sinking is so closely linked with that of ·drowning, that his mind moves from one idea to the next to the next without help from his memory. . . . But as this transition comes from experience and not from any primary connection between the ideas, we have to acknowledge that experience can produce a belief—a judgment regarding causes and effects—by a secret operation in which it is not once thought of. This removes any pretext that may remain for asserting that the mind is convinced *by reasoning* of the principle that instances of which we haven't had experience *must* resemble those of which we have. For we here find that the understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience without so much as reflecting on it—let alone forming a principle about it and reasoning on the basis of the principle!

In general we may observe that in all the most established and uniform conjunctions of causes and effects—gravity, impact, solidity, etc.—the mind never consciously reflects on any past experience; though in cause- effect linkages that are more rare and unusual the mind may engage in such reflections as an aid to the custom and transition of ideas. Indeed, in some cases ·the reflection produces the belief without the custom; or— more accurately—·the reflection produces ·the belief by producing· the custom in an oblique and artificial manner. Let me explain. It is certain that not only in philosophy and science, but even in common life, we can come to know of a particular cause by *a single experiment*, provided it is judiciously made with a careful removal of all extraneous and irrelevant circumstances. . . . A habit can't be acquired from a single instance, so it may be thought that belief in this case can't be the effect of custom. But this difficulty will vanish if we consider that, though we are here supposed to have had only *one* experience of a particular effect, we have *millions* to convince us of this principle:

•Like objects placed in like circumstances will always produce like effects.

And as this principle has established itself by a sufficient custom, it makes convincing and firm any opinion to which it can be applied. The connection of the ideas is not habitual after one experiment; but this connection is covered by another principle that *is* habitual; which brings us back to my hypothesis. In *all* cases we transfer our experience to instances of which we have no experience, doing this consciously or implicitly, directly or indirectly.

I mustn't leave this subject without remarking that it is very difficult to talk perfectly properly and accurately about the operations of the mind, because common language has seldom made any very fine distinctions amongst them, generally calling by the same word all that *closely resemble* each other. And as this is almost inevitably a source of obscurity and confusion in an author, so it may cause you to have doubts and objections that you otherwise would never have dreamed of. Thus, my general position that

•an opinion or belief is nothing but a strong and lively idea derived from a present impression related to it may be liable to the following objection, because of a little ambiguity in the words 'strong' and 'lively':

It is not only an •impression that can give rise to reasoning—an •idea can have the same influence, especially given your principle that all our ideas are derived from corresponding impressions. If I now form an idea whose corresponding impression I have forgotten, I can still conclude from •the existence of• this idea that *such an impression did once exist*; and this conclusion comes as a belief; so •what is the source of the qualities of force and liveliness that constitute this belief?

I am ready with an answer: •it comes from the present idea.

This idea is not here considered as •the representation of an absent object but as •a real perception in the mind, of which we are intimately conscious; so it must be able to bestow on whatever is related to it the same quality (call it 'firmness', or 'solidity', or 'force', or 'liveliness' [Hume throughout uses 'vivacity']) with which the mind reflects on it and is assured of its present existence. The idea here takes the place of an impression, and so far as our present purpose goes it is entirely the same.

For the same reason, we needn't be surprised to hear of the *memory* of an idea—that is, the *idea of* an idea—and of *its* having more force and liveliness than the loose conceptions of the imagination. In thinking of our past thoughts we don't just sketch out the objects of which we were thinking; we also conceive the action of our mind in doing this— that certain *je-ne-sais-quoi* of which it is impossible to give any definition or description but which everyone understands well enough. When the memory offers an idea of this, and represents it as past, it is easy to see how that idea could have more vigour and firmness than •the idea that occurs• when we *think* of a past thought without having any *memory* of it. . . .

Section 9: The effects of other relations and other habits

However convincing those arguments may appear, I mustn't rest content with them, but must turn the subject on every side in order to find new points of view from which I can illustrate and confirm these extraordinary and fundamental principles. Philosophers are *right* when they conscientiously hesitate to accept a new hypothesis; their attitude is necessary for progress towards the truth, and should be respected.

So I must produce every argument that may tend to their satisfaction, and remove every objection that may stop them in their reasoning.

I have often remarked that in addition to •cause and effect the two relations of •resemblance and •contiguity are associating forces of thought, capable of conveying the imagination from one idea to another. I have also noted that when two objects are linked by either of these relations, and one of the objects is immediately present to the memory or senses, the mind is not only •carried to the linked object by means of the associating force, but •conceives that object with an additional force and vigour through the combined operation of the associating force and the present impression. In pointing all this out I was confirming *by analogy* my account of our judgments about cause and effect. But this very argument might be turned against me, becoming an objection to my hypothesis rather than a confirmation of it. The objection goes like this:

If all the parts of your hypothesis are true, namely:

- these three kinds of relation are derived from the same principles_c,
- their effects in giving force and liveliness to our ideas are the same, and
- belief is nothing but a more forceful and vivacious conception of an idea,

it should follow that *belief* can come not only from the relation of •cause and effect, but also from those of •contiguity and •resemblance. But we find by experience that belief arises only from causation, and that we can draw no inference from one object to another unless they are connected by *this* relation. So we can conclude that there is some error in the reasoning that has led us into such difficulties.

That is the objection; now let us consider its solution. It is obvious that whatever is present to the memory, striking on the mind with a liveliness that resembles •that of• an immediate impression, must have a considerable effect on all the operations of the mind, easily distinguishing itself from mere fictions of the imagination. Of these impressions or ideas of the memory we form a kind of *system*, incorporating into it whatever we remember having been present to our internal perception or •our external• senses; and whenever some particular item in that system is joined to a present impressions, we choose to call it ‘a reality’. But the mind doesn’t stop at that. Finding that •this system of perceptions is connected by custom—or, if you like, by the relation of cause and effect—with •another system, it proceeds to consider the ideas of items in the latter system. It feels itself to be somehow forced to view these particular ideas, and finds that the custom or relation which does the forcing can’t be changed in the slightest; so it forms them—•this second set of ideas—into a new system, which it likewise dignifies with the title of ‘realities’. •The former of these two systems is the object of the memory and senses, the •latter of the judgment.

The judgment is what populates and furnishes the world, acquainting us with things that are too remote in time or space for our senses or memory to reach them. [Hume goes on to describe his beliefs about the history of Rome. Then:] These and all my other beliefs are nothing but *ideas*, though by their force and settled order, arising from custom and the relation of cause and effect, they distinguish themselves from ideas that are merely the offspring of the imagination.

As to the influence of •contiguity and •resemblance, we may observe that if the contiguous and resembling object is included in this system of realities, there is no doubt that these two relations *will* assist that of cause and effect, and fix the related idea with more force into the imagination. . . .

But though I can't entirely exclude the relations of resemblance and contiguity from operating on the imagination in this way, it is observable that when they occur on their own their influence is very feeble and uncertain. The cause-effect relation is needed to persuade us of any real existence, and its persuasion is also needed to give power to these other relations. Here is why. Take a case where the appearance of an impression leads us not only to feign another object but quite arbitrarily to give the latter a particular relation to the impression: this can't have any great effect on the mind, and there is no reason why if the same impression returns we should be led to place the same object in the same relation to it. [The word 'feign' comes from a Latin word that is also the source for 'fiction'. Hume is talking about fictions, inventions, stories we tell ourselves.] It is in no way necessary for the mind to feign any resembling or contiguous objects; and if it *does* feign them it needn't always do it in the same way. Indeed, such a fiction is based on so little reason that nothing but pure whim can lead the mind to form it; and *whim* being fluctuating and uncertain, it can't possibly operate with any considerable degree of force and constancy. . . . The relation of cause and effect has all the opposite advantages. The objects it presents are fixed and unalterable. The impressions of memory never change in any considerable degree; and each impression draws along with it a precise idea, which takes its place in the imagination as something solid and real, certain and invariable. The thought is always made to pass from the impression to the idea—and from that particular impression to that particular idea—without any choice or hesitation.

Not content with removing this objection, however, I shall try to extract from it an argument *for* my doctrine. Contiguity and resemblance have much less effect than does causation; but they still have some effect, and strengthen the confi-

dence of any opinion and the liveliness of any conception. If I can show this with various new examples in addition to the ones I have already noted, you will grant that that will be a considerable further argument that belief is nothing but a lively idea related to a present impression.

To begin with contiguity: it has been remarked that Moslem pilgrims who have seen Mecca, and Christians who have seen the Holy Land, are from then on more faithful and zealous believers than those who haven't had that advantage. A man whose memory presents him with a lively image of the Red Sea, the desert, Jerusalem, and Galilee can never doubt any miraculous events that are related by Moses or by the evangelists. His lively idea of those places passes by an easy transition to the events that are supposed to have been related to them by contiguity, and increases his belief by increasing the liveliness of his conception. A memory of these fields and rivers has the same influence on ordinary people as a new argument would—and from the same causes! Something similar holds for resemblance. I have remarked that the conclusion we draw from a present object to its absent cause or effect is never based on any qualities that we observe in that object considered in itself; or, in other words, that it is only through experience that one can determine what a given event resulted from or what will result from it. But though this is so obvious that it didn't seem to need supporting argument, some philosophers have imagined that there is a visible cause for the communication of motion, and that a reasonable man could *immediately* infer the motion of one body from the impact of another, without appealing to any past observation. It is easy to prove that this is false, thus:

If such an inference can be drawn merely from the ideas of body, motion, and impact, it must amount to a *demonstration*, and must imply the absolute im-

possibility of any contrary supposition. From this it would follow that 'A case of impact caused something other than the communication of motion' implies a formal contradiction: not merely that it can't possibly be true but that it can't even be *conceived*. But we can quickly satisfy ourselves that this is wrong by forming a clear and consistent idea of one body's colliding with another, and

immediately coming to rest, or
going back in the same line in which it came, or
going out of existence, or
moving in a circle or an ellipse,
or—cutting it short—going through any one of countless other changes.

These suppositions are all consistent and natural; and the reason why some philosophers imagine the communication of motion to be *more* consistent and natural, not only than those suppositions but also than any other natural effect, is based on the *resemblance* between the cause and the effect—motion into the collision, motion out from it. In this case the •resemblance combines with •experience of motion in, motion out—and binds the objects in the closest and most intimate manner to each other, so as to make those philosophers imagine them to be absolutely inseparable. Resemblance, then, has the same influence as experience, or anyway a parallel one; and as the only immediate effect of experience is to associate our ideas together, it follows that all belief arises from the association of ideas—which is what my hypothesis says.

Writers on optics all agree that the eye at all times sees the same number of physical points, and that a man on a mountain-top has no larger an image presented to his senses than when he is cooped up in the smallest room. It is only through experience that he infers from some special quali-

ties of the image the largeness of the object he is seeing; and here as in other contexts he confuses this inference of his •judgment with a •sensation. [Hume develops this point in some detail, giving a special role to the relation of resemblance; omitted here.] No weakness of human nature is more universal and conspicuous than what we commonly call 'credulity', or too easily believing what others say; and this weakness is also very naturally accounted for by the influence of resemblance. When we accept any matter of fact on the strength of human testimony, our belief comes from the very same source as our inferences from causes to effects, and from effects to causes. Our experience of the dominant drives in human nature is the only possible basis for any confidence we may have in the veracity of men. But though experience is the true standard for this as of all other judgments, we seldom regulate ourselves entirely by it, and have a remarkable propensity to believe whatever we are told—even about apparitions, enchantments, and wonders, however contrary to daily experience and observation. The words or discourses of other people have an intimate •connection with certain ideas in their minds, and these ideas have a •connection with the facts or objects that they represent. This latter •connection is generally much overrated, and commands our assent beyond what experience will justify; and the explanation for this must lie in the resemblance between the ideas of the speakers and the supposed facts. Other effects indicate their causes only in an *oblique* manner; but the testimony of men does it *directly*, and is to be considered as a likeness as well as an effect. So it is not surprising that we are so rash in drawing inferences from it, and are less guided by experience in our judgments about it than we are in our judgments about any other subject.

Just as resemblance when combined with causation strengthens our reasonings, so a considerable lack of resemblance can almost entirely destroy them. A remarkable example of this is the universal carelessness and stupidity of men with regard to a future state, a topic in which they show as obstinate an *incredulity* as they do a blind credulity about other things. There is indeed no richer source of material for a studious man's wonder, and a pious man's regret, than the negligence of the bulk of mankind concerning their after-life; and it is with reason that many eminent theologians have been so bold as to say that though common people don't explicitly assent to any form of unbelief they are really unbelievers in their hearts and have nothing like what we could call a *belief* that their souls are eternal. Let us consider on the one hand •what divines have presented with such eloquence about the importance of eternity, •which is to be spent either in heaven or in hell•; and in estimating this let us reflect that though in matters of rhetoric we can expect some exaggeration, in *this* case we must allow that the strongest figures of speech fall infinitely short of the subject. Then let us view on the other hand •how prodigiously *safe* men feel about this! Do these people really *believe* what they are taught, and what they claim to affirm? Obviously not. •And I shall now explain why•.

Given that belief is an act of the mind arising from custom, it isn't surprising that a lack of resemblance should overthrow what custom has established, and lessen the force of the idea as much as custom increases it. A future state is so far removed from our comprehension, and we have so obscure an idea of *how* we shall exist after our bodies have disintegrated, that all the reasons we can devise—however strong in themselves and however much assisted by education—can never, in people with slow imaginations, surmount this difficulty and bestow a sufficient authority and

force on the idea. I ascribe this incredulity to the faintness of our idea of our future condition, derived from its •lack of resemblance to the present life, rather than to faintness derived from the after-life's •remoteness in time. For I observe that men are everywhere concerned about what may happen *in this world* after their death, and that nearly everyone has some care for his •post mortem• reputation, his family, his friends, and his country.

[Then a paragraph continuing this theme, adducing other evidence that hardly anyone really *believes* that he is at risk of eternal damnation. Then:] I would further remark that in matters of religion men take a pleasure in being terrified, and that no preachers are as popular as those who arouse the most dismal and gloomy emotions. In the common affairs of life, where we feel and are penetrated with the reality of the subject, nothing can be nastier than fear and terror; it is only in •dramatic performances and •religious discourses that they ever give pleasure. In these latter cases the imagination lazily admits the idea; and the emotion, being softened by the lack of belief in what is said, has merely the agreeable effect of enlivening the mind and fixing the attention.

My hypothesis will be further confirmed if we examine the effects of other kinds of custom as well as of other relations. Custom, to which I attribute all belief and reasoning, can operate on the mind in invigorating an idea in two different ways. •One is the way I have been describing•. •If in all past experience we have found two •kinds of• objects to be always conjoined together, the appearance of one of these objects in an impression leads us, through custom, to move easily to the idea of the •kind of• object that usually accompanies it; and the present impression and the easy transition make us conceive that idea in a stronger and livelier manner than we do any loose floating image of the imagination. But let us next •suppose that a mere idea alone, without any of

this curious and almost artificial preparation of experienced linkage with something else, should frequently appear to the mind, this idea must gradually become easier to have and more forceful when it does occur; and this facility and force—this easy introduction and firm hold on the mind—distinguish this recurring idea from any new and unusual idea. This is the only respect in which these two kinds of custom agree; and if it turns out that their effects on judgment are similar, we can certainly conclude that my account of judgment or belief is satisfactory. Well, is their influence on judgment similar? Who can doubt it when we consider the nature and effects of education?

All the opinions and notions of things to which we have been accustomed from our infancy take such deep root that it is impossible for us, by all the powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them; and this *habit* has an influence that is as strong as the influence arising from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effects. Indeed, it is sometimes *stronger*, and *overcomes* the latter influence. Don't say that the vividness of the idea *produces* the belief; the vivid idea *is* the belief. The frequent repetition of an idea fixes it in the imagination, but such a repetition couldn't possibly produce belief all by itself if we were so built that belief could come only through reasoning and comparison of ideas. . . .

(Here are three parallel instances. •Someone who has lost a leg or an arm by amputation tries for a long time afterwards to use the lost limb. •After someone's death it is common for members of his household, especially the servants, to

say that they can hardly believe he is dead, but still imagine him to be in his study or wherever else in the house they were accustomed to find him. •In conversation about some celebrated person, I have often heard something like this: 'I never saw him, but I almost fancy that I have, because I have so often heard talk of him.')

If we look at this argument from education in the right way, it will appear very convincing; and all the more so from being based on one of the most common phenomena that is to be met with anywhere. We are all familiar with *education*; and I am contending that the core of education is the production of beliefs through sheer repetition of certain ideas—that is, through creating customs of the second of the two kinds I have mentioned. I am convinced that more than half of the opinions that prevail among mankind are products of education, and that the principles that are implicitly embraced from this cause over-balance the ones that come either from abstract reasoning or from experience. [Hume's word 'over-balance' might mean 'outnumber' or 'overpower' or both.] As liars through the frequent repetition of their lies come at last to *remember* them, so our judgment, or rather our imagination, can through similar repetition have ideas so strongly and brightly imprinted on it that they operate on the mind in the same way as do the perceptions that reach us through the senses, memory, or reason.⁶ But as education is an artificial and not a natural cause, and as its maxims are frequently contrary to reason and even to one another in different times and places, philosophers don't

⁶I should remark that as our assent to all probable reasonings is based on the liveliness of ideas, it resembles many of the whimsies and prejudices that are rejected as 'mere offspring of the imagination'. From this way of talking we learn that 'imagination' is commonly used in two different senses; and in the following reasonings I have used it in both of them (I know that nothing is more contrary to true philosophy than this sort of inaccuracy). When I contrast •imagination with •memory, I mean (•broad sense•) the faculty by which we form our fainter ideas. When I contrast it with •reason, I mean (•narrower sense•) the same faculty but excluding our demonstrative and probable reasonings. When I am not contrasting it with either memory or reason, it doesn't matter whether you take it in the broader or narrower sense, or at least the context will sufficiently explain the meaning.

take account of it ·in their theorizing about belief·, though in reality it is built on almost the same foundation of custom and repetition as are our ·natural· reasonings from causes and effects.

Section 10: The influence of belief

[This section discusses, with examples, ways in which imagination and belief interact with one another, always with an eye to confirming Hume's own theory about what belief is.]