

# 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 iv: The sceptical and other systems of philosophy

### 1: Scepticism with regard to reason

In all demonstrative sciences the •rules are certain and infallible; but when we •apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them and fall into error. So we must in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or control on our first judgment or belief; and •as a basis for the new judgment• we must enlarge our view to take in a kind of history of all the cases where our understanding has deceived us, compared those with the ones where its testimony was sound and true. Our reason must be considered as a kind of *cause* of which truth is the natural *effect*; but a cause that can often be prevented from having its natural effect by the intrusion of other causes and by the inconstancy of our mental powers. In this way, all •knowledge degenerates into •probability; and this probability is greater or less depending on our experience of the truthfulness or deceitfulness of our understanding, and on how simple or complex the question is.

No algebraist or mathematician is so expert in his science that he places *complete* confidence in any truth immediately on discovering it, or regards it •initially• as more than merely probable. Every time he runs over his proofs, his confidence increases; but still more by the approval of his friends; and it is brought to full perfection by the universal assent and applause of the learned world. And this gradual increase in confidence is obviously nothing but the addition of new probabilities, and is derived from the constant union of causes and effects according to past experience and observation.

In financial accounts of any length or importance, merchants seldom rely on the infallible certainty of numbers

for their security. Rather, they structure their accounts in a manner that gives their results a greater probability than what is derived from the skill and experience of the accountant. For it is clear that skill and experience do yield some probability •of accuracy•, though *what* the probability is varies according to how experienced the accountant is and how long his account is. Now, nobody will maintain that the result of a long calculation can be more than probable. Yet it is safe to say that there is hardly any proposition about numbers of which we can be more sure; for it is easy to break the longest series of additions down into steps in each of which one number less than 10 is added to another—the simplest operation that can be done with numbers. So we shall find it impracticable to show the precise limits of knowledge and of probability, or discover the particular number of steps at which knowledge stops and probability begins. But knowledge and probability can't shade into each other: they are of contrary and disagreeing natures, and they can't be split up—each of them must be either entirely present, or entirely absent. Furthermore, if •any single addition were certain •and a case of knowledge•, •every one would be so, and consequently the total sum would be certain—unless the whole can be different from all its parts. I had almost said 'This is certain', but I reflect that what I am saying applies to itself as well as to every other reasoning, and thus must therefore slide from knowledge down into probability.

So all knowledge resolves itself into probability, and eventually comes to be of the same nature as the kind

of assurance that we have in common life. Let us, then, examine our common-life sort of reasoning, to see what foundation it stands on.

In every judgment that we can form about probability, as well as about knowledge, we ought always to correct the •first judgment derived from the nature of the object by a •second judgment derived from the nature of the understanding. A man of solid sense and long experience certainly should and usually does have more confidence in his opinions than a man who is foolish and ignorant. . . . But even in someone with the best sense and longest experience this confidence is never complete, because such a person must be conscious of many errors in the past, and must still fear making more. So now there arises a new sort of probability to correct and regulate the first, assigning to it its proper level of confidence. Just as demonstration is subject to the control of probability, so also •this• probability admits of further adjustment through an act of the mind in which we reflect on the nature of our understanding and on the reasoning that took us to the first probability.

Now we have found in every probability •the original uncertainty inherent in the subject and also •a second uncertainty derived from the weakness of our judgment •in arriving at the first probability•. When we have put two together •to get a single over-all probability•, we are obliged by our reason to add •a third doubt derived from the possibility of error •at the second stage• where we estimated the reliability of our faculties. This third doubt is one that immediately occurs to us, and if we want to track our reason closely we can't get out of reaching a conclusion about it. But even if this conclusion is favourable to our second judgment, it is itself based only on probability and must weaken still further our first level of confidence. And it must *itself* be weakened by a •fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on ad

infinitum; till at last nothing remains of the first probability, however great we may have supposed it to be, and however small the lessening of it by every new uncertainty. Nothing that is finite can survive an infinity of repeated decreases; and even the vastest quantity that we can imagine must in this manner be reduced to nothing. However strong our first belief is, it is bound to perish when it passes through so many new examinations, each of which somewhat lessens its force and vigour. When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions than when I consider only the topic that I am reasoning about; and when I go still further and scrutinize every successive estimation that I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual lessening and eventually a total extinction of belief and evidentness.

'Do you sincerely assent to this argument that you seem to take such trouble to persuade us of? Are you really one of those sceptics who hold that everything is uncertain, and that our judgment doesn't have measures of truth and falsehood on any topic?' I reply that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I nor anyone else was ever sincerely and constantly of that •sceptical• opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity, *makes* us judge as well as breathe and feel; and we *can't prevent ourselves* from •viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light on account of their customary connection with a present impression, any more than we can prevent ourselves from •thinking as long as we are awake, or from •seeing nearby bodies when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunlight. Whoever has taken trouble to refute the objections of this total scepticism has really been disputing without an antagonist, trying to establish •by arguments a faculty that •Nature has already implanted in the mind and made unavoidable.

Then why did I display so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect (·the total sceptics·)? It was to make you aware of the truth of my hypotheses that •all our reasonings about causes and effects are derived from nothing but custom, and that •belief is strictly an act of the *feeling* part of our natures rather than of the *thinking* part. ·I now proceed to connect the second of these hypotheses with what I have shown about reasoning and probability·.

Concerning the elements in our make-up that make us reach a conclusion on any subject, and correct that conclusion in the light of thoughts about our intellectual limits and about the situation of our mind when we reached the conclusion, I have proved that they—these very same elements—when carried further and applied to every new judgment on ourselves, must by continually lessening our original confidence eventually reduce it to nothing, utterly subverting all belief and opinion. So if belief were a simple act of thought, not involving any special *manner* of conception such as conceiving in a forceful and lively way, it would be bound to destroy itself and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment. But experience will sufficiently convince you (if you think it worthwhile to try this) that although you can't find anything wrong with my arguments you still continue to believe, think, and reason as usual; so you can safely conclude that your reasoning and belief is some *sensation* or peculiar *manner* of conception that can't be destroyed by mere ideas and reflections.

But here a further question may be raised:

Even on your hypothesis ·about what belief is·, how does it happen that your arguments early in this section don't produce a total suspension of judgment? *How* does the mind ever retain any degree of assurance on any subject? These new probabilities whose repetition perpetually lessens the original confidence

are based on the very same principles as the first judgment in the series, and it makes no difference whether the principles have to do with thought (·which you deny·) or with sensation (·which you assert·). *Either way*, it seems unavoidable that they must subvert belief, through the opposition either of contrary thoughts or of contrary sensations, reducing the mind to a total uncertainty. Some question is proposed to me, and after going over the impressions of my memory and senses, and carrying my thoughts from them to objects of the kinds commonly conjoined with them, I feel a stronger and more forcible conception on one side ·of the question· than on the other. This strong conception (·according to you·) constitutes my first conclusion ·or belief·. Next, I examine my judgment itself and, observing from experience that it is sometimes sound and sometimes erroneous, I see it as governed by contrary forces or causes, of which some lead to truth and others to error; and in balancing these contrary causes I arrive at a new probability which lessens the assurance of my first conclusion. This new probability is open to being lessened in the same way as the previous one was, and so on, ad infinitum. So how does it happen that even after all that we retain a degree of belief that is sufficient for our purpose in philosophy or in common life?

I answer that after the first and second conclusions the action of the mind becomes forced and unnatural, and the ideas become faint and obscure. The •principles<sub>c</sub> of judgment and the balancing of opposite causes is the same as at the very beginning, but their •influence on the imagination and the difference they make to the vigour of the thought is by no means the same. When the mind doesn't grasp its objects

with easy smoothness, the same sources of activity don't have the same effect as they do in a more natural conception of the ideas; and the imagination doesn't feel a sensation anything like the one that comes from its everyday judgments and opinions. The attention is on the stretch; the posture of the mind is uncomfortable, and the ·animal· spirits, being diverted from their natural course, are not governed in their movements by the same laws as when they flow in their usual channel—or at any rate are not governed by them to the same degree.

It isn't difficult to provide other examples of the same phenomenon; the present subject of metaphysics supplies them in abundance. An argument that would have been found convincing in a reasoning about history or politics has little or no influence in abstruser subjects such as metaphysics, even when it is perfectly understood; and that is because understanding it requires a study and an effort of thought, which disturbs the operation of our sentiments on which the belief depends. The case is the same in other subjects. The straining of the imagination always hinders the regular flowing of the passions and sentiments. A tragic poet who represented his heroes as talking cleverly and inventively in their misfortunes would never touch the passions. Just as the •emotions of the soul prevent any •subtle reasoning and reflection, so •reflective thinking tends to quell •emotions. The mind, as well as the body, seems to be endowed with a certain definite amount of force and activity which it employs in one action only at the expense of all the rest. This is more evidently true where the actions are of quite different kinds; for then the force of the mind is not only redirected but its disposition is changed, making us incapable of a sudden switch from one action to the other, let alone of performing both at once. No wonder, then, that the belief arising from a subtle reasoning lessens in proportion to the efforts that

the imagination makes to enter into the reasoning and to conceive it in all its parts. Belief, being a lively conception, can never be complete when it is not founded on something natural and easy.

I take this to be the true state of the question, and cannot approve of the way in which some people try dispose of the sceptics by rejecting all their arguments at once, without enquiry or examination. They argue like this:

If the sceptical reasonings are strong, that is a proof that reason can have some force and authority; if they are weak, they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions of our understanding.

This argument is not sound, and here is why. If the sceptical reasonings could exist and not be destroyed by their own subtlety, they would be successively strong and weak, according to the successive dispositions of the mind. Reason first appears in possession of the throne, prescribing laws with absolute authority. So her enemy (·the sceptical argument·) has to take shelter under her protection and by using rational arguments to prove reason's incompetence and liability to error, her enemy produces a sort of warrant of authenticity signed and sealed by reason. This warrant initially has some authority in proportion to the present and immediate authority of reason from which it is derived. But as it is supposed to be contradictory to reason, it gradually lessens •the force of that governing power and •its own force at the same time; till at last they both vanish away into nothing through regular and proper lessenings. ·Here is how·. The sceptical and anti-sceptical reasons are of the same kind, though working in contrary directions, so that when the anti- sceptical case is strong it has to reckon with an enemy of equal force in the sceptical case; and as they started out with equal force, they continue like that for as long as either of them exists; and neither loses any force

in the contest without taking as much from its opponent. So it is fortunate that Nature eventually breaks the force of all sceptical arguments, keeping them from having much influence on the understanding. If we put all our trust

in their destroying themselves, as alleged in the above argument, we would be relying on something that can never take place until they (the sceptical arguments) have first subverted all belief and totally destroyed human reason.

## 2: Scepticism with regard to the senses

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even though he asserts that he can't defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, though he can't claim to maintain its truth by any arguments of philosophy. Nature hasn't left this to his choice, and has doubtless thought it too important to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask 'What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?' but it is pointless to ask 'Is there body or not?', because that is something we must—being compelled by Nature—take for granted in all our reasonings.

So the subject of our present enquiry is *the causes that induce us to believe in the existence of body*. I start with a distinction that at first sight may seem superfluous, but which will contribute greatly to the perfect understanding of what follows. Two questions that are commonly run together ought to be examined separately. They are:

- Why do we attribute a **continued** existence to objects even when they aren't present to the senses? and
- Why do we suppose objects to have an existence **distinct** from the mind and perception?

In the second question, I am using 'distinct from' to refer to

object's spatial position as well as its causal relations—its external position as well as the independence of its existence and operation. These two questions, about the continued and distinct existence of body, are intimately connected. For if the objects of our senses continue to exist even when they are not perceived, their existence is of course independent of the perception and in that sense distinct from it; and conversely, if their existence is independent of the perception and in that sense distinct from it, they must continue to exist even when they are not perceived. But though a decision on either of the questions also decides the other as well, it will be easier for us to discover the sources in human nature from which the decision arises if we treat continuity separately from distinctness. So I shall inquire whether the opinion that bodies have a continued existence is produced by the senses, by reason, or by the imagination, and shall inquire into the analogous question regarding the opinion that bodies exist distinct from the mind. These are the only questions that are intelligible on the present subject. As for the notion of external existence, when understood to mean that bodies exist and are of a categorially different sort from our perceptions, I have already shown its absurdity in 6<sub>ii</sub>.

## ·THE SENSES·

Obviously the senses can't give rise to the view that objects •continue to exist after they have stopped appearing to the senses. For them to do *that* would be for them to continue to operate even after they have entirely stopped operating, which is a contradiction in terms. So if the senses have any influence in the present case, it must be in producing the opinion that bodies have a •distinct (not a continued) existence. If they were to do that, it would have to be either by presenting their impressions as •images [= 'likenesses'] and representations ·of bodies existing distinct from the mind· or by presenting their impressions as •themselves *being* these distinct and external existences. ·Let us look at these separately·.

It is obvious that our senses don't offer their impressions as the images of something distinct (i.e. independent and external), because all they convey to us is a single perception, with not the slightest hint of anything beyond it. A single perception can't produce the idea of two existing things except through some inference of either reason or imagination (·and I shall come to them later·). When the mind looks further than what immediately appears to it, its conclusions can never be attributed to the senses; and it certainly *does* look further when from a single perception it infers two existing things and supposes relations of resemblance and causation between them.

So if our senses suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must do it by presenting their impressions as *being* those very existences, this being a kind of fallacy and illusion. In this connection I point out that all sensations are felt by the mind as what they really are; when we *wonder whether* they present themselves as distinct objects or only as impressions, we aren't asking about their nature but about their •relations and •situation—·specifically, about whether they

are •related to us by causation or resemblance, and whether they are •located somewhere other than where we are·. Now, if the senses presented our impressions as being objects that are *external to and independent of ourselves*, they must be able to relate the objects to ourselves, which means that we ourselves must appear to our senses. So that is the question we now have to face: *how far are we ourselves the objects of our senses?* No question in philosophy is more abstruse than the one about ·personal· identity—about the nature of the uniting principle<sub>c</sub> that ·makes a •number of items· constitute •one person. So far from being able to answer it merely through our senses, we must—and in section 6 I shall—have recourse to the most profound metaphysics to give a satisfactory answer to it; and in common life it is obvious that these ideas of *self* and *person* are never very fixed or determinate. So it is absurd to suggest that *the senses* can ever distinguish ourselves from external objects.

And a further point: All impressions (external and internal), passions, affections, sensations, pains, and pleasures are originally on the same footing; and whatever differences we may observe among them, they *all* appear in their true colours *as impressions or perceptions* ·and not as objects distinct from ourselves·. Indeed, it is hardly possible that it should be otherwise: it isn't conceivable that our senses should be able to deceive us about the •situation and relations of our impressions, any more than about their •nature. For since all the actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must in every detail appear to be what they are, and be what they appear. It is impossible that something that enters the mind as *really* a perception should *appear* to be something different. If that could happen, it would mean that we might be mistaken even about what we are most intimately conscious of.

Rather than spending more time examining whether our senses *possibly could* deceive us by representing our perceptions as distinct from ourselves (that is, as •external to and •independent of us), let us consider whether they *really do* so. . . . Here is an argument that might be used:

My own body evidently belongs to me, and as various impressions appear exterior to *my body* I suppose them to be exterior to *me*. (Let's set aside the metaphysical question about the identity of a thinking substance, which may be tied up with the question of what *I am*.) The paper on which I am now writing is beyond my hand. The table is beyond the paper. The walls of the room beyond the table. And in looking towards the window I see a great stretch of fields and buildings beyond my room. From all this it can be inferred that all I need are my senses, with no help from any other faculty, to be convinced of the external existence of body.

This inference is blocked by the three following considerations. **(1)** Properly speaking, when we look at our limbs and other body-parts what we perceive isn't •our body but rather •certain impressions that come to us through the senses; so when we treat these impressions as being (or as being impressions *of*) real bodies, that is an act of the mind that's as hard to explain as the one we are now examining. **(2)** Sounds, tastes, and smells, though commonly regarded by the mind as •continued •independent qualities, don't appear to have any existence in the extended realm, so that *they* can't appear to the senses as situated outside the body. The reason why we *ascribe* a place to them will be considered in section 5. **(3)** Even our sight doesn't inform us of distance or outerness immediately and without a certain reasoning and experience, as is agreed by the most rational philosophers •under the lead of Berkeley.

As to the •independence of our perceptions from ourselves, this can never be given to us by the senses; any opinion we form about it must be derived from experience and observation; and we'll see later that our conclusions from experience are far from being favourable to the doctrine of the independence of our perceptions. Anyway, I would point out that when we talk of real 'distinct' existents, we are usually thinking more of their •independence than of their •external position; we think an object has sufficient reality if its existence is uninterrupted, and independent of the incessant revolutions that we are conscious of in ourselves.

Summing up what I have said about the senses: They give us no notion of •continued existence because they can't operate beyond the limits within which they really operate. No more do they produce the opinion of a •distinct existence, because they can't offer that to the mind as represented or as original. To offer it as represented, they must present both an object and an image. To make it appear as original, they would have to convey a falsehood, . . . . but in fact they don't and can't deceive us. So we can conclude with certainty that the senses don't give rise to the opinion of a •continued existence or of a •distinct one.

I shall confirm this •with an argument that will run to the end of the next paragraph. Three different kinds of impressions are conveyed by the senses:

- those of bodies' shape, size, motion, and solidity,
- those of colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat, and cold; and
- pains and pleasures that arise from the application of objects to our bodies, for example by the cutting of our flesh with steel.

Both philosophers and ordinary folk suppose the first of these to have a distinct continued existence. Only common

people regard the second in that way. Both philosophers and common folk, again, regard the third as merely perceptions and thus as being interrupted and dependent in their existence.

Now, whatever our philosophical opinion may be, it is obvious that *so far as the senses can tell* colours, sounds, heat, and cold exist in the same way as do motion and solidity; and that the mere perception of them isn't what makes us distinguish them in this respect, by attributing independent existence to the latter group and not the former.

On the contrary, many people think their senses tell them that colours etc. do have an independent existence. The prejudice in favour of assigning a distinct continued existence to colours etc. is so strong that when the contrary opinion is advanced by modern philosophers, people think they can almost refute it by appealing only to their feeling and experience; their very senses, they think, contradict this philosophy! It is also obvious that colours etc. are originally on the same footing as the pain that arises from steel and pleasure that comes from a fire, and that the difference between them is based not on perception or reason but on the imagination. Both lots—colour etc. and pain etc.—are agreed to be nothing but perceptions arising from the particular configurations and motions of the parts of body, so how could they possibly differ? Taking all this into account, we can conclude that, as far as the senses are judges, all perceptions are the same in their manner of existence.

·REASON·

Notice that when people attribute a distinct continued existence to sounds and colours, they do this without ever consulting reason or testing our opinions by any philosophical principles. Indeed, whatever convincing arguments philosophers may think they can produce to establish the

belief in objects that are independent of the mind, these arguments are known to only a very few; it is not by *them* that children, peasants, and most of mankind are induced to attribute independent objects to some impressions and deny them to others. Thus, we find that all the conclusions that common people arrive at about this are *directly contrary* to those that are confirmed by philosophy! For philosophy informs us that everything that appears to the mind is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted and dependent on the mind; whereas common people confuse perceptions with objects, and attribute a distinct continued existence (objects) to the very things they feel or see (perceptions). This opinion is entirely *unreasonable*, therefore, and so it must come from some faculty other than the understanding, i.e. other than *reason*. To which I would add this: As long as we take our perceptions and objects to be the same, we can't infer the existence of the objects from the existence of the perceptions, or form any argument from the relation of cause and effect, which is the only one that can assure us of any matter of fact. And even after we distinguish perceptions from objects, it will soon appear that we still can't reason from the existence of one to the existence of the other. All this shows that our reason doesn't and couldn't possibly, on any supposition, give us an assurance of the continued and distinct existence of body. That opinion must be entirely owing to the imagination, which must now be the subject of our enquiry. The discussion of the imagination's role in producing the belief in continued bodies that are distinct from us will occupy more than half of the length of this section.

·IMAGINATION: FIRST ATTEMPTS·

Since all impressions are internal and perishing things, and appear as such, the notion of their distinct and continued existence can't arise from them alone; so it must

arise from some of their qualities aided by qualities of the imagination; and since •this notion doesn't extend to *all* of them, it must arise from qualities that *only some* impressions possess. So we can easily discover what these qualities are by comparing the impressions to which we attribute a distinct and continued existence with those that we regard as internal and perishing.

It has commonly been supposed that we attribute a reality and continued existence to some impressions because they are *involuntary* (•as I look up from this table with my eyes open I *can't help seeing* the window, whereas with my eyes closed I can *choose* whether to **imagine** the window•); and another suggestion is that we attribute a reality and continued existence to some perceptions because they have *greater force and violence* than the others (•my perception when I see the window is more forceful than the one I have when I imagine the window•). These are both wrong. It is obvious that some impressions that we never suppose to have any existence beyond our perception are just as involuntary as, and are *more violent* than, the impressions of shape and extension, colour and sound that we suppose to be permanent beings; for example our pains and pleasures, our passions and affections. . . .

Having rejected these common opinions, we must search for some other theory revealing the special qualities in some impressions that makes us attribute to them a distinct and continued existence.

After a little examination we shall find that all the objects to which we attribute a continued existence have a peculiar **constancy** that distinguishes them from the impressions •that we don't regard as existing continuously, through gaps in our perception, because we think that their• existence depends on our perception. The mountains and houses and trees that I see at this moment have always appeared to me

in the same order, and when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head I soon after find them return to me without the least alteration. My bed and table, my books and papers, present themselves in the same uniform manner, and don't change because of interruptions in my seeing or perceiving them. This is the case with *all* the impressions whose objects are supposed to have an external existence, and it doesn't hold for *any* other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary.

But this constancy is not perfect, and admits of considerable exceptions: bodies often change their position and qualities, and after a little absence or interruption they may be hardly knowable. But we can see that even in these changes they preserve a •coherence, and have a regular •dependence on each other, which is the basis for a kind of reasoning from causation that produces the opinion of their continued existence. When I return to my room after an hour's absence, I don't find my fire in the same state as when I left it; but then in other cases I have been accustomed to seeing a similar alteration produced in a similar period of time, whether I am present or absent. (•Similar initial states of the fire have regularly been followed by similar subsequent states; this makes me think that the former cause the latter; and that requires that the fire stayed in existence throughout. This is the 'kind of reasoning from causation' to which I referred•.) So this **coherence** in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their **constancy**.

Having found that the belief in the continued existence of body depends on the coherence and constancy of certain impressions, I now ask *how* these qualities give rise to this extraordinary opinion. To begin with coherence: although the internal impressions that we regard as fleeting and perishing also have a certain coherence or regularity in their

appearances, it is of a somewhat different kind from what we find in bodies. We find by experience that our passions have a mutual connection with and dependence on each other; but we never find ourselves having to suppose that they have existed and operated when they were not perceived, in order to preserve the same dependence and connection of which we have had experience. It is not like that with external objects. *They* require a continued existence if they are not to lose much of the regularity of their operation. I am sitting here in my room with my face to the fire, and all the objects that strike my senses are within a few yards of me. (It is true that my memory informs me of the existence of many other objects; but what it tells me is only about their *past* existence, and neither it nor my senses tell me that those things have continued in existence until now.) So here I am, turning over these thoughts, when suddenly I hear a noise as of a door turning on its hinges, and a moment later I see a porter coming towards me. This gives rise to many new reflections and reasonings in which three things predominate. •I have never observed that this kind of noise could come from anything but the motion of a door; so I conclude that the present phenomenon is a contradiction to all past experience unless the door that I remember on the other side of the room still exists. •I have always found that human bodies have a quality that I call 'gravity' which prevents them from floating in the air, which is what this porter must have done to arrive at my chamber unless the stairs that I remember have survived my absence from them. •I receive a letter which, when I open it, I see by the handwriting and signature to have come from a friend, and in it he says he is six hundred miles away. Obviously I can't account for this phenomenon, consistently with my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us, and supposing the effects and

continued existence of coaches and ferries, according to my memory and observation. Looked at in a certain way, these phenomena of the porter and letter are contradictions to common experience, and may be regarded as objections to the maxims we form about the connections of causes and effects. I am accustomed to hearing a certain sound and at the same time seeing a certain object in motion. On this occasion I have received one of these impressions without the other. These observations are contrary unless I suppose that the door still exists and that it was opened without my perceiving it; and this supposition, which at first was entirely arbitrary and hypothetical, becomes more strong and convincing through being the only one that lets me reconcile the contradiction. At almost every moment of my life there is a similar instance presented to me, leading me to suppose the continued existence of objects in order to connect their past appearances with their present ones, giving them such a union with each other as I have found by experience to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances. Thus I am naturally led to regard the world as something real and durable, and as preserving its existence even when I don't perceive it.

•This inference from the coherence of appearances may seem to be of the same nature with our reasonings about causes and effects, because both are derived from custom and regulated by past experience. But we shall find that they are ultimately quite different from one another, and that our present inference arises from the understanding and from custom not in the direct way that causal reasoning does, but in an indirect and oblique manner. You will agree that since nothing is ever really present to the mind except its own perceptions,

it is impossible that any habit should ever be acquired other than through the regular succession of

these perceptions, and impossible that •any habit should ever exceed that degree of regularity.

So a certain degree of regularity in our perceptions can't be a basis for us to infer a *greater* degree of regularity in some objects that are not perceived. To suppose that it could is to suppose a contradiction—namely, a habit acquired by something that was never present to the mind. But when we infer the continued existence of the objects of sense from their coherence and the frequency of their union, we obviously do this so as to give them a *greater* regularity than has been observed in our mere perceptions. •To make this clearer, I shall redescribe the situation in slightly different terms•. We notice a connection between two kinds of objects in their past appearance to the senses, but we don't see this connection to be perfectly constant, because we can break it by turning our head or shutting our eyes. So what we suppose in this case is that these objects still continue their usual connection, despite their apparent interruption, and that the irregular appearances •of them• are joined by something that we don't perceive. But as all reasoning about matters of fact arises purely from custom, and custom can only be the effect of repeated perceptions, extending custom and reasoning *beyond* the perceptions can never be the direct and natural effect of the constant repetition and connection. It must, therefore, arise from the cooperation of some other forces.

I have already observed in examining the foundation of mathematics (in 4<sub>ii</sub>) that when the imagination embarks on any line of thinking it is apt to continue even when its object fails it; like a galley put in motion by the oars, it carries on its course without any new impulse. I gave this as the reason why, after considering several rough standards of equality and correcting them by each other, we proceed to imagine a standard of equality that is so correct and

exact that it can't admit of the least error or variation. The same tendency makes us easily entertain this opinion of the continued existence of body:

Objects have a certain •coherence even as they appear to our senses; but this coherence is much greater and more uniform if we suppose the objects to have a continued existence; and once the mind is engaged in observing a uniformity among objects, it naturally continues this until it renders the uniformity as complete as possible. The simple supposition of their continued existence suffices for this purpose, and gives us a notion of a much greater regularity •or •coherence• among objects than they have when we look no further than our senses.

But whatever force we may ascribe to this tendency, I am afraid it is too weak to support unaided such a vast edifice as *the continued existence of all external bodies*. To give a satisfactory account of that opinion, I think, we must bring in not only the •coherence of objects but also their •constancy. There is an inference from the constancy of our perceptions which, like the preceding one from their coherence, gives rise to the opinion of the continued existence of body. (•Notice that I am still focussing on objects' *continued* existence; the belief in that is prior to, and a cause of, the belief in their *distinct* existence.) Explaining this will lead me into a considerable range of very profound reasoning, and I want to avoid confusion; so I think it worthwhile to give a short sketch or abridged version of my system before proceeding to lay out its parts in detail.

•IMAGINATION: SKETCH OF THE SYSTEM•

When we have been accustomed to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found that the perception of the sun or ocean (for instance) returns to us after an absence or annihilation with similar parts and in a similar order to its

first appearance, we aren't apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different, which they really are; on the contrary, we consider them as *individually the same*—thinking that my present impression that I now have is the very one, the same individual impression, that I had an hour ago—on account of their *resemblance*. But we are pulled also in the opposite direction: the interruption of the existence of the impressions is contrary to their perfect individual identity, and makes us think that the first impression was annihilated and a second one created later; so we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involved in a kind of contradiction. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise the interruption as much as we can, or rather we abolish it by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence that we don't perceive. This supposition—this *idea of continued existence*—acquires force and liveliness from the memory of the broken impressions and from that propensity they give us to suppose them to be individually the same; and according to my theory of belief, the very essence of belief consists in the force and liveliness of the conception.

In order to justify this system, four things are needed. •To explain the *principium individuationis*, or principle of identity; •to explain why the resemblance of our broken and interrupted perceptions induces us to attribute an identity to them; •to explain why this illusion—this false attribution of identity—gives us a propensity to unite these broken appearances by supposing a continued existence; and •to explain the force and liveliness of conception that arises from the propensity.

•IMAGINATION: FIRST PART OF THE SYSTEM•

First, as to the principle of individuation, notice that the view of a single object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity. Consider the proposition *An object is the same*

*as itself*. If the idea expressed by 'object' is exactly the one meant by 'itself', the proposition really means nothing; and in that case it doesn't contain a predicate and a subject, though the sentence purports to do so. One single object conveys the idea of *unity*, not of *identity*.

On the other hand, a number of objects can never convey the idea of identity, however alike they may be. The mind always pronounces *this* one not to be *that* or *the other*, and considers them as forming two, three or some higher number of objects, whose existences are entirely distinct and independent.

Since *number* and *unity* are thus both incompatible with it, the relation of identity must lie in something that is neither of them. At first sight this seems quite impossible: there can't be something intermediate between unity and number, any more than there can between existence and non-existence. Given one object, we either have another, in which case we have the idea of number; or we don't have any other, in which case the object remains at unity.

To remove this difficulty, let us get help from the idea of time or duration. I have already observed in 5<sub>ii</sub> that time in a strict sense implies change, and that when we apply the idea of time to any unchanging object, supposing it to participate in the changes of the coexisting objects and in particular of the changes in our perceptions, this is only *a fiction of the imagination*. This fiction, which almost universally takes place, is the means by which we get a notion of identity from a single object that we survey for a period of time without observing in it any interruption or variation. Here is how it does that. We can consider any two points in this period in either of two ways: we can

•survey them at the very same instant, in which case they give us the idea of **number**: both as being two points in time, and as containing perceptions of two

objects, for the objects must be multiplied in order to be conceived as existing in these two different points of time;

or we can

- trace the succession of time by a matching succession of ideas, conceiving first one moment along with the object at that time, then imagine a change in the time without any variation or interruption in the object; and so we get the idea of **unity**.

Here then is an idea that is intermediate between unity and number, or—more properly speaking—is either of them, according to how we look at it; and this is the idea that we call the idea of identity. We can't in propriety of speech say that *an object is the same as itself* unless we mean that *the object existent at one time is the same as itself existent at another*. In this way we make a difference between the idea meant by 'object' and that meant by 'itself', without going as far as number yet without confining ourselves to a strict and absolute unity.

Thus the principle of individuation is nothing but the invariableness and uninterruptedness of an object through a supposed variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break in the view, and without being obliged to form the idea of multiplicity or number.

·IMAGINATION: SECOND PART OF THE SYSTEM·

I now proceed to show why the constancy of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them a perfect numerical identity, even though there are very long intervals between their appearances, and even though they have only one of the essential qualities of identity, namely invariableness. To avoid all ambiguity and confusion about this, I explain that I am here going to account for the opinions of *common people* with regard to the existence of bodies; so I must entirely

conform to their manner of thinking and talking. Now, ·some· philosophers distinguish sense-*perceptions* from *objects* of the senses, and suppose that the objects coexist with the perceptions and resemble them; but, as I have already remarked, this distinction is not recognized by the general run of people, who *perceive* only one thing and wouldn't assent to the opinion that there *really are* two, of which one represents the other. For them, the very sensations that enter by the eye or ear are the true objects, and they can't make much sense of the suggestion that •this pen that is immediately perceived represents •another pen that is like it. To accommodate myself to their notions, therefore, I shall at first suppose that there is only a single existing thing that I shall call 'object' or 'perception' as seems best for my purpose ·in the given context·, understanding each word to stand for what any common man means by 'hat' or 'shoe' or 'stone' or any other impression that his senses bring to him. I shall be sure to warn you when I return to a more philosophical way of speaking and thinking. [See page 110.] Now we face the question about the source of the error and deception that we are prey to when we attribute identity to our resembling perceptions, despite their interruption. Here I must recall something that I proved and explained in 5<sub>ii</sub>, namely that what is most apt to make us mistake one idea for another is a relation between them that links them in the imagination so that it passes easily from one to the other. The relation that does this the most effectively is *resemblance*, because it causes an association not only of ideas but also of dispositions: when some act or operation of the mind leads us to have a certain idea, it will be led also to have a similar idea *through a similar act or operation*. I have commented on the importance of this. We can take it as a general rule that any •two ideas that put the mind into the same disposition, or into similar ones, are very apt to be confounded—and

thus to be thought to be •one idea•. The mind readily passes from one to the other and doesn't notice the change unless it attends very closely—and that is something of which most people's minds are wholly incapable.

In order to apply this general maxim, we must first examine

- the disposition of the mind when it views an object that preserves a perfect identity,

and then find

- some other object that we wrongly identify with the former one because it causes in us a similar disposition.

When we fix our thought on some object and suppose it to continue the same for some time, it's clear that we are supposing that only the *time* is changing, and we don't put ourselves to the trouble of producing any new image or idea of the *object*. The mind's faculties in this case are not put to any work beyond what is necessary to continue the idea we formerly had, which goes on existing without variation or interruption. The passage from one moment to the next is hardly felt, and the conception of it doesn't involve any difference of perception or idea. . . . That is the disposition of the mind when it contemplates a perfectly identical object. Now we have to discover what *other* objects can put the mind in that same disposition when it considers them, causing the same uninterrupted passage of the imagination from one idea to another. This is of the highest importance. For if we find any such objects, we can certainly conclude (from the foregoing principle) that it is very natural for them to be wrongly identified with identical objects, and are taken to be such in most of our reasonings. But though this question is very important, it is not very difficult or doubtful. For I immediately reply that *a sequence of related objects* puts the mind into this disposition: such a •sequence is contemplated

with the same smooth and uninterrupted progress of the imagination as accompanies a view of a •single invariable object. The very nature and essence of •natural• relations is to connect our ideas with each other, and when one idea appears to facilitate the move to the related one. The move between related ideas is therefore so smooth and easy that it produces little alteration in the mind, and seems like a continuation of a single action; and as the continuation of a single action is an effect of the continued view of a single object, this is why we attribute singleness to every succession of related objects, treating them as though they were a single object. The thought slides along the succession as easily as if it were considering only one object; and so it confounds the succession with the identity.

We shall later see many instances of this tendency of *relations* to make us •wrongly• identify different objects with one another, but here I shall stay with the present subject. We find by experience that there is so much constancy in most of the impressions of the senses that their interruption produces no alteration in them, allowing them to return •to our senses• with the same appearance and situation as they had before. I survey the furniture in my room; I shut my eyes and then re-open them; and I find my new perceptions to resemble perfectly the previous ones. I observe this resemblance •across interruptions• in a thousand instances, and it naturally connects my ideas of these interrupted perceptions by the strongest relation, conveying the mind easily from one to another. An easy passage of the imagination along the ideas of these •different and interrupted perceptions is almost the same disposition

of mind as that in which we contemplate •one constant and uninterrupted perception. It is therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other.<sup>8</sup>

·IMAGINATION: THIRD PART OF THE SYSTEM·

The people who have this opinion about the identity of our resembling perceptions are in general all the uthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us at one time or another); so they are the ones who (·as I said earlier·) suppose their perceptions to be their only objects, and never think of a double existence: ·perception and external object·, internal and external, representing and represented. The very image that is present to the senses is for them (for *us!*) the real body, and it is to these interrupted images we ascribe a perfect identity. But the interruption of the appearance seems contrary to their identity, and that naturally leads us to regard the resembling perceptions as different from each other ·after all·. Here we find ourselves at a loss how to reconcile such opposite opinions.

•The smooth passage of the imagination along the ideas of the resembling perceptions makes us ascribe to them a perfect identity. •The interrupted manner of their appearance makes us consider them as a number of distinct though similar things that appear after certain intervals.

The perplexity arising from this contradiction inclines us to unite these broken appearances by *the fiction of a continued existence*, which is the third part of the system I offered to explain.

Our experience shows us—as certainly as it shows anything—that whatever contradicts either our opinions or our passions generates a noticeable uneasiness, whether the contradiction comes from without or from within—from the opposition of external objects or from the conflict of forces inside us. On the other hand, anything that chimes with our natural propensities, and either externally advances their satisfaction or internally goes along with their turns of thought and feeling, is sure to give us conscious pleasure. Now, we have here an opposition between •the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions and •the interruption in their appearance, so the mind is bound to be uneasy and to seek relief from that uneasiness. Since the uneasiness arises from the opposition of two contrary forces, the mind must look for relief by sacrificing one to the other. But as the smooth passage of our thought along our resembling perceptions makes us ascribe an identity to them, we are very reluctant to give up that opinion. So we must turn to the other side ·of the dilemma·, and suppose that our perceptions are not interrupted after all, that their existence is not only invariable but continuous, and that this enables them to be entirely the same, strictly identical. But *appearances of* these perceptions are interrupted so often and for such long periods that we can't overlook the interruptions; and they seem to imply that the perceptions *didn't exist* during those periods. The alternative is to suppose that they existed but weren't present to the mind; but this looks like a flat contradiction that we couldn't ever swallow, because

<sup>8</sup>This reasoning is admittedly rather abstruse and hard to understand; but the remarkable fact is that this very difficulty can be turned into an argument for the reasoning! We can see that there are two resemblances that contribute to our mistaking •the sequence of our interrupted perceptions for •an identical object. The first is the resemblance of the perceptions that are involved in each; the second is the resemblance of the acts of the mind that are involved in each. Now we are apt to confound *these resemblances* with each other, ·and that is what makes this whole piece of theory hard to get straight in one's mind·. It is also what it is natural for us to do, according to this very theory. If you can only keep the two resemblances distinct, you'll have no difficulty in following my argument.

a perception's *existing* seems at first sight to be the very same thing as its *appearing to a mind*. To clear this matter up, and to learn how an interruption in the appearance of a perception doesn't necessarily imply an interruption in its existence, I need to touch on some principles that I'll have occasion to explain more fully in section 6.

I begin by observing that our present difficulty is not about the factual question of whether the mind *does* form such a conclusion about the continued existence of its perceptions, but only about *how* it does so, about what forces are at work in this. It is certain that almost all mankind—and even philosophers most of the time—take their perceptions to be their only objects, and suppose that the very thing that is intimately present to the mind is the real body or material thing. It is also certain that this very perception or object is supposed to have a continued uninterrupted existence, and to be neither annihilated by our absence nor brought into existence by our presence. We say:

When we are absent from it, it still exists, but we don't feel, we don't see it. When we are present, we feel or see it.

So two questions arise. •How can we get ourselves to be satisfied in supposing a perception to be absent from the mind without being annihilated? •How do we conceive an object to become present to the mind, without some new creation of a perception or image; and what do we mean by 'seeing' and 'feeling' and 'perceiving' an object? As to the first question, I would remark that what we call 'a mind' is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, held together by certain relations and wrongly supposed to be endowed with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now, every perception is distinguishable from every other, and can be considered as existing separately from any other; from which it clearly follows that there is no absurdity in separating any

particular perception from the mind—that is, in breaking off all its relations with that heap of connected perceptions that constitute a thinking being.

The same reasoning gives us an answer to the second question. If the label 'perception' doesn't make this separation from a mind absurd and contradictory, the label 'object', standing for the very same thing, can't make a presence to the mind impossible. External objects are seen and felt and become present to the mind; that is, they acquire such a relation to a connected heap of perceptions as to influence them very considerably in augmenting their number by present reflections and passions, and in storing the memory with ideas. The same continued and uninterrupted being can therefore be sometimes present to the mind and sometimes absent from it, without any real or essential change in the being itself. An interrupted appearance to the senses doesn't necessarily imply an interruption in the existence; the supposition of the continued existence of perceptible objects or perceptions involves no contradiction; we can easily go along with out inclination to make that supposition. When the exact resemblance of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, we can remove the seeming interruption by *feigning* a continued being that can fill those intervals and preserve a perfect and entire identity to our perceptions. [*Feigning* is creating a *fiction*; the two words come from a single Latin word.]

•IMAGINATION: FOURTH PART OF THE SYSTEM•

But we don't just feign this continued existence—we believe in it. Where does this belief come from? This question leads us to the fourth part of my system. I have already shown that belief in general consists in nothing but the liveliness of an idea, and that an idea can acquire this liveliness by its •relation to some present impression. Impressions are naturally the most vivid perceptions of the

mind, and some of this vividness is conveyed by the •relation to every connected idea. The relation •disposes the mind to go from the impression to the idea, and causes the move to be a •smooth one. The mind goes so easily from the one perception to the other that it hardly notices the change, and retains in the second perception (•the idea•) a considerable share of the liveliness of the first (•the impression•). It is aroused by the lively impression, and this liveliness is conveyed without much loss to the related idea, because of the •smooth transition and the •disposition of the imagination.

Even if this disposition arises from something other than the influence of relations, its source—whatever it is—must obviously have the same effect •as I have been attributing to relations•, and must convey the liveliness from the impression to the idea. And that is what we have in our present case. Our memory presents us with a vast number of instances of perceptions perfectly resembling each other that return at different distances of time and after considerable interruptions. This resemblance disposes us to consider these •different• interrupted perceptions as •being• •the same; and also disposes us to connect them by a continued existence in order to justify •this identity and avoid its seeming contradiction with the interrupted appearance of these perceptions. So we are disposed to feign the continued existence of all perceptible objects; and as this disposition arises from some lively impressions of the memory it gives liveliness to that fiction—which is to say that it makes us *believe* in the continued existence of the body. If we sometimes ascribe a continued existence to objects that are perfectly new to us, and of whose constancy and coherence we have no experience, it is because they present themselves to our senses in a manner that resembles that of constant and coherent objects; and *this* resemblance is a source of reasoning and analogy, leading us to attribute the

same qualities to objects that are similar.

I believe a thinking reader will find it easier to •assent to this system than to •grasp it fully and clearly, and after a little thought will agree that every part carries its own proof along with it. •I shall now run through the argument again in a slightly different way•. It is obvious that as common people

•suppose their perceptions to be their only objects, and at the same time

•believe in the continued existence of matter, we have to explain how •that belief can arise for people who make •that supposition. Now, on that supposition it is not true that any of our objects (or perceptions) is identically the same after an interruption; and consequently the opinion of their identity can never arise from reason, but must arise from the imagination. The imagination is seduced into this opinion only by the resemblance of certain perceptions (evidence for this: our resembling perceptions are the only ones that we are disposed to suppose the same). This disposition to confer an identity on our resembling perceptions produces the fiction of a continued existence. That fiction •is properly so-called• because it, as well as the identity, really is false, as all philosophers agree, and its only effect is to remedy the interruption of our perceptions which is the only obstacle to their identity. Finally, this disposition causes belief by means of the present impressions of the memory (evidence: without memories of former sensations we would obviously never have any belief in the continued existence of body). Thus, in examining all these parts, we find that each of them is supported by the strongest proofs; and that all of them together form a consistent system that is perfectly convincing. . . .

But although the natural disposition of the imagination leads us in this way to ascribe a continued existence to

those perceptible objects or perceptions that we find to resemble each other in their interrupted appearance, a very little reflection and philosophy is sufficient to make us see the fallacy of that opinion. I have already remarked that there is an intimate connection between the two theses, of a •continued existence and of a •distinct or independent existence, and that we no sooner establish one than the other follows as a necessary consequence. It is the belief in a continued existence that comes first, and without much study or reflection pulls the other along with it. . . . But when we compare experiments and think about them a little, we quickly see that the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensory perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience. This leads us to retrace our steps and perceive our error in attributing a continued existence to our perceptions. It is the origin of many very curious opinions that I shall here try to account for.

First I should mention a few of those experiential episodes that convince us that our perceptions don't have any independent existence. When we press one eye with a finger, we immediately perceive all the objects to become double, and half of them to be removed from their usual position. But as we don't attribute a continued existence to both these perceptions, and as they are both of the same nature, we clearly perceive that all our perceptions depend on our organs and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits. This is confirmed by the seeming growth and shrinkage of objects according to how far away they are, by the apparent alterations in their shapes, by the changes in their colour and other qualities, when we are ill, and by countless other experiences of the same kind—from all which we learn that our sensible perceptions don't have any distinct or independent existence.

·THE NEW PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM·

The natural consequence of this reasoning should be that our perceptions don't have a continued existence either; and indeed philosophers have reached this view so thoroughly that they change their system, and distinguish (as I shall do from here on) between •perceptions and •objects. They hold that perceptions are interrupted and perishing, and different at every different return ·to our senses·; and that objects are uninterrupted and preserve a continued existence and identity. But however philosophical this new system may be thought to be, I contend that it is only a superficial remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the common system along with some others that are all its own. There are no drives in either the understanding or the imagination that lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of •perceptions and •objects, and we can't arrive at it except by passing through the common hypothesis of the identity and continuity of our interrupted •perceptions. If we weren't first convinced that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer appear to the senses, we would never be led to think that our perceptions and our objects are different, and that it is only our objects that have a continued existence. ·I contend·:

The philosophical hypothesis •has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination, and •acquires all its influence on the imagination from the common hypothesis.

This ·displayed· proposition contains two parts, which I shall try to prove as distinctly and clearly as such abstruse subjects will permit.

As to the first part of the proposition that this philosophical hypothesis has no primary recommendation either to

reason or the imagination, we can soon satisfy ourselves with regard to *reason*, by the following reflections. The only existences of which we are certain are perceptions that, being immediately present to us in consciousness, command our strongest assent and are the ultimate basis of all our conclusions. The only conclusion we can draw from the existence of one thing to the existence of another is through the relation of *cause and effect*, showing that there is a connection between them and that the existence of one depends on that of the other. The idea of the cause-effect relation is derived from past experience in which we find that two kinds of beings are constantly conjoined and are always present together to the mind. But no beings are ever present to the mind except perceptions; so we can observe a conjunction or cause-effect relation between different perceptions, but can never observe it between perceptions and objects. So it is impossible that from any fact about perceptions we can ever validly form any conclusion about the existence of objects when these are understood, as they are in the philosophical hypothesis, as different from perceptions.

It is no less certain that this philosophical system has no primary recommendation to the *imagination*, which would never have arrived at such a view on its own and through forces that are intrinsic to it. It will be somewhat difficult to prove this to your full satisfaction, I admit, because it implies a negative, and negatives very often don't admit of any positive proof. If someone would take the trouble to look into this question and invent a system claiming to account for how this opinion *does* arise directly from the imagination, we could by examining that system reach a certain judgment on the present topic. Thus:

Let it be taken for granted that our perceptions are broken and interrupted, and that however alike they

are they are still different from each other; and let anyone on this basis show why the imagination *directly and immediately* (not through the indirect mechanism I have proposed) proceeds to the belief in another existing thing that resembles these perceptions in their nature but differs from them in being continuous and uninterrupted and identical.

When someone has done this to my satisfaction, I promise to renounce my present opinion. Meanwhile I can't help thinking that this, because of the very abstractedness and difficulty of the first supposition [Hume's phrase], is not fit material for the imagination to work on. Whoever wants to explain the origin of the *common* opinion about the continued and distinct existence of body must focus on the mind as it *commonly* is, and proceed on the supposition that our perceptions are our only objects and continue to exist even when not perceived. This opinion is false, but it is the most natural of any, and is the only one that has any primary recommendation to the imagination. As to the second part of the proposition that is displayed a page back, that the philosophical system acquires all its influence on the imagination from the common one: this is a natural and unavoidable consequence of the foregoing conclusion that the philosophical system has no primary recommendation to reason or the imagination. We find by experience that the philosophical system *does* take hold of many minds, especially of all those who reflect even a little on this subject; so it must derive all its authority from the common system, as it has no authority of its own. These two systems, though directly contrary, are connected together and here is how.

The imagination naturally thinks along the following lines:

- Our perceptions are our only objects.
- Resembling perceptions are the same, however broken

or uninterrupted in their appearance.

- This apparent interruption is contrary to the identity.
- So it is only an *apparent* interruption, and the perception or object *really* continues to exist even when absent from us.
- So our sensory perceptions have a continued and uninterrupted existence.

But as a little reflection destroys this conclusion that our perceptions have a continued existence by showing that they have a dependent one—and I have shown that they couldn't be continuous unless they were independent—it would naturally be expected that we should altogether reject the opinion that Nature contains any such thing as a continued existence that is preserved even when it no longer appears to the senses. But that is not what has happened! Philosophers don't in general infer from

Our sensory perceptions are dependent and not continuous

that

Nothing has a continued existence through gaps in our perceptions.

Indeed, they are so far from making that inference that although all philosophical sects agree with the former view, the latter—which is in a way its necessary consequence—has been the property only of a few extravagant sceptics; and even they have maintained it in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it.

There is a great difference between opinions that we form after calm deep thought and ones that we embrace by a kind of instinct or natural impulse because of their suitableness and conformity to the mind. When opinions of these two kinds come into conflict, it is easy to foresee which will win! As long as our attention is focussed on the subject, the philosophical and studied principle may prevail;

but the moment we relax our thoughts, Nature will display herself and pull us back to our former instinctive or natural opinion. Indeed, Nature sometimes has so much influence that she can stop us in our tracks, even in the middle of our deepest reflections, and keep us from running on into all the consequences of some philosophical opinion. Thus, though we clearly perceive the dependence and interruption of our perceptions, we come to an abrupt halt and don't infer that there is nothing independent and continuous. The opinion that there *are* such things has taken such deep root in the imagination that it is impossible ever to eradicate it; no tenuous metaphysical conviction of the dependence of our perceptions is sufficient for that purpose.

But though our natural and obvious drives here prevail over our studied reflections, there must surely be some struggle and opposition over this, at least so long as these reflections retain any force or liveliness. In order to set ourselves at ease in this respect, we contrive a new hypothesis that seems to take in both these influences—of reason and of imagination. This is the philosophical hypothesis of the double existence of perceptions and objects: it pleases our reason by allowing that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different, and it is also agreeable to the imagination because it attributes a continued existence to something else that we call 'objects'. This philosophical system, therefore, is the misshaped offspring of two principles that are •contrary to each other, are •both at once embraced by the mind, and are •unable mutually to destroy each other. The imagination tells us that our resembling perceptions

- have a continued and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by being absent from us.

Reflection tells us that even our resembling perceptions

- are interrupted in their existence, and are different from each other.

We escape the contradiction between these opinions by a new fiction that squares with the hypotheses of both reflection and imagination by ascribing these contrary qualities to different existences—•the interruption to perceptions, and •the continuity to objects. Nature is obstinate, and refuses to give up, however strongly it is attacked by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear about this matter that there is no possibility of disguising it •by muffling and then evading its message•. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we try to set ourselves at ease as much as possible by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a *double existence* in which each can find something that meets all the conditions it lays down. •Look at how we get ourselves into this•:

If we were fully convinced that our resembling perceptions are continued and identical and independent, we would never go for this opinion of a double existence; because in that case we would find satisfaction in our first supposition, and would not look beyond.

On the other hand,

If we were fully convinced that our perceptions are dependent and interrupted and different, we would be equally disinclined to embrace the opinion of a double existence; because in that case we would clearly perceive the error of our first supposition of a continued existence, and give it no further thought.

So the opinion of a double existence arises from the half-way situation of the mind—from adhering to these two contrary principles in such a way as to seek some pretext to justify accepting both; which (happily!) is found at last in the system of a double existence.

Another advantage of this philosophical system is its similarity to the common one: it enables us to humour our reason for a moment when it becomes troublesome and

anxious, but as soon as reason's attention flags, the system makes it easy to us to return to our common and natural notions. Sure enough, we find that philosophers make use of this advantage: as soon as they leave their studies they join with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same through all their interrupted appearances.

Other aspects of the philosophical system show very conspicuously its dependence on the imagination. I shall note two of them. First, •in the philosophical system• we suppose external objects to *resemble* internal perceptions. I have already shown that the relation of cause and effect can never let us soundly infer the existence of external continuous objects from the existence or qualities of our perceptions; and I now add that even if we could justify such an inference, we should never have any reason to infer that our objects *resemble* our perceptions. So that opinion is comes purely from the quality of the imagination that I have explained above, namely that *it borrows all its ideas from some earlier perception*. We never can conceive anything but perceptions, so •in our imagination• we must make everything resemble them.

Secondly, •in the philosophical system• we don't merely suppose our objects to resemble our perceptions in a general way; we also take it for granted that each particular object resembles the perception that it causes. The relation of cause and effect makes us bring in that other relation, resemblance; and since the ideas of these items—the object and the perception of it—are already united together in the imagination by the former relation (•cause-effect•), we naturally add the latter (•resemblance•) to complete the union. We have a strong disposition to complete every union by joining new relations to those that we have before observed between any

ideas, as I shall have occasion to remark in section 5.

·FINAL REMARKS·

Having thus given an account of all the systems, both popular and philosophical, with regard to external existents, I can't help expressing a certain attitude that arises in me when I review those systems. I began this subject by laying it down that we ought to have an unquestioning faith in our senses, and that this would be the conclusion I would draw from the whole of my reasoning. Frankly, however, I feel myself at present in a quite contrary frame of mind, and am more inclined to put •no faith at all in my senses (or rather my imagination) than to place in it such an •unquestioning confidence. I can't conceive how such trivial qualities of the imagination, guided by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. I mean the qualities of the coherence and constancy of our perceptions, which produce the opinion of their continued existence, although these qualities of perceptions have no perceivable *connection* with such an existence. The *constancy* of our perceptions has the most considerable effect, and yet it is the one that brings the greatest difficulties. It is a gross illusion to suppose that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same ·after an interruption·; and it is this illusion that leads us to the view that these perceptions are *not* interrupted and still exist when not present to our senses. So much for our popular system! As to our philosophical system: it suffers from the same difficulties, and in addition to them it is loaded with the absurdity of at once •denying and •asserting the common supposition! Philosophers say that our resembling perceptions are *not* identically the same and uninterrupted; yet they have so great a disposition to believe that they *are*

that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions to which they attribute these qualities. (I say 'a new set of *perceptions*' ·for a good reason·. We can in a general ·vague· way suppose there are objects that are not perceptions, but it is impossible for us to think clearly and sharply about objects as being in their nature anything but exactly the same as perceptions.) What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falsehood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief in them? This sceptical doubt, with respect to both reason and the senses, is an illness that can never be thoroughly cured; it is bound to return upon us every moment, even if we chase it away and sometimes seem to be entirely free from it. On no system is it possible to defend either our understanding (·i.e. reason·) or our senses, and when we try to justify them in that manner ·that I have been discussing· we merely expose their defects further. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from deep and hard thought about those subjects, it always increases as we think longer and harder, whether our thoughts are in opposition to sceptical doubt or conformity with it. Only •carelessness and •inattention can give us any remedy. For this reason I rely entirely on •them; and I take it for granted that whatever you may think at this present moment, in an hour from now you will be convinced that there is both an external and internal world; and on that supposition—that there is an external as well as an internal world—I intend now to examine some general systems, ancient and modern, that have been proposed regarding both 'worlds', before I proceed ·in section 5· to a more particular enquiry about our impressions. This may eventually be found to be relevant to the subject of the present section.

### 3: The ancient philosophy

Several moralists have recommended, as an excellent method of becoming acquainted with our own hearts and knowing our progress in virtue, to recollect our dreams in the morning and examine them as severely as we would our most serious and deliberate actions. Our character is the same sleeping as waking, they say, and it shows up most clearly when deliberation, fear, and scheming have no place, and when men can't try to deceive themselves or others. The generosity or baseness of our character, our mildness or cruelty, our courage or cowardice, are quite uninhibited in their influence on the •fictions of the imagination, revealing themselves in the most glaring colours. In a similar way I believe that we might make some useful discoveries through a criticism of the •fictions of ancient philosophy concerning substances, substantial forms, accidents, and occult qualities; those fictions, however unreasonable and capricious they may be, have a very intimate connection with the forces at work in human nature.

The most judicious philosophers agree that our ideas of bodies are nothing but

collections formed by the mind of the ideas of the various distinct perceptible qualities of which objects are composed and which we find to have a constant union with each other.

Although these qualities are in themselves entirely distinct ·from one another·, it is certain that we commonly regard the compound that they form as *one thing* and as continuing to be that thing while it undergoes very considerable alterations. The admitted •compositeness is obviously contrary to this supposed •simplicity, just as the •alteration is contrary to the •identity. So it may be worthwhile to consider the causes

that make us almost universally fall into such evident contradictions, and also the means by which we try to conceal them. [In this context, 'simple' means 'without parts'. In equating 'x is one thing' with 'x is simple', Hume is assuming that an item with parts—a 'composite' item—is really a collection of its parts, not really *one thing*.] The ideas of the various different qualities that an object has one after another are linked by a very close relation; so when the mind looks along the series it is carried from one part of it to another by an easy transition, and doesn't perceive the change any more than it would perceive a change when contemplating a single unchanging object. This easy transition is an effect . . . . of the relation ·between each quality and its successor·; and as the imagination readily identifies one idea with another when their influence on the mind is similar, it comes about that the mind considers any such •sequence of related qualities as •one continuous object, existing without any alteration. The smooth and uninterrupted movement of thought, being alike in both cases, easily deceives the mind and makes us ascribe an *identity* to the changing sequence of connected qualities.

But when we look at the sequence in a different way, not •tracking it gradually through the successive moments, but instead •surveying at once any two distinct periods of its duration, and •laying its qualities at those two moments side by side in our minds, *then* the variations that we didn't notice when they arose gradually appear significant, and seem entirely to destroy the identity. Thus there comes to be a kind of contrariety in our method of thinking, because of the different •points of view from which we survey the object and the different •lengths of time between the moments that we consider together. ·Here is the essential contrast·:

•When we gradually follow an object through its successive changes, the smooth progress of our thought makes us ascribe an *identity* to the sequence, because this smooth progress is similar to our act of the mind when we consider an unchanging object. •When we compare its situation after a considerable change with its situation before, the progress of the thought is broken, so that we are presented with the idea of diversity, i.e. *non-identity*.

To reconcile these contradictory positions the imagination is apt to feign *something unknown and invisible* which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible *something* it calls a ‘substance’, or ‘original and first matter’.

We have a similar notion with regard to the simplicity of substances, and from similar causes. Suppose that •a perfectly simple and indivisible object is presented, along with •another object—a composite one—whose coexistent parts are linked by a strong relation. Obviously the actions of the mind in considering these two objects are not very different. The imagination conceives the simple object

at once, easily, by a single effort of thought, without change or variation.

The connection of parts in the composite object has almost the same effect on the contemplating mind: it unites the object within itself in such a way that the imagination doesn’t feel the transition when it passes from one part to another. Thus the colour, taste, shape, solidity, and other qualities that are combined in a peach or a melon are thought of as forming *one thing*; and this happens because of their close relation, which makes them affect our thought in the same way as if the object were perfectly un-compounded—i.e. had no parts at all. But the mind doesn’t stop at that. When it views the object in a different way it finds that all these

qualities are different, distinguishable, and separable from each other; that view of things destroys the mind’s primary and more natural notions, and obliges the imagination to feign an unknown something—an original •substance and •matter—as a source of the union or cohesion among these qualities, and as what may entitle the composite object to be called *one thing*, despite its diversity and compositeness.

The Aristotelian philosophy says that the ‘original’ matter is absolutely the same in all bodies, and it considers fire, water, earth, and air as being of the very same *substance* because of their gradual changes into each other. At the same time it assigns to each of these sorts of objects a distinct *substantial form* that it supposes to be the source of all the different qualities the objects possess, and to be a new basis for simplicity and identity for each particular sort. All depends on how we look at the objects. •When we look along the imperceptible changes of bodies, we suppose all of them to be of the same substance or essence. •When we consider their perceptible differences, we attribute to each of them a substantial and essential difference. •And to allow ourselves to keep both these ways of considering our objects, we suppose all bodies to have at once a substance and a substantial form.

The notion of *accidents* [= ‘qualities’] is an unavoidable consequence of this way of thinking about substances and substantial forms. [Hume uses ‘quality’ freely throughout the *Treatise*. He uses ‘accident’ for qualities thought of as existing things that have to be kept in existence by other things, namely the substances that *have* them.] We can’t help thinking of colours, sounds, tastes, shapes, and other properties of bodies as existents that can’t exist on their own and have to be supported by something in which they *inhere*. For whenever we have discovered any of these perceptible qualities we have, for the reasons mentioned above, imagined a substance to exist also; the

same habit that makes us infer •a connection between cause and effect here makes us infer •a dependence of every quality on an unknown substance.

The custom of *imagining* a dependence has the same effect as the custom of *observing* it would have. But this turn of thought is no more reasonable than any of the previous ones. Every quality is distinct from every other, and can be conceived to exist on its own—apart from every other quality and also from that unintelligible chimera of *a substance*.

But these philosophers carry their fictions still further in their opinions about *occult* qualities: they suppose a supporting substance, which they don't understand, and a supported accident, of which they have no better an idea. The whole system, therefore, is entirely incomprehensible, and yet is derived from principles as natural as any of the ones I have explained.

In considering this subject, we can see that as the people concerned acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge, their opinions rise up through three levels. These opinions are •that of the common people, •that of a false philosophy, and •that of the true philosophy—and we shall find when we look into it that the true philosophy is closer to the views of the common people than it is to those of a mistaken knowledge •such as many philosophers have•. It is natural for men in their common and careless way of thinking to imagine that they perceive a connection between objects that they have constantly found united together; and because custom has made it hard for them to separate the ideas, they are apt to imagine such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd. •Thus, for example: Someone observes—for things (x) like middle-sized physical objects—that •x-is-left-unsupported is almost always followed immediately by •x-falls-to-the-ground; this creates in him a custom of expectation, in which an impression of

•x-unsupported *leads quickly and smoothly* and easily to an idea of •x-falling; and this inclines him to think that the idea of •non-support *is absolutely tied to* the idea of •falling in the way that the idea of being square is tied to the idea of being rectangular; which means that he is inclined to think he can see that it is absolutely (logically) impossible for an unsupported object of the relevant kind not to fall•. But philosophers, who set aside the effects of custom and look for relations between the ideas of objects, immediately see the falsehood of these common opinions and discover that there is no known connection among objects—that is, none of the kind involving a connection between the ideas of the objects•. Every object appears to them entirely distinct and separate from every other; and they see that when we infer one from *another*, our basis is not a view of the nature and qualities of the objects but only an experience of having often observed •objects of those kinds• to have been constantly conjoined. But these philosophers, instead of soundly inferring from this that we don't have *any* idea of mind-independent objective power or agency, frequently search for the qualities in which this agency consists, and are displeased with every account of it that their reason suggests to them. Their intellects are sharp enough to keep from the common error that there is a natural and perceivable connection •of ideas• between matter's various perceptible qualities and how it behaves, but not sharp enough to keep them from looking for such a connection in matter itself—in the causes themselves. If they had found their way to the right conclusion, they would have turned back to the situation of the common people, and would have adopted a lazy 'don't care' attitude to all these long investigations •into the causal tie•. As things are, they seem to be in a very lamentable condition, much worse than the poets present in their descriptions of the punishments of Sisyphus and Tantalus. For what could be more tormenting

than to seek eagerly something that always flies away from us, and to seek it in a place where it can't possibly be?

But as Nature seems to have observed a kind of justice and compensation in everything, she hasn't neglected philosophers more than the rest of the creation, but has provided them with a consolation amid all their disappointments and afflictions. This consolation principally consists in their invention of the words 'faculty' and 'occult quality'. After the frequent use of a term that is significant and intelligible, we often omit the idea that we mean to express by it, and preserve only the custom by which we recall the idea when we want to; so it naturally happens that after the frequent use of a term that is wholly *insignificant* and *unintelligible*, we fancy *it* to be on the same footing with the meaningful ones and to have a meaning that we don't actually have in mind but that we could bring to mind if we thought about it. . . . By this means these philosophers set themselves at ease, and eventually arrive through •an illusion at the same 'don't care' attitude that common people achieve through •their stupidity, and true philosophers achieve through •their moderate scepticism. They need only to say that a

phenomenon that puzzles them arises from a 'faculty' or an 'occult quality' and there's an end of all dispute and enquiry about it!

But among all the examples of the ancient Aristotelians' showing they were guided by every trivial twist of the imagination, none is more remarkable than their 'sympathies', 'antipathies', and 'horrors of a vacuum'! There is a very remarkable inclination in human nature to attribute to external objects the same emotions that it observes in itself, and to find everywhere those ideas [here = 'qualities'] that are most present to it. This inclination is suppressed by a little reflection, and it occurs only in children, poets, and the ancient philosophers. It appears in children when they want to kick the stones that hurt them; in poets by their readiness to personify everything; and in the ancient philosophers by these fictions of 'sympathy' and 'antipathy'. We must pardon •children because of their age, and •poets because they are openly obedient to the promptings of their imagination; but what excuse shall we find to justify our •philosophers—the ancients and their modern disciples—in such a striking weakness?

#### 4: The modern philosophy

You may want to object:

You say yourself that the imagination is the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy. So you are unjust in blaming the ancient philosophers for making use of their imagination, and letting themselves be entirely guided by it in their reasonings.

In order to justify myself, I must distinguish two kinds of forces that are at work in the imagination: •those that are permanent, irresistible, and universal, such as the customary transition from causes to effects and from effects to causes, and •those that are changing, weak, and irregular; such as those on which I have just been commenting. •The

former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that if they were lost human nature would immediately perish and go to ruin. •The latter are not ones that *must* be at work in mankind, and they are not necessary for the conduct of life or even useful in it. On the contrary, we see them at work only in weak minds, and because they are opposite to the former forces of custom and reasoning they can easily be overthrown when confronted by the opposition. For this reason, the former are accepted by philosophy and the latter rejected. Someone who hears an articulate voice in the dark and concludes that there is someone there reasons soundly and naturally, even though his inference is derived from nothing but custom, which brings him a lively idea of a human creature because of his usual conjunction of that with the present impression of the voice. But someone who is tormented—he knows not why—with the fear of spectres in the dark may perhaps be said to reason, and indeed to reason ‘naturally’; but then it must be in the same sense that a malady is said to be ‘natural’ because it arises from natural causes, even though it is contrary to health, which is the most agreeable and most natural condition for a man to be in.

The opinions of the ancient philosophers, their fictions of substance and accident, and their reasonings about substantial forms and occult qualities, are like spectres in the dark! They are driven by forces which, however common, are neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature. The *modern* philosophy claims to be entirely free from this defect, and to arise only from the solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination. We must now look into the grounds for this claim.

The fundamental principle of that philosophy is the opinion about colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat, and cold, which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in the mind,

derived from the operation of external objects and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. Having examined the reasons commonly produced for this opinion, I find only one of them to be satisfactory, namely the one based on the variations of those impressions even while the external object seems to remain unaltered. These variations depend on various factors. •Upon the different states of our health: a sick man feels a disagreeable taste in food that used to please him the most. •Upon the different conditions and constitutions of men: stuff that seems bitter to one man is sweet to another. •Upon differences in location and distance: colours reflected from the clouds change according to the distance of the clouds, and according to the angle they make with the eye and the luminous body. Fire also communicates the sensation of pleasure at one distance and of pain at another. Instances of this kind are very numerous and frequent.

The conclusion drawn from them is also utterly satisfactory. When different impressions of the same sense come from an object, it certainly can’t be that *each* of these impressions resembles a quality that exists in the object. (Why? Because one object can’t, at one time have different qualities of the same sense, and one quality can’t resemble impressions that are entirely different from one another.) It evidently follows that *many* of our impressions have no external model or archetype [= ‘thing from which something is copied’]. Now, from similar effects we presume similar causes. Many of our impressions of colour, sound, etc., are admittedly nothing but internal existences with no archetypes in Nature, arising from causes that don’t resemble them in the slightest. *These* impressions are in appearance in no way different from *the other* impressions of colour, sound, etc. So we conclude that they *all* have causes of that sort.

Once this principle has been accepted, all the other

doctrines of the modern philosophy seem to follow by an easy inference:

Once we have removed sounds, colours, heat, cold, and other perceptible qualities from the category of continuous independent existents, we are left with only what are called 'primary qualities', as the only real ones of which we have any adequate notion. These primary qualities are extension and solidity, with their different mixtures and special cases: shape, motion, gravity, and cohesion. The generation, growth, decline, and death of animals and vegetables are nothing but changes of shape and motion, as are all the operations of bodies on each other, and the operations of fire, light, water, air, earth and all the elements and powers of Nature. *One shape and motion produces another shape and motion*; and we can't form even the remotest idea of any force or drive (active or passive) among systems of matter other than that one.

I think that many objections could be made to this system, but at present I shall confine myself to one that I think is very decisive. I contend that instead of explaining the operations of external objects by means of this system, we utterly annihilate all these objects and reduce ourselves to the opinions of the most extravagant scepticism about them. If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells are merely perceptions, nothing that we can conceive has a real, continuous, and independent existence—not even motion, extension, and solidity, which are the primary qualities emphasized most in the modern philosophy.

To start with motion: obviously this quality is altogether inconceivable except when thought of as the motion of an *object*: the idea of motion necessarily supposes that of a moving body. Now, what is our idea of the moving *body*, without which motion is incomprehensible? It must come

down to the idea of •extension or of •solidity; so the reality of motion depends on the reality of those other two qualities.

Everyone agrees with this opinion about motion, namely that it is conceivable only as the motion of *something*; and I have proved that it holds also with regard to extension, which is conceivable only as the extension of *something*.—I have shown that it is impossible to conceive extension except as composed of parts that have either colour or solidity. The idea of extension is a compound idea; but it isn't compounded out of *infinitely* many parts or lesser ideas, so it must eventually be made up of parts that are perfectly simple and indivisible and thus don't have parts in their turn. These simple and indivisible parts are not themselves ideas of extension because extension must have parts, so they must be non-entities, nothings, unless they are conceived as coloured or solid. Colour is excluded from any real existence by the modern philosophy which I am now examining. The reality of our •idea of extension therefore depends on the reality of •our idea of solidity; the former can't be sound if the latter is chimerical. Let us look, then, into the idea of solidity.

The idea of •solidity is the idea of •two objects which, however hard they are pushed, can't penetrate each other, but still maintain a separate and distinct existence. So solidity is perfectly incomprehensible taken on its own, without the conception of *some bodies that are solid* and maintain this separate and distinct existence. Now, what idea do we have of these bodies? The ideas of colours, sounds, and other 'secondary qualities' are excluded. The idea of •motion depends on the idea of •extension, and the idea of •extension depends on the idea of •solidity. So the idea of solidity can't possibly depend on either of those two ideas (•motion and extension), for that would be to run in a circle, make one idea depend on another which at the same time depends on

*it.* Our modern philosophy, therefore, provides us with no sound or satisfactory idea of solidity or, therefore, of matter.

This argument will appear entirely conclusive to anyone who understands it; but it may seem abstruse and complicated to the general run of readers, so I shall try to make it obvious by some changes of wording. To form an idea of solidity we must conceive two bodies pressing on each other without any penetration; and we can't do that if we confine ourselves to one object. (And still less if we don't conceive any: two non-entities can't exclude each other from their places, because they don't have places and don't have qualities.) What idea do we form of these bodies or objects to which we attribute solidity? To say that we conceive them merely as *solid* is to run on ad infinitum. To affirm that we depict them to ourselves as *extended* either •bases everything on a false idea or •brings us around in a circle. Extension must necessarily be considered either as •coloured, which is a false idea according to the modern philosophy, which says that nothing out there in the world is coloured, or as •solid, which brings us back to where we started. The same argument applies regarding mobility and shape; and so ultimately we have to conclude that after the exclusion of colour, sounds, heat, and cold from the category of external existents there remains nothing that can give us a sound and consistent idea of body. . . . Let us remember here our accustomed method of examining ideas by considering the impressions from which they came. The impressions that enter through the sight and hearing, smell and taste, are affirmed by modern philosophy to have no resembling external objects; so the idea of solidity, which is supposed to be real—i.e. to resemble external objects—can't be derived from any of those senses. So all that remains is the sense of *touch* as a conveyor of the impression that is the ultimate source of the idea of solidity; and indeed we

*do* naturally imagine that we *feel* the solidity of bodies, and need only to touch an object to perceive its solidity. But this is a layman's way of thinking rather than a philosopher's, as will appear from the following two reflections.

First, it is easy to observe that although bodies are felt by means of their solidity, the *feeling* doesn't resemble the *solidity*. A man with no feeling in one hand has as perfect an idea of impenetrability when he •sees that hand supported by the table as when he •feels the table with the other hand. An object pressing on any part of our bodies meets with resistance; and that resistance, through the motion it gives to the nerves and animal spirits, conveys a certain sensation to the mind; but it doesn't follow that there are any resemblances among the sensation, the motion, and the resistance.

Secondly, the impressions of touch are simple impressions (except with regard to their extent, which is irrelevant to the present purpose); and from this simplicity I infer that they don't represent solidity or any real object. Consider these two cases in which solidity is manifested:

- A man presses a stone or other solid body with his hand;
- Two stones press each other.

You will agree that these two cases are not in every respect alike, because the former involves not just solidity but also a *feeling or sensation* that doesn't appear in the latter. So to bring out the likeness between these two cases alike we must remove at least some part of the impression that the man feels by his hand; but a simple impression doesn't have parts, so we have to remove the whole impression; which proves that this whole impression has no archetype or model in external objects. To which we may add that solidity necessarily involves •two bodies along with •contiguity [= 'nextness'] and •impact; but that trio is a compound object,

and can't possibly be represented by a simple impression. Not to mention the fact that though •solidity is always the same, •tactual impressions keep changing, which is a clear proof that •the latter are not representations of •the former.

Thus there is a direct and total opposition between our reason and our senses; or, more properly speaking, between the conclusions we form from cause and effect and those

that convince us of the continued and independent existence of body. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continued and independent existence. When we exclude these perceptible qualities there is nothing left in the universe that *does* have such an existence.

### 5: The immateriality of the soul

Having found such contradictions and difficulties in every system concerning •external objects, and in the idea of •matter (which we imagine is so clear and determinate), we would expect still greater difficulties and contradictions in every hypothesis about our •internal perceptions, and the nature of the •mind (which we are apt to imagine so much more obscure and uncertain). But in this we would be wrong. The intellectual world, though involved in infinite obscurities, is not tangled in contradictions such as we discovered in the natural world. What is known about it is self-consistent, and what is unknown we must be content to leave so.

Certain philosophers promise to lessen our ignorance if we will listen to them, but I'm afraid that in doing so we would risk running into contradictions from which the subject itself is free. These philosophers are the reasoners who probe the question of whether the 'substances' in which they suppose our perceptions to 'inhere' are material or immaterial. In order to put a stop to this endless point-scoring on both sides, I know no better method than to ask these philosophers 'What do you mean by "substance" and by "inhere"?' It will

be reasonable to enter seriously into the dispute after they have answered this question, but not until then.

We have found the question impossible to answer with regard to *matter and body*; and when it comes to *mind* there are all the same difficulties and some additional ones that are special to that subject. As every idea is derived from a preceding impression, if we had any *idea* of the substance of our minds we must also have an *impression* of it; and it is hard if not impossible to conceive what such an impression could be. For how can an impression •represent a substance otherwise than by •resembling it? And how can an impression resemble a substance, given that (according to the philosophy I am examining) it isn't a substance and has none of the special qualities or characteristics of a substance? But leaving the question of *what may or may not be*, and turning to the question of *what actually is*, I ask the philosophers who claim that we have an idea of the substance of our minds to point out the impression that produces it, and say clearly how the impression operates and from what object it is derived. Is it an impression of sensation

or of reflection? Is it pleasant, or painful, or neither? Do we have it all the time, or does it only return at intervals? If at intervals, *when* does it principally return, and what causes produce it? If, instead of answering these questions, anyone should evade the difficulty by saying that the definition of 'a substance' is *something that can exist by itself*, and that this definition ought to satisfy us, I would reply that this definition fits everything that can possibly be conceived, and can't possibly serve to distinguish substance from accident, or the soul from its perceptions. Here is why. This is a principle:

Everything can be distinguished from everything else; and if two things can be distinguished, they can be separated by the imagination—which is to say that they can be conceived as separate from one another.

Another principle that has been already acknowledged is this:

Anything that is clearly conceived can exist, and anything that can be clearly conceived as being thus-and-so can exist in that way—for example, things that can *be conceived as existing* separately from one another can *exist* separately from one another.

My conclusion from these two principles is that since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from everything else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be considered *or conceived* as separately existent, and *therefore* can exist separately and have no need of anything else to support their existence. So they are *substances* according to this definition.

So we can't arrive at any satisfactory notion of substance, whether by looking for an originating impression or by means of a definition; and that seems to me a sufficient reason for abandoning utterly the dispute about whether the soul is material or not, and makes me absolutely condemn

the very question. We have no perfect idea of anything except *perceptions*. A substance is entirely different from a perception. So we have no idea of a substance. It is thought *by some philosophers* that our perceptions can exist only if they 'inhere in' something that supports them; but nothing seems to be needed to support the existence of a perception. So we have no idea of 'inhesion'. That being the case, how can we possibly answer the question 'Do perceptions inhere in a material substance or in immaterial one?' when we don't so much as understand the meaning of the question?

·THE LOCATION OF OUR PERCEPTIONS·

One argument that is commonly employed for the immateriality of the soul seems to me remarkable:

Whatever is extended consists of parts; and whatever consists of parts can be divided, if not in reality then at least in the imagination. But something that is divisible can't possibly be conjoined to a thought or perception, which is altogether indivisible. If such a conjunction did occur, would the indivisible thought exist on the left or on the right side of this extended divisible body? On the surface or in the middle? On the back or on the front side of it? *If you aren't convinced by those rhetorical questions, consider instead this sober argument.* If the thought or perception is conjoined with something extended, it must exist *somewhere* within that thing's boundaries—either *in* one particular part or *in* every part. In *the* former case, that particular part is indivisible, and the perception is conjoined only with *it* and not with the extended thing; and in *the* latter case, the thought must also be extended and separable and divisible, just as the body is, which is utterly absurd and contradictory. Can anyone conceive a passion that is a yard long, a foot wide, and an inch thick? So thought and extension

are wholly incompatible qualities, and can never come together in one subject.

This argument doesn't bear on the question about the substance of the soul, but only the question about its being in the same place as matter; so it may be worthwhile to consider in general what objects are capable of being *in places* and what ones are not. This is an interesting and challenging question, which may lead us to some discoveries of considerable importance.

Our first notion of space and extension is derived solely from the senses of sight and touch; only things that are coloured or tangible can have parts that are arranged in such a way as to convey that idea. You might say that a *taste* has parts, because it can be lessened or increased; but increasing or lessening a taste is not like lessening or increasing a visible object. Again, you might say that we experience distance—and thus extension—through the sense of hearing; but when several sounds strike our hearing at once, it is only through custom and reflection that we form an idea of spatial relations among the bodies from which the sounds are derived. Anything that exists *somewhere* must either be extended or be a mathematical point having no parts or inner complexity. Something extended must have a particular shape—square, round, triangular—none of which can be true of a desire, or indeed of any impression or idea except ones belonging to sight and touch. And although a desire is indivisible, it oughtn't to be considered as a mathematical point. If it were one, it could be arranged along with three or four other desires in such a way as to make a complex with a determinate length, width, and thickness; which is obviously absurd.

In the light of these remarks, you won't be surprised when I affirm something that is condemned by many metaphysicians, and regarded as contrary to the most certain principles

of human reason. It is that *an object can exist, and yet be nowhere*. And I assert that this is not only *possible* but that most existing things *do* and indeed *must* exist in that way. An object can be said to 'be nowhere' when its parts are not related to one another in such a way as to form any shape or size, and it as a whole isn't related to other bodies in such a way as to fit our notions of closeness or distance. Now this is obviously the case with all our perceptions and objects except those of the sight and touch. A smell or a sound can't be either circular or square; a moral reflection can't be situated to the right or to the left of a passion. These objects and perceptions, so far from requiring any particular place, are absolutely incompatible with it; we can't even *imagine* their being located. . . . Perceptions that have no parts and exist nowhere cannot be spatially conjoined with matter or body—i.e. with something extended and divisible—because any relation has to be based on some common quality. But there is no need for me now to press this argument. It may be better worth our while to remark that this question of the placing of objects comes up not only in metaphysical disputes about the nature of the soul but even in everyday life. Consider a fig at one end of the table and an olive at the other: when we form the complex ideas of these substances, one of the most obvious is that of their different tastes, and clearly we incorporate and conjoin these qualities with ones that are coloured and tangible. The bitter taste of one and sweet taste of the other are supposed to lie *in* the visible bodies and thus to be separated from each other by the whole length of the table. This illusion is so remarkable and yet so natural that it may be proper to consider its causes.

Although things that exist without any place or extension can't be joined in space by something extended, they can enter into many other relations. Thus the taste and smell of a piece of fruit are inseparable from its other qualities of

colour and tangibility; and whichever of them is the cause and whichever the effect, they certainly always exist together. And it's not just that they coexist in some general way—their coexistence exhibits two relations that we have seen to have a powerful effect on our minds. The taste •appears in the mind at the same time as the smell; and it is when the extended body comes within reach of our senses that we perceive its particular taste and smell—so we naturally infer that the body •causes the taste and smell. So we have the relations of •causation and •contiguity in the time of their appearance between the extended object and the quality that exists nowhere; and this must have such an effect on the mind that when one of the related items appears the mind will immediately turn to the conception of the other. And this is not all. As well as turning our thought from one to the other on account of their relation, we try to give them a further relation—namely, being in the same place—so as to make the transition more easy and natural. For it is a quality in human nature that I shall often have occasion to mention, and shall explain more fully in its proper place, that when objects are united by some relation we are strongly disposed to add some further relation to them in order to complete their union. . . . But whatever confused notions we may form of a union in place between (say) a fig and its particular taste, when we think about it we have to see that there is something altogether unintelligible and contradictory about such a union. Let us ask ourselves one obvious question:

The taste that we conceive to be contained within the boundary of the fig—is it in every part of the fig, or in only one part?

Faced with this, we must quickly find ourselves at a loss, and see the impossibility of ever giving a satisfactory answer. We can't reply that it is only in one part, for experience convinces us that every part has the same taste. And it's

no better to reply that it exists in every part, for then we must suppose the taste to have shape and size, which is absurd and incomprehensible. So here we are pulled in opposite directions by two forces—the inclination of our imagination, which makes us incorporate the taste into the fig, and •our reason, which shows us the impossibility of such a union. Being divided between these opposing pulls, we don't renounce either of them, but instead involve the subject in so much confusion and obscurity that we no longer see the opposition. We suppose that the taste exists within the boundary of the fig, but in such a way that it •fills the whole thing without being extended, and •exists complete in every part of it without being divided! In short, in our most ordinary everyday way of thinking we use a principle of the Aristotelian philosophers which seems shocking when it is expressed crudely: *totum in toto, et totum in qualibet parte*—which is about the same as saying that a thing is in a certain place and yet is not there. [The Latin means, literally, 'The whole in the whole, and the whole in each part'.] All this absurdity comes from our trying to assign a *place* to something that is utterly incapable of it; and that attempt comes from our inclination to complete a union that is based on causation and contiguity of time, by crediting the objects with being in the same place. But if reason is ever strong enough to overcome prejudice, it must surely prevail here. For here are our only choices regarding such items as passions and tastes and smells:

- They exist without being in any place.
- They have shapes and sizes.
- They are incorporated with extended objects, and then the whole is in the whole and the whole is in every part.

The absurdity of the second and third suppositions proves sufficiently the truth of the first. And there is no fourth opinion. What about the supposition that these items exist

in the way mathematical points do? That isn't a genuine fourth option, because it boils down to the second opinion: it supposes that various passions may be placed in a circle, and that a certain number of smells can combine with a certain number of sounds to compose a body of twelve cubic inches; the mere mention of which shows it to be ridiculous.

But though in this view of things we can't refuse to condemn the materialists, who conjoin all thought with an extended body, a little thought will show us an equally strong reason for blaming their opponents, who conjoin all thought with a simple and indivisible substance. The plainest and most down-to-earth philosophy informs us that an external object can't make itself known to the mind immediately; it has to appear through the interposition of an image or perception. The table that appears to me right now is only a perception, and all its qualities are qualities of a perception. Now, the most obvious of all its qualities is extendedness. The perception consists of parts. These parts are arranged in such a way as to give us the notion of distance and closeness, of length, width, and thickness. The termini of these three dimensions create what we call *shape*. This shape is movable, separate, and divisible. *Mobility* and *divisibility* are the distinguishing properties of extended objects. And to cut short all disputes, the very idea of extendedness is copied from nothing but an impression, with which it must therefore perfectly agree. To say that the idea of extension 'agrees with' something is to say that the 'something' is extended.

The materialist free-thinker can now have his turn to triumph. Having found that some impressions and ideas are really extended, he can ask his opponents 'How can you bring a simple and indivisible subject together with an extended perception?' All the arguments of the theologians can here be turned back against them. They have demanded of the materialist 'Is the unextended perception on the left-hand

or the right-hand part of the extended body?', but now the materialist can demand: 'Is the unextended subject (or immaterial substance, if you like) on the left-hand or the right hand part of the extended perception? Is it in this particular part, or in that other? Is it in every part without being extended? Or is it complete in any one part without deserting the rest?' It is impossible to give to these questions any answer that won't both be absurd in itself and be available (if it weren't absurd) for the materialists to use for *their* purposes, that is, to account for the union of our unextended perceptions with an extended substance.

THE SUBSTANTIAL UNDERLAY OF OUR PERCEPTIONS—  
(SPINOZA)

This is my opportunity to take up again the question about the substance of the soul. Though I have condemned that question as utterly unintelligible, I can't refrain from offering some further reflections on it. I assert this:

The doctrine of a thinking substance that is immaterial, simple and indivisible is a true *atheism*. From it we can infer all the atheistic views for which Spinoza is so universally infamous

From this line of thought I hope at least to reap one advantage, that my adversaries won't have any excuse for rendering *my* doctrine odious by accusations that can be so easily turned back against *them*. The fundamental principle of Spinoza's atheism is the doctrine of the simplicity of the universe—that is, the universe's not having *parts*—and the unity of the substance in which he supposes both thought and matter to inhere. There is only one substance in the world, says Spinoza, and that substance is perfectly simple and indivisible, and doesn't have any particular position because it exists everywhere. Whatever we discover externally by sensation, whatever we feel internally by reflection—all these are nothing but qualities of that one simple and

necessarily existent being, and don't have any separate or distinct existence. This table and that chair are not two distinct things, they are just two qualities of the one and only thing—the one substance. All the passions of the soul, all the configurations of matter however different and various, inhere in the same substance; they can be distinguished from one another, without their distinctness bringing it about that they inhere in distinct substances. The same substratum [= 'underlay'], if I may so speak, supports the most different qualities without any difference in itself, and varies them without itself varying. Neither time, nor place, nor all the diversity of Nature are able to produce any composition or change in the perfect simplicity and identity of the one substance.

This brief exposition of the principles of that famous atheist will, I think, be sufficient for the present purpose. Without our having to enter further into these gloomy and obscure regions, I shall be able to show that this hideous hypothesis of Spinoza's is almost the same as the doctrine of the immateriality of the soul, which has become so popular. To make this evident, let us remember (from 6<sub>ii</sub>) that because every idea is derived from a preceding perception, it follows that we can't have an idea of something that it is radically different in kind from a perception; from which it follows in turn that our idea of an externally existing object can't possibly represent anything radically different in kind from every perception. Whatever difference we may suppose between perceptions and external objects, it is still incomprehensible to us; and we are obliged either to make external objects the same as perceptions or to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative—that is, to conceive it emptily as whatever-it-is-that-some-perceptions-are-perceptions-of.

The conclusion I shall draw from this may at first sight

appear to be a cheat, but a very little thought will show it to solid and satisfactory. I start with this:

We can *suppose* there to be a radical difference in kind between an object and an impression, but we cannot *conceive* such a difference; so when we reach any conclusion about impressions that are inter-connected or incompatible we shan't know for certain that it will apply also to objects; but any such conclusion that we form about objects will certainly apply also to impressions.

The reason is not difficult. An object is supposed to be different from an impression; so if in our reasoning we start with the impression, we can't be sure that the details of the impression that we are going by are shared by the object; it may for all we know be that the object differs from the impression in that respect. But the converse doesn't hold: our reasoning, if it starts with the object, certainly must hold also for the impression. Why? Because the quality of the object on which the reasoning is based must at least be conceived by the mind (otherwise it couldn't be reasoned about), and it couldn't be conceived unless it were a quality also possessed by an impression, because all our ideas are derived from impressions. So we can lay it down as a certain maxim that we can never . . . discover a connection or incompatibility between objects that doesn't hold also for impressions; though the converse proposition—that all the discoverable relations between impressions hold also for objects—may not be equally true, .

Let us now apply this to the present case. I am presented with two different systems of existing things for which—I am supposing for purposes of argument—I have to assign some substance or ground of inhesion. I observe first the universe of objects or of bodies—the sun, moon, and stars, the earth, seas, plants, animals, men, ships, houses, and

other productions of art or of nature. Here Spinoza appears, and tells me that

these are only qualities, and the subject in which they inhere—the substance that *has* them—is simple, uncompounded, and indivisible.

After this I consider •the other system of beings, namely the universe of thought, or of my impressions and ideas. There I observe another sun, moon, and stars, an earth and seas, covered and inhabited by plants and animals; towns, houses, mountains, rivers—and in short everything I can discover or conceive in the first system. When I ask about these, theologians present themselves and tell me that

these also are qualities, and indeed qualities of one simple, uncompounded, and indivisible substance.

Then I am deafened by the noise of a hundred voices that treat Spinoza's hypothesis with detestation and scorn, and the theologians' view with applause and veneration! I look into these hypotheses to see what may be the reason for such a strong preference for one of them, and I find that •they share the fault of being unintelligible, and that •as far as we *can* understand them they are so much alike that we can't find any absurdity in one that isn't shared by the other. Because all our ideas are derived from our impressions, we have no idea of a quality in an object that doesn't match and can't represent a quality in an impression. So if we can •against Spinoza• find a conflict between *an extended object as a quality* and *something simple and uncompounded which is the substance in which it inheres*, then there must (•against the theologians•) be the same conflict between *the perception or impression of an extended object* and *something simple and uncompounded which is the substance •in which it inheres•*. Every idea of a quality in an object passes through an impression, so every *perceivable* relation, whether of connection or incompatibility, must be common to both

objects and impressions.

Looked at in a general way, this argument seems obvious beyond all doubt and contradiction. Still, to make it clearer and more intuitive, let us go through it in detail, and see whether all the absurdities that have been found in Spinoza's system may not also be found in that of the theologians.

First, this has been said against Spinoza:

Because according to Spinoza a mode [= 'quality'] is not a distinct or separate existent—something over and above the one substance—it must *be* its substance. So the extended universe, which is supposed to inhere •as a mode or quality• in a simple, uncompounded substance, must be in a manner identified with that substance. But this is utterly impossible and inconceivable, unless the indivisible substance *expands* so as to correspond to the extended world, or the extended world *contracts* so as to match the indivisible substance.

This argument (•against Spinoza•) seems sound, as far as we can understand it; and it is clear that with some change in the wording it applies equally (•against the theologians•) to our extended perceptions and the simple substance of the soul. For the ideas of objects and of perceptions are in every respect the same, except for the supposition of a difference that is unknown and incomprehensible.

Secondly, it has been said •against Spinoza• that

we have no idea of *substance* that isn't applicable to *matter*, and no idea of a *distinct substance* that isn't applicable to every *distinct portion of matter*. So matter is not a mode •or quality• but a substance, and each part of matter is not a distinct mode but a distinct substance.

I have already proved that we have no perfect idea of substance, but that taking 'substance' to mean 'something that

can exist by itself it is obvious that every perception is a substance and every distinct part of a perception is a distinct substance. So in this respect each hypothesis labours under the same difficulties as does the other.

Thirdly, it has been objected to the system of one simple substance in the universe that

this substance, being the support or substratum of everything, must at the very same instant be modified into forms that are contrary and incompatible. The round and square figures are incompatible in the same substance at the same time. How then is it possible for one substance to be modified into that square table and into this round one?

I ask the same question about the *impressions of* these tables, and I find that the answer is no more satisfactory in one case than in the other. So any embarrassment for Spinoza along these lines is equally an embarrassment for the theologians.

It appears, then, that whichever way we turn the same difficulties follow us, and that we can't advance one step towards the establishing the simplicity and immateriality of the soul without preparing the way for a dangerous and incurable atheism. The situation is the same if, instead of calling thought a modification or quality of the soul, we give it the more ancient and yet more fashionable name of 'action'. By an action we mean much the same thing as what is commonly called an 'abstract mode'— that is, something that strictly speaking isn't distinguishable or separable from its substance, and is conceived only through a distinction of reason, that is, an abstraction. For example, a *dance* is not distinguishable or separable from *the dancer*, but from the totality that is the dancer we *abstract* one aspect, which we call her *dance*. But nothing is gained by this switch from 'modification' to 'action': it doesn't free us from a single

difficulty. . . . [Hume explains and defends this claim in two paragraphs which are not included here.]

·THE CAUSE OF OUR PERCEPTIONS·

From these hypotheses about the •location and the •substance of our perceptions, let us pass to another that is more intelligible than •the latter and more important than •the former, namely concerning the *cause* of our perceptions. The Aristotelians say this:

Matter and motion, however varied, are still •only-matter and motion, and cause only differences in where bodies are and how they are oriented. Divide a body as often as you please, it is still body. Give it any shape and nothing will result but shape (which is the relation of parts). Move it in any way and all you will get is motion (which is a change of relation to other bodies). It is absurd to imagine that motion in a circle should be merely •motion in a circle while motion in an ellipse should also be •a passion or moral reflection; or that the collision of two spherical particles should become •a sensation of pain while the collisions of two triangular ones yields •pleasure. Now, as these different collisions and variations and mixtures are the only changes of which matter is capable, and as they never give us any idea of thought or perception, it follows that thought cannot possibly be caused by matter.

Few have been able to resist the seeming force of this argument, yet nothing in the world is easier than to refute it! We need only reflect on what I have proved in general, namely we never sense any connection between causes and effects, and that it is only through our experience of their constant conjunction that we can arrive at any knowledge of the causal relation. Now,

- no two real objects are contrary to one another, and
- objects that are not contrary are capable of being constantly conjoined,

and from these two principles I have inferred in 15<sup>iii</sup> that

- to consider the matter *a priori*, **anything could produce anything**, and we shall never discover a reason why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however alike or unlike they may be.

This obviously destroys the foregoing reasoning about the cause of thought or perception. For though no connection between motion or thought appears to us, neither does any connection between any other causes and effects. Place one body of a pound weight on one end of a lever, and another body of the same weight on another end; you will never find in these bodies any •movement-force that depends on their distances from the centre, any more than a •force of thought and perception. So if you claim to prove *a priori* that •a position of bodies can never cause thought because, turn it which way you will, it is nothing but a position of bodies, you must by the same line of reasoning conclude that •a position of bodies can never produce motion, since there is no more apparent connection in that case than in the other. But the latter conclusion is contrary to evident experience, which shows that how a body moves may depend on how it is situated; and we *could* come to have similar experiences in the operations of the mind, perceiving a constant conjunction of thought with motion. So you reason too hastily when you conclude, from merely attending to the ideas, that motion cannot possibly produce thought and that a different position of parts cannot produce a different passion or reflection. Indeed, it is not only *possible* for us to have such an experience, but it is certain that we *do* have it, for everyone can perceive that the different dispositions of his

body change his thoughts and sentiments. You might say: 'This is a special case, because it depends on the union of soul and body.' To that I reply that we must separate the question about •the substance of the mind from the one about •the cause of its thought; and that if we take the latter question on its own,

we find by comparing their ideas that thought and motion are different from each other,

and

we find by experience that thought and motion are constantly united.

Such constant uniting is all we demand for the causal relation when we are considering the effects of matter on matter; so we can confidently conclude that motion *can be* and *actually is* the cause of thought and perception.

We seem to be left with a dilemma. Either •nothing can be the cause of something else unless the mind can perceive a connection between the ideas of the two items, or •all objects that we find constantly conjoined are on that account to be regarded as causes and effects. If we choose the first horn of the dilemma, the consequences are as follows. First, we are really saying that there is no such thing in the universe as a cause or productive force, not even God himself, since our idea of that Supreme Being is derived from particular impressions, none of the ideas of which have any perceptible connection with the idea of any other existent. You may object: 'The connection between the idea of an infinitely powerful being and that of any effect that he wills is necessary and unavoidable.' To this I make two replies. •We have no idea of a being endowed with any power, much less of one endowed with infinite power. And if in order to avoid this point you seek to *define* 'power', you will have to do it in terms of 'connection'; and then in saying that

the idea of an infinitely powerful being is connected with that of every effect that he wills

you are really saying only that

a being whose volition is connected with every effect is connected with every effect;

which is an identical proposition—a tautology—and gives us no insight into the nature of this power or connection. •Supposing that God were the great and effective force that makes up for what is lacking in all ·other· causes, this leads us into the grossest impieties and absurdities. It involves having recourse to God in natural operations, saying that matter can't of itself communicate motion or produce thought because matter has no perceptible connection with motion or thought, ·so that when matter seems to cause something it is really God at work·; and I say that on this account we must acknowledge that God is the author of all our volitions and perceptions, for they also have no perceptible connection with one another or with the supposed but unknown *substance* of the soul. Father Malebranche and other Cartesians have taken this view of all the actions of the mind, except for volition, or rather an inconsiderable part of volition—though it's easy to see that this exception is a mere dodge to avoid the dangerous consequences of their doctrine. If nothing is active except what has a perceptible apparent power, thought is never any more active than matter; and if this inactivity must make us fall back on a Deity ·to explain what seem to be cause-effect relations·, God is the real cause of all our actions, bad as well as good, vicious as well as virtuous.

So we are necessarily brought to the other horn of the dilemma, namely that all objects that are found to be constantly conjoined are—for that reason and only for that reason—to be regarded as causes and effects. Now, as all objects that are not contrary are capable of being constantly

conjoined, and as no real objects are contrary, it follows that (for all we can tell by considering the mere ideas of things) anything could be the cause or effect of anything; which obviously gives the advantage to the materialists ·who let matter do all the causing· over their antagonists ·who say that God must be brought into the causal story·.

The final verdict, then, must be this: •the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible; •some of our perceptions are unextended, so they can't *all* be located in the same place as something extended, and some of them are extended, so they can't *all* be co-located with something unextended; and as the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect, matter and motion can often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of the causal relation.

Philosophy's sovereign authority ought to be acknowledged everywhere; so it is a kind of indignity to oblige her on every occasion to apologize for her conclusions and justify herself to every particular art and science that may be offended by her. It's like a king being arraigned for high treason against his subjects! The only occasion when philosophy will think it necessary and even honourable to justify herself is when religion may seem to be in the least offended; for the rights of religion are as dear to philosophy as her own, and are indeed the same. So if anyone imagines that the arguments I have presented are in any way dangerous to religion, I hope the following explanation will remove his worries.

There is no foundation for any *a priori* conclusion about either the •operations or the •duration of any object that the human mind can conceive. Any object can be imagined suddenly to become entirely •inactive, or to be •annihilated, and it is an obvious principle that whatever we can imagine is possible. Now this is no more true of matter than of

mind; no more true of an extended compounded substance than of a simple and unextended one. In both cases the •metaphysical arguments for the immortality of the soul are equally inconclusive; and in both cases the •moral arguments and those derived from the analogy of Nature are

equally strong and convincing. If my philosophy doesn't add to the arguments for religion, I have at least the satisfaction of thinking that it doesn't take anything from them either. Everything remains precisely as before.

## 6: Personal identity

Some philosophers believe this:

We are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our *self*; we feel its existence and its continuing to exist, and are certain—more even than any demonstration could make us—both of its perfect identity and of its simplicity. The strongest sensations and most violent emotions, instead of distracting us from this view of our self, only focus it all the more intensely, making us think about how these sensations and emotions affect our *self* by bringing it pain or pleasure. To offer further evidence of the existence of one's self would make it less evident, not more, because no fact we could use as evidence is as intimately present to our consciousness as is the existence of our self. If we doubt the latter, we can't be certain of anything.

Unfortunately, all these forthright assertions are in conflict with the very experience that is supposed to support them. We don't so much as have an *idea* of self of the kind that is here described. From what impression could this idea be derived? This question can't be answered without obvious contradiction and absurdity; yet it must be answered if the idea of self is to qualify as clear and intelligible. Every real

idea must arise from some one impression. But *self* or *person* is not any one impression, but is rather that to which all our many impressions and ideas are supposed to be related. If the idea of self came from an impression, it would have to be an impression that remained invariably the same throughout our lives, because the self is supposed to exist in that way. But no impression is constant and invariable. Pain and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations follow one other and never all exist at the same time. So it can't be from any of these impressions or from any other that the idea of self is derived. So there is no such idea.

Furthermore, if we retain this hypothesis about the self, what are we to say about all our particular perceptions? They are all different, distinguishable, and separable from one other—they can be separately thought about, and can exist separately—with no need for anything to support their existence. In what way do they *belong* to self? How are they connected with it? For my part, when I look inward at what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, or the like. I never catch myself *without* a perception, and never observe anything *but* the perception.

When I am without perceptions for a while, as in sound sleep, for that period I am not aware of myself and can truly be said not to exist. If all my perceptions were removed by death, and I could not think, feel, see, love or hate after my body had decayed, I would be entirely annihilated—I cannot see that anything more would be needed to turn me into nothing. If anyone seriously and thoughtfully claims to have a different notion of himself, I can't reason with him any longer. I have to admit that he may be right about himself, as I am about myself. He may perceive something simple and continued that he calls himself, though I am certain there is no such thing in me.

But setting aside metaphysicians of this kind, I am willing to affirm of the rest of mankind that each of us is nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions that follow each other enormously quickly and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes can't turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions; our thought is even more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change in our perceptions, with no one of them remaining unaltered for a moment. The mind is a kind of stage on which many perceptions successively make their appearance: they pass back and forth, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of positions and situations. Strictly speaking, there is no •simplicity in the mind at one time and no •identity through different times, no matter what natural inclination we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. •That is to say: It is not strictly true that •when a blue colour is seen and a whistling sound heard at the same time, one single unified mind has both these perceptions; nor is it strictly true that •the mind that has a certain perception at one time is the very same mind that has a perception at another time•. The 'stage' comparison must not mislead us. What constitutes the mind is just the

successive perceptions; we haven't the faintest conception of *the place* where these scenes are represented or of the materials of which it is composed.

What, then, makes us so inclined to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose that we have an invariable and uninterrupted existence through the whole course of our lives? To answer this question we must distinguish what we *think and imagine* about personal identity from the role of personal identity in *our emotions and desires*. The former is our present subject. To explain it perfectly we must dig fairly deep: first we must account for the identity that we attribute to plants and animals, because there is a great analogy between that and the identity of a self or person.

We have a clear idea of an object that remains invariable and uninterrupted while time supposedly passes. We call this the idea of *identity* or *sameness*. We have also a clear idea of many different objects existing successively in a close relation to one another; and this, properly understood, is just as good an example of *diversity* as it would be if the objects were not related to one another in any way. •As the sand runs in the hour-glass, *this* grain is distinct from *that* one that falls a tenth of a second later and a micromillimetre behind; they are diverse from one another, which is simply to say that they are two grains, not one; and the fact that they are closely related to one another (in space, in time, and in being alike) makes no difference to that. They are as distinct from one another—they are as clearly *two*—as the Taj Mahal and the Grand Canyon•. But though these two ideas of *identity* and *a sequence of related objects* are perfectly distinct from one another and even contrary, yet in our everyday thinking they are often confused with one another, treated as though they were the same. •I now explain what leads us into that confusion•. Here are two mental activities:

- (1) thinking about a sequence of related objects, and
- (2) thinking about one uninterrupted and invariable object.

Although these are distinct, and involve different activities of the imagination, they *feel the same*. The activity in (1) doesn't require much more effort than the activity in (2): in (1) the relation between the objects helps the mind to move easily from one to the next, making its mental journey as smooth as if it were contemplating one continued object as in (2). This resemblance between these two kinds of thought generates the confusion in which we mistakenly substitute the notion of (2) *identity* for that of (1) *related objects*. When contemplating a sequence of related objects, at one moment we think of it as (1) variable or interrupted, which it is, yet the very next moment we wrongly think of it as (2) a single, identical, unchanging and uninterrupted thing. That completes the explanation. The resemblance that I have mentioned between the two acts of the mind gives us such a strong tendency to make this mistake that we make it without being aware of what we are doing; and though we repeatedly correct ourselves and return to a more accurate and philosophical way of thinking, we can't keep this up for long, and we fall back once more into the mistake. Our only way out of this oscillation between truth and error is to give in to the error and boldly assert that these different related objects are really the same, even though they are interrupted and variable. To justify this absurdity to ourselves, we often feign [= 'create a fiction of'] some new and unintelligible thing that connects the objects together and prevents them from being interrupted and variable. The perceptions of our senses are *intermittent*—there are gaps between them—but we disguise this by feigning that they exist continuously; and they *vary*, but we disguise this by bringing in the notion of a soul or self or substance which

stays the same under all the variation. Even in contexts where we don't indulge in such fictions, we are so strongly inclined to confuse identity with relatedness that we are apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious connecting the parts, other than the relations between them; and this is what I think happens when we ascribe identity to plants. When even *this* kind of fiction-making doesn't take place, we still feel impelled to confuse these ideas with one another, though we can't give a satisfactory account of what we are doing or find anything invariable and uninterrupted to justify our notion of identity.

Thus the controversy about identity is not a merely verbal dispute. For when we attribute identity in an improper sense to variable or interrupted objects, we are not just using words wrongly but are engaging in a fiction, a false thought, either of something invariable and uninterrupted or of something mysterious and inexplicable. To convince a fair-minded person that this is so, we need only to show him through his own daily experience that when variable or interrupted objects are supposed to continue the same, they really consist only in a sequence of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity [= 'nextness'], or causation. Such a sequence obviously fits our notion of *diversity*, so it can only be by mistake that we attribute an *identity* to it; and this mistake must arise from the fact that when the imagination moves from one of the related parts to the next, this act of the mind resembles the act in which we contemplate one continued object. What I mainly have to prove, then, is that whenever we ascribe identity to something that we do not observe to be unchanging and uninterrupted, what we are really talking about is not a single object, but rather a sequence of related objects.

To get started on this, suppose we have in front of us a mass of matter whose parts are contiguous and connected;

clearly we have to attribute a perfect identity to this mass so long as it continues uninterruptedly to contain the very same parts, even if those parts move around within it. Now suppose that some very small or inconspicuous part is added to the mass or removed from it. Strictly speaking, it is no longer the same mass of matter; but we—not being accustomed to think so accurately—don't hesitate to say that a mass of matter is still 'the same' if it changes only in such a trivial way. Our thought moves from the object before the change to the object after it so smoothly and easily that we are hardly aware that there is any movement; and this tempts us to think that it is nothing but a continued survey of the same object.

One aspect of this phenomenon is well worth noticing. Although a turnover in any *large* part of a mass of matter destroys the identity of the whole, that is, makes us unwilling to say that it continues to be the same thing, what we count as *large* in this context depends not on the actual size of the part but rather on how big a proportion it is of the whole. We would count a planet as still 'the same' if it acquired or lost a mountain, but the change of a few inches could destroy the identity of some bodies. The only way to explain this is by supposing that objects interrupt the continuity of the mind's actions not according to their real size but according to their proportion to each other; and therefore, since this interruption makes an object cease to appear 'the same', it must be the uninterrupted movement of the thought that constitutes the imperfect identity, that is, that leads us to say that something is 'the same' when, strictly speaking, it is not the same.

This is confirmed by another phenomenon. Although a change in any considerable part of a body destroys its identity, if the change is produced gradually and imperceptibly we are less apt to see it as destroying the identity. The reason

for this must be that the mind, in following the successive changes of the body, slides easily along from surveying its condition at one moment to surveying it at another, and is never aware of any interruption in its actions.

However careful we are to introduce changes gradually and to make each a small proportion of the whole, when eventually they add up to a considerable change we hesitate to attribute identity to such different objects. But we have a device through which we can induce the imagination to go one step further in attributing identity where really there is none—namely, relating the parts to one another through some common end or purpose. A ship of which a considerable part has been changed by frequent repairs is still considered 'the same' even if the materials of which it is composed have come to be quite different. Through all the variations of the parts, they still serve the same common purpose; and that makes it easy for the imagination to move from the ship before the repairs to the ship after.

This happens even more strikingly when we see the parts as being causally related to one another in everything they do, in ways that reflect their common end. This is not the case with ships, but it is the case with all animals and vegetables: not only are the parts taken to have some over-all purpose, but also they depend on and are connected with one another in ways that further that purpose. The effect of this relation is that, although in a very few years both plants and animals go through a total change, with their form, size and substance being entirely altered, yet we still attribute identity to them. An oak that grows from a small plant to a large tree is still the same oak, we say, though there is not one particle of matter or shape of its parts that is the same. An infant becomes a man, and is sometimes fat, sometimes thin, without any change in his identity.

We should also consider two further noteworthy facts. The

first is that though we can usually distinguish quite exactly between numerical and specific identity, yet sometimes we mix them up and use one in place of the other in our thinking and reasoning. [Numerical identity is real identity, or being *the very same thing*. It is called 'numerical' because it affects counting: if x is not numerically identical with y, then x and y are two. By 'specific identity' Hume means *similarity*, qualitative likeness, being of the same species, sort, or kind.] Thus, a man who hears a noise that is frequently interrupted and renewed says it is still 'the same noise', though clearly the sounds have only a specific identity, that is, a resemblance, and there is nothing numerically the same but the cause that produced them. Similarly, when an old brick church fell to ruin, we may say that the parish rebuilt 'the same church' out of sandstone and in a modern architectural style. Here neither the form nor the materials are the same; the buildings have nothing in common except their relation to the inhabitants of the parish; and yet this alone is enough to make us call them 'the same'. It is relevant that in these cases ·of the noises and the churches· the first object is in a manner annihilated before the second comes into existence. That protects us from being presented at any one time with the idea of difference and multiplicity; ·that is, we are not in a position to pick out both noises (or both churches) at the same time, and have the thought 'This is one and *that* is another'·; and that increases our willingness to call them 'the same'.

Secondly, although in general we don't attribute identity across a sequence of related objects unless the change of parts is gradual and only partial, with objects that are by nature changing and inconstant we will say they are 'the same' even if the changes are quite sudden. For example, the nature of a river consists in the motion and change of parts, so that there is a total turnover of these in less than twenty-four hours, but this does not stop the river

from being 'the same' for centuries. What is natural and essential to a thing is expected, and what is expected makes less impression and appears less significant than what is unusual and extraordinary. A big change of an expected kind looks smaller to the imagination than the most trivial unexpected alteration; and by making less of a break in the continuity of the thought it has less influence in destroying the ·supposition of· identity.

I now proceed to explain the nature of personal identity, which has become such a great issue in philosophy. The line of reasoning that has so successfully explained the identity of plants and animals, of ships and houses, and of all changing complex things—natural and artificial—must be applied to personal identity too. The identity that we ascribe to the mind of man is fictitious; it is like the identity we ascribe to plants and animals. So it can't have a different origin from the latter, but must come from a similar operation of the imagination on similar objects.

That argument strikes me as perfectly conclusive, but if you aren't convinced by it you should consider the following even tighter and more direct argument. It is obvious that the identity we attribute to the human mind, however perfect we may imagine it to be, cannot make *many different* perceptions become *one* by making them lose the distinctness and difference that are essential to them. Every distinct perception that enters into the mind's make-up is a distinct existence, and is different and distinguishable and separable from every other perception (whether occurring at the same time or at other times). Yet we suppose the whole sequence of perceptions to be united by identity—we say that the members of the sequence are all perceptions of a single person—which naturally raises a question about this relation of identity. Is it something that really binds together our various *perceptions themselves*, or does it only

associate *the ideas of them* in the imagination? In other words, when we speak about the identity of a person, do we observe some real bond among his perceptions, or do we merely feel a bond among the ideas we form of those perceptions? The question is easy to answer, if we remember what I have already proved, namely that the understanding never observes any real connection among objects, and that even the cause-effect relation, when strictly examined, comes down to a customary association of ideas. For that clearly implies that identity doesn't really belong to these different perceptions, holding them together, but is merely a quality that we attribute to them because of how the ideas of them are united in the imagination when we think about them. Now, the only qualities that can unite ideas in the imagination are the three I have mentioned. They are the uniting principles in the world of ideas; without them every distinct object is separable by the mind and can be separately thought about, and seems to be disconnected from *every* other object, not merely from ones that are very dissimilar or distant. So identity must depend on some of the three relations of *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation*. Now, the very essence of these relations consists in their making ideas follow one another easily; so our notions of personal identity must proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted movement of thought along a sequence of connected ideas, in the way I have explained.

The only remaining question is: *Which* of the three relations produce this uninterrupted movement of our thought when we consider the successively existing perceptions that we take to constitute a mind or thinking person? Obviously contiguity has little or nothing to do with it; so we must attend to resemblance and causation.

Let us take resemblance first. If someone always remembers a large proportion of his past perceptions, this will

contribute greatly to the holding of a certain relation within the sequence of his perceptions, varied as they may be. For memory is just a faculty by which we raise up images of past perceptions; and an image of something must resemble it. So each memory involves a perception that resembles some past perception the person has had; and the frequent occurrence of these resembling pairs of perceptions in the chain of thought makes it easier for the imagination to move from one link in the chain to another, making the whole sequence seem like the continuation of a single object. In this way, therefore, memory doesn't merely *show* the identity but also helps to *create* it, by bringing it about that many of the perceptions resemble one another. The account given in this paragraph applies equally to one's sense of one's own identity and to one's thoughts about the identity of others.

Causation also has a role. The true idea of the human mind is the idea of a system of different perceptions that are linked by the cause-effect relation, through which they mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. Our impressions *give rise to* corresponding ideas, which in their turn *produce* other impressions. One thought chases another and draws after it a third by which it is expelled in its turn. In this respect the soul is very like a republic or commonwealth, in which the members are united by the links that connect rulers with subjects; these members cause others to come into existence by begetting or giving birth to them, and these in their turn keep the same republic continuously in existence throughout all the unceasing changes of its parts. And just as the same individual republic may change not only its members but also its laws and constitution, so also the same person can vary his character and disposition as well as his impressions and ideas. Whatever changes he undergoes, his various parts are still connected by causation. Our emotions contribute

to our identity just as our impressions and ideas do, by making some of our perceptions influence others that occur at very different times. This is what happens when we have a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures.

Memory should be regarded as the source of personal identity, mainly because without it we wouldn't know of the existence of this lengthy and continuous sequence of perceptions. If we had no memory, we would never have any notion of causation or, consequently, of the chain of causes and effects that constitute our self or person. Once we have acquired this notion of causation from our memory, we can extend the same chain of causes—and consequently the identity of our persons—beyond our memory, stretching it out to include times, circumstances and actions that we have entirely forgotten but which we suppose on general grounds to have existed. How many of our past actions do we actually remember? Who can tell me, for instance, what he thought and did on the 1st of January 1715, the 11th of March 1719 and the 3rd of August 1733? Or will he overturn all the most established notions of personal identity by saying that because he has forgotten the incidents of those days his present self is not the same person as the self of that time? Looked at from this angle, memory can be seen not so much to *create* personal identity as to *reveal* it, by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. Those who contend that memory alone produces our personal identity ought to explain how we can in this way extend our identity beyond our memory.

The whole of this doctrine leads us to the very important conclusion that all the precise, subtle questions about personal identity can never be settled, and should be seen as verbal difficulties rather than philosophical ones. Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity by means of that easy movement of thought that

they give rise to. But the relations in question are matters of degree, and so is the easiness of the mental movement that depends on them; so we have no correct standard by which to settle when they acquire or lose their entitlement to the name 'identity'. Just because the basis of our identity judgments consists in matters of degree, there can be borderline cases—just as there are borderlines for baldness, tallness and so on. All the disputes about the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except in so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction—some imaginary source of union—such as I have described.

What I have said about the origin and the uncertainty of our notion of the *identity* of the human mind can also be applied—with little or no change—to our notion of *simplicity*, that is, the notion of a thing's not having parts. An object whose different *coexistent* parts are closely related strikes the mind in much the same way as one that is perfectly simple and indivisible, and the thought of it doesn't require a much greater mental stretch. Because contemplating it is like contemplating something simple, we regard as though it *were* simple, and we invent a principle of union as the support of this simplicity and as the centre of all the different parts and qualities of the object.

\* \* \* \* \*

[After Book I of the *Treatise of Human Nature* had been published, Hume had some afterthoughts that were published in an Appendix to Book III. Here is the afterthought that he asks us to insert at this point.]

·START OF THE APPENDIX PASSAGE·

I had hoped that however deficient my theory of the *intellectual* world might be, it would at least be free from those contradictions and absurdities that seem to infect every explanation that human reason can give of the *material*

world. But reconsidering more carefully the section on personal identity I find myself involved in such a labyrinth that I don't know how to correct my former opinions, nor do I know how to make them consistent. If this is not a good general reason for scepticism, it is at least a sufficient one (as if I didn't already have plenty) for me to be cautious and modest in all my conclusions. I shall present the arguments on both sides, starting with those that led me to deny the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a self or thinking being. I offer seven of these, each pretty much independent of the others.

(1) When we talk of *self* or *substance* we must associate ideas with these terms, otherwise they would be meaningless. Every idea is derived from previous impressions; and we have no impression of self or substance as something simple and individual. We have, therefore, no idea of them in that sense.

(2) Whatever is distinct is distinguishable, and whatever is distinguishable is separable by the thought or imagination. All perceptions are distinct. They are, therefore, distinguishable, and separable, and may be thought of as separately existent, and may exist separately, without any contradiction or absurdity.

When I view this table and that chimney, nothing is present to me but particular perceptions that are of the same kind as all other perceptions. This is the doctrine of philosophers. But this table and that chimney can and do exist separately. This is the doctrine of the common man, and it implies no contradiction. So there is no contradiction in extending the same doctrine to all perceptions—that is, the doctrine that they can exist separately. The next paragraph gives an argument for this.

The following reasoning seems satisfactory on the whole. All ideas are borrowed from previous perceptions. So our ideas of objects are derived from that source. Therefore any

proposition that is intelligible and consistent with regard to *objects* must be equally so when applied to *perceptions*. But it is intelligible and consistent to say that objects exist independently, without having to inhere in any common simple substance. So it can't be absurd to say the same thing about perceptions. We are therefore not entitled to insist that there *must* be some self or substance in which our perceptions exist.

(3) When I look in on myself, I can never perceive this self without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive anything but the perceptions. It is a complex of these perceptions, therefore, that constitutes the self.

(4) We can conceive a thinking being to have as few perceptions as we like—even to be reduced to the level (below that of an oyster) of having only one perception, such as that of thirst or hunger. In considering such a mind, do you conceive anything more than merely that one perception? Have you any notion of self or substance? If not, the addition of other perceptions can never give you that notion.

(5) The annihilation that some people suppose to follow on death, and which entirely destroys this self, is nothing but an extinction of all particular perceptions—love and hatred, pain and pleasure, thought and sensation. So these must be the same as the self, since the one cannot survive the other.

(6) Is self the same as substance? If it is, then there can be no question of the same self remaining when there is a change of substance. If on the other hand self and substance are distinct, what is the difference between them? For my part, I have no notion of either when they are conceived as distinct from particular perceptions.

(7) Philosophers are beginning to be reconciled to the principle that we have no idea of *external* substance distinct from the ideas of particular qualities. This should pave the way for a similar principle regarding the mind, namely

that we have no notion of it distinct from the particular perceptions.

All of this seems clear and true. But having started my account with our particular perceptions all loose and separate, when I proceed to explain the principle of connection that binds them together, making us attribute to them a real simplicity and identity, I come to realize that my account is very defective, and that I wouldn't have accepted it if it weren't for the seeming power of the foregoing arguments.

[Hume now re-states his own theory of personal identity, in a manner that is favourable to it. His subsequent worries and doubts start to surface only at the end of this paragraph.] If perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only by being connected together. But the human understanding can never discover connections among distinct existences; we only *feel* a connection in our mind when our thought is compelled to pass from one object to another. It follows, then, that personal identity is merely *felt* by our thought: this happens when our thought reflects on the sequence of past perceptions that compose a mind, and feels its the ideas of them to be inter-connected and to follow on from one another in a natural way. Extraordinary though it is, this conclusion need not surprise us. Most philosophers today seem inclined to think that personal identity arises from consciousness, and consciousness is nothing but a thought or perception directed inwards towards oneself. To that extent, this present philosophy of mine looks promising. [Now comes the

trouble.] But all my hopes vanish when I come to explain the principles<sub>c</sub> that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any satisfactory theory about this.

In short, there are two principles that I cannot render consistent, nor can I give either of them up: **(1)** all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and **(2)** the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences. If our perceptions either inhered in something simple and individual, or if the mind perceived some real connection among them, there would be no difficulty. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic and confess that this problem is too hard for my understanding. I don't say outright that it is absolutely insoluble. Perhaps someone else—or even myself after further reflection—will discover some hypothesis that will reconcile those contradictions.

·NOW BACK TO SECTION 6·

Thus I have finished my examination of the various systems of philosophy, both of the intellectual and the moral world; and, in my miscellaneous way of reasoning I have been led into several topics that will either illustrate and confirm some of what I have been saying or prepare the way for what is to come. It is now time to return to a closer examination of our subject, and to proceed in the accurate anatomy of human nature, having fully explained the nature of our judgment and understanding.

## 7: Conclusion of this book

But before I launch out into those immense depths of philosophy that lie before me ·in Books II and III of this *Treatise*·, I want to stop for a moment at the place I have so far reached, and to ponder the voyage I have undertaken, which undoubtedly requires the utmost skill and hard work to be brought to a happy conclusion. I am like a man who, having grounded his ship on many shoals and nearly wrecked it in passing a small island, still has the nerve to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of going around the globe in it. My memory of past errors and perplexities makes me unsure about the future. The wretched condition, the weakness and disorder, of the ·intellectual· faculties that I have to employ in my enquiries increase my anxiety. And the impossibility of amending or correcting these faculties reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to die on the barren rock where I am now rather than to venture into that boundless ocean that goes on to infinity. This sudden view of my danger makes me gloomy; and as that above all is the passion that indulges itself, I can't help feeding my despair with all those down-casting reflections that the present subject provides in such abundance.

First, I am frightened and confused by the forlorn solitude in which my philosophy places me, and see myself as some strange uncouth monster who, not being able to mingle and unite in society, has been expelled from all human society and left utterly abandoned and disconsolate. I would like to run into the crowd for shelter and warmth, but I can't get myself to mix with such deformity. I call on others to join me so that we can make our own separate society, but no-one will listen. Everyone keeps at a distance, and

dreads the storm that beats upon me from every side. I have exposed myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians—can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have declared my rejection of their systems—can I be surprised if they express a hatred of mine and of me? When I look outwards ·and ahead· I foresee on every side dispute, contradiction, anger, slander, and detraction. When I look inwards I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. All the world conspires to oppose and contradict me; and I am so weak that when •my opinions are not supported by the approval of others I feel •them loosen and fall away. I take every step with hesitation, and every new reflection makes me dread an error and absurdity in my reasoning.

·This is not unreasonable·; for what confidence can I have in venturing on such bold enterprises when, beside the countless infirmities that I personally have, I find so many that are common to human nature? Can I be sure that when I leave all established opinions I am following truth? and by what criterion shall I recognize her [= truth] even if fortune should at last guide me onto her path? After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no *reason* why I should assent to it [= my conclusion]; I merely feel a *strong* disposition to consider objects *strongly* in the manner in which they appear to me ·as a result of that reasoning·. Experience is a force that instructs me in the various conjunctions of objects in the past; habit is another force that makes me expect the same in the future; and the two work together on the imagination, making me form certain ideas in a more intense and lively manner than other ideas that don't have the same advantages. This quality by

which the mind enlivens some ideas more than others seems trivial, and has no basis in reason; yet without it we could never assent to any argument, or carry our view beyond •the few objects that are present to our senses. Indeed, even to *those* objects we could never attribute any existence but •what was dependent on the senses, and must •therefore bring them entirely into that sequence of perceptions that constitutes our self or person. And even in relation to that sequence, we could •at any given time• only accept the existence of •the perceptions that are immediately present to our consciousness •at that moment•; the lively images with which the memory presents us could never be accepted as true pictures of past perceptions. The memory, senses, and understanding are therefore *all* founded on the imagination, or the liveliness of our ideas.

No wonder a force that is so inconstant and fallacious should lead us into errors when uncritically followed (as it must be) in all its variations. It is this force that •makes us reason from causes and effects, and that •convinces us of the continued existence of external objects when they are absent from the senses. But though these two operations are equally natural and necessary in the human mind, in some circumstances they are directly contrary to one another (section 4); so we can't reason soundly and regularly from causes and effects while at the same time believing in the continued existence of matter. How then shall we relate those two forces to one another? Which of them shall we prefer? Or if we prefer neither of them, and (as philosophers usually do) go sometimes with one and at other times with the other, how confidently can we give ourselves the glorious title of 'philosopher' when we thus knowingly accept an obvious contradiction? This contradiction (see 14<sup>iii</sup>) would be more excusable if it were compensated by any degree of solidity and satisfaction in the other parts of our reasoning.

But that is not how things stand. When we trace human understanding back to its first sources, we find that it leads us into opinions that seem to make a mockery of all our past trouble and work, and to discourage us from future enquiries. Nothing is more assiduously enquired into by the mind of man than the causes of every phenomenon; and we aren't content with knowing the *immediate* causes, but push our enquiries on until we arrive at the basic ultimate cause. We aren't willing to stop until we are acquainted with the energy in the cause by which it operates on its effect—the tie that connects cause and effect together—and the effective quality on which that tie depends. This is our aim in all our studies and reflections; so how disappointed we must be when we learn that this connection, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that set of mind that custom creates, which causes us to make a transition from the impression of an object to the lively idea of its usual accompaniment! Such a discovery not only cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but won't even let us *wish* for it; for it appears that when we say that we want to know 'the ultimate and operating force', regarding this as something that resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves or talk without a meaning.

This deficiency in our ideas is not indeed perceived in common life. Indeed, we are not in general aware that in the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect we are as ignorant of the ultimate force that binds them together as we are in the most unusual and extraordinary cases. But this •unawareness• comes merely from an illusion of the imagination; and the question is 'How far ought we to yield to these illusions?'. This question is very difficult, and the choice of answers forces us to confront a very dangerous dilemma. One option is to assent to every trivial suggestion of the imagination. But these suggestions are often contrary

to one another; and anyway they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities that we must eventually become ashamed of our credulity. Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has led to more mistakes among philosophers. Men with bright imaginations may in this respect be compared to the angels whom the Scripture represents as *covering their eyes with their wings!* I have already shown so many instances of this that I can spare myself the trouble of going on about it any more.

The consideration of these troubles might make us resolve to reject all the *trivial* suggestions of the imagination, and adhere to the understanding—that is, to the imagination's *general and more established* properties. But even this resolution, if steadily kept to, would be dangerous and would bring the most fatal consequences. For I have already shown in section 1 that the understanding, when it acts alone and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself and leaves us without even the lowest level of conviction about any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of a special and seemingly trivial property of the imagination—namely, its making it difficult for us to enter into remote views of things, not being able to accompany them with as strong an impression as we do things that are more easy and natural. Shall we, then, adopt it as a general maxim that *no refined or elaborate reasoning is ever to be accepted?* Consider well the consequences of such a principle! It cuts you off entirely from all science and philosophy; you proceed on the basis of one special quality of the imagination, and by parity of reasoning you should embrace them all; and you explicitly contradict yourself, because this maxim must be *based on* the preceding reasoning, which you must admit is sufficiently refined and metaphysical ·to

fall under the principle and thus be *rejected* by it! What side shall we choose among these difficulties? If we embrace this principle and condemn all refined reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we entirely subvert the human understanding. We are left with a choice between ·a false reason and ·no reason at all. For my part, I don't know what *ought to be* done in the present case. I can only observe what commonly *is* done, namely: this difficulty is seldom or never thought of, and even when it is present to the mind it is quickly forgotten and leaves only a small impression behind it. Very refined reflections have little or no influence on us; and yet we don't and can't accept the rule that they ought not to have any influence, for that implies a manifest contradiction.

But what have I just said? That very refined and metaphysical reflections have little or no influence on us? I can scarcely refrain from retracting ·even· *this* opinion, and condemning it on the basis of my present feeling and experience. The intense view of all these contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so heated my brain that I am ready to reject *all* belief and reasoning, and can't see *any* opinion ·as true, or· even as more probable or likely than another.

Where am I?

What am I?

What has caused me to exist, and to what condition shall I return ·after death·?

Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread?

What beings surround me? Which ones can I influence, and which have any influence on me?

I am bemused by all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable—surrounded by the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of

the use of every skill of body and mind.

Most fortunately it happens that since reason can't scatter these clouds, Nature herself suffices for that purpose and cures me of this philosophical gloom and frenzy, either by reducing the intensity of these thoughts or by some pastime that makes lively impressions on my senses that obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse cheerfully with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement I turn back to these speculations, they appear so cold, strained, and ridiculous that I can't find in my heart to enter into them any further.

Here, then, I find myself absolutely and necessarily made to live and talk and act like other people in the common affairs of life. But although my natural disposition and the course of my animal spirits and passions bring me to this lazy acceptance of the general maxims of the world, I still feel such remains of my earlier frame of mind that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never again to turn away from the pleasures of life in order to resume reasoning and philosophy. For that's how I feel in the depressed mood that governs me at present. I may—I *must*—go with the current of Nature in my dealings with my senses and understanding, and in this blind obedience I show most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. But does it follow that I must go *against* the current of Nature that leads me to laziness and pleasure? that I must to some extent shut myself away from dealings with and the society of men that is so agreeable? that I must torture my brain with subtleties and sophistries, doing this at the very time when I can't satisfy myself that this painful activity is a reasonable thing to do and can't have any tolerable prospect of arriving through it at truth and certainty? Why *must* I? What obliges me to misuse my time in that way? And what purpose can it serve, either for the service of mankind or

for my own personal interests? No: if I must be a fool (and all those who reason or believe anything certainly *are* fools), my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable! Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led to wander into such dreary solitudes and rough passages as I have so far met with.

These are the sentiments of my depression and slackness; and indeed I must confess that philosophy has nothing to bring against them, and expects a victory more from the benefits of a serious good-humoured disposition than from the force of reason and conviction. In all the incidents of life, we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe that fire warms or water refreshes, it is only because it is too much trouble to think otherwise. Indeed, if we *are* philosophers, it ought only to be on sceptical principles—not in the hope of arriving at assured truths, but only because we feel inclined to employ ourselves in that way. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some disposition, it ought to be assented to. Where it doesn't, it can't have any right to operate on us.

Thus, at a time when I am tired with amusement and company, and have allowed myself a daydream in my room or in a solitary walk by a river-side, I feel my mind all collected within itself, and am *naturally inclined* to think about all those subjects about which I have met with so many disputes in the course of my reading and conversation. I can't help wanting to know the sources of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of the various passions and inclinations that move and govern me. I am not contented with the thought that I approve of one thing and disapprove of another, call one thing beautiful and another ugly, and make decisions concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing what principles

I am going by in all this. I am concerned for the condition of the learned world that is so deplorably ignorant about all this. I feel an ambition arising in me to contribute to the instruction of mankind, and to make myself known through my discoveries. These feelings spring up naturally in my present frame of mind; and if I tried to get rid of them by applying myself to any other activity or pastime, I feel I would be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy.

But if this curiosity and ambition *didn't* carry me into speculations outside the sphere of common life, I would still inevitably be led into them by my own weakness. Let me explain. It is certain that superstition is much bolder in its systems and hypotheses than philosophy is: whereas philosophy contents itself with assigning new causes and explanations for the phenomena that appear in the visible world, superstition opens up a world of its own, and presents us with scenes and beings and states of affairs that are altogether new. Now, it is almost impossible for the mind of man to stay—like the minds of lower animals—within the narrow circle of items that are the subject of daily conversation and action; so we are bound to stray outside that circle, and all we have to deliberate about is our choice of guide when we do so, looking for the one that is safest and most agreeable. In this respect I venture to recommend *philosophy*, and I don't hesitate to prefer it to superstition of every kind. For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives. Philosophy stands in contrast to that. Sound philosophy can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and the opinions offered by false and extravagant philosophy are merely the objects of cool generalizing thought, and seldom go so far as to

interrupt the course of our natural inclinations. The Cynics are an extraordinary instance of philosophers who, from purely philosophical reasonings, entered into extravagances of conduct as great as any monk or dervish that ever was in the world. Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy are only ridiculous.

I am aware that these two cases of the strength and weakness of the mind—that is, philosophy and superstition—don't cover all mankind, and that in England in particular there are many honest gentlemen who are always engaged in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, and so have carried their thoughts very little beyond the objects that are every day exposed to their senses. I don't purport to make philosophers of these, and I don't expect them either to join in these researches or listen to their results. Such people do well to keep themselves in their present situation; and, rather than refining them into philosophers, I would like to make philosophers more like them; that is, I wish we could give our founders of philosophical systems a share of this gross earthy mixture, as an ingredient that they commonly need and don't have, an ingredient that would damp down those fiery particles of which they are composed! As long as philosophy makes room for a lively imagination and for hypotheses that are embraced merely because they are glittering and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles or any opinions that will square with common practice and experience. If such hypotheses were removed from philosophy, *then* we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions which—if not true (for that may be too much to hope for)—might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination. Many flimsy systems that have arisen and then died, but this shouldn't make us despair of attaining this goal; consider the shortness of the period

in which these questions have been the subjects of enquiry and reasoning. Two thousand years, with long interruptions and under mighty discouragements, are a small stretch of time to bring the sciences to anything like completion; and perhaps the world is still too young for us to discover *any* principles that will stand up under examination by our remote descendants. Speaking for myself, my only hope is that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge by giving in some respects a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and more clearly indicating to them the only subjects in which they can expect assurance and conviction. *Human nature* is the only science of man; and yet it has been until now been the most neglected. I will be satisfied if I can bring it a little more into fashion; and the hope of this serves to bring me out of the depression and slackness that sometimes take me over. If you find yourself in the same easy disposition, follow me in my future speculations ·in Books II and III·. If not, follow your own inclination, and wait for the return of good humour and industriousness. The conduct of a man who studies philosophy in this careless manner is more truly sceptical than the conduct of one who, feeling in himself an inclination to it, nevertheless totally rejects it because he is overwhelmed with doubts and worries. A true sceptic will be cautious about his philosophical doubts as

well as about his philosophical convictions; and he will never refuse any innocent satisfaction that offers itself on account of either of them.

It is proper that we should •in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles, and also that we should •give rein to our inclination to be positive and certain about *particular points*, according to how we see them at any *particular instant*. It is easier •to give up examination and enquiry altogether than •to restrain such a natural disposition in ourselves and guard against the confidence that always arises from an exact and full survey of an object. At those moments we are apt to forget not only our scepticism but even our modesty, and make use of such expressions as ‘it is evident’, ‘it is certain’, ‘it is undeniable’, which a due deference to the public ought perhaps to prevent. I may have followed others into committing this fault, but in face of any objections that may be made against me on that account I declare that such expressions were dragged out of me by my view of the object at that moment; they don’t imply any dogmatic spirit or conceited idea of my own judgment—attitudes that I am aware are not suitable for anybody, least of all a sceptic.