

Treatise of Human Nature

Book I: The Understanding

David Hume

Copyright ©2005–2010 All rights reserved. Jonathan Bennett

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

First launched: July 2004

Last amended: April 2007

Contents

Section 3: The ancient philosophy	110
Section 4: The modern philosophy	113
Section 5: The immateriality of the soul	117
Section 6: Personal identity	126
Section 7: Conclusion of this book	135

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 con-

traditions, 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 uncompounded—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 jus-

tice 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?

Section 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 communi-

cates 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.

Section 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 there-

fore 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_{ii}) 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 un-*

compounded 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 un-compounded 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, un-compounded 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 ar-

gument, 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 15ⁱⁱⁱ 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.

Section 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 interconnected 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_c 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.

Section 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_{iii}) 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.