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.

First launched: July 2004 Last amended: April 2007

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Part iv: The sceptical and other systems of philosophy

Section 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$_c$ 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.

Section 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_{ii}.

·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$_c$ 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 origi-

nally 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_{ii}) 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_{ii} 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 82.] 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_{ii}, 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 returning ·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.[1]

·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

[1] 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.

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 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.