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Principles of Human Knowledge

By George Berkeley

Introduction

1 intro. Philosophy is just the study of wisdom and truth, so one might reasonably expect that those who have spent most time and care on it would enjoy a greater calm and serenity of mind, know things more clearly and certainly, and be less disturbed with doubts and difficulties than other men. But what we find is quite different, namely that the illiterate majority of people, who walk the high road of plain common sense and are governed by the dictates of nature, are mostly comfortable and undisturbed. To them nothing that is familiar appears hard to explain or to understand. They don't complain of any lack of certainty in their senses, and are in no danger of becoming sceptics. But as soon as we depart from sense and instinct to follow the light of a higher principle—that is, to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things—a thousand doubts spring up in our minds concerning things that we previously seemed to understand fully. We encounter many prejudices and errors of the senses; and when we try to correct these by reason, we are gradually drawn into crude paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow on us as our thoughts progress; until finally, having wandered through many intricate mazes, we find ourselves back where we started or—which is worse—we sit down in a forlorn scepticism.

2 intro. The cause of this is thought to be the obscurity of things or the natural weakness and imperfection of our understandings. It is said that our faculties are few in number and are designed by nature merely to promote survival and comfort, not to penetrate into the inward essence and constitution of things. Besides, it is not surprising that the *finite* mind of man runs into absurdities and contradictions—ones from which it cannot possibly escape—when it tackles things that involve *infinity*, because it is of the nature of the infinite not to be comprehended by anything that is finite.

3 intro. But when we lay the blame for our paradoxes and difficulties on our faculties rather than on our wrong use of them, perhaps we are letting ourselves down too lightly. It is hard to believe that right deductions from true principles should ever lead to conclusions that can't be maintained or made consistent. We should believe that God has been more generous with men than to give them a strong desire for knowledge that he has placed out of their reach. That would not square with the kindly ways in which Providence, having given creatures various desires, usually supplies them the means—if

used properly—to satisfy them. I am inclined to think that most if not all of the difficulties that have in the past puzzled and deceived philosophers and blocked the way to knowledge are entirely of our own making. We have first raised a dust, and then we complain that we can't see.

4 intro. My purpose therefore is to try to discover what the underlying sources are of all that doubtfulness and uncertainty, those absurdities and contradictions, into which the various sects of philosophy have fallen—and indeed fallen so badly that the wisest men have thought our ignorance to be incurable, thinking that it comes from the natural dullness and limitedness of our faculties. Surely it is well worth the trouble to make a strict enquiry into the first principles of human knowledge, to sift and examine them on all sides; especially since there may be some grounds to suspect that the obstacles and difficulties that block and confuse the mind in its search for truth don't spring from any darkness and intricacy in the objects, or any natural defect in the understanding, but come rather from false principles that have been insisted on and might have been avoided.

5 intro. When I consider how many great and extraordinary men have already tried to do this, my own attempt seems difficult and discouraging. But I have some hope of success, because the largest views are not always the clearest, and he who is shortsighted will have to bring the object nearer to him, and may by looking closely at the fine details notice things that have escaped far better eyes.

6 intro. You will understand the rest of this work more easily if I begin by discussing the nature of language and how it can be misused. I need especially to attend to a doctrine that seems to have played a large part in making people's theories complex and confusing, and to have caused endless errors and difficulties in most branches of knowledge. I am referring to **the theory that the mind has a power of forming abstract ideas or notions of things**. Anyone who knows anything about the writings and disputes of philosophers must realize that a great part of them is spent on abstract ideas, which are thought to be especially the object of the sciences of logic and metaphysics, and of all learning of the supposedly most abstracted and elevated kind. In all of these studies, almost every discussion assumes that there are abstract ideas in the mind, and that it is quite familiar with them.

7 intro. Everyone agrees that the qualities of things never really exist in isolation from one another; rather, they are mixed and blended together, several in the same object. But, we are told by the supporters of 'abstract ideas', the mind can consider each quality on its own, abstracted from the others with which it is united in the object, and in that way the mind forms abstract ideas. For example, your eyesight presents you with an object that is extended, coloured, and moving; and your mind resolves this mixed or compound idea into its simple, constituent parts, and views each in isolation from the rest; which is how it forms the abstract ideas of *extension*, of *colour*, and of *motion*. It isn't possible for colour or motion to exist without extension: but according to these 'abstract idea' theorists the mind can by abstraction form the idea of colour without extension, and of motion without either colour or extension.

8 intro. [This section continues to expound the theory of abstract ideas, in preparation for an attack on it.] Again, the mind observes that the extended things that we perceive by sense, although they vary in size, shape and so on, also all have something in common; and it singles out and isolates the common element, thereby forming a highly abstract idea of *extension*. This is neither line, surface, nor solid, and it has no particular shape or size; it is an idea entirely separated out from all these features that distinguish extended things from one another. Similarly the mind can leave out all the differences amongst the colours that are seen, retaining only what is common to them all; and in this way it makes an idea of *colour*, which is not red, blue, white or any other specific colour. Again, by considering motion on its own—separated out not only from the body that moves but also from how it moves, in what direction and how fast—the mind forms an abstract idea of *motion*, which is equally applicable to all particular movements that we can perceive through our senses—the movement of a beckoning finger and the movement of Venus around the sun.

9 intro. [The exposition of the theory of abstract ideas continues, becoming increasingly ironical in tone.] The kind of mental separation through which the mind forms abstract ideas of qualities taken singly also enables it to achieve abstract ideas of more complex items each of which includes a number of qualities that exist together in a single object. For example, having observed that Peter, James, and John have certain features of shape etc. in common, the mind forms a complex idea that leaves out whatever differentiates these men from one another or from other men, and retains only what is common to all; and in this way it makes an abstract idea that applies equally to all men, excluding any details that might tie it down to any one man in particular. This (they say) is how we come to have the abstract idea of *man* (or of *humanity* or *human nature*, if you like). This idea includes colour, because every man has some colour; but then it can be neither white, nor black, nor any particular colour, because there is no one colour that all men have. The idea also includes height because every man has some height or other, but it is neither tall nor short nor middling, but something abstracted from all these because there is no one height that all men have. Similarly for all the rest. Furthermore, many sorts of creatures correspond in some ways but not all to the complex idea of *man*; and the mind, leaving out the features that are special to men and retaining only the ones that are shared by all the living creatures, forms the idea of *animal*. This abstracts not only from all particular men, but also all birds, beasts, fishes, and insects. The constituent parts of the abstract idea of animal are *body*, *life*, *sense*, and *spontaneous motion* [= 'the ability to move without being pushed or pulled']. By 'body' is meant body without any particular shape or size, because no one shape or size is common to all animals. The idea does not include any specific kind of covering—hair or feathers or scales, etc.—but nor does it specify bare skin; for various animals differ in respect of whether they have hair, feathers, scales, or bare skin, so that all those differences must be left out of the abstract idea of *animal*. For the same reason, the spontaneous motion must not be walking, flying or creeping; but it is a motion all the same. What kind of motion it can be is not easy to conceive.

10 intro. Whether others have this amazing ability to form abstract ideas, they will know better than I. Speaking for myself: I find that I do indeed have a capacity for imagining—representing to myself the ideas of particular things that I have perceived—and of

splitting those ideas up and reassembling them in various ways. I can imagine a man with two heads, or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse. I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself abstracted or separated from the rest of the body. But then whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and colour. Similarly, any idea that I form of a man must be of a specific kind of man: he must be white or black or brown, straight or crooked, tall or short or middling. Try as I may, I can't get into my mind the abstract idea of *man* that is described in the preceding section. And I find it equally impossible to form an abstract idea of *motion* that leaves out the thing that moves and is neither swift nor slow, curved nor straight. The same holds for absolutely all abstract ideas. I freely admit that I can perform 'abstraction' in a certain sense, namely: when several parts or qualities are united in an object, I can have the thought of one of them separated from the others *if it could really exist apart from them*. But I deny that I can perform 'abstraction' in the standard meaning of that word, which covers two kinds of mental performance: (i) conceiving abstractly and in isolation a quality that could not exist in isolation ·as we are said to do with colour and motion·; and (ii) forming a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the way I have described ·as we are said to do with man and animal·. There is reason to think that most people are like me in this respect. The majority of people, who are simple and illiterate, never claim to have abstract notions. Such notions are described ·by those who believe in them· as difficult to form; it takes hard work, we are told, to make an abstract idea. So we can reasonably conclude that if there are any abstract ideas they are all in the minds of learned people.

11 intro. Let us see what can be said in defence of this theory of abstract ideas. What attracts philosophers to a view that seems so remote from common sense? A rightly admired philosopher who died not long ago certainly helped to make the doctrine popular when he suggested that the biggest intellectual difference between man and beast is that men can form abstract ideas while beasts cannot. [Berkeley's *Principles* was published in 1710; John Locke had died in 1704. In their time 'brute' and 'beast' were standard terms for non-human animals.] He wrote:

What perfectly distinguishes men from brutes is that men have general ideas, this being something that the brutes are not equipped to do. Clearly, we don't see in them the faintest trace of the use of general signs to stand for universal ideas; so we can reasonably suppose that they lack the ability to abstract, i.e. to make general ideas, since they have no use of words or any other general signs. (Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.xi.10)

A little later he wrote:

So we are entitled to conclude that this is what marks off the species of brutes from men. It creates a clear gap between them, which eventually broadens out to a great width. If the brutes have any ideas at all rather than being mere machines (as some people think they are), we can't deny that they have a certain degree of reason. That some of them sometimes *reason* seems to me as obvious as that they *sense* things; but when they reason, it is only with particular ideas, just as they receive them from their senses. Even the highest of the brutes are confined within those narrow limits, I believe, and have no capacity to widen their intellectual range through any kind of abstraction. (11)

I readily agree with this learned author that brutes have no capacity for abstraction. But if that is to be our criterion for whether something is a brute, I am afraid that many who are accepted as men should be counted among the brutes! We have no evidence that brutes have abstract general ideas, the author said, because we do not observe them using words or other general signs. He was assuming that one cannot use words unless one has general ideas; from which it follows that men who use language are able to abstract or make their ideas general. That the author was thinking along these lines can be seen in how he answered his own question: ‘Since all things that exist are only particulars, how do we come by general terms?’ His answer was, ‘Words become general by being made the signs of general ideas’ (III.iii.6). But I maintain, on the contrary, that it seems that a word becomes general by being made the sign not of *one abstract* general idea but of *many particular* ideas, any one of which it may suggest to the mind. Consider for example the propositions *A thing’s change of motion is proportional to the force that is exerted on it*, and *Whatever is extended can be divided*. These axioms are to be understood as holding for motion and extension in general; but that doesn’t imply that they suggest to my thoughts an idea of motion without a body moved, and with no determinate direction or velocity, or that I must conceive

an abstract general idea of extension, which is not line or surface or solid, not large or small, not black or white or red or of any other determinate colour.

All that is needed is that the first axiom is true for *every* motion that I consider, whether it be swift or slow, perpendicular or horizontal or oblique, and in whatever object; and that the second axiom holds for *every* specific extension, whether line or surface or solid, and whether of this or that size or shape.

12 intro. We shall be better placed to understand what makes a word a general term if we first understand how ideas become general. (I emphasize that I don’t deny that there are general ideas—only that there are *abstract* general ideas. In the passages I have quoted, every mention of general ideas carries the assumption that they are formed by abstraction in the manner described in 7 and 9 above.) If we want to speak meaningfully and not say things that we can’t make sense of, I think we shall agree to the following. An idea, which considered in itself is particular, becomes general in its meaning by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort as itself. Suppose for example that a geometrician, proving the validity of a procedure for cutting a line in two equal parts, draws a black line one inch long. As used in this geometrical proof, this particular line is general in its significance because it is used to represent all particular lines, so that what is proved regarding it is proved to hold for all lines. And just as that particular *line* becomes general by being used as a sign, so the *word* ‘line’—which in itself is particular—is used as a sign with a general meaning. The line is general because it is the sign not of an abstract or general line but of all particular straight lines that could exist, and the word is general for the same reason—namely that it stands equally well for each and every particular line.

13 intro. To give you a still clearer view of what abstract ideas are supposed to be like, and of how we are supposed to need them, I shall quote one more passage from the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*:

For children and others whose minds have not yet been put to work much, abstract ideas are not as easy to form as particular ones are. If adults find them easy, that is only because they have had so much practice. For when we reflect carefully and in detail on them, we'll find that general ideas are mental fictions or contrivances that are quite difficult to construct; we don't come by them as easily as we might think. The general idea of a *triangle*, for example, though it is not one of the most abstract, comprehensive, and difficult ideas, can't be formed without hard work and skill. For that idea must be neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect that cannot exist, an idea in which parts of several different and inconsistent ideas are put together. It is true that because of our imperfect human condition, the mind needs such ideas for two of its main purposes—communication, and the growth of knowledge—so it moves as fast as it can to get them. Still, there is reason to suspect that such ideas indicate how imperfect we are. Anyway, what I have said is enough to show that the ideas that come earliest and most easily to the mind are not abstract and general ones, and that our earliest knowledge does not involve them.' (IV.vii.9)

If anyone thinks he can form in his mind an idea of a triangle such as the one described in that passage, I shan't waste my time trying to argue him out of it. I merely ask you, the reader, to find out for sure whether you have such an idea. This cannot be very difficult. What is easier than for you to look a little into your own thoughts and to discover whether you *do* or *can* have an idea that fits the description we have been given of the general idea of a triangle—'neither oblique nor rectangle, neither equilateral, equicrural, nor scalenon, but all and none of these at once'?

14 intro. Much is said by Locke about how difficult abstract ideas are—about the care and skill that is needed in forming them. And everyone agrees that it takes hard mental work to free our thoughts from particular objects and raise them to the level of theorizing that involves abstract ideas. It would seem to follow that the forming of abstract ideas is too difficult to be necessary for communication, which is so easy and familiar for all sorts of people. But, we are told by Locke, replying to this point, if adults find abstract ideas easy to form, that is only because they have become good at it through long practice. Well, I would like to know *when* it is that people are busy overcoming that difficulty and equipping themselves with what they need for communication! It can't be when they are grown up, for by then they can communicate, so that it seems the difficulty is behind them; so it has to be something they do in their childhood. But surely the labour of forming abstract notions—with so many to be formed, and each of them so difficult—is too hard a task for that tender age. Who could believe that a couple of children cannot chatter about sugar-plums and toys until they have first tacked together numberless inconsistencies and so formed abstract general ideas in their minds, attaching them to every common name they make use of?

15 intro. Abstract ideas are no more needed, in my opinion, for the growth of knowledge than they are for communication. I entirely agree with the widespread belief that all

knowledge and demonstration concerns universal notions; but I can't see that those are formed by abstraction. The only kind of universality that I can grasp does not belong to anything's *intrinsic* nature; a thing's universality consists how it *relates* to the particulars that it signifies or represents. That is how things, names, or notions that are intrinsically particular are made to be universal through their relation to the many particulars that they represent. When I prove a proposition about triangles, for instance, I am of course employing the universal idea of a *triangle*; but that doesn't involve me in thinking of a triangle that is neither equilateral nor scalenon nor equicrural! All it means is that the particular triangle I have in mind, no matter what kind of triangle it may be, is 'universal' in the sense that it equally stands for and represents all triangles whatsoever. All this seems to be straightforward and free of difficulties.

16 intro. You may want to make this objection:

How can we know any proposition to be true of all particular triangles unless we first see it demonstrated of the abstract idea of a triangle that fits all the particular ones? Just because a property can be demonstrated to belong to some one particular triangle, it doesn't follow that it equally belongs to any other triangle that differs in some way from the first one.

For example, having demonstrated of an *isosceles right-angled triangle* that *its three angles are equal to two right ones*, I can't conclude from this that the same holds for *all other triangles* that don't have a right angle and two equal sides. If we are to be certain that this proposition is universally true, it seems, we must either •prove it of every particular triangle (which is impossible) or •prove it once and for all of the abstract idea of a triangle, in which all the particulars are involved and by which they are all equally represented.

To this I answer that although the idea I have in view while I make the demonstration may be (for instance) that of an isosceles right-angled triangle whose sides are of a determinate length, I can still be certain that it applies also to all other triangles, no matter what their sort or size. I can be sure of this because neither the right angle nor the equality of sides nor length of the sides has any role in the demonstration. It is true that the diagram I have in view in the proof includes all these details, but **they are not mentioned in the proof** of the proposition. It is not said that the three angles are equal to two right ones *because one of them is a right angle*, or *because the sides that form it are of the same length*. This shows that the demonstration could have held good even if the right angle had been oblique and the sides unequal. That is why I conclude that the proposition holds for all triangles, having •demonstrated it in a certain way to hold for a particular right-angled isosceles triangle—not because I •demonstrated it to hold for the abstract idea of a triangle! I don't deny that a man can *abstract*, in that he can consider a figure merely as triangular without attending to the particular qualities of the angles or relations of the sides. But that doesn't show that he can form an abstract general inconsistent idea of a triangle. Similarly, because all that is *perceived* is not *considered*, we may think about Peter considered as a man, or considered as an animal, without framing the abstract idea of *man* or of *animal*.

17 intro. It would be an endless and a useless task to trace the scholastic philosophers [that is, mediaeval followers of Aristotle], those great masters of abstraction, through all the tangling labyrinths of error and dispute that their doctrine of *abstract natures and notions* seems to have led them into. What bickerings and controversies have arisen about those matters, and [Berkeley adds sarcastically] what great good they have brought to mankind, are well enough known these days, and I need not go on about them. It would have been better if the bad effects of that doctrine ·of abstract natures and notions· had been confined to the people who most openly adhered to it. ·But the bad effects have spread further·. When men consider that the advancement of knowledge has been pursued with great care, hard work, and high abilities, and yet most branches of knowledge remain full of darkness and uncertainty, and of disputes that seem likely never to end; and that even propositions thought to be supported by the most clear and compelling demonstrations contain paradoxes that are utterly at variance with the understandings of men; and that only a small portion of them brings any real benefit to mankind except as an innocent diversion and amusement; the consideration of all this is apt to make people depressed, and to give them a complete contempt for all study. Perhaps this will cease when we have a view of the false principles that people have accepted, of which I think the one that has had the widest influence over the thoughts of enquiring and theory-building men is the doctrine of abstract general ideas.

18 intro. This prevailing view about abstract ideas seems to me to have its roots in language. There is some evidence for this in what is openly said by the ablest supporters of abstract ideas, who acknowledge that they are made for the purpose of *naming*; from which it clearly follows that if there had been no such thing as speech or universal signs, abstraction would never have been thought of. (See *Essay* III.vi.39 and elsewhere.) So let us examine how words have helped to give rise to the mistaken view that there are abstract ideas. They have contributed to it through two mistakes about language, which I shall now discuss. (i) People assume that every name does or should have just one precise and settled signification. This encourages them to believe in abstract, determinate ideas, each serving as the true and only immediate signification of some general name, and to think further that a general name comes to signify this or that particular thing through the mediation of these abstract ideas—for example, •the general name ‘pebble’ stands for •my abstract idea of *pebble*, which in a certain way fits •the pebble I hold in my hand; and that’s how the general name comes to apply to the particular pebble. [Here, as in Locke’s writings, a ‘general name’ is just a general word, such as ‘pebble’, ‘daffodil’ and ‘triangle’. ‘Signification’ could often be replaced by ‘meaning’, but not always.] Whereas really no general name has a single precise and definite signification; each general name can equally well signify a great number of particular ideas. All of this clearly follows from what I have already said; reflect on it a little and you will agree. Here is a possible objection:

When a name has a definition, that ties it down to one determinate signification. For example, ‘triangle’ is defined as ‘plane surface bounded by three straight lines’; and that definition confines the word ‘triangle’ to standing for one certain idea and no other.

To this I reply that definition of ‘triangle’ does not say whether the surface is large or small, black or white, nor whether the sides are long or short, equal or unequal, nor what angles they form. Each of these can vary greatly; so there is no one settled idea to which the signification of the word ‘triangle’ is confined. It is one thing to make a name always

obey the same definition, and another to make it always stand for the same idea: one is necessary, the other useless and impracticable.

19 intro. (ii) Words helped in another way to produce the doctrine of abstract ideas, namely through the widespread opinion that language is for the communicating of our ideas and for nothing else, and that every significant name stands for an idea. People who think this, and who can see the obvious fact that some names that are regarded as significant do not have particular specific ideas corresponding to them, conclude that such names must stand for abstract notions. Now, nobody will deny that many names that are in use amongst thoughtful people do not always put determinate particular ideas into the minds of listeners. And even when a name does stand for ideas, it doesn't have to arouse them in the listener's mind every time it is used, even in the strictest reasonings. That is because in reading and conversation names are mostly used as letters are in algebra: each letter stands for a particular number, but you can conduct a proof accurately without at each step having each letter bring to mind the particular number it is meant to stand for.

20 intro. Besides, the communicating of ideas through words is not the chief and only end of language, as people commonly think. Speech has other purposes as well: raising emotions, influencing behaviour, changing mental attitudes. The communication of ideas is often subservient to these other purposes, and sometimes it doesn't take place at all because the purposes can be achieved without it. I urge you to reflect on your own experience. When you are hearing or reading a discourse, doesn't it often happen that emotions of fear, love, hatred, admiration, disdain, and so on arise immediately in your mind when you see or hear certain words, without any ideas intervening between the words and the emotion? It may well be that those •words did originally evoke •ideas that produced those sorts of •emotions; but I think you will find that, once the language has become familiar, hearing the sounds or seeing the •words is often followed by those •emotions immediately, entirely leaving out the •ideas that used to be a link in the chain. For example, can't we be influenced by the promise of 'a good thing' without having an idea of what it is? Again, is not a threat of 'danger' enough to make us afraid, even if we don't think of any particular evil that is likely to befall us or even form an idea of danger in the abstract? If you reflect a little on your own situation in the light of what I have said, I think you will find it obvious that general names are often used, in a perfectly proper way, without the speaker's intending them as marks of ideas in his own mind that he wants to arouse in the mind of the hearer. Even proper names, it seems, are not always spoken with the intention of bringing into hearers' minds the ideas of those individuals who are named. For example, when a schoolman [= 'follower of Aristotle'] tells me 'Aristotle has said it', I understand him merely to be trying to incline me to accept his opinion with the deference and submission that custom has linked with the name 'Aristotle', and my idea of Aristotle doesn't come into it. Innumerable examples of this kind could be given, but why should I go on about things that I'm sure are abundantly illustrated in your own experience?

21 intro. I think I have •shown the impossibility of abstract ideas. I have •considered what has been said on their behalf by their ablest supporters, and have •tried to show they

are of no use for the purposes for which they are thought to be necessary. And, lastly, I have •traced them to their source, which appears to be language. It can't be denied that words are extremely useful: they make it possible for all the knowledge that has been gained by the enquiries of men at many times and in all nations to be pulled together and surveyed by a single person. But at the same time it must be admitted that most branches of knowledge have been made enormously much darker and more difficult by the misuse of words and turns of phrase. Therefore, since words are so apt to influence our thoughts, when I want to consider any ideas I shall try to take them bare and naked, keeping out of my thoughts—as much as I can—the names that those ideas have been given through long and constant use. From this I expect to get the following •three• advantages:-

22 intro. •First, I shall be sure to keep clear of all purely verbal controversies—those *weeds* whose springing up, in almost all branches of knowledge, has been a principal hindrance to the growth of true and sound knowledge. •Secondly, this seems to be a sure way to extricate myself from that fine and delicate net of abstract ideas, which has so miserably perplexed and entangled the minds of men (with this special feature: the more sharp-witted and exploratory any man's mind is, the more completely he is likely to be trapped and held by the net!). •Thirdly, so long as I confine my thoughts to my own ideas with the words peeled off, I don't see how I can be easily mistaken. The objects that I consider are all ones that I clearly and adequately know: I can't fall into error by thinking I have an idea that I really don't have, or by imagining that two of my own ideas are alike (or that they are unlike) when really they are not. To observe how my ideas agree or disagree, and to see which ideas are included in any compound idea and which are not, all I need is to pay attention to what happens in my own understanding.

23 intro. But I can't get all these advantages unless I free myself entirely from the deception of words. I hardly dare promise myself that, because the union between words and ideas began early and has been strengthened by many years of habit •in thought and speech•, so that it is very difficult to dissolve. This difficulty seems to have been very much increased by the doctrine of abstraction. For so long as men thought their words have abstract ideas tied to them, it is not surprising that they used words *in place of* ideas: they found that they couldn't set aside the word and retain the abstract idea in the mind, because abstract ideas are perfectly inconceivable. That is the principal cause for the fact that men who have emphatically recommended to others that in their meditations they should lay aside all use of words and instead contemplate their bare ideas have failed to do this themselves. Recently many people have become aware of the absurd opinions and meaningless disputes that grow out of the misuse of words. And they had given good advice about how to remedy these troubles—namely that we should attend not to the *words that signify ideas* but rather to the *ideas themselves*. But however good this advice that they have given others may be, they obviously couldn't properly follow it themselves so long as they thought that •the only immediate use of words was to signify ideas, and •that the immediate signification of every general name was a determinate, abstract idea.

24 intro. But when you know that these are mistakes, you can more easily prevent your thoughts from being influenced by words. Someone who knows that he has only *particular* ideas won't waste his time trying to conceive the abstract idea that goes with

any name. And someone who knows that names don't always stand for ideas will spare himself the labour of looking for ideas where there are none to be had. So it is desirable that everyone should try as hard as he can to obtain a clear view of the ideas he wants to consider, separating from them all the clothing and clutter of words that so greatly blind our judgment and scatter our attention. In vain do we extend our view into the heavens, and presumably into the entrails of the earth; in vain do we consult the writings of learned men, and trace the dark footsteps of antiquity; we need only draw aside the curtain of words, to behold the fairest tree of knowledge, whose fruit, -namely, our 'bare naked ideas', is excellent and lies within reach of our hand.

25 intro. Unless we take care to clear the first principles of knowledge from being burdened and deluded by words, we can reason from them for ever without achieving anything; we can draw consequences from consequences and be never the wiser. The further we go, the more deeply and irrecoverably we shall be lost and entangled in difficulties and mistakes. To anyone who plans to read the following pages, therefore, I say: Make my words the occasion of your own thinking, and try to have the same sequence of thoughts in reading that I had in writing. This will make it easy for you to discover the truth or falsity of what I say. You will run no risk of being deceived by my words, and I do not see how you can be led into an error by considering your own naked, undisguised ideas. [End of introduction]

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Principles of Human Knowledge (Main Text)

1. Anyone who surveys the objects of human knowledge will easily see that they are all *ideas* that are either •actually imprinted on the senses or •perceived by attending to one's own emotions and mental activities or •formed out of ideas of the first two types, with the help of memory and imagination, by compounding or dividing or simply reproducing ideas of those other two kinds. By sight I have the ideas of light and colours with their different degrees and variations. By touch I perceive hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and so on; and each of these also admits of differences of quantity or degree. Smelling supplies me with odours; the palate with tastes; and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition. And when a number of these are observed to accompany each other, they come to be marked by one name and thus to be thought of as one thing. Thus, for example, a certain colour, taste, smell, shape and consistency having been observed to go together, they are taken to be one distinct thing, called an 'apple'. Other collections of ideas constitute a stone, a tree, a book, and similar perceptible things; and these can arouse the emotions of love, hate, joy, grief, and

so on, depending on whether they please or displease us.

2. In addition to all that endless variety of ideas, or objects of knowledge, there is also something that knows or *perceives* them, and *acts* on them in various ways such as willing, imagining, and remembering. This perceiving, active entity is what I call 'mind', 'spirit', 'soul', or 'myself'. These words do not refer to any one of my ideas, but rather to a thing that is entirely distinct from them. It is something *in* which they *exist*, or *by* which they *are perceived*. Those are two ways of saying the same thing, because the existence of an idea consists in its being perceived.

3. Everyone will agree that our thoughts, emotions, and ideas of the imagination exist only in the mind. It seems to me equally obvious that the various sensations or ideas that are imprinted on our senses cannot exist except in a mind that perceives them - no matter how they are blended or combined together (that is, no matter what objects they constitute). You can know this intuitively [= 'you can see this as immediately self-evident'] by attending to what is meant by the term 'exist' when it is applied to perceptible things. The table that I am writing on exists, that is, I see and feel it: and if I were out of my study I would still say that it existed, meaning that •if I were in my study I would perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. Similarly,

 `there was an odour' - that is, it was smelled;

 `there was a sound' - it was heard;

 `there was a colour or shape' - it was seen or felt.

This is all that I can understand by such expressions as these. There are those who speak of things that -unlike spirits. do not think and -unlike ideas- exist whether or not they are perceived; but that seems to be perfectly unintelligible. For unthinking things, to exist is to be perceived: so they couldn't possibly exist out of the minds or thinking things which perceive them.

4. It is indeed widely believed that all perceptible objects - houses, mountains, rivers, and so on - really exist independently of being perceived by the understanding. But however widely and confidently this belief may be held, anyone who has the courage to challenge it will - if I am not mistaken - see that it involves a manifest contradiction. For what are houses, mountains, rivers etc. but things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And isn't it plainly contradictory that these, either singly or in combination, should exist unperceived?

5. If we thoroughly examine this belief ·in things existing independently of the mind· it will, perhaps, be found to depend basically on the doctrine of abstract ideas. For can there be a more delicate and precise strain of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of perceptible things from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? Light and colours, heat and cold, extension and shapes, in a word the things we see and feel - what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas, or sense impressions? And can any of these be separated, even in thought, from perception? Speaking for myself; I would find it no easier to do that than to divide a thing from itself] I don't deny that I can abstract (if indeed this is property called abstraction) by conceiving separately objects that can exist separately, even if I have never experienced them apart

from one another. I can for example imagine a human torso without the limbs, or conceive the smell of a rose without thinking of the rose itself. But my power of conceiving or imagining goes no further than that: it doesn't extend beyond the limits of what can actually exist or be perceived. Therefore, because I cannot possibly see or feel a thing without having an actual sensation of it, I also cannot possibly conceive of a perceptible thing distinct from the sensation or perception of it.

6. Some truths are so close to the mind, and so obvious, that as soon as you open your eyes you will see them Here is an important truth of that kind:

All the choir of heaven and furniture of the earth, in a word all those bodies that compose the mighty structure of the world, have no existence outside a mind; for them to exist is for them to be perceived or known; consequently so long as they are not actually perceived by (ie. don't exist in the mind of) myself or any other created spirit, they most either have no existence at all or else exist in the mind of some eternal spirit; because it makes no sense - and involves all the absurdity of abstraction - to attribute to any such thing an existence independent of a spirit.

To be convinced of this, you need only to reflect and try to separate in your own thoughts the existence of a perceptible thing from its being perceived - you'll find that you can't.

7. From what I have said it follows that the only *substances* are *spirits* - things that perceive. Another argument for the same conclusion is the following down to the end of the section. The perceptible qualities are colour, shape, motion, smell, taste and so on, and these are ideas perceived by sense. Now it is plainly self-contradictory to suppose that an idea might exist in an unperceiving thing, for *to have an idea* is just the same as *to perceive*: so whatever *has* colour, shape and so on must *perceive* these qualities; from which it clearly follows that there can be no unthinking substance or substratum of those ideas.

8. 'But', you say, 'though the ideas themselves do not exist outside the mind, still there may be things like them of which they are copies or resemblances, and *these* things may exist outside the mind in an unthinking substance.' I answer that *the only thing an idea can resemble is another idea*; a colour or shape can't be like anything but another colour or shape. Pay just a little attention to your own thoughts and you will find that you cannot conceive of any likeness except between your ideas. Also: tell me about those supposed originals or external things of which our ideas are the pictures or representations - are *they* perceivable or not? If they are, then they are ideas, and I have won the argument; but if you say they are not, I appeal to anyone whether it makes sense to assert that a colour is like something that is invisible; that hard or soft is like something intangible; and similarly for the other qualities.

9. Some philosophers distinguish 'primary qualities' from 'secondary' qualities: they use the former term to stand for extension, shape, motion, rest, solidity and number; by the latter term they denote all other perceptible qualities, such as colours, sounds, tastes, and so on. Our ideas of secondary qualities don't resemble anything existing outside the mind or unperceived, they admit; but they insist that our ideas of primary qualities are patterns or images of things that exist outside the mind in an unthinking substance which they call

'matter'. By 'matter', therefore, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance in which extension, shape and motion actually exist. But I have already shown that extension, shape, and motion are quite clearly nothing but ideas existing in the mind, and that an idea can't be like anything but another idea, and that consequently neither they nor things from which they are copied can exist in an unperceiving substance. So the very notion of so-called 'matter', or corporeal substance, clearly involves a contradiction.

10. Those who assert that shape, motion and the other primary qualities exist outside the mind in unthinking substances say in the same breath that colours, sounds, heat, cold, and other secondary qualities do not. These, they tell us, are sensations that exist in the mind alone, and depend on the different size, texture, and motion of the minute particles of matter. They offer this as an undoubted truth that they can prove conclusively. Now if it is certain that (1) primary qualities are inseparably united with secondary ones, and can't be abstracted from them even in thought, it clearly follows that (2) primary qualities exist only in the mind, just as the secondary ones do. I now defend (1). Look in on yourself, and see whether you can perform a mental abstraction that enables you to conceive of a body's being *extended* and *moving* without having any other perceptible qualities. Speaking for myself, I see quite clearly that I can't form an idea of an extended, moving body unless I also give it some colour or other perceptible quality which is admitted by the philosophers I have been discussing to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, shape and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. It follows that these primary qualities must be where the secondary ones are - namely in the mind and nowhere else.

11. Here is a further point about extension and motion. Large and small, and fast and slow, are generally agreed to exist only in the mind. That is because they are entirely relative: whether something is large or small, and whether it moves quickly or slowly, depends on the condition or location of the sense-organs of the perceiver. [See the end of 14 for a little light on the quick/slow part of this point.] So if there is extension outside the mind, it must be neither large nor small, and extramental motion must be neither fast nor slow. I conclude that there is no such extension or motion. (If you reply 'They do exist; they are extension *in general* and motion *in general*', that will be further evidence of how greatly the doctrine about extended, movable substances existing outside the mind depends on that strange theory of abstract ideas.) So unthinking substances can't be extended; and that implies that they can't be solid either, because it makes no sense to suppose that something is solid but not extended.

12. Even if we grant that the other primary qualities exist outside the mind, it must be conceded that *number* is entirely created by the mind. This will be obvious to anyone who notices that the same thing can be assigned different numbers depending on how the mind views it. Thus, the same distance is one or three or thirty-six, depending on whether the mind considers it in terms of yard, feet or inches. Number is so obviously relative and dependent on men's understanding that I find it surprising that anyone should ever have credited it with an absolute existence outside the mind. We say one book, one page, one line; all these are equally units - that is, each is *one* something - yet the book contains many pages and the page many lines. In each case, obviously, what we are saying there is

one of is a particular combination of ideas arbitrarily put together by the mind, ·for example, the arbitrary combination of ideas that we choose to call ‘a book’·.

13. Some philosophers, I realize, hold that *unity* is a simple or uncompounded idea that accompanies every other idea into the mind. I do not find that I have any such idea corresponding to the word ‘unity’. I could hardly overlook it if it were there in my mind: it ought to be the most familiar to me of all my ideas, since it is said to accompany all my other ideas and to be perceived by all the ways of sensation and reflection. In short, it is an abstract idea!

14. Here is a further point. Some modern philosophers argue that certain perceptible qualities have no existence in matter or outside the mind; their arguments can be used to prove the same thing of all perceptible qualities whatsoever. They point out for instance that a body that appears cold to one hand seems warm to the other, from which they infer that •heat and cold are only states of the mind and don’t resemble anything in the corporeal substances that cause them. If that argument is good, then why can’t we re-apply it to prove that •shape and extension do not resemble any fixed and determinate qualities existing in matter, because they appear differently to the same eye in different positions, or eyes in different states in the same position? Again, they argue that •sweetness is not really in the thing that is described as ‘sweet’, because sweetness can be changed into bitterness without there being any alteration in the thing itself - because the person’s palate has been affected by a fever or some other harm. Is it not equally reasonable to argue that •motion is not outside the mind because a thing will appear to move more or less quickly - without any change in the thing itself - depending on whether the succession of ideas in the observer’s mind is slow or fast?

15. In short, the arguments that are thought to prove that colours and tastes exist only in the mind have as much force to prove the same thing of extension, shape and motion. Really, though, these arguments *don’t* prove that there is no extension or colour in an outward object, but only that our senses don’t tell us what its true extension or colour is. My own previous arguments ·do better: they· clearly show it to be impossible that any colour or extension or other perceptible quality should exist in an unthinking thing outside the mind, or indeed that there should be any such thing as an object outside the mind.

16. But let us examine the usual opinion a little further. It is said that extension is a quality of matter, and that matter is the substratum that supports it. Please explain to me what is meant by matter’s ‘supporting’ extension. You reply: ‘I have no idea of matter; so I can’t explain it.’ I answer: Even if you have no *positive* meaning for ‘matter’ - ·that is, have no idea of what matter is like in itself· - you must at least have a *relative* idea of it, so that you know how matter relates to qualities, and what it means to say that it ‘supports’ them. If you don’t even know *that*, you have no meaning at all in what you are saying. Explain ‘support’, then! Obviously it cannot be meant here in its usual or literal sense, as when we say that pillars support a building: in what sense, then, are we to understand it?

17. When we attend to what the most accurate philosophers say they mean by ‘material substance’, we find them admitting that the only meaning they can give to those words is the idea of *being in general*, together with the relative notion of its *supporting qualities*. The general idea of *being* seems to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all. As for its ‘supporting qualities’: since this cannot be understood in the ordinary sense of those words (as I have just pointed out), it must be taken in some other sense; but we are not told what that other sense is. I am sure, therefore, that there is no clear meaning in either of the two parts or strands that are supposed to make up the meaning of the words ‘material substance’. Anyway, why should we trouble ourselves any further in discussing this material substratum or support of shape and motion and other perceptible qualities? · Whatever we make of its details - the notions of being in general, and of support - it is clearly being said that shape and motion and the rest exist outside the mind. Isn’t this a direct contradiction, and altogether inconceivable?

18. Suppose it were possible for solid, figured, movable substances to exist outside the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies - how could we possibly know that there are any such things? We must know it either by *sense* or by *reason*. Our senses give us knowledge only of our sensations - ideas - things that are immediately perceived by sense - call them what you will! They don’t inform us that outside the mind (that is, unperceived) there exist things that resemble the items that are perceived. The materialists themselves admit this. So if we are to have any knowledge of external things, it must be by reason, *inferring* their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense. But what reasons can lead us •from the ideas that we perceive •to a belief in the existence of bodies outside the mind? The supporters of matter themselves don’t claim that there is any necessary connection between material things and our ideas. We could have all the ideas that we now have without there being any bodies existing outside us that resemble them; everyone admits this, and what happens in dreams, hallucinations and so on puts it beyond dispute. Evidently, then, we are not compelled to suppose that there are external bodies as causes of our ideas. Those ideas are *sometimes*, so they could be *always*, produced without help from bodies yet falling into the patterns that they do in fact exhibit.

19. ‘Even though external bodies are not absolutely needed to explain our sensations,’ you might think, ‘the course of our experience is easier to explain on the supposition of external bodies than it is without that supposition. So it is at least *probable* there are bodies that cause our minds to have ideas of them.’ But this is not tenable either. The materialists admit that they cannot understand *how* body can act upon spirit, or *how* it is possible for a body to imprint any idea in a mind; and that is tantamount to admitting that they don’t know how our ideas are produced. So the production of ideas or sensations in our minds can’t be a reason for supposing the existence of matter or corporeal substances, because it admittedly remains a mystery with or without that supposition. So even if it were possible for bodies to exist outside the mind, the belief that they actually do so must be a very shaky one; since it involves supposing, without any reason at all, that God has created countless things that are entirely useless and serve no purpose.

20. In short, if there were external bodies, we could not possibly come to know this; and

if there were not, we might have the very same reasons to think there were that we have now. No-one can deny the following to be possible: A thinking being might, without the help of external bodies, be affected with the same series of sensations or ideas that you have, imprinted in the same order and with similar vividness in his mind. If that happened, wouldn't that thinking being have all the reason to believe 'There are corporeal substances that are represented by my ideas and cause them in my mind' that you can possibly have for believing the same thing? Of course he would; and that consideration is enough, all on its own, to make any reasonable person suspect the strength of whatever arguments he may think he has for the existence of bodies outside the mind.

21. If, even after what has been said, more arguments were needed against the existence of matter, I could cite many errors and difficulties (not to mention impieties) that have sprung from that doctrine. It has led to countless controversies and disputes in philosophy, and many even more important ones in religion. But I shan't go into the details of them here, because I think arguments about 'materialism's' bad consequences are unnecessary for confirming what has, I think, been well enough proved *a priori* regarding its intrinsic defects, and the lack of good reasons to support it. [The word 'materialism' does not occur in the *Principles*. It is used in this version, in editorial interventions, with the meaning that Berkeley gives it in other works, naming the doctrine that •there is such a thing as mind-independent matter, not restricting it to the view that •there is nothing but matter.]

22. I am afraid I have given you cause to think me needlessly long-winded in handling this subject. For what is the point of hammering away at something that can be proved in a line or two, convincing anyone who is capable of the least reflection? Look into your own thoughts, and *try* to conceive it possible for a sound or shape or motion or colour to exist outside the mind, or unperceived. Can you do it? This simple thought-experiment may make you see that what you have been defending is a downright contradiction. I am willing to stake my whole position on this: if you can so much as conceive it *possible* for one extended movable substance - or in general for any one idea or anything like an idea - to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I shall cheerfully give up my opposition to matter; and as for all that great apparatus of external bodies that you argue for, I shall admit its existence, even though you cannot either give me any reason why you believe it exists, or assign any use to it when it is supposed to exist. I repeat: the bare possibility of your being right will count as an argument that you are right.

23. 'But', you say, 'surely there is nothing easier than to imagine trees in a park, for instance, or books on a shelf, with nobody there to perceive them.' I reply that this is indeed easy to imagine; but let us look into what happens when you imagine it. You form in your mind certain ideas that you call 'books' and 'trees', and at the same time you omit to form the idea of anyone who might perceive them. But while you are doing this, *you* perceive or think of them! So your thought experiment misses the point; it shows only that you have the power of imagining or forming ideas in your mind; but it does not show that you can conceive it possible for the objects of your thought to exist outside the mind. To show that, you would have to *conceive* them existing *unconceived* or unthought—which is an obvious contradiction. However hard we try to conceive the existence of external bodies, all we achieve is to contemplate our own ideas. The mind is misled into

thinking that it can and does conceive bodies existing outside the mind or unthought-of because it *pays no attention to itself*, and so does not notice that *it* contains or thinks of the things that it conceives. Think about it a little and you will see that what I am saying is plainly true; there is really no need for any of the other disproofs of the existence of material substance.

24. It takes very little enquiry into our own thoughts to know for sure whether we can understand what is meant by ‘the absolute existence of perceptible objects outside the mind’. To me it is clear that those words mark out either a direct contradiction or else nothing at all. To convince you of this, I know no easier or fairer way than to urge you to attend calmly to your own thoughts: if that attention reveals to you the emptiness or inconsistency of those words, that is surely all you need to be convinced. So that is what I insist on: the phrase ‘the absolute existence of unthinking things’ has either no meaning or a self-contradictory one. This is what I repeat and teach, and urge you to think about carefully.

25. All our ideas - sensations, things we perceive, call them what you will - are visibly inactive; there is no power or agency in them. One idea or object of thought, therefore, cannot produce or affect another. To be convinced of this we need only to attend to our ideas. They are wholly contained within the mind, so whatever is in them must be perceived. Now, if you attend to your ideas, whether of sense or reflection, you will not *perceive* any power or activity in them; so *there is* no power or activity in them. Think about it a little and you will realize that passiveness and inertness are of the essence of an idea, so that an idea cannot *do* anything or be the *cause* (strictly speaking) of anything; nor can it resemble anything that is active, as is evident from **8**. From this it clearly follows that extension, shape and motion can’t be the cause of our sensations. So it must be false to say our sensations result from powers that things have because of the arrangement, number, motion, and size of the corpuscles in them.

26. We perceive a continual stream of ideas: new ones appear, others are changed or totally disappear. These ideas must have a cause - something they depend on, something that produces and changes them. It is clear from **25** that this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of ideas, because that section argues that ideas are inactive, i.e. have no causal powers; and thus qualities have no powers either, because qualities *are* ideas. So the cause must be a substance, because reality consists of nothing but substances and their qualities. It cannot be a corporeal or material substance, because I have shown that there is no such thing. We must therefore conclude that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal active substance - a spirit.

27. A spirit is an active being. It is simple, in the sense that it does not have parts. When thought of as something that •perceives ideas, it is called ‘the understanding’, and when thought of as •producing ideas or doing things with them, it is called ‘the will’. But understanding and will are different powers that a spirit has; they are not *parts* of it. It follows that *no-one can form an idea of a soul or spirit*. We have seen in **25** that all ideas are passive and inert, and therefore no idea can *represent* an active thing, which is what a spirit is, because no idea can *resemble* an active thing. If you think about it a little, you

will see clearly that it is absolutely impossible to have an idea that is like an active cause of the change of ideas. The nature of spirit (i.e. that which acts) is such that it cannot itself be perceived; all we can do is to perceive the effects it produces. To perceive a spirit would be to have an idea of it, that is, an idea that resembles it; and I have shown that no idea can resemble a spirit because ideas are passive and spirits active. If you think I may be wrong about this, you should look in on yourself and try to form the idea of a power or of an active being, that is, a thing that *has* power. To do this, you need to have ideas of two principal powers called 'will' and 'understanding', these ideas being distinct from each other and from a third idea of substance or being in general, which is called 'soul' or 'spirit'; and you must also have a relative notion of spirit's supporting or being the subject of those two powers. Some people say that they have all that; but it seems to me that the words 'will' and 'spirit' do not stand for distinct ideas, or indeed for any idea at all, but for something very different from ideas. Because this 'something' is an agent, it cannot resemble or be represented by any *idea* whatsoever. Though it must be admitted that we have some *notion* of soul, spirit, and operations of the mind such as willing, loving and hating, in that we understand the meanings of those words.

28. I find I can arouse ideas in my mind at will, and vary and shift the mental scene whenever I want to. I need only to will, and straight away this or that idea arises in my mind; and by willing again I can obliterate it and bring on another. It is because the mind makes and unmakes ideas in this way that it can properly be called *active*. It certainly *is* active; we know this from experience. But anyone who talks of 'unthinking agents' or of 'arousing ideas without the use of volition' is merely letting himself be led astray by words.

29. Whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, however, I find that the ideas I get through my senses don't depend on my will in the same way. When in broad daylight I open my eyes, it is not in my power to choose whether or not I shall see anything, or to choose what particular objects I shall see; and the same holds for hearing and the other senses. My will is not responsible for the ideas that come to me through any of my senses. So there must be some other will - some other spirit - that produces them.

30. The ideas of sense are stronger, livelier, and clearer than those of the imagination; and they are also steady, orderly and coherent. Ideas that people bring into their own minds at will are often random and jumbled, but the ideas of sense are not like that: they come in a regular series, and are inter-related in admirable ways that show us the wisdom and benevolence of the series' author. The phrase 'the laws of nature' names the set rules or established methods whereby the mind we depend on - that is, God - arouses in us the ideas of sense. We learn what they are by experience, which teaches us that such and such ideas are ordinarily accompanied or followed by such and such others.

31. This gives us a sort of foresight that enables us to regulate our actions for the benefit of life. Without this we would always be at a loss: we couldn't know how to do anything to bring ourselves pleasure or spare ourselves pain. That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that to sow in the spring is the way to get a harvest in the fall, and in general that such and such means are the way to achieve such and such ends - we know

all this not by discovering any necessary connection between our ideas but only by observing the settled *laws of nature*. Without them we would be utterly uncertain and confused, and a grown man would have no more idea than a new-born infant does of how to manage himself in the affairs of life.

32. This consistent, uniform working obviously displays the goodness and wisdom of ·God·, the governing spirit whose will constitutes the laws of nature. And yet, far from leading our thoughts *towards* him, it sends them *away from* him· in a wandering search for second causes - ·that is, for causes that come between God and the effects we want to explain·. For when we perceive that certain ideas of sense are constantly followed by other ideas, and we know that this is not our doing, we immediately attribute power and agency to the ideas themselves, and make one the cause of another - than which nothing can be more absurd and unintelligible. Thus, for example, having observed that when we perceive by sight *a certain round luminous figure*, we at the same time perceive by touch *the idea or sensation called heat*, we infer that the sun causes heat. Similarly, when we perceive that *a collision of bodies* is accompanied by *sound*, we are inclined to think the latter an effect of the former.

33. The [1] ideas imprinted on the senses by the author of nature are called ‘real things’; and those [2] that are caused by the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly called ‘ideas’ or ‘images’ of things that they copy and represent. But our [1] sensations, however vivid and distinct they may be, are nevertheless *ideas*; that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, as truly as [2] the ideas that mind itself makes. The [1] ideas of sense are agreed to have more reality in them - that is, to be more strong, orderly, and coherent than ideas made by the mind; but this does not show that they exist outside the mind. They are also less dependent on the spirit or thinking substance that perceives them, for they are caused by the will of another and more powerful spirit, ·namely God·; but still they are ideas, and certainly no idea whether faint or strong - can exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it.

34. Before we move on, I have to spend some time in answering objections that are likely to be made against the principles I have laid down. ·I shall answer twelve of them, ending in **72**; and further objections will occupy **73-84**. My answer to the first of the twelve will run to the end of **40**·. If fast-thinking readers find me too long-winded about this, I hope they will pardon me. ·My excuse is that· people are not all equally quick in getting a grasp on topics such as this, and I want to be understood by everyone. **First**, then, this will be objected:

By your principles everything real and substantial in nature is banished out of the world, and replaced by a chimerical [= ‘unreal or imaginary’] system of ideas. All things that exist do so only in the mind ·according to you·, that is, they are purely notional. Then what becomes of the sun, moon, and stars? What must we think of houses, rivers, mountains, trees, stones - even of our own bodies, for that matter? Are all these mere illusions, creatures of the imagination?

To all this - and any other objections of the same sort - I answer that the principles I have laid down don’t deprive us of any one thing in nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or in

any way conceive or understand remains as secure as ever, and is as real as ever. There *is* a real world, and the distinction between realities and chimeras retains its full force. This is evident from **29**, **30**, and **33**, where I have shown what is meant by ‘real things’ in opposition to chimeras or ideas made by us; but by that account real things and chimeras both exist in the mind, and in that sense are alike in being ideas.

35. I don’t argue against the existence of any one thing that we can take in, either by sense or reflection. I don’t in the least question that the things I see with my eyes and touch with my hands do exist, really exist. The only thing whose existence I deny is what philosophers call ‘matter’ or ‘corporeal substance’. And in denying this I do no harm to the rest of mankind - that is, to people other than philosophers - because they will never miss it. The atheist indeed will lose the rhetorical help he gets from an empty name, - namely ‘matter’, which he uses to support his impiety; and the philosophers may find that they have lost a great opportunity for word-spinning and disputation.

36. If you think that this detracts from the existence or reality of things, you are very far from understanding what I have said in the plainest way I could think of. Here it is again, in brief outline. There are spiritual substances, minds, or human souls, which cause •ideas in themselves through acts of the will, doing this as they please; but these ideas are faint, weak, and unsteady as compared with other •ideas that minds perceive by sense. The latter ideas, being impressed on minds according to certain rules or *laws of nature* tell us that they are the effects of a mind that is stronger and wiser than human spirits. The latter are said to have more reality in them than the former: by which is meant that they are more forceful, orderly, and distinct, and that they are not fictions of the mind that perceives them. In this sense, the sun that I see by day is the real sun, and what I imagine by night is the idea of the former. In the sense I am here giving to ‘reality’, it is evident that every plant, star, rock, and in general each part of the system of the world, is as much a real thing by my principles as by any others. Whether you mean by ‘reality’ anything different from what I do, I beg you to look into your own thoughts and see.

37. You will want to object: ‘At least it is true that you take away all corporeal substances.’ I answer that if the word ‘substance’ is taken in the ordinary everyday sense - standing for a combination of perceptible qualities such as extension, solidity, weight, etc. - I cannot be accused of taking substance away. But if ‘substance’ is taken in a philosophic sense - standing for the support of qualities outside the mind - then indeed I agree that I take it away, if one may be said to ‘take away’ something that never had any existence, not even in the imagination.

38. ‘But’, you say, ‘it sounds weird to say that •we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with them.’ So it does, because the word ‘idea’ is not used in ordinary talk to signify the combinations of perceptible qualities that are called *things*; and any expression that differs from the familiar use of language is bound to seem weird and ridiculous. But this does not concern the truth of the proposition, which in other words merely says that •we are fed and clothed with things that we perceive immediately by our senses. The hardness or softness, the colour, taste, warmth, shape and such like qualities, which combine to constitute the various sorts of food and clothing, have been shown to exist only in the

mind that perceives them; and this is all I mean by calling them 'ideas'; which word, if it was as ordinarily used as 'thing', would sound no weirder or more ridiculous than 'thing' does in the statement that we eat and drink things and are clothed with them. My concern is not with the propriety of words but with the truth of my doctrine. So if you will agree with me that what we eat, drink, and clothe ourselves with are immediate objects of sense that cannot exist unperceived or outside the mind, I will readily agree with you that it is more proper - more in line with ordinary speech - to call them 'things' rather than 'ideas'.

39. Why do I employ the word 'idea', rather than following ordinary speech and calling them 'things'? For two reasons: first, because the term 'thing', unlike 'idea', is generally supposed to stand for something existing outside the mind; and secondly, because 'thing' has a broader meaning than 'idea', because it applies to spirits, or thinking things, as well as to ideas. Since the objects of sense •exist only in the mind, and also •are unthinking and inactive •which spirits are not•, I choose to mark them by the word 'idea', which implies those properties.

40. You may want to say: 'Say what you like, I will still believe my senses, and will never allow any arguments, how plausible they may be, to prevail over the certainty of my senses.' Be it so, assert the obvious rightness of the senses as strongly as you please - I shall do the same! What I see, hear, and feel *exists* - that is, *is perceived by me* - and I do not doubt this any more than I doubt my own existence. But I don't see how the testimony of the senses can be brought as proof of the existence of anything that is *not* perceived by sense. I do not want anyone to become a sceptic, and to disbelieve his senses; on the contrary, I give the senses all the emphasis and assurance imaginable; and there are no principles more opposed to scepticism than those I have laid down, as will be clearly shown later on.

41. Secondly [of the twelve objections mentioned in **34**], it will be objected that there is a great difference between (for instance) real fire and the idea of fire, between actually being burnt and dreaming or imagining oneself to be burnt. The answer to this - and to all the similar objections that may be brought against my position - is evident from what I have already said. At this point I shall add only this: if real fire is very different from the idea of fire, so also is the real pain that comes from it very different from the idea of that pain; but nobody will maintain that real pain could possibly exist in an unperceiving thing, or outside the mind, any more than the idea of it can.

42. Thirdly, it will be objected that we see things actually outside us, at a distance from us; and these things do not exist in the mind, for it would be absurd to suppose that things that are seen at the distance of several miles are as near to us as our own thoughts. In answer to this I ask you to consider the fact that in dreams we often perceive things as existing at a great distance off, and yet *those* things are acknowledged to exist only in the mind.

43. In order to clear up this matter more thoroughly, let us think about *how* we perceive distance, and things placed at a distance, by sight. For if we really do see external space,

and bodies actually existing in it at various distances from us, that does seem to tell against my thesis that bodies exist nowhere outside the mind. It was thinking about this difficulty that led me to write my *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, which was published recently. In that work I show that distance or externality is not immediately of itself perceived by sight, nor is it something we grasp or believe in on the basis of lines and angles, or anything that has a necessary connection with it. Rather, it is only *suggested* to our thoughts by certain visible ideas and sensations that go with vision - ideas which in their own nature are in no way similar to or related to either •distance or •things at a distance. By a connection taught us by experience they come to signify and suggest distances and distant things to us, in the same way that the words of a language suggest the ideas they are made to stand for. There is nothing intrinsic to the word 'red' that makes it the right name for that colour; we merely learn what it names through our experience of general usage. Similarly, there is nothing intrinsic to my present visual idea that makes it an idea of a tree in the middle distance; but ideas like it have been connected with middle-distance things in my experience. Thus, a man who was born blind, and afterwards made to see, would not at first sight think the things he saw to be outside his mind or at any distance from him because he would not have had any experience enabling him to make that connection. See section 41 of the *New Theory*.

44. The ideas of *sight* and of *touch* make two species, entirely distinct and different from one another. The former are marks and forward-looking signs of the latter. (Even in my *New Theory* I showed - though this was not its central purpose - that the items that are perceived only by sight don't exist outside the mind and don't resemble external things. Throughout that work I supposed that tangible objects - ones that we *feel* - do exist outside the mind. I didn't *need* that common error in order to establish the position I was developing in the book; but I let it stand because it was beside my purpose to examine and refute it in a treatment of *vision*.) Thus, the strict truth of the matter is this: when we see things at a distance from us, the ideas of sight through which we do this do not •suggest or mark out to us things actually existing at a distance, but only •warn us about what ideas of touch will be imprinted in our minds if we act in such and such ways for such and such a length of time. On the basis of what I have already said in the present work, and of **147** and other parts of the *New Theory*, it is evident that visible ideas are the *language* in which the governing spirit on whom we depend - God - tells us what tangible ideas he is about to imprint on us if we bring about this or that movement of our own bodies. For a fuller treatment of this point, I refer you to the *New Theory* itself.

45. Fourthly, this will be objected:

It follows from your principles that things are at every moment annihilated and created anew. The objects of sense according to you exist only when they are perceived; so the trees are in the garden and the chairs in the parlour only as long as there is somebody there to perceive them. When I shut my eyes all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and merely from my opening them it is again created.

In answer to all this, I ask you to look back at **3**, **4**, etc. and then ask yourself whether you mean by 'the actual existence' of an idea anything but *its being perceived*. For my part,

after the most carefully precise enquiry I could make, I cannot discover that I mean anything else by those words. I ask you again - as I did in **25 intro** - to examine your own thoughts, and not to allow yourself to be imposed on by words. If you can conceive it to be possible for either your ideas or things of which they are copies to exist without being perceived, then I throw in my hand; but if you cannot, you will admit that it is unreasonable for you to stand up in defence of you know not what, and claim to convict me of absurdity because I don't assent to propositions that at bottom have no meaning in them.

46. It would be as well to think about how far the commonly accepted principles of philosophy are themselves guilty of those alleged absurdities. It is thought to be highly absurd that when I close my eyes all the visible objects around me should be reduced to nothing; but isn't this what philosophers commonly admit when they all agree that light and colours - which are the only immediate objects of sight and only of sight - are mere sensations, and exist only while they are perceived? Again, some may find it quite incredible that things should be coming into existence at every moment; yet this very notion is commonly taught in the schools [= the Aristotelian philosophy departments]. For the schoolmen, though they acknowledge the existence of matter, and say that the whole world is made out of it, nevertheless hold that matter cannot go on existing without God's *conserving* it, which they understand to be his continually *creating* it.

47. Furthermore, a little thought will show us that even if we do admit the existence of matter or corporeal substance, it will still follow *from principles that are now generally accepted*, that no particular bodies of any kind exist while they are not perceived. For it is evident from **11** and the following sections that the *matter* philosophers stand up for is an incomprehensible *something*, having none of those particular qualities through which the bodies falling under our senses are distinguished one from another. To make this more plain, bear in mind that *the infinite divisibility of matter* is now accepted by all, or at least by the most approved and considerable philosophers, who have demonstrated it conclusively from principles that are generally accepted. Now consider the following line of thought, starting from the premise of the infinite divisibility of matter.

Each particle of matter contains an infinite number of parts that are not perceived by sense because they are too small. Why, then, does any particular body seem to be of a finite magnitude, or exhibit only a finite number of parts to our senses? Not because it *has* only finitely many parts, for it contains an infinite number of parts. Rather, it is because our senses are not acute enough to detect any more. Therefore, in proportion as any of our senses becomes more acute, it will perceive more parts in the object; that is, the object will appear larger, and its shape will be different because parts near its outer edges - ones that before were unperceivable - will appear to give it a boundary whose lines and angles are very different from those perceived by the sense before it became sharper. If the sense in question became infinitely acute, the body would go through various changes of size and shape, and would eventually seem infinite. All this would happen with no alteration in the body, only a sharpening of the sense. Each body, therefore, considered in itself, *is infinitely extended* and consequently *has no shape*.

From this it follows that even if we grant that the existence of matter is utterly certain, it is equally certain - as the materialists are forced by their own principles to admit - that the

particular bodies perceived through the senses do not exist outside the mind, nor does anything like them. According to them each particle of matter is *infinite and shapeless*, and it is the mind that makes all that variety of bodies that compose the visible world, none of which exists any longer than it is perceived.

48. When you think about it, the objection brought in **45** turns out not to provide reasonable support for any accusation against my views. I do indeed hold that the things we perceive are nothing but ideas that can't exist unperceived, but it doesn't follow that they have no existence except when they are perceived by us; for there may be some other spirit that perceives them when we do not. Whenever I say that bodies have no existence outside 'the mind', I refer not to this or that particular mind but to all minds whatsoever. So it doesn't follow from my principles that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or that they don't exist at all during the intervals between our perception of them.

49. Fifthly, it may be objected that if extension and shape exist only in the mind, it follows that the mind is extended and shaped, because extension is a quality or attribute, which is predicated of the subject in which it exists. I answer, that those qualities are 'in the mind' only in that they are *perceived by it* - that is, not as qualities or attributes of it - but only as ideas that it has. It no more follows that the soul or mind is extended because extension exists only in it than it follows that the mind is red or blue because (as everyone agrees) those colours exist only in it. As to what philosophers say of subject and mode [= quality], that seems very groundless and unintelligible. For instance, in the proposition *A die is hard, extended, and square* they hold that the word 'die' refers to a subject or substance that is distinct from the hardness, extension, and squareness that are predicated of it - a subject *in* which those qualities exist. I cannot make sense of this. To me a die seems to be nothing over and above those things that are termed its qualities. And to say that a die is hard, extended, and square is not to attribute those qualities to a subject distinct from and supporting them, but only to explain the meaning of the word 'die'.

50. Sixthly, you will object like this:

Many things have been explained in terms of *matter* and *motion*. if you take away these you will destroy the whole corpuscular philosophy [that is, the approach to physics in which the key concepts are those of matter, motion, and physical structure], and undermine those mechanical principles that have been applied with so much success to explain the phenomena. In short, whatever advances have been made in the study of nature by ancient scientists or by modern ones have all built on the supposition that *corporeal substance* or *matter* really exists.

To this I answer that every single phenomenon that is explained on that supposition could just as well be explained without it, as I could easily show by going through them all one by one. Instead of that, however, I shall do something that takes less time, namely show that the supposition of matter *cannot* explain any phenomenon. To explain *the phenomena* is simply to show why *upon such and such occasions we are affected with such and such ideas*. But how matter should operate on a mind, or produce any idea in it,

is something that no philosopher or scientist will claim to explain. So, obviously, there can be no use of the concept of *matter* in natural science. Besides, those who try explain things do it not by *corporeal substance* but by *shape, motion* and other qualities; these are really just mere ideas and therefore cannot cause anything, as I have already shown. See **25**.

Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists.

By George Berkeley

THE FIRST DIALOGUE

Philonous: Good morning, Hylas: I didn't expect to find you out and about so early.

Hylas: It is indeed somewhat unusual: but my thoughts were so taken up with a subject I was talking about last night that I couldn't sleep, so I decided to get up and walk in the garden.

Phil: That's good! It gives you a chance to see what innocent and agreeable pleasures you lose every morning. Can there be a pleasanter time of the day, or a more delightful season of the year? That purple sky, those wild but sweet notes of birds, the fragrant bloom upon the trees and flowers, the gentle influence of the rising sun, these and a thousand nameless beauties of nature inspire the soul with secret raptures. But I'm afraid I am interrupting your thoughts; for you seemed very intent on something.

Hyl: Yes, I was, and I'd be grateful if you would allow me to carry on with it. But I don't in the least want to deprive myself of your company, for my thoughts always flow more easily in conversation with a friend than when I am alone. Please, may I share with you the thoughts I have been having?

Phil: With all my heart! It is what I would have requested myself, if you had not got in first.

Hyl: I was considering the odd fate of those men who have in all ages, through a desire to mark themselves off from the common people or through heaven knows what trick of their thought, claimed either to believe nothing at all or to believe the most extravagant things in the world. This wouldn't matter so much if their paradoxes and scepticism did not bring consequences that are bad for mankind in general. But there's a risk that they *will* do that, and that when men who are thought to have spent their whole time in the pursuit of knowledge claim to be entirely ignorant of everything, or advocate views that are in conflict with plain and commonly accepted principles, this will tempt other people—who have less leisure for this sort of thing—to become suspicious of the most important truths, ones that they had previously thought to be sacred and unquestionable.

Phil: I entirely agree with you about the bad effects of the paraded doubts of some philosophers and the fantastical views of others. I have felt this so strongly in recent times that I have dropped some of the high-flown theories I had learned in their universities, replacing them with ordinary common opinions. Since this revolt of mine against metaphysical notions and in favour of the plain dictates of nature and common

sense, I swear that I find I can think ever so much better, so that I can now easily understand many things which previously were mysteries and riddles.

Hyl: I am glad to find there was nothing in the accounts I heard of you.

Phil: What, if you please, were they?

Hyl: In last night's conversation you were represented as someone who maintains the most extravagant opinion that ever entered into the mind of man, namely that there is no such thing as *material substance* in the world.

Phil: I seriously believe that there is no such thing as what philosophers call 'material substance'; but if I were made to see anything absurd or sceptical in this, I should then have the same reason to renounce this belief as I think I have now to reject the contrary opinion.

Hyl: What! can anything be more fantastical, more in conflict with common sense, or a more obvious piece of scepticism, than to believe there is no such thing as *matter*?

Phil: Steady on, Hylas! What if it were to turn out that you who hold that there *is* matter are—by virtue of that opinion—a greater sceptic, and maintain more paradoxes and conflicts with common sense, than I who believe no such thing?

Hyl: You have as good a chance of convincing me that *the part is greater than the whole* as of convincing me that I must give up my belief in matter if I am to avoid absurdity and scepticism.

Phil: Well then, are you content to accept as true any opinion which turns out to be the most agreeable to common sense, and most remote from scepticism?

Hyl: With all my heart. Since you want to start arguments about the plainest things in the world, I am content for once to hear what you have to say.

Phil: Tell me, please, Hylas: what do you mean by a 'sceptic'?

Hyl: I mean what everyone means, 'someone who doubts everything'.

Phil: So if someone has no doubts concerning some particular point, then with regard to that point he cannot be thought a sceptic.

Hyl: I agree with you.

Phil: Does doubting consist in accepting the affirmative or negative side of a question?

Hyl: Neither. Anyone who understands English must know that *doubting* signifies a suspense between the two sides.

Phil: So if someone *denies* any point, he can no more be said to *doubt* concerning it than he who *affirms* it with the same degree of assurance.

Hyl: True.

Phil: And so his denial no more makes him a sceptic than the other is.

Hyl: I acknowledge it.

Phil: Then how does it happen, Hylas, that you call me a sceptic because I deny what you affirm, namely the existence of matter? For all you know, I may be as firmly convinced in my denial as you are in your affirmation.

Hyl: Hold on a moment, Philonous. My definition of ‘sceptic’ was wrong; but you can’t hold a man to every false step he makes in conversation. I did say that a sceptic is someone who doubts everything; but I should have added, ‘. . . or who denies the reality and truth of things’.

Phil: What things? Do you mean the principles and theorems of sciences? But these, you know, are universal intellectual notions, and have nothing to do with *matter*, so that the denial of matter does not imply the denial of them.

Hyl: I agree about that. But what about other things? What do you think about distrusting the senses, denying the real existence of sensible things, or claiming to know nothing of them? Isn’t that enough to qualify a man as a sceptic? [Throughout the *Dialogues*, ‘sensible’ means ‘capable of being sensed’—that is, visible or audible or tangible etc.]

Phil: Well, then, let us see which of us it is that denies the reality of sensible things, or claims to have the greatest ignorance of them; since, if I understand you rightly, he is to be counted the greater sceptic.

Hyl: That is what I desire.

Phil: What do you mean by ‘sensible things’?

Hyl: Things that are perceived by the senses. Can you imagine that I mean anything else?

Phil: I’m sorry, but it may greatly shorten our enquiry if I have a clear grasp of your notions. Bear with me, then, while I ask you this further question. Are things ‘perceived by the senses’ only the ones that are perceived *immediately*? Or do they include things that are perceived *mediately*, that is, through the intervention of something else?

Hyl: I don’t properly understand you.

Phil: In reading a book, what I *immediately* perceive are the letters on the page, but *mediately* or *by means of these* the notions of God, virtue, truth, etc. are suggested to my mind. Now, there is no doubt that the letters are truly sensible things, or things perceived by sense; but I want to know whether you take the things suggested by them to be 'perceived by sense' too.

Hyl: No, certainly, it would be absurd to think that God or virtue are sensible things, though they may be signified and suggested to the mind by sensible marks with which they have an arbitrary connection.

Phil: It seems then, that by 'sensible things' you mean only those that can be perceived immediately by sense.

Hyl: Right.

Phil: Doesn't it follow from this that when I see one part of the sky red and another blue, and I infer from this that there must be some cause for that difference of colours, that cause cannot be said to be a 'sensible thing' or perceived by eyesight?

Hyl: It does.

Phil: Similarly, when I hear a variety of sounds I cannot be said to hear their causes.

Hyl: You cannot.

Phil: And when by touch I feel a thing to be hot and heavy, I can't say with any truth or correctness that I feel the cause of its heat or weight.

Hyl: To head off any more questions of this kind, I tell you once and for all that by 'sensible things' I mean only things that are perceived by sense, and that the senses perceive only what they perceive *immediately*; because they don't make inferences. So the deducing of causes or occasions from effects and appearances (which are the only things we perceive by sense) is entirely the business of reason. [In this context, 'occasion' can be taken as equivalent to 'cause'. The two terms are separated in the Second Dialogue at pages 36-7.]

Phil: We agree, then, that sensible things include only things that are *immediately* perceived by sense. Now tell me whether we immediately perceive

- by sight anything besides light, colours, and shapes;
- by hearing anything but sounds;
- by the palate anything besides tastes;
- by the sense of smell anything besides odours;
- by touch anything more than tangible qualities.

Hyl: We do not.

Phil: So it seems that if you take away all sensible qualities there is nothing left that is sensible.

Hyl: I agree.

Phil: Sensible things, then, are nothing but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities.

Hyl: Nothing else.

Phil: So heat is a sensible thing.

Hyl: Certainly.

Phil: Does the *reality* of sensible things consist in being perceived? or is it something different from their being perceived—something that doesn't involve the mind?

Hyl: To exist is one thing, and to be perceived is another.

Phil: I am talking only about *sensible* things. My question is: By the 'real existence' of one of *them* do you mean an existence exterior to the mind and distinct from their being perceived?

Hyl: I mean a real absolute existence—distinct from, and having no relation to, their being perceived.

Phil: So if heat is granted to have a real existence, it must exist outside the mind.

Hyl: It must.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, is this real existence equally possible for all degrees of heat that we feel; or is there a reason why we should attribute it to some degrees of heat and not to others? If there is, please tell me what it is.

Hyl: Whatever degree of heat we perceive by sense we can be sure exists also in the object that occasions it.

Phil: What, the greatest as well as the least?

Hyl: Yes, because the same reason holds for both: they are both perceived by sense; indeed, the greater degree of heat is more intensely sensibly perceived; so if there is any difference it is that we are *more* certain of the real existence of a greater heat than we can be of the reality of a lesser.

Phil: But isn't the most fierce and intense degree of heat a very great pain?

Hyl: No-one can deny that.

Phil: And can any unperceiving thing have pain or pleasure?

Hyl: Certainly not.

Phil: Is your material substance a senseless thing or does it have sense and perception?

Hyl: It is senseless, without doubt.

Phil: So it can't be the subject of pain.

Hyl: Indeed it can't.

Phil: Nor, consequently, can it be the subject of the greatest heat perceived by sense, since you agree that this is a considerable pain.

Hyl: I accept that.

Phil: Then what are we to say about your external object? Is it a material substance, or is it not?

Hyl: It is a material substance with the sensible qualities inhering in it.

Phil: But then how can a great heat exist in it, since you agree it cannot exist in a material substance? Please clear up this point.

Hyl: Hold on, Philonous! I'm afraid I went wrong in granting that intense heat is a pain. I should have said not that the pain *is* the heat but that it is *the consequence or effect of* it.

Phil: When you put your hand near the fire, do you feel one simple uniform sensation or two distinct sensations?

Hyl: Just one simple sensation.

Phil: Isn't the heat immediately perceived?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: And the pain?

Hyl: True.

Phil: Well, then, seeing that they are both immediately perceived at the same time, and that the fire affects you with only one simple or uncompounded idea [= one idea without parts], it follows that this *one* simple idea is both the immediately perceived intense heat

and the pain; and consequently, that the immediately perceived intense heat is identical with a particular sort of pain.

Hyl: It seems so.

Phil: Consult your thoughts again, Hylas: can you conceive an intense sensation to occur without pain or pleasure?

Hyl: I cannot.

Phil: Or can you form an idea of sensible pain or pleasure *in general*, abstracted from every *particular* idea of heat, cold, tastes, smells, etc.?

Hyl: I don't find that I can.

Phil: Then doesn't it follow that sensible pain is nothing distinct from intense degrees of those sensations or ideas?

Hyl: That is undeniable. In fact, I am starting to suspect that a very great heat can't exist except in a mind perceiving it.

Phil: What! are you then in that *sceptical* state of suspense, between affirming and denying?

Hyl: I think I can be definite about it. A very violent and painful heat can't exist outside the mind.

Phil: So according to you it has no real existence.

Hyl: I admit it.

Phil: Is it certain, then, that no body in nature is really hot?

Hyl: I haven't said that there is no real heat in bodies. I only say that there is no such thing as an intense real heat ·in bodies·.

Phil: But didn't you say earlier that all degrees of heat are equally real, or that if there *is* any difference the greater heat is more certainly real than the lesser?

Hyl: Yes, I did; but that was because I had overlooked the reason there is for distinguishing between them, which I now plainly see. It is this: because •intense heat is nothing but a particular kind of painful sensation, and •pain cannot exist except in a perceiving being, it follows that •no intense heat can really exist in an unperceiving corporeal [= 'bodily'] substance. But this is no reason why we should deny that less intense heat can exist in such a substance.

Phil: But how are we to draw the line separating degrees of heat that exist only in the mind from ones that exist outside it?

Hyl: That is not hard. The slightest pain cannot exist unperceived, as you know; so any degree of heat that is a pain exists only in the mind. We do not have to think the same for degrees of heat that are not pains.

Phil: I think you agreed a while back that no unperceiving being is capable of pleasure, any more than it is of pain.

Hyl: I did.

Phil: Well, isn't warmth—a milder degree of heat than what causes discomfort or worse—a pleasure?

Hyl: What of it?

Phil: It follows that warmth cannot exist outside the mind in any unperceiving substance, or body.

Hyl: So it seems.

Phil: So we have reached the position that degrees of heat that *are not* painful and also ones that *are* can exist only in a thinking substance! Can't we conclude from this that external bodies are absolutely incapable of any degree of heat whatsoever?

Hyl: On second thoughts, I am less sure that warmth is a pleasure than I am that intense heat is a pain.

Phil: I don't claim that warmth is as great a pleasure as heat is a pain. But if you admit it to be even a small pleasure, that is enough to yield my conclusion.

Hyl: I could rather call it 'absence of pain'. It seems to be merely the lack of pain and of pleasure. I hope you will not deny that *this* quality or state is one that an unthinking substance can have!

Phil: If you are determined to maintain that warmth is not a pleasure, I don't know how to convince you otherwise except by appealing to your own experience. But what do you think about cold?

Hyl: The same that I do about heat. An intense degree of cold is a pain; for to feel a very great cold is to experience a great discomfort, so it can't exist outside the mind. But a lesser degree of cold can exist outside the mind, as well as a lesser degree of heat.

Phil: So when we feel a moderate degree of heat (or cold) from a body that is applied to our skin, we must conclude that that body has a moderate degree of heat (or cold) in it?

Hyl: We must.

Phil: Can any doctrine be true if it necessarily leads to absurdity?

Hyl: Certainly not.

Phil: Isn't it an absurdity to think that a single thing should be at the same time both cold and warm?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: Well, now, suppose that one of your hands is hot and the other cold, and that they are both at once plunged into a bowl of water that has a temperature between the two. Won't the water seem cold to one hand and warm to the other?

Hyl: It will.

Phil: Then doesn't it follow by your principles that the water really is both cold and warm at the same time—thus believing something that you agree to be an absurdity?

Hyl: I admit that that seems right.

Phil: So the principles themselves are false, since you have admitted that no true principle leads to an absurdity.

Hyl: But, after all, can anything be more absurd than to say that there is no heat in the fire?

Phil: To make the point still clearer, answer me this: in two cases that are exactly alike, oughtn't we to make the same judgment?

Hyl: We ought.

Phil: When a pin pricks your finger, doesn't it tear and divide the fibres of your flesh?

Hyl: It does.

Phil: And when hot coal burns your finger, does it do any more?

Hyl: It does not.

Phil: You hold that the pin itself does not contain either the sensation that it causes, or anything like it. So, given what you have just agreed to—namely that like cases should be judged alike—you ought to hold that the fire doesn't contain either the sensation that it causes or anything like it.

Hyl: Well, since it must be so, I am content to give up this point, and admit that heat and cold are only sensations existing in our minds. Still, there are plenty of other qualities through which to secure the reality of external things.

Phil: But what will you say, Hylas, if it turns out that the same argument applies with regard to all other sensible qualities, and that none of them can be supposed to exist outside the mind, any more than heat and cold can?

Hyl: Proving that would be quite a feat, but I see no chance of your doing so.

Phil: Let us examine the other sensible qualities in order. What about tastes? Do you think they exist outside the mind, or not?

Hyl: Can anyone in his right mind doubt that sugar is sweet, or that wormwood is bitter?

Phil: Tell me, Hylas: is a sweet taste a particular kind of pleasure or pleasant sensation, or is it not?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: And is not bitterness some kind of discomfort or pain?

Hyl: I grant that.

Phil: If therefore sugar and wormwood are unthinking corporeal substances existing outside the mind, how can sweetness and bitterness—that is, pleasure and pain—be in them?

Hyl: Hold on, Philonous! Now I see what has deluded me all this time. You asked whether heat and cold, sweetness and bitterness, are particular sorts of pleasure and pain; to which I answered simply that they are. I should have answered by making a distinction: those qualities *as perceived by us* are pleasures or pains, but *as existing in the external objects* they are not. So we cannot conclude without qualification that there is no heat in the fire or sweetness in the sugar, but only that heat or sweetness *as perceived by us* are not in the fire or sugar. What do you say to this?

Phil: I say it is irrelevant. We were talking only about ‘sensible things’, which you defined as things we immediately perceive by our senses. Whatever *other* qualities you are talking about have no place in our conversation, and I don’t know anything about them. You may indeed claim to have discovered certain qualities that you do not perceive, and assert that *they* exist in fire and sugar; but I can’t for the life of me see how that serves your side in the argument we were having. Tell me then once more, do you agree that heat and cold, sweetness and bitterness (meaning those qualities which are perceived by the senses), don’t exist outside the mind?

Hyl: I see it is no use holding out, so I give up the cause with respect to those four qualities. Though I must say it sounds odd to say that sugar is not sweet.

Phil: It might sound better to you if you bear this in mind: someone whose palate is diseased may experience as *bitter* stuff that at other times seems *sweet* to him. And it is perfectly obvious that different people perceive different tastes in the same food, since what one man delights in another loathes. How could this be, if the taste were really inherent in the food?

Hyl: I admit that I don't know how.

Phil: Now think about odours. Don't they exactly fit what I have just been saying about tastes? Aren't they just so many pleasing or displeasing sensations?

Hyl: They are.

Phil: Then can you conceive it to be possible that they should exist in an unperceiving thing?

Hyl: I cannot.

Phil: Or can you imagine that filth and excrement affect animals that choose to feed on them with the same smells that we perceive in them?

Hyl: By no means.

Phil: Then can't we conclude that smells, like the other qualities we have been discussing, cannot exist anywhere but in a perceiving substance or mind?

Hyl: I think so.

Phil: What about sounds? Are they qualities really inherent in external bodies, or not?

Hyl: They don't inhere in the sounding bodies. We know this, because when a bell is struck in a vacuum, it sends out no sound. So the subject of sound must be the air.

Phil: Explain that, Hylas.

Hyl: When the air is set into motion, we perceive a louder or softer sound in proportion to the air's motion; but when the air is still, we hear no sound at all.

Phil: Granting that we never hear a sound except when some motion is produced in the air, I still don't see how you can infer from this that the sound itself is in the air.

Hyl: This motion in the external air is what produces in the mind the sensation of sound. By striking on the ear-drum it causes a vibration which is passed along the auditory nerves to the brain, whereupon the mind experiences the sensation called sound.

Phil: What! is sound a sensation?

Hyl: As I said: *as perceived by us* it is a particular sensation in the mind.

Phil: And can any sensation exist outside the mind?

Hyl: No, certainly.

Phil: But if sound is a sensation, how can it exist in the air, if by ‘the air’ you mean a senseless substance existing outside the mind?

Hyl: Philonous, you must distinguish sound as it is perceived by us from sound as it is in itself; or—in other words—distinguish the sound we immediately perceive from the sound that exists outside us. The former is indeed a particular kind of sensation, but the latter is merely a vibration in the air.

Phil: I thought I had already flattened that distinction by the answer I gave when you were applying it in a similar case before. But I’ll let that pass. Are you sure, then, that sound is really nothing but motion?

Hyl: I am.

Phil: Whatever is true of real sound, therefore, can truthfully be said of motion.

Hyl: It may.

Phil: So it makes sense to speak of motion as something that is loud, sweet, piercing, or lowpitched!

Hyl: I see you are determined not to understand me. Isn’t it obvious that those qualities belong only to *sensible* sound, or ‘sound’ in the ordinary everyday meaning of the word, but not to ‘sound’ in the real and scientific sense, which (as I have just explained) is nothing but a certain motion of the air?

Phil: It seems, then, there are two sorts of sound—the common everyday sort that we hear, and the scientific and real sort that we don’t hear.

Hyl: Just so.

Phil: And the latter kind of sound consists in motion.

Hyl: As I told you.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, which of the senses do you think the idea of motion belongs to? The sense of hearing?

Hyl: Certainly not. To the senses of sight and touch.

Phil: It should follow then, according to you, that real sounds may possibly be seen or felt, but can never be heard.

Hyl: Look, Philonous, make fun of my views if you want to, but that won't alter the truth of things. I admit that the inferences you draw from them sound a little odd; but ordinary language is formed by ordinary people for their own use, so it's not surprising if statements that express exact scientific notions seem clumsy and strange.

Phil: Is it come to that? I assure you, I think I have scored a pretty big win when you so casually depart from ordinary phrases and opinions; because what we were mainly arguing about was whose notions are furthest from the common road and most in conflict with what people in general think. Your claim that *real sounds are never heard*, and that we get our idea of sound through some other sense—can you think that this is merely an odd-sounding scientific truth? Isn't something in it contrary to nature and the truth of things?

Hyl: Frankly, I don't like it either. Given the concessions I have already made, I had better admit that sounds also have no real existence outside the mind.

Phil: And I hope you won't stick at admitting the same of colours.

Hyl: Pardon me; the case of colours is very different. Can anything be more obvious than the fact that we see colours *on* the objects?

Phil: The objects you speak of are, I suppose, corporeal substances existing outside the mind.

Hyl: They are.

Phil: And they have true and real colours inhering in them?

Hyl: Each visible object has the colour that we see in it.

Phil: Hah! is there anything visible other than what we perceive by sight?

Hyl: There is not.

Phil: And do we perceive anything by our senses that we don't perceive immediately?

Hyl: How often do I have to say it? I tell you, we do not.

Phil: Bear with me, Hylas, and tell me yet again whether anything is immediately perceived by the senses other than sensible qualities. I know you asserted that nothing is; but I want to know now whether you still think so.

Hyl: I do.

Phil: Now, is your *corporeal substance* either a sensible quality or made up of sensible qualities?

Hyl: What a question to ask! Who ever thought it was?

Phil: Here is why I ask. When you say that *each visible object has the colour that we see in it*, you imply that either (1) visible objects are sensible qualities, or else (2) something other than sensible qualities can be perceived by sight. But we earlier agreed that (2) is false, and you still think it is; -so we are left with the thesis (1) that *visible objects are sensible qualities*. Now, in this conversation you have been taking it that *visible objects are corporeal substances*; and so we reach the conclusion that your *corporeal substances are nothing but sensible qualities*.

Hyl: You may draw as many absurd consequences as you please, and try to entangle the plainest things; but you will never persuade me out of my senses. I clearly understand my own meaning.

Phil: I wish you would make me understand it too! But since you don't want me to look into your notion of corporeal substance, I shall drop that point. But please tell me whether the colours that we see are •the very ones that exist in external bodies or •some other colours.

Hyl: They are the very same ones.

Phil: Oh! Then are the beautiful red and purple that we see on those clouds over there really in them? Or do you -rather- think that the clouds in themselves are nothing but a dark mist or vapour?

Hyl: I must admit, Philonous, that those colours are not really in the clouds as they seem to be at this distance. They are only apparent colours.

Phil: *Apparent* call you them? How are we to distinguish these apparent colours from real ones?

Hyl: Very easily. When a colour appears only at a distance, and vanishes when one comes closer, it is merely apparent.

Phil: And I suppose that real colours are ones that are revealed by looking carefully from close up?

Hyl: Right.

Phil: Does the closest and most careful way of looking use a microscope, or only the naked eye?

Hyl: A microscope, of course.

Phil: But a microscope often reveals colours in an object different from those perceived by unassisted sight. And if we had microscopes that could magnify to as much as we liked, it is certain that no object whatsoever when seen through them would appear with the same colour that it presents to the naked eye.

Hyl: Well, what do you conclude from that? You can't argue that there are really and naturally no colours on objects, just because by artificial managements they can be altered or made to vanish.

Phil: It can obviously be inferred from your own concessions, I think, that all the colours we see with our naked eyes are only *apparent*—like those on the clouds—since they vanish when one looks more closely and accurately, as one can with a microscope. And to anticipate your next objection I ask you whether the *real and natural* state of an object is revealed better by a very sharp and piercing sight, or by one that is less sharp.

Hyl: By the former, without doubt.

Phil: Isn't it plain from the science of optics that microscopes make the sight more penetrating, and represent objects as they would appear to the eye if it were naturally endowed with extreme sharpness?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: So the microscopic representation of a thing should be regarded as the one that best displays the thing's real nature, or what the thing is in itself. so the colours perceived through a microscope are more genuine and real than those perceived in any other way.

Hyl: I admit that there's something in what you say.

Phil: Besides, it's not only *possible* but clearly *true* that there actually are animals whose eyes are naturally formed to perceive things that are too small for us to see. What do you think about those inconceivably small animals that we perceive through microscopes? Must we suppose they are all totally blind? If they can see, don't we have to suppose that their sight has the same use in preserving their bodies from injuries as eyesight does in all other animals? If it does have that use, isn't it obvious that they must see particles that are smaller than their own bodies, which will present them with a vastly different view of each object from the view that strikes our senses? Even our own eyes don't always represent objects to us in the same way. Everyone knows that to someone suffering from

jaundice all things seem yellow. So isn't it highly probable that animals whose eyes we see to be differently structured from ours, and whose bodily fluids are unlike ours, don't see the same colours in every object that we do? From all of this, shouldn't it seem to follow that all colours are equally •apparent, and that none of the ones that we see are •really in any outer object?

Hyl: It should.

Phil: To put it past all doubt, consider the following. If colours were real properties or qualities inhering in external bodies, they couldn't be altered except by some alteration in the very bodies themselves: but isn't it evident that the colours of an object can be changed or made to disappear entirely through the use of a microscope, or some change in the fluids in the eye, or a change in the viewing distance, without any sort of real alteration in the thing itself? Indeed, even when all the other factors remain unaltered some objects present different colours to the eye depending on the angle from which they are looked at. The same thing happens when we view an object in different brightnesses of light. And everyone knows that the same bodies appear differently coloured by candle-light from what they do in daylight. Add to these facts our experience of a prism, which separates the different rays of light and thereby alters the colour of an object, causing the whitest object to appear deep blue or red to the naked eye. *Now* tell me whether you still think that every body has its true, real colour inhering in it. If you think it has, I want to know what •particular distance and orientation of the object, what •special condition of the eye, what •intensity or kind of light is needed for discovering that true colour and distinguishing it from the apparent ones.

Hyl: I admit to being quite convinced that they are all equally apparent, that no such thing as colour really inheres in external bodies, and that *colour is wholly in the light*. What confirms me in this opinion is the fact that colours are more or less vivid depending on the brightness of the light, and that when there is no light no colours are seen. Furthermore, if there were colours in external objects, how could we possibly perceive them? No external body affects the mind unless it acts first on our sense-organs; and the only action of bodies is motion, and this can't be communicated except in *collisions*. So a *distant* object can't act on the eye, and so can't enable itself or its properties to be perceived by the mind. From this it plainly follows that what immediately causes the perception of colours is some substance that is *in contact with* the eye—such as light.

Phil: What? Is light a substance?

Hyl: I tell you, Philonous, external light is simply a thin fluid substance whose tiny particles, when agitated with a brisk motion and in various ways reflected to the eyes from the different surfaces of outer objects, cause different motions in the optic nerves; these motions are passed along to the brain, where they cause various states and events; and these are accompanied by the sensations of red, blue, yellow, etc.

Phil: It seems, then, that all the light does is to shake the optic nerves.

Hyl: That is all.

Phil: And as a result of each particular motion of the nerves the mind is affected with a sensation, which is some particular colour.

Hyl: Right.

Phil: And these sensations have no existence outside the mind.

Hyl: They have not.

Phil: Then how can you say that colours are *in the light*, since you take light to be a corporeal substance external to the mind?

Hyl: Light and colours *as immediately perceived by us* cannot exist outside the mind. I admit that. But *in themselves* they are only the motions and arrangements of certain insensible particles of matter.

Phil: Colours then, in the ordinary sense—that is, understood to be the immediate objects of sight—cannot be had by any substance that does not perceive.

Hyl: That is what I say.

Phil: Well, then, you give up your position as regards those *sensible* qualities which are what all mankind takes to be colours. Think what you like about the scientists' *invisible* colours; it is not my business to argue about *them*. But I suggest that you consider whether it is wise for you, in a discussion like this one, to affirm that the red and blue we see *are not* real colours, and that certain unknown motions and shapes which no man ever did or could see *are* real colours. Aren't these shocking notions, and aren't they open to as many ridiculous inferences as those you had to give up in the case of sounds?

Hyl: I have to admit, Philonous, that I can't keep this up any longer. Colours, sounds, tastes—in a word, all that are termed 'secondary qualities'—have no existence outside the mind. But in granting this I don't take anything away from the reality of matter or external objects, because various philosophers maintain what I just did about secondary qualities and yet are far from denying matter. [In this context, 'philosophers' means 'philosophers and scientists'.] To make this clearer: philosophers divide sensible qualities into *primary* and *secondary*. •Primary qualities are extendedness, shape, solidity, gravity, motion, and rest. They hold that these really exist in bodies. •Secondary qualities are all the sensible qualities that aren't primary; and the philosophers assert that these are merely sensations or ideas existing nowhere but in the mind. No doubt you are already aware of all this. For my part, I have long known that such an opinion was current among philosophers, but I was never thoroughly convinced of its truth till now.

Phil: So you still believe that extension and shapes are inherent in external unthinking substances? [Here 'extension' could mean 'extendedness' or it could mean 'size'.]

Hyl: I do.

Phil: But what if the same arguments which are brought against secondary qualities hold against these also?

Hyl: Why, then I shall have to think that shape and extension also exist only in the mind.

Phil: Is it your opinion that the very shape and extension that you perceive by sense exist in the outer object or material substance?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: Have all other animals as good reason as you do to think that the shape and extension that *they* see and feel is in the outer object??

Hyl: Surely they do, if they can think at all.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, do you think that the senses were given to all animals for their preservation and well-being in life? or were they given only to men for that end?

Hyl: I don't doubt that they have the same use in all other animals.

Phil: If so, mustn't their senses enable them to perceive their own limbs, and to perceive bodies that are capable of harming them?

Hyl: Certainly.

Phil: A tiny insect, therefore, must be supposed to see its own foot, and other things of that size or even smaller, seeing them all as bodies of considerable size, even though *you* can see them—if at all—only as so many visible points.

Hyl: I can't deny that.

Phil: And to creatures even smaller than that insect they will seem even bigger.

Hyl: They will.

Phil: So that something you can hardly pick out ·because it is so small· will appear like a huge mountain to an extremely tiny animal.

Hyl: I agree about all this.

Phil: Can a single thing have different sizes at the same time?

Hyl: It would be absurd to think so.

Phil: But from what you have said it follows that the true size of the insect's foot is •the size you see it having *and* •the size the insect sees it as having, *and* •all the sizes it is seen as having by animals that are even smaller. That is to say, your own principles have led you into an absurdity.

Hyl: I seem to be in some difficulty about this.

Phil: Another point: didn't you agree that no real inherent property of any object can be changed unless the thing itself alters?

Hyl: I did.

Phil: But as we move towards or away from an object, its visible size varies, being at one distance ten or a hundred times greater than at another. Doesn't it follow from this too that size is not really inherent in the object?

Hyl: I admit that I don't know what to think.

Phil: You will soon be able to make up your mind, if you will venture to think as freely about this quality as you have about the others. Didn't you admit that it was legitimate to infer that neither heat nor cold was in the water from the premise that the water seemed warm to one hand and cold to the other?

Hyl: I did.

Phil: Isn't it the very same reasoning to infer that there is no size or shape in an object from the premise that to one eye it seems little, smooth, and round, while to the other eye it appears big, uneven, and angular?

Hyl: The very same. But does the latter ever happen?

Phil: You can at any time find out that it does, by looking with one eye bare and with the other through a microscope.

Hyl: I don't know how to maintain it, yet I am reluctant to give up extension [= 'size'], because I see so many odd consequences following from the concession that extension is not in the outer object.

Phil: Odd, you say? After the things you have already agreed to, I hope you won't be put off from anything just because it is *odd*! But in any case wouldn't it seem very odd if the general reasoning that covers all the other sensible qualities *didn't* apply also to extension? If you agree that no idea or anything like an idea can exist in an unperceiving substance, then surely it follows that no shape or mode of extension [= 'no specific way of being extended'] that we can have any idea of—in perceiving or imagining—can be really inherent in matter. Whether the sensible quality is shape or sound or colour or what you

will, it seems impossible that any of these should subsist in something that does not perceive it. (Not to mention the peculiar difficulty there must be in conceiving a material substance, prior to and distinct from extension, to be the *substratum* of extension. ·I shall say more about that shortly·.)

Hyl: I give up on this point, for just now. But I reserve the right to retract my opinion if I later discover that I was led to it by a false step.

Phil: That is a right you can't be denied. Shapes and extendedness being disposed of, we proceed next to *motion*. Can a real motion in any external body be at the same time both very swift and very slow?

Hyl: It cannot.

Phil: Isn't the speed at which a body moves inversely proportional to the time it takes to go any given distance? Thus a body that travels a mile in an hour moves three times as fast as it would if it travelled only a mile in three hours.

Hyl: I agree with you.

Phil: And isn't time measured by the succession of ideas in our minds?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: And isn't it possible that ideas should succeed one another twice as fast in your mind as they do in mine, or in the mind of some kind of non-human spirit?

Hyl: I agree about that.

Phil: Consequently the same body may seem to another spirit to make its journey in half the time that it seems to you to take. (*Half* is just an example; any other fraction would make the point just as well.) That is to say, according to your view that the motions perceived are both really in the object, a single body can really move both very swiftly and very slowly at the same time. How is this consistent either with common sense or with what you recently agreed to?

Hyl: I have nothing to say to it.

Phil: Now for *solidity*:- If you don't use 'solidity' to name any sensible quality, then it is irrelevant to our enquiry. If you *do* use it to name a sensible quality, the quality must be either *hardness* or *resistance*. But each of these is plainly relative to our senses: it is obvious that what seems hard to one animal may appear soft to another that has greater force and firmness of limbs; and it is equally obvious that the resistance I feel ·when I press against a body· is not in the body.

Hyl: I agree that the sensation of resistance, which is all you immediately perceive, is not in the body; but the cause of that sensation is.

Phil: But the causes of our sensations are not immediately perceived, and therefore are not sensible. I thought we had settled this point.

Hyl: I admit that we did. Excuse me if I seem a little embarrassed; I am having trouble quitting my earlier views.

Phil: It may be a help for you to consider this point: once extendedness is admitted to have no existence outside the mind, the same *must* be granted for motion, solidity, and gravity, since obviously they all presuppose extendedness. So it is superfluous to enquire into each of them separately; in denying extendedness, you have denied them all to have any real existence.

Hyl: If this is right, Philonous, I wonder why the philosophers who deny the secondary qualities any real existence should yet attribute it to the primary qualities. If there is no difference between them, how can this be accounted for?

Phil: It is not my business to account for every opinion of the philosophers! But there are many possible explanations, one of them being that those philosophers were influenced by the fact that pleasure and pain are associated with the secondary qualities rather than with the primary ones. Heat and cold, tastes and smells, have something more vividly pleasing or disagreeable than what we get from the ideas of extendedness, shape, and motion. And since it is too visibly absurd to hold that pain or pleasure can be in an unperceiving substance, men have more easily been weaned from believing in the external existence of the secondary qualities than of the primary ones. You will see that there is something in this if you recall the distinction *you* made between moderate heat and intense heat, allowing one a real existence outside the mind while you denied that to the other. But after all, there is no rational basis for that distinction; for surely a sensation that is neither pleasing nor painful is just as much *a sensation* as one that is pleasing or painful; so neither kind should be supposed to exist in an unthinking subject.

Hyl: It has just come into my head, Philonous, that I have somewhere heard of a distinction between absolute and sensible extendedness. Granted that *large* and *small* consist merely in the relation other extended things have to the parts of our own bodies, and so aren't really in the substances themselves; still, we don't have to say the same about *absolute extendedness*, which is something abstracted from large and small, from this or that particular size and shape. Similarly with motion: *fast* and *slow* are altogether relative to the succession of ideas in our own minds. But just because those special cases of motion do not exist outside the mind, it doesn't follow that the same is true of the absolute motion that is abstracted from them.

Phil: What distinguishes one instance of motion, or of extendedness, from another? Isn't it something sensible—for instance some *speed*, or some *size and shape*?

Hyl: I think so.

Phil: So these qualities—namely, absolute motion and absolute extendedness—which are stripped of all sensible properties, have no features making them more specific in any way.

Hyl: That is right.

Phil: That is to say, they are *extendedness in general*, and *motion in general*.

Hyl: If you say so.

Phil: But everyone accepts the maxim that *every thing that exists is particular*. How then can motion in general, or extendedness in general, exist in any corporeal substance?

Hyl: I will need time to think about that.

Phil: I think the point can be speedily decided. Without doubt you can tell whether you are able to form this or that idea in your mind. Now I am willing to let our present dispute be settled in the following way. If you can form in your thoughts a distinct abstract idea of motion or extendedness, having none of those sensible qualities—swift and slow, large and small, round and square, and the like—which we agree exist only in the mind, then I'll capitulate. But if you can't, it will be unreasonable for you to insist any longer on something of which you have no notion.

Hyl: To be frank, I cannot.

Phil: Can you even separate the ideas of extendedness and motion from the ideas of all the so-called secondary qualities?

Hyl: What! isn't it easy to consider extendedness and motion by themselves, abstracted from all other sensible qualities? Isn't that how the mathematicians handle them?

Phil: I acknowledge, Hylas, that it is not difficult to form general propositions and reasonings about extendedness and motion, without mentioning any other qualities, and in that sense to treat them abstractedly. I can pronounce the *word* 'motion' by itself, but how does it follow from this that I can form in my mind the *idea* of motion without an idea of body? Theorems about extension and shapes can be proved without any *mention* of large or small or any other sensible quality, but how does it follow from this that the mind can form and grasp an abstract *idea* of extension, without any particular size or shape or other sensible quality? Mathematicians study *quantity*, disregarding any other sensible qualities that go with it on the grounds that they are irrelevant to the proofs. But when they lay aside the words and contemplate the bare ideas, I think you will find that they are not the pure abstracted ideas of extendedness.

Hyl: But what do you say about *pure intellect*? Can't abstracted ideas be formed by that faculty?

Phil: Since I can't form abstract ideas at all, it is clearly impossible for me to form them with help from 'pure intellect', whatever faculty you mean that phrase to refer to. Setting aside questions about the nature of pure intellect and its spiritual objects such as virtue, reason, God, etc., I can say this much that seems clearly true: sensible things can only be perceived by the senses or represented by the imagination; so shape and size don't belong to pure intellect because they are initially perceived through the senses. If you want to be surer about this, try and see if you can frame the idea of any shape, abstracted from all particularities of size and from other sensible qualities.

Hyl: Let me think a little—I do not find that I can.

Phil: Well, can you think it possible that something might really exist in nature when it implies a contradiction in its conception?

Hyl: By no means.

Phil: Therefore, since even the mind can't possibly separate the ideas of •extendedness and motion from •all other sensible qualities, doesn't it follow that where •the former exist •the latter must also exist?

Hyl: It would seem so.

Phil: Consequently the very same arguments that you agreed to be decisive against the •secondary qualities need no extra help to count just as strongly against the •primary qualities also. Besides, if you trust your senses don't they convince you that all sensible qualities co-exist, that is, that they all appear to the senses as being in the same place? Do your senses ever represent a motion or shape as being divested of all other visible and tangible qualities?

Hyl: You needn't say any more about this. I freely admit—unless there has been some hidden error or oversight in our discussion up to here—that *all* sensible qualities should alike be denied existence outside the mind. But I fear that I may have been too free in my former concessions, or overlooked some fallacy in your line of argument. In short, I didn't take time to think.

Phil: As to that, Hylas, take all the time you want to go back over our discussion. You are at liberty to repair any slips you have made, or to support your initial opinion by presenting arguments that you have so far overlooked.

Hyl: I think it was a big oversight on my part that I failed to distinguish sufficiently the *object* from the *sensation*. The sensation cannot exist outside the mind, but it does not follow that the object cannot either.

Phil: What object do you mean? The object of the senses?

Hyl: Exactly.

Phil: So it is immediately perceived?

Hyl: Right.

Phil: Explain to me the difference between *what is immediately perceived* and a *sensation*.

Hyl: I take the sensation to be an *act* of the perceiving mind; beside which, there is something perceived, which I call the *object* of the act. For example, there is red and yellow on that tulip, but the act of perceiving those colours is in me only, and not in the tulip.

Phil: What tulip are you talking about? Is it the one that you see?

Hyl: The same.

Phil: And what do you see beside colour, shape, and extendedness?

Hyl: Nothing.

Phil: So you would say that the red and yellow are co-existent with the extension, wouldn't you?

Hyl: Yes, and I go further: I say that they have a real existence outside the mind in some unthinking substance.

Phil: That the colours are really in the tulip which I see, is obvious. Nor can it be denied that this tulip may exist independently of your mind or mine; but that any immediate object of the senses—that is, any idea or combination of ideas—should exist in an unthinking substance, or exterior to all minds, is in itself an obvious contradiction. Nor can I imagine how it follows from what you said just now, namely that the red and yellow are on *the tulip you saw*, since you don't claim to *see that unthinking substance*.

Hyl: You are skillful at changing the subject, Philonous.

Phil: I see that you don't want me to push on in that direction. So let us return to your distinction between sensation and object. If I understand you correctly, you hold that in every perception there are two things of which one is an action of the mind and the other is not.

Hyl: True.

Phil: And this action can't exist in or belong to any unthinking thing; but whatever else is involved in a perception may do so.

Hyl: That is my position.

Phil: So that if there *were* a perception without any act of the mind, that perception could exist in an unthinking substance.

Hyl: I grant that. But it is impossible there should be such a perception.

Phil: When is the mind said to be active?

Hyl: When it produces, puts an end to, or changes anything.

Phil: Can the mind produce, discontinue, or change anything in any way except by an •act of the will?

Hyl: It cannot.

Phil: So the mind is to count as being active in its perceptions to the extent that •volition is included in them.

Hyl: It is.

Phil: When I •pluck this flower I am active, because I do it by a hand-movement which arose from my volition; so likewise in •holding it up to my nose. But is either of these *smelling*?

Hyl: No.

Phil: I also act when I draw air through my nose, because my breathing in that manner rather than otherwise is an effect of my volition. But this is not smelling either; for if it were, I would smell every time I breathed in that manner.

Hyl: True.

Phil: Smelling, then, is a *result* of all this •plucking, holding up, and breathing in.

Hyl: It is.

Phil: But I do not find that my will is involved any further—that is, in anything other than the plucking, holding up, and breathing in. Whatever else happens—including my perceiving a smell—is independent of my will, and I am wholly passive with respect to it. Is it different in your case, Hylas?

Hyl: No, it's just the same.

Phil: Now consider seeing: isn't it in your power to open your eyes or keep them shut, to turn them this way or that?

Hyl: Without doubt.

Phil: But does it similarly depend on your will that when you look at this flower you perceive white rather than some other colour? When you direct your open eyes towards that part of the sky, can you avoid seeing the sun? Or is light or darkness the effect of your volition?

Hyl: No, certainly.

Phil: In these respects, then, you are altogether passive.

Hyl: I am.

Phil: Tell me now, does seeing consist •in perceiving light and colours or rather in •opening and turning the eyes?

Hyl: The former, certainly.

Phil: Well, then, since in the actual perception of light and colours you are altogether *passive*, what has become of that *action* that you said was an ingredient in every sensation? And doesn't it follow from your own concessions that the perception of light and colours—which does not involve any action—can exist in an unperceiving substance? And isn't this a plain contradiction?

Hyl: I don't know what to think.

Phil: Furthermore, since you distinguish active and passive elements in every perception, you must do it in the perception of pain. But how could pain—however inactive it is—possibly exist in an unperceiving substance? Think about it, and then tell me frankly: aren't light and colours, tastes, sounds, etc. all equally passions or sensations in the mind? You may call them 'external objects', and give them in *words* whatever kind of existence you like; but examine your own *thoughts* and then tell me whether I am not right?

Hyl: I admit, Philonous, that when I look carefully at •what goes on in my mind, all I can find is that I am a thinking being which has a variety of sensations; and I cannot conceive how a sensation could exist in an unperceiving substance. But when on the other hand I look in a different way at •sensible things, considering them as so many properties and qualities, I find that I have to suppose a *material substratum*, without which they can't be conceived to exist.

Phil: *Material substratum* you call it? Tell me, please, which of your senses acquainted you with it?

Hyl: It is not itself sensible; only its properties and qualities are perceived by the senses.

Phil: I presume, then, that you obtained the idea of it through reflection and reason.

Hyl: I don't claim to have any proper •positive idea of it. [Here 'positive' means 'non-relational': Hylas means that he doesn't have an idea that represents what material substance is like in itself.] But I conclude that it exists, because qualities can't be conceived to exist without a support.

Phil: So it seems that you have only a •relative notion of material substance: you conceive it only by conceiving how it relates to sensible qualities.

Hyl: Right.

Phil: Tell me, please, what that relation is.

Hyl: Isn't it sufficiently expressed in the term 'substratum' or 'substance'? [One is Latin, and means 'underneath layer'; the other comes from Latin meaning 'standing under'.]

Phil: If so, the word 'substratum' should mean that it is *spread under* the sensible qualities.

Hyl: True.

Phil: And consequently •spread• under extendedness.

Hyl: I agree.

Phil: So in its own nature it is entirely distinct from extendedness.

Hyl: I tell you, extendedness is only a quality, and matter is something that supports qualities. And isn't it obvious that the supported thing is different from the supporting one?

Phil: So something distinct from extendedness, and not including it, is supposed to be the substratum of extendedness.

Hyl: Just so.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, can a thing be *spread* without being extended? Isn't the idea of extendedness necessarily included in •that of• spreading?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: So anything that you suppose to be spread under something else must have *in itself* an extendedness distinct from the extendedness of the thing under which it is spread.

Hyl: It must.

Phil: Consequently every bodily substance, being the substratum of extendedness, must have in itself another extendedness which qualifies it to be a substratum, and *that* extendedness must also have something spread under it, a sub-substratum, so to speak, and so on to infinity. Isn't this absurd in itself, as well as conflicting with what you have just said, namely that the *substratum* was something distinct from extendedness and not including it?

Hyl: Yes, but Philonous you misunderstand me. I do not mean that matter is 'spread' in a crude literal sense under extension. The word 'substratum' is used only to express in general the same thing as 'substance'.

Phil: Well, then, let us examine the relation implied in the term 'substance'. Is it not the relation of *standing under* qualities?

Hyl: The very same.

Phil: But doesn't a thing have to be extended if it is to stand under or support another?

Hyl: Yes.

Phil: So isn't this supposition infected with the same absurdity as the previous one?

Hyl: You still take things in a strict literal sense; that is not fair, Philonous.

Phil: I don't want to force any meaning onto your words; you are free to explain them as you please. But please make me understand *something* by them! You tell me that matter supports or stands under accidents. How? As your legs support your body?

Hyl: No; that is the literal sense.

Phil: Please let me know *any* sense, literal or not literal, that you understand it in. ---How long must I wait for an answer, Hylas?

Hyl: I don't know what to say. I once thought I understood well enough what was meant by matter's 'supporting' qualities. But now the more I think about it the *less* I understand it. In short, I find that I don't know anything about it.

Phil: So it seems that you have no idea at all, either positive or relative, of matter. You don't know what it is in itself, or what relation it has to qualities.

Hyl: I admit it.

Phil: And yet you said that you could not conceive the real existence of qualities without conceiving at the same time a material support for them.

Hyl: I did.

Phil: That amounted to saying that when you conceive the real existence of qualities you also conceive something that you can't conceive!

Hyl: It was wrong, I admit. But still I fear there is some fallacy or other. Let me try this:- It has just occurred to me that we were both led into error by your treating each quality by itself. I grant that no quality can exist on its own outside the mind; colour cannot without extension, neither can shape without some other sensible quality. But as a number of qualities united or blended together *constitute* an entire sensible thing, there is no obstacle to supposing that such things—that is, such collections of qualities—can exist outside the mind.

Phil: Are you joking, Hylas, or do you have a very bad memory? We did indeed go through all the qualities by name, one after another; but my arguments—or rather your concessions—nowhere tended to prove that the secondary qualities don't exist outside the mind *in isolation*; the point was rather that secondary qualities don't exist outside the mind *at all*. It's true that existing-in-isolation did come up in our discussion: in discussing shape and motion, we concluded they couldn't exist outside the mind because it was impossible even in thought to separate them from all secondary qualities, so as to conceive them existing by themselves. But this wasn't the only argument I used on that occasion. However, if you like we can set aside our whole conversation up to here, counting it as nothing. I am willing to let our whole debate be settled as follows:- If you can conceive it to be possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any sensible object whatever, to exist outside the mind, then I will grant it actually to be so.

Hyl: By that test, the point will soon be decided. What is easier than to conceive a tree or house existing by itself, independently of and unperceived by any mind whatsoever? I conceive them existing in that way right now.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, can you see a thing which is at the same time unseen?

Hyl: No, that would be a contradiction.

Phil: Is it not as great a contradiction to talk of conceiving a thing which is unconceived?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: The tree or house therefore which you think of is conceived by you.

Hyl: How could it be otherwise?

Phil: And what is conceived is surely in the mind.

Hyl: Without question, what is conceived is in the mind.

Phil: Then what led you to say that you conceived a house or tree existing independently and out of all minds whatsoever?

Hyl: That was an oversight, I admit; but give me a moment to think about what led me into it. It was—I now realize, after reflection—an amusing mistake. As I was thinking of a tree in a solitary place with nobody there to see it, I thought that was conceiving a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of, overlooking the fact I myself conceived it all the while. But now I plainly see that all I can do is to form ideas in my own mind. I can conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from proving that I can conceive them existing out of the minds of all spirits.

Phil: You agree, then, that you can't conceive how any corporeal sensible thing should exist otherwise than in a mind.

Hyl: I do.

Phil: And yet you will earnestly contend for the truth of something that you can't even conceive.

Hyl: I admit that I don't know what to think, but I still have doubts. Isn't it certain that I see things at a distance? Don't we perceive the stars and moon, for example, to be a long way away? Isn't this, I say, obvious to the senses?

Phil: Don't you in dreams also perceive objects like those?

Hyl: I do.

Phil: And don't they then appear in the same way to be distant?

Hyl: They do.

Phil: But do you conclude that the apparitions in a dream are outside the mind?

Hyl: By no means.

Phil: Then you ought not to conclude that sensible objects ·seen when you are awake· are outside the mind, from their appearance or the manner in which you perceive them.

Hyl: I admit that. But doesn't my ·visual· sense deceive me in those cases, ·by telling me that sensible objects are at a distance when really they are not·?

Phil: By no means. Neither eyesight nor reason inform you that the idea or thing that you immediately perceive actually exists outside the mind. By eyesight you know only that you are affected with certain sensations of light and colours, etc. And you will not say that *these* are outside the mind.

Hyl: True; but all the same, don't you think that eyesight makes some suggestion of outerness or distance?

Phil: When you approach a distant object, do the visible size and shape keep changing, or do they appear the same at all distances?

Hyl: They are in a continual change.

Phil: So sight does not 'suggest' or in any way inform you that the visible object you immediately perceive exists at a distance, or that *it* will be perceived when you move further forward; because there is a continued *series* of visible objects succeeding each other during the whole time of your approach.

Hyl: I agree about that: but still I know, upon seeing an object, what object I shall see *after I have gone a certain distance*—never mind whether it is exactly the same object or not. So something about *distance* is still being suggested.

Phil: My dear Hylas, just think about that a little, and then tell me whether there is anything more to it than this:—From the ideas that you actually perceive by sight you have by experience learned to infer (in accordance with the general rules of nature) what other ideas you will experience after such and such a succession of time and motion.

Hyl: Upon the whole, I think that's what it comes down to.

Phil: Isn't it obvious that if a man born blind were suddenly enabled to see, he would start with no experience of what may be suggested by sight?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: So he would not, according to you, have any notion of *distance* linked to the things he saw. He would take the latter to be a new set of sensations existing only in his mind.

Hyl: That is undeniable.

Phil: But to make it still more plain: isn't distance a line running out from the eye?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: Can a line so situated be perceived by sight?

Hyl: It cannot.

Phil: So doesn't it follow that distance is not strictly and immediately perceived by sight?

Hyl: It seems so.

Phil: Again, do you think that colours are at a distance?

Hyl: I have to acknowledge that they are only in the mind.

Phil: But don't colours appear to the eye as coexisting at the same place as extension and shape?

Hyl: They do.

Phil: Then how can you conclude from the deliverances of sight that shapes do exist outside the mind, when you agree colours don't? The sensible appearances of both are the very same.

Hyl: I don't know what to answer.

Phil: Even if distance *were* truly and immediately perceived by the mind, it still wouldn't follow that it existed out of the mind. For whatever is immediately perceived is an idea; and can any idea exist out of the mind?

Hyl: It would be absurd to suppose so. But tell me, Philonous, can we perceive or know nothing except our ideas?

Phil: Set aside what we may know through the rational deducing of causes from effects; that is irrelevant to our enquiry. As for the senses: you are the best judge of whether you perceive anything that you do not immediately perceive. And I ask you, are the things you immediately perceive anything but your own sensations or ideas? In the course of this conversation you have more than once declared yourself on those two points; this latest question of yours seems to indicate that you have changed your mind.

Hyl: To tell you the truth, Philonous, I think there are two kinds of objects: one kind perceived immediately, and called 'ideas'; the other kind are real things or external objects perceived by the mediation of ideas, which resemble and represent them. Now I grant that ideas do not exist outside the mind; but the second sort of objects do. I am sorry I did not think of this distinction sooner; it would probably have cut short your discourse.

Phil: Are those external objects perceived by sense, or by some other faculty?

Hyl: They are perceived by sense.

Phil: What? Is there anything perceived by sense that isn't immediately perceived?

Hyl: Yes, Philonous, there is—in a way. For example, when I look at a picture or statue of Julius Caesar, I may be said to perceive him in a fashion (though not immediately) by my senses.

Phil: You seem to hold, then, that our ideas, which are all that we immediately perceive, are pictures of external things; and that the latter are also perceived by sense because they have a conformity or resemblance to our ideas.

Hyl: That is my meaning.

Phil: And in the same way that Julius Caesar, in himself invisible, is nevertheless perceived by sight, so also real things, in themselves imperceptible, are perceived by sense.

Hyl: In the very same way.

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, when you look at the picture of Julius Caesar, do you see with your eyes anything more than some colours and figures, with a certain symmetry and composition of the whole?

Hyl: Nothing else.

Phil: And would not a man who had never known anything about Julius Caesar see as much?

Hyl: He would.

Phil: So he has his sight, and the use of it, as perfectly as you have yours.

Hyl: I agree with you.

Phil: Then why are your thoughts directed to the Roman emperor while his are not? This cannot come from the sensations or ideas of sense that you perceive at that moment, for you have agreed that you have in that respect no advantage over the man who has never heard of Julius Caesar. So it seems that the direction of your thoughts comes from reason and memory—doesn't it?

Hyl: It does.

Phil: So that example of yours does not show that anything is perceived by sense which is not immediately perceived. I don't deny that we can be said in a certain sense to perceive sensible things *mediately* by sense: that is when the immediate perception of ideas by one sense suggests to the mind others, perhaps belonging to another sense, of a kind that have often been perceived to go with ideas of the former kind. For instance, when I hear a coach drive along the streets, all that I immediately perceive is the sound;

but from my past experience that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to 'hear the coach'. Still, it is obvious that in truth and strictness *nothing can be heard but sound*; and the coach in that example is not strictly perceived by sense but only suggested from experience. Similarly, when we are said to see a red-hot bar of iron; the solidity and heat of the iron are not the objects of sight, but are suggested to the imagination by the colour and shape that *are* strictly perceived by that sense. In short,

the only things that are *actually and strictly perceived* by any sense are the ones that would have been perceived even if we had only just acquired that sense and were using it for the first time.

As for other things, clearly they are only *suggested to the mind* by past experience. But to return to your comparison of imperceptible 'real things' with Caesar's picture: obviously, if you keep to that you'll have to hold that the real things which our ideas copy are perceived not by sense but by some internal faculty of the soul such as •reason or •memory. I would be interested to know what arguments •reason gives you for the existence of your 'real things' or material objects; or whether you •remember seeing them formerly not as copied by your ideas but as they are in themselves; or if you have heard or read of anyone else who did!

Hyl: I can see that you want to make fun of me, Philonous; but that will never convince me.

Phil: All I want is to learn from you how to come at the knowledge of material things. Whatever we perceive is perceived either immediately by sense, or mediately by reason and reflection. But you have excluded sense; so please show me what reason you have to believe in their existence, or what means you can possibly make use of to prove, to my understanding or your own, that they exist.

Hyl: To be perfectly frank, Philonous, now that I think about it I can't find any good reason for my position. But it seems pretty clear that it's at least *possible* that such things really exist; and as long as there is no absurdity in supposing them I shall continue in my belief until you bring good reasons to the contrary.

Phil: What? Has it come to this, that you believe in the existence of material objects, and that this belief is based on the mere *possibility* of its being true? Then you challenge me to bring reasons against it; though some people would think that the burden of proof lies with him who holds the affirmative position. Anyway, this very thesis that you are now determined to maintain without any reason is in effect one that you have—more than once during this conversation—seen good reason to give up. But let us set all that aside. If I understand you rightly, you say our ideas *do not* exist outside the mind, but that they are copies, likenesses, or representations of certain originals that *do*.

Hyl: You have me right.

Phil: Our ideas, then, are *like* external things.

Hyl: They are.

Phil: Do those external things have a stable and permanent nature independently of our senses; or do they keep changing as we move our bodies and do things with our faculties or organs of sense?

Hyl: Real things, obviously, have a fixed and real nature which remains the same through any changes in our senses or in how our bodies are placed or how they move. Such changes may indeed affect the ideas in our minds, but it would be absurd to think they had the same effect on things existing outside the mind.

Phil: How, then, can things that are perpetually fleeting and variable as our ideas are be copies or likenesses of any thing that is fixed and constant? Since all *sensible qualities*—size, shape, colour, etc.—that is, our *ideas*, are continually changing with every alteration in the distance, medium, or instruments of sensation, how can any fixed material object be properly represented or depicted by several distinct things or ideas, each of which is so unlike the others? Or if you say that the object resembles just one of our ideas, how can we distinguish that true copy from all the false ones?

Hyl: I have to admit, Philonous, that I am at a loss. I don't know what to say to this.

Phil: There is more. Are material objects in themselves perceptible or imperceptible?

Hyl: Properly and immediately nothing can be perceived but ideas. All material things, therefore, are in themselves insensible, and can be perceived only through ideas of them.

Phil: Ideas are sensible, then, and their originals—the things they are copies of—are insensible?

Hyl: Right.

Phil: But how can something that is sensible be *like* something that is insensible? Can a real thing, in itself invisible, be like a colour? Can a real thing that is not audible be like a sound? In a word, can anything be like a sensation or idea but another sensation or idea?

Hyl: I must admit that I think not.

Phil: Can there possibly be any doubt about this? Don't you perfectly know your own ideas?

Hyl: Yes, I know them perfectly; for something that I don't perceive or know can't be any part of my idea.

Phil: Well, then, examine your ideas, and then tell me if there is anything in them that could exist outside the mind, or if you can conceive anything *like* them existing outside the mind.

Hyl: Upon looking into it I find that I can't conceive or understand how anything but an idea can be like an idea. And it is most evident that no idea can exist outside the mind.

Phil: So you are forced by your own principles to deny the reality of sensible things, because you made it consist in an absolute existence outside the mind. That is to say, you are a downright sceptic. So I have met my target, which was to show that your principles lead to scepticism.

Hyl: For the present I am, if not entirely convinced, at least silenced.

Phil: I wonder what more you would require in order to be perfectly convinced. Haven't you been free to explain yourself in any way you liked? Were any little conversational slips held against you? Weren't you allowed to retract or reinforce anything you had previously said, as best served your purpose? Hasn't everything you could say been heard and examined with all the fairness imaginable? In a word, haven't you on every point been convinced out of your own mouth? And if you can now discover any flaw in any of your former concessions, or think of any remaining tactic, any new distinction, shading, or comment whatsoever, why don't you produce it?

Hyl: A little patience, Philonous. I am at present so bewildered to see myself entangled, and as it were imprisoned in the labyrinths you have led me into, that I can't be expected to find my way out on the spur of the moment. You must give me time to look around me, and recollect myself.

Phil: Listen—isn't that the college-bell? Let us go in, and meet here again to-morrow morning. In the mean time you can think about this morning's conversation, and see if you can find any fallacy in it, or invent any new means to extricate yourself.

Hyl: Agreed.

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Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous, in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists. By George Berkeley

THE THIRD DIALOGUE

Philonous: Tell me, Hylas, what has come of yesterday's meditation? Has it confirmed you in the views you held when we parted? Or has it given you cause to change your opinion?

Hylas: Truly my opinion is that all our opinions are equally useless and uncertain. What we approve today we condemn tomorrow. We make a fuss about knowledge, and spend our lives in the pursuit of it, yet all the time, alas! we know nothing; and I don't think we *can* ever know anything in this life. Our faculties are too narrow and too few. Nature certainly never intended us for speculation [= 'for the pursuit of true theories'].

Phil: What? You say we can know nothing, Hylas?

Hyl: There is not one single thing in the world whose real nature we can know.

Phil: Are you going to tell me that I don't really know what fire or water is?

Hyl: You may indeed know that fire appears hot, and water fluid; but that is merely knowing what sensations are produced in your own mind when fire or water is applied to your senseorgans. You are utterly in the dark as to their internal constitution, their true and real nature.

Phil: Don't I know that this is a real stone that I'm standing on, and that what I see before my eyes is a real tree?

Hyl: *Know?* No, it is impossible that you or any man alive should know it. All you *know* is that you have such and such an idea or appearance in your own mind. But what does that have to do with the real tree or stone? I tell you, the colour, shape, and hardness which you perceive are not the real natures of those things, or in the least like them. The same may be said of all other real things or corporeal substances that make up the world. None of them has in itself anything like those sensible qualities that we perceive. So we shouldn't claim to affirm or know anything about them as they are in their own nature.

Phil: But surely, Hylas, I can distinguish gold, for example, from iron. How could I do that if I didn't know what either truly was?

Hyl: Believe me, Philonous, you can only distinguish between your own ideas. That yellowness, that weight, and other sensible qualities—do you think that they are really in the gold? They are only relations to the senses, and have no absolute existence in nature. And in claiming to distinguish the species of real things on the basis of the appearances in your mind, you may be acting as foolishly as someone who inferred that two men were of a different species because their clothes were of different colours.

Phil: It seems, then, that we are fobbed off with the appearances of things, and false appearances at that. The food I eat and the clothes I wear have nothing in them that is like what I see and feel.

Hyl: Just so.

Phil: But isn't it strange that everyone should be thus deceived. and be so foolish as to believe their senses? And yet men (I don't know *how*) eat and drink and sleep and get on with their lives as comfortably and conveniently as if they really knew the things they have to deal with.

Hyl: They do so; but you know ordinary practical affairs don't require precise theoretical knowledge. So the common people can retain their mistakes and yet manage to bustle through the affairs of life. But philosophers know better things.

Phil: You mean, they know that they know nothing.

Hyl: That is the very peak and perfection of human knowledge.

Phil: But are you serious about all this, Hylas? Are you really convinced that you know nothing real in the world? If you were going to write, wouldn't you call for pen, ink, and paper, like anyone else? And wouldn't you know what it was you were calling for?

Hyl: How often must I tell you that I don't know the real nature of any single thing in the universe? It is true that I sometimes use pen, ink, and paper, but I declare positively that I do not know what any of them is in its own true nature. And the same is true with regard to every other corporeal thing. Furthermore, we are ignorant not only of the true and real nature of things but even of their existence. It can't be denied that we perceive certain appearances or ideas; but it can't be concluded from this that bodies really exist. Indeed, now that I think about it, my former concessions oblige me to declare that it is impossible that any real corporeal thing should exist in nature.

Phil: You amaze me! Was ever anything more wild and extravagant than the notions you now maintain? Isn't it evident that you are led into all these extravagances by the belief in *material substance*? It is what makes you dream of those unknown natures in every thing. It is this that leads to your distinguishing the reality of things from their sensible appearances. It is to this that you are indebted for being ignorant of what everyone else knows perfectly well. Nor is this all: you are ignorant not only of the true nature of every thing, but of whether any thing really exists, or whether there are any true natures at all; because you attribute to your 'material beings' an absolute or external existence and suppose that their reality consists in that. As you are eventually forced to admit that such an existence means either a direct contradiction or nothing at all, it follows that you are obliged to pull down your own hypothesis of material substance, and positively to deny the real existence of any part of the universe. And so you are plunged into the deepest and most deplorable scepticism that anyone ever suffered from. Tell me, Hylas, isn't that what has happened?

Hyl: Yes, it is. *Material substance* was no more than an hypothesis, and a false and groundless one too. I will no longer waste my breath defending it. But whatever •hypothesis you advance, whatever system you introduce in place of it, I am sure it will appear every bit as false, if you allow me to question you about it. Allow me to treat you as you have me, and I'll lead you through as many perplexities and contradictions to the very same state of scepticism that I myself am in at present.

Phil: I assure you, Hylas, I don't claim to formulate any •hypothesis at all. I have the common man's frame of mind; I am simple enough to believe my senses and to leave things as I find them. Here is what I think, in plain words. The real things are the very things I see and feel and perceive by my senses. I know these; and because I find that they satisfy all the needs and purposes of life, I have no reason to worry about any other unknown beings. A piece of sensible [= 'perceptible'] bread, for instance, would appease my hunger better than ten thousand times as much of that insensible, unintelligible, 'real' bread you speak of. It is also my opinion that colours and other sensible qualities are in the objects. I can't for the life of me help thinking that snow is white, and fire hot. You indeed, who by 'snow' and 'fire' mean certain external, unperceived, unperceiving substances, are right to deny whiteness or heat to be qualities inherent in them. But I, who understand by 'snow' and 'fire' the things I see and feel, am obliged to think as other folk do. And as I am no sceptic about •the nature of things, I am not a sceptic either about •their existence. That a thing should be really perceived by my senses, and at the same time not really exist, is to me a plain contradiction; since I cannot abstract, even in thought, the existence of a sensible thing from its being perceived. Wood, stones, fire, water, flesh, iron, and other such things that I name and talk about are things that I know. And I wouldn't have known them if I hadn't perceived them by my senses; and
 things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived; and
 things that are immediately perceived are ideas; and
 ideas can't exist outside the mind.

So it follows that

 the •existence of things I perceive by my senses consists in •being perceived.
 When they are actually perceived, therefore, there can be no doubt about their existence. Away, then, with all that scepticism, all those ridiculous philosophical doubts! What a joke is it for a philosopher to question the existence of sensible things until it is proved to him from the truthfulness of God, or to claim that our knowledge about this falls short of the knowledge we have of things that are obviously self-evident or rigorously proved. I might as well doubt my own existence as the existence of the things that I actually see and feel.

Hyl: Not so fast, Philonous! You say that you can't conceive how sensible things should exist outside the mind—don't you?

Phil: I do.

Hyl: Supposing you were annihilated, can't you conceive it to be possible that things perceivable by sense might still exist?

Phil: I can; but then it must be in another mind. When I say that sensible things can't exist out of the mind, I don't mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now, they clearly have an existence exterior to *my* mind, since I find by experience that they are independent of it. There is therefore some *other* mind in which they exist during the intervals between the times when I perceive them; as likewise they did before my birth, and would do after my supposed annihilation. And as the same is true with regard to all other finite created minds, it necessarily follows that there is an *omnipresent, eternal Mind* which knows and comprehends all things, and lets us experience them in a certain manner according to rules that he himself has ordained and that we call the 'laws of nature'. [Although 'comprehends' can mean 'understands', here it probably means 'includes'—all things are known by, and are *in*, the mind of God. When Philonous uses 'comprehend' on page 46, he says that that's what he means.]

Hyl: Tell me, Philonous: are all our ideas perfectly inert beings? Or have they any agency included in them?

Phil: They are altogether passive and inert.

Hyl: And is not God an agent, a being purely active?

Phil: I agree.

Hyl: So an idea cannot be like God, or represent his nature.

Phil: It cannot.

Hyl: •If you have no idea of the mind of God, how can you conceive it to be possible that things exist in his mind? ·That is, if you have no idea of his mind, how can you have any thought about his mind?· On the other hand, •if you can have a thought about the mind of God without having an idea of him, then why can't I conceive the existence of matter without having an idea of it?

Phil: I acknowledge that strictly speaking I have no idea either of God or any other spirit; for these, being active, can't be represented by things that are perfectly inert, as our ideas are. Still, even though I have no idea of myself because I am a spirit or thinking substance, *I know that I exist*. I know this, indeed, as certainly as I know that my ideas exist. I also know what I mean by the terms 'I' and 'myself'; and I know this immediately or intuitively, though I don't perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour or a sound. The mind (spirit, soul) is the indivisible and unextended thing that thinks, acts and perceives. It is indivisible because it is unextended; and it is unextended because the only extended, shaped, movable things are ideas; and something that *perceives* ideas, and that thinks and wills, clearly can't itself *be* an idea. Ideas are inactive things which are perceived: and spirits are things of a totally different sort. So I deny that my soul is an idea, or like an idea. However, my soul can be said to furnish me with an 'idea' of God in a broad sense of the word 'idea'—that is, an image or likeness of God, though indeed an extremely inadequate one. I get my notion of God by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its

powers and removing its imperfections. My basic thought of God, therefore, is the thought of ‘a thing that is *like me* except . . .’ and so on. So although I have no inert idea of God in my mind, I do have in myself a kind of active image of him because I myself *am* an image = likeness of him. And though I do not perceive him by sense, still I have a *notion* of him, which is to say that I know him by reflection and reasoning. I immediately know my own mind and my own ideas; and these give me, in an indirect way, a grasp of the possibility that other spirits and ideas exist. Further, from the fact that I exist and the fact that I find that my ideas of sense are not caused by me, I reason my way to the unavoidable conclusion that a God exists and that all created things exist in his mind. So much for your first question. By this time you can probably answer your second question for yourself. I have shown that there are four different ways in which things can come before the mind, and none of them is a way in which matter could come before your mind. (i) You don’t perceive matter by mentally representing it, as you do an inactive being or idea; (ii) nor do you know it, as you know yourself, by an act of mentally attending to yourself. (iii) You don’t understand it indirectly, through a resemblance between it and either your ideas or yourself; and (iv) you don’t bring it into your mind by reasoning from what you know immediately. All of this makes the case of matter widely different from that of the Deity, because your knowledge of him involves (iii) and (iv).

Hyl: You say that your own soul supplies you with a kind of idea or image of God; but you admit that strictly speaking you have no idea of your soul. You even assert that spirits are utterly different in kind from ideas, which means that no idea can be *like* a spirit, which implies that there can be no idea of a spirit. So you have no idea of spiritual substance, yet you insist that spiritual substance exists. On the other hand, from your having no idea or notion of material substance you infer that material substance does not exist. Is that fair? To be consistent you should either admit matter or reject spirit. What do you say to this?

Phil: My answer falls into three parts. (1) I do not deny the existence of material substance merely because I have no notion of it, but because the notion of it is inconsistent—to have a notion of it would involve a self-contradiction. For all I know to the contrary, there may exist many things of which none of us has or can have any idea or notion whatsoever. But such things must be possible, that is, nothing inconsistent must be included in their definition. (2) Although we believe in the existence of some things that we don’t perceive, we ought not to believe that any particular thing exists without some reason for thinking so; but I have no reason for believing in the existence of matter. I have no immediate intuition of it; and I can’t infer it—rigorously or even by probable inference—from my sensations, ideas, notions, actions or passions. In contrast with this, I undeniably know by reflection the existence of myself, that is, my own soul, mind, or source of thought. You will forgive me if I repeat the same things in answer to the same objections. The notion or definition of material substance includes an obvious inconsistency, and that is not so for the notion of spirit. That ideas should exist in something that doesn’t perceive, or be produced by something that doesn’t act, is inconsistent. But there is no inconsistency in saying that a perceiving thing is the subject of ideas, or that an active thing causes them. I concede that the existence of other finite spirits is not immediately evident to us, nor have we any way of rigorously proving it; but

that doesn't put such spirits on a level with material substances, because there are the following three differences. •It is inconsistent to suppose there is matter, but not to suppose there are finite spirits; •there is no argument for matter, while there are probable reasons in favour of spirits; •there are no signs or symptoms that make it reasonable to believe in matter, but we see signs and effects indicating that there are other finite agents like ourselves. (3) Although I don't have an idea of spirit, if 'idea' is used strictly, I do have a notion of it. I do not perceive it as an idea, or by means of an idea, but I know it by reflection on myself.

Hyl: Despite all that you have said, it seems to me that according to your own way of thinking, and by your own principles, you should conclude that you are only a system of floating ideas without any substance to support them. Words should not be used without a meaning; and as there is no more meaning in 'spiritual substance' than in 'material substance', the former is to be exploded as well as the latter.

Phil: How often must I repeat it? I know or am conscious of my own existence; and I know that I myself am not my ideas but something else—a thinking, active principle [here = 'force or source of energy'] which perceives, knows, wills and operates on ideas. I know that I, one and the same self, perceive both colours and sounds; that a colour cannot perceive a sound, nor a sound a colour; and therefore that I am one individual thing, distinct from colour and sound and (for the same reason) distinct from all other sensible things and inert ideas. But I am not in the same way conscious of either the existence or the essence of matter. On the contrary, I know that nothing inconsistent can exist, and that the existence of matter implies an inconsistency. Furthermore, I know what I mean when I assert that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas, that is, that a spirit knows and perceives ideas. But I do not know what people mean when they say that an unperceiving substance contains and supports either ideas or items of which ideas are copies. So there is no significant likeness between spirit and matter.

Hyl: I admit to being satisfied about this. But do you seriously think that the real existence of sensible things consists in their being actually perceived? If so, how does it come about that all mankind distinguish between them? Ask the first man you meet, and he'll tell you that to *be perceived* is one thing and to *exist* is another.

Phil: I am content, Hylas, to appeal to the common sense of the world for the truth of my view. Ask the gardener why he thinks that cherry tree over there exists in the garden, and he will tell you, because he sees and feels it—in short, because he perceives it by his senses. Ask him why he thinks there is no orange-tree there, and he will tell you, because he does not perceive one. When he perceives something by sense, he terms it a real thing and says that it exists; and anything that is not perceivable he says does not exist.

Hyl: Yes, Philonous, I agree that the existence of a sensible thing consists in being *perceivable*, but not in being *actually perceived*.

Phil: And what is perceivable but an idea? And can an idea exist without being actually perceived? These are points long since agreed between us.

Hyl: However true your view is, you must admit that it is shocking, and contrary to the common sense of men. Ask your gardener whether that tree has an existence out of his mind; what answer do you think he would give you?

Phil: The same answer that *I* would give, namely, that it does exist out of his mind. But then surely to a Christian it can't be shocking to say that the real tree existing outside his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, exists in) the infinite mind of God. Probably the gardener won't at first glance be aware of the direct and immediate proof there is of this—namely that the very existence of a tree or any other perceptible thing implies a mind that contains it. But the point itself is one that he can't deny. What is at issue between the materialists and me is not whether things have a real existence outside the mind of this or that person, but whether they exist outside *all* minds, having an existence that does not involve being perceived by God. Some heathens and philosophers have indeed affirmed this, but anyone whose notions of God are appropriate to the holy scriptures will think differently

Hyl: But how, according to your views, do real things differ from chimeras formed by the imagination or the visions of a dream, since according to you they are all equally in the mind?

Phil: The ideas formed by the imagination are faint and indistinct; also, they are entirely dependent on the will. But the ideas perceived by sense—that is, real things—are more vivid and clear, and they don't in that way depend on our will, because they are imprinted on our mind by a spirit other than us. So there is no danger of mixing up these real things with the foregoing ideas formed by the imagination, and equally little danger of failing to distinguish them from the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused. And even if dreams were very lively and natural, they could easily be distinguished from realities by their not being coherently connected with the preceding and subsequent episodes of our lives. In short, whatever method you use to distinguish things from chimeras is obviously available to me too. For any such method must, I presume, be based on some *perceived* difference, and I don't want to deprive you of any one thing that you perceive.

Hyl: But still, Philonous, you hold that there is nothing in the world but spirits and ideas. You must admit that this sounds very odd.

Phil: I agree that the word 'idea', not being commonly used for 'thing', sounds a little peculiar. I used it because it implies a necessary relation to the mind; and it is now commonly used by philosophers to stand for the immediate objects of the understanding. But however odd the proposition may sound in words, there is nothing very strange or shocking in what it means, which in effect amounts merely to this: that there are only perceiving things and perceived things; or that every unthinking being is necessarily—from the very nature of its existence—perceived by some mind, if not by any finite created mind then certainly by the infinite mind of God, in whom 'we live, and move, and have our being'. Is this as strange as to say that sensible qualities are not in the

objects? Or that we can't be sure of the existence of things, or know anything of their real natures, although we see and feel them and perceive them by all our senses?

Hyl: Don't we have to infer from this that there are no such things as physical or corporeal causes, but that a spirit is the immediate cause of all the phenomena in nature? Can there be anything more extravagant than this?

Phil: Yes, it is infinitely more extravagant to say that an *inert* thing *operates* on the mind, and an *unperceiving* thing causes our *perceptions*. Anyway, the view that you for some reason find so extravagant is no more than the holy scriptures assert in a hundred places. In them God is represented as the sole and immediate cause of all those effects that some heathens and philosophers customarily attribute to nature, matter, fate, or some such unthinking agent. There is no need for me to support this with particular citations—scripture is full of it.

Hyl: You are not aware, Philonous, that in making God the immediate cause of all the motions in nature you make him the author of murder, sacrilege, adultery, and the like heinous sins.

Phil: In answer to that, I remark first that a person's guilt is the same whether he performs an action with or without an instrument. So if you think that God acts through the mediation of an instrument or 'occasion' called *matter*, you make him the author of sin just as much as I do through my view that he is *immediate* agent in all those operations that common people ascribe to 'nature'. I further remark that sin or wickedness does not consist in the outward physical action or movement, but in something internal—the will's departing from the laws of reason and religion. This is clearly so, from the fact that killing an enemy in a battle or putting a criminal legally to death is not thought sinful, although the outward acts are exactly the same as in murder. Sin therefore does not consist in the physical action, so making God an immediate cause of all such actions is not making him the author of sin. Lastly, I have nowhere said that God is the only agent who produces all the motions in bodies. True, I have denied there are any agents other than spirits; but this is quite consistent with assigning to thinking, rational beings the use of limited powers in the production of motions. These powers are indeed ultimately derived from God, but they are immediately under the direction of the beings' own wills, and that is sufficient to entitle them to all the guilt of their actions.

Hyl: But denying matter, Philonous, or corporeal substance! There is the ·sticking· point. You can never persuade me that this is not in conflict with the universal sense of mankind. If our dispute were to be settled by majority vote, I am confident that you would surrender without counting the votes.

Phil: I would like both our positions to be fairly stated and submitted to the judgment of men who had plain common sense, without the prejudices of a learned education. Let me be represented as one who trusts his senses, who thinks he knows the things he sees and feels, and has no doubts about their existence; and you fairly present yourself, armed with all your doubts, your paradoxes, and your scepticism; and I shall willingly accept the

decision of any unbiased person. To me it is obvious that •spirit is the only substance in which ideas can exist. And everyone agrees that •the objects we immediately perceive are ideas. And no-one can deny that •sensible qualities are objects that we immediately perceive. It is therefore evident there can be no *substratum* of those qualities but spirit, in which they exist—not in the manner of a quality or property, but in the way that a thing perceived is *in* the thing that perceives it. So I deny that there is any unthinking substratum of the objects of sense, and that is the meaning of my denial that there is any material substance. But if by ‘material substance’ is meant only *sensible body*, that which is seen and felt (and I dare say that unphilosophical people mean no more), then I am more certain of matter’s existence than you or any other philosopher claim to be. If there is anything that turns people in general off from the views that I support, it is the mistaken idea that I deny the reality of sensible things. But it is you who are guilty of that, not I, so what they are really hostile to are your notions, not mine. I do therefore assert—as something I am as certain of as I am of my own existence—that there are bodies or corporeal substances (meaning the things I perceive by my senses). Most people will agree with this, and will neither think nor care about the fate of those unknown natures and essences that some men are so fond of.

Hyl: What do you say to this? Since, according to you, men judge the reality of things by their senses, how can a man be mistaken in thinking that the moon is a plain shining surface, about a foot in diameter; or that a square tower seen at a distance is round; or that an oar with one end in the water is crooked?

Phil: He is mistaken not with regard to the ideas he actually perceives, but in what he infers from his present perceptions. Thus in the case of the oar, what he immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked; and to that extent he is right. But if he infers from this that when he takes the oar out of the water he will see the same crookedness, or that it will affect his sense of touch as crooked things usually do, in that he is mistaken. Likewise, if from what he perceives in one place he infers that if he moves closer to the moon or tower he will still experience similar ideas, he is mistaken. But his mistake lies not in what he perceives immediately and at present (for it is a manifest contradiction to suppose he could err about that), but in the wrong judgment he makes concerning •the ideas he thinks to be connected with the ones he immediately perceives; or concerning •the ideas that—judging by what he perceives at present—he thinks would be perceived in other circumstances. The case is the same with regard to the Copernican system. We don’t perceive any motion of the earth while we are standing on it; but it would be wrong to infer from this that if we were placed at as great a distance from earth as we are now from the other planets we would not *then* perceive the earth’s motion.

Hyl: I understand you; and I have to admit that what you say is plausible enough. Still, let me remind you of something. Tell me, Philonous, weren’t you formerly as sure that matter exists as you are now that it does not?

Phil: I was. But here lies the difference. Before, my confidence was uncritically based upon prejudice; but my confidence now, after enquiry, rests upon evidence.

Hyl: After all, it seems that our dispute is about words rather than things. We agree in the thing, but differ in the name. It is obvious that we are affected with ideas from outside ourselves; and it is equally obvious that there must be powers outside the mind corresponding to those ideas (I do not say *resembling* them). And as these powers cannot exist by themselves, we have to postulate some subject of them—some *thing* that *has* the powers—which I call ‘matter’, and you call ‘spirit’. This is all the difference.

Phil: Hylas, is that powerful being, or subject of powers, extended?

Hyl: It is not; but it has the power to cause the idea of extension in you.

Phil: In itself, therefore, it is unextended.

Hyl: I grant it.

Phil: Is it not also active?

Hyl: Without doubt: otherwise, how could we attribute powers to it?

Phil: Now let me ask you two questions. First, does it conform to the usage of philosophers or of non-philosophers to give the name ‘matter’ to an unextended active being? Second, isn’t it ridiculously absurd to misapply names contrary to the common use of language?

Hyl: Well, then, let it not be called ‘matter’, since you insist, but some *third nature* distinct from matter and spirit. For, what reason do you have to call it ‘spirit’? Doesn’t the notion of *spirit* imply that it is thinking as well as active and unextended?

Phil: My reason is as follows. I want to have some notion or meaning in what I say; but **I have no notion of any action other than volition**, and I can’t conceive of volition as being anywhere but in a spirit; so when I speak of an active being, I am obliged to mean a spirit. Besides, it is quite obvious that a thing that can impart ideas to me must have ideas in itself; and if a thing has ideas, surely it must be a spirit. I shall state the case differently, to enable you to understand the point still more clearly, if that is possible. I assert, as you do, that since we are affected from outside ourselves we must accept that there are powers outside us in some being that is distinct from ourselves. Up to here we are in agreement; but then we differ about what kind of powerful being it is. I say it is spirit; you say that it is matter or else some third kind of thing—I don’t know of what kind, and nor do you! Here is how I prove it to be spirit. •From the effects I see produced, I infer that there are actions; so there are volitions; so there must be a *will*. Again, •the things I perceive (or things they are copied from) must exist outside my mind: but because they are ideas, neither they nor things they are copied from can exist otherwise than in an understanding; there is therefore an *understanding*. •But will and understanding constitute in the strictest sense a mind or spirit. The powerful cause of my ideas is, therefore, something that it is strictly proper to call ‘a spirit’.

Hyl: I suppose you think you have made the point very clear, little suspecting that what you propose leads directly to a contradiction. It is an absurdity to imagine any imperfection in God, is it not?

Phil: Without doubt.

Hyl: To suffer pain is an imperfection.

Phil: It is.

Hyl: Are we not sometimes affected with pain and discomfort by some being other than ourselves?

Phil: We are.

Hyl: And haven't you said that that being is a spirit, and is not that spirit God?

Phil: I agree.

Hyl: But you have asserted that any ideas that we perceive from outside ourselves are in the mind that affects us. It follows that the ideas of pain and discomfort are in God; or, in other words, God suffers pain. That is to say that there is an imperfection in the divine nature, which you agreed was absurd. So you are caught in a plain contradiction.

Phil: I do not question that God knows or understands all things, including knowing what pain is; he even knows every sort of painful sensation, and what it is for his creatures to suffer pain. But I positively deny that God, though he knows and sometimes causes painful sensations in us, can himself suffer pain. We who are limited and dependent spirits are liable to sensory impressions - caused by an external agent and produced against our wills—that are sometimes painful and distressing. But God cannot suffer anything, or be affected with any painful sensation, or indeed with any sensation at all, because: •no external being can affect him, •he perceives nothing by sense as we do, •his will is absolute and independent, causing all things and incapable of being thwarted or resisted by anything. We are chained to a body; that is to say, our perceptions are connected with bodily motions. By the law of our nature we undergo changes ·in our minds· with every alteration in the nervous parts of our sensible [= 'perceptible'] body; this sensible body is really nothing but a complex of qualities or ideas that have no existence other than through being perceived by a mind; so that this connection of sensations with bodily motions comes down to a mere correspondence in the order of nature between two sets of ideas or immediately perceivable things—the set of ideas perceived by someone's mind, and the set constituting his body·. In contrast with this, God is a pure spirit, disengaged from all such correspondences or linkages according to laws of nature. No bodily motions are accompanied by sensations of pain or pleasure in his mind. To know everything knowable is certainly a perfection; but to endure, or suffer, or feel anything through the senses is an imperfection. The former, I repeat, fits God, but not the latter. God knows or has ideas; but his ideas are not conveyed to him by sense as ours are. What

led you to think you saw an absurdity where really there is none was your failure to attend to this obvious difference between God and his creatures.

Hyl: ·There is a well established scientific result which implies the existence of matter, and you have ignored it·. Throughout all this you have not considered the fact that the quantity of matter has been *demonstrated* [= ‘rigorously proved’] to be proportional to the gravity of bodies. And what can stand up against the force of a demonstration?

Phil: Let me see how you demonstrate that point.

Hyl: I lay it down for a principle that the *quantities of motion* in bodies are directly proportional to their *velocities* and the *quantities of matter* contained in them. When the velocities of two bodies are equal, therefore, their quantities of motion are directly proportional to the quantity of matter in each. But it has been found by experience that all bodies (not counting small inequalities arising from the resistance of the air) fall with an equal velocity; and so the motion of falling bodies (and consequently their gravity, which is the cause or source of that motion) is proportional to the quantity of matter they contain; which is what I was to demonstrate.

Phil: You lay it down as a self-evident principle that the quantity of motion in any body is proportional to the velocity and *matter* taken together; and this is used to prove a proposition from which the existence of *matter* is inferred. Isn’t this arguing in a circle?

Hyl: In the premise I only mean that the *motion* is proportional to the *velocity* jointly with the *extension and solidity*, ·so I don’t need to use the term ‘matter’ in the premise·.

Phil: But even if this is true, it doesn’t imply that gravity is proportional to *matter* in your philosophical sense of the word. To get that conclusion you have to take it for granted ·in your premise· that your unknown substratum or whatever else you call it is proportional to those sensible qualities (·velocity and quantity of motion·); but to suppose *that* is plainly assuming what was to be proved. I readily grant that there is size and solidity (or resistance) perceived by the senses; and I shan’t dispute the claim that gravity is proportional to those qualities. What I *do* deny is that these qualities as perceived by us, or the powers producing them, exist in a material substratum. You affirm this, but despite your ‘demonstration’ you haven’t yet proved it.

Hyl: I shan’t press that point any further. Do you expect, though, to persuade me that natural scientists have been dreaming all through the years? What becomes of all their hypotheses and explanations of the phenomena, which presuppose the existence of matter?

Phil: What do you mean by ‘the phenomena’?

Hyl: I mean the appearances that I perceive by my senses.

Phil: And the appearances perceived by the senses—aren’t they ideas?

Hyl: I have told you so a hundred times.

Phil: Therefore, to 'explain the phenomena' is to show how we come to be affected with ideas in the particular manner and order in which they are imprinted on our senses. Is it not?

Hyl: It is.

Phil: Now, if you can prove that any scientist has explained the production of any one idea in our minds with the help of *matter*, I shall capitulate, and regard all that I have said against matter as nothing; but if you can't, you will get nowhere by urging the explanation of phenomena. It is easy to understand that a being endowed with knowledge and will should produce or display ideas; but I can never understand how a being that is utterly destitute of knowledge and will could produce ideas or in any way to affect a mind. Even if we had some positive conception of matter, knew its qualities, and could comprehend its existence, it would still be so far from *explaining* things that it would itself be the most inexplicable thing in the world. From all this, however, it doesn't follow that scientists have been doing nothing; for by observing and reasoning about connections of ideas they discover the laws and methods of nature, which is a useful and interesting branch of knowledge.

Hyl: All the same, can it be supposed God would deceive all mankind? Do you imagine that he would have induced the whole world to believe in the existence of matter if there was no such thing?

Phil: I don't think you will affirm that *every* widespread opinion arising from prejudice, or passion, or thoughtlessness, may be blamed on God as the author of it. We are not entitled to lay at his door an opinion of ours unless either he has shown it to us by supernatural revelation or it is so evident to our natural faculties, which were formed and given to us by God, that we couldn't possibly withhold our assent from it. But where is the supernatural revelation of matter, or where is the evidence that compels us to believe in it? Indeed, what is the evidence that matter, taken for something distinct from what we perceive by our senses, *is* thought to exist by all mankind, or indeed by any except a few philosophers who don't know what they are saying? Your question presupposes that these points are clear. When you have made them so, I shall regard myself as obliged to give you another answer. In the meantime let it suffice that I tell you that I do not suppose that God has deceived mankind at all.

Hyl: But the novelty, Philonous, the novelty! There lies the danger. New notions should always be discouraged; they unsettle men's minds, and nobody knows what they will lead to.

Phil: I can't imagine why rejecting a notion that has no basis in sense, or in reason, or in divine authority, should be thought to unsettle men's hold on beliefs that are grounded on all or any of these. I freely grant that new opinions about government and religion are

dangerous, and ought to be discountenanced. But is there any such reason why they should be discouraged in philosophy? Making anything known that was unknown before introduces a new opinion; and if all such new opinions had been forbidden, what a notable progress men would have made in the arts and sciences! But it is not my concern to plead for novelties and paradoxes. •That the qualities we perceive are not in the objects;

- that we must not believe our senses;
- that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be assured even that they exist;
- that real colours and sounds are nothing but certain unknown shapes and motions;
- that motions are in themselves neither swift nor slow;
- that bodies have absolute extensions, without any particular size or shape;
- that a stupid, thoughtless, and inactive thing operates on a spirit;
- that the tiniest particle of a body contains innumerable extended parts.

These are the novelties, these are the strange notions which shock the genuine uncorrupted judgment of all mankind and, having once been accepted, embarrass the mind with endless doubts and difficulties. And it is against these and their like that I try to vindicate common sense. It is true that in doing this I may have to express myself in some roundabout ways and to use uncommon turns of speech; but once my notions are thoroughly understood, what is strangest in them will be found to come down merely to this: *it is absolutely impossible, and a plain contradiction to suppose, that any unthinking being should exist without being perceived by a mind.* And if this view is found to be strange, it is a shame that it should be so in our age and in a Christian country.

Hyl: I shan't question what you say about the difficulties that other opinions may be liable to; ·but· it is your business to defend your own opinion. Can anything be more obvious than that you support changing all things into ideas? Yes, *you*, who are not ashamed to charge me with scepticism! This is so obvious that there is no denying it.

Phil: You have me wrong. What I support is not changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things; since those immediate objects of perception which you say are only appearances of things are what I take to be the real things themselves.

Hyl: Things! Say what you like, it is certain that you leave us with nothing but the empty forms of things, the outside only which strikes the senses.

Phil: What you call the 'empty forms' and 'outside' of things seem to me to be the things themselves. And they are not empty or incomplete, except on your supposition that *matter* is an essential part of all bodily things. So you and I agree that we perceive only sensible forms; but we differ in that you maintain them to be empty appearances, while I think they are real beings. In short, you don't trust your senses, I do trust mine.

Hyl: You say that you believe your senses, and you seem to congratulate yourself on agreeing with common people about this. According to you, therefore, the true nature of a thing is discovered by the senses. If so, what is the source of the sensory disagreement

·that we experience·? Why do different ways of perceiving—e.g. sight and touch—indicate different shapes for the same object? And if the true nature of a body can be discovered by the naked eye, why should a microscope enable us to know it better?

Phil: Strictly speaking, Hylas, we don't see the same object that we feel; and the object perceived through the microscope is not the same one that was perceived by the naked eye. But if every variation were thought sufficient to constitute a new kind or new individual, language would be made useless by the sheer number of names or by confusions amongst them. Therefore, to avoid this and other inconveniences which are obvious upon a little thought, men in their thought and language treat as *one thing* a number of ideas that are observed to have some connection in nature (either occurring together or in sequence), although the ideas are certainly distinct from one another, because they are perceived through different senses, or through one sense at different times or in different circumstances. So when I see a thing and then proceed to examine it by my other senses, I'm not trying to understand better the same object that I had seen. It can't be, because the object of one sense can't be perceived by the other senses. And when I look through a microscope, it is not so as to perceive more clearly what I had already perceived with my bare eyes, because the objects perceived in these two ways are quite different from one another. In each case, all I want is to know what ideas are connected together; and the more a man knows of the *connection of ideas* the more he is said to know of the *nature of things*. If our ideas are variable, and our senses are not always affected with the same appearances—what of it? It doesn't follow that they are not to be trusted, or that they are inconsistent either with themselves or with anything else, except for your preconceived notion that each name stands for I know not what single, unchanged, unperceivable 'real nature'; a prejudice that seems to have arisen from a failure to understand the common language that people use when speaking of *several distinct ideas* as united into *one thing* by the mind. There is reason to suspect that other erroneous views of the philosophers are due to the same source: they founded their theories not so much on *notions* as on *words*, which were invented by the common people merely for convenience and efficiency in the common actions of life, without any regard to theories.

Hyl: I think I follow you.

Phil: You hold that the ideas we perceive by our senses are not real things but images or copies of them. So our knowledge is real only to the extent that our ideas are the true representations of those originals. But as these supposed originals (·or real things·) are in themselves unknown, we cannot know how far our ideas resemble them, or indeed whether they resemble them at all. We cannot, therefore, be sure that we have any real knowledge. Furthermore, while the supposed real things remain unchanged our ideas keep changing; so they can't *all* be true copies of the real things; and if some are and others are not, we can't tell which are which. This plunges us yet deeper into uncertainty. Again, when we think about it we can't conceive how any idea, *or anything like an idea*, could have an absolute existence out of any mind; from which it follows, according to your views, that we can't conceive how there should be any *real thing* in nature because you say that real things are like ideas. The result of all this is that we are hopelessly lost

in scepticism. Now let me ask you four questions. First, •doesn't all this scepticism arise from your relating ideas to certain absolutely existing unperceived substances, as their originals? Secondly, •are you informed, either by sense or reason, of the existence of those unknown originals? And if you are not, isn't it absurd to suppose that they exist? Thirdly, •when you look into it, do you find that there is anything distinctly conceived or meant by the *absolute or external existence of unperceiving substances*? Lastly, •having considered the premises ·that I have put to you·, isn't it wisest to follow nature, trust your senses, lay aside all anxious thought about unknown natures or substances, and join the common people in taking the things that are perceived by the senses to be real things?

Hyl: Just now I am not inclined to answer your questions. I would much rather see how you can answer mine. Aren't the objects perceived by one person's senses also perceivable by others who are present? If there were a hundred more people here, they would all see the garden, the trees, and flowers as I see them. But they do not experience in the same way the ideas that I form in my imagination. Doesn't this make a difference between the former sort of objects and the latter?

Phil: I agree that it does; and I have never denied that the objects of sense are different from those of imagination. But what would you infer from this? You can't say that sensible objects exist unperceived because they are perceived by many people.

Hyl: I admit that I can't make anything of that objection ·of mine·; but it has led me to another. Isn't it your opinion that all we perceive through our senses are the ideas existing in our minds?

Phil: It is.

Hyl: But the idea that is in my mind can't be in yours, or in any other mind. So doesn't it follow from your principles that no two people can see the same thing? And isn't this highly absurd?

Phil: If the term 'same' be given its common meaning, it is certain (and not at all in conflict with the principles I maintain) that different persons may perceive the same thing; and that the same thing or idea can exist in different minds. The meanings of words are assigned by us; and since men customarily apply the word 'same' where no distinction or variety *is perceived*, and I do not claim to alter their perceptions, it follows that as men have sometimes said 'Several people saw the same thing', they may continue to talk like that in similar situations, without deviating either from correctness of language or the truth of things. But if the term 'same' is used in a meaning given to it by philosophers who claim to have an *abstracted notion of identity*, then in *that* sense it may or may not be possible for different people to perceive the same thing—depending on their various definitions of this notion (for it is not yet agreed what that philosophical identity consists in). But whether philosophers shall think fit to call a thing 'the same' or not is of small importance, I think. Let us suppose a group of men together, all having the same faculties and consequently affected in similar ways by their senses, but with no use of language. There is no doubt that they would agree in their perceptions. But when they

came to the use of speech, they might go different ways in their use of 'same'. Some of them, impressed by the uniformness of what was perceived, might speak of 'the same thing'; while others, struck by the diversity of the people whose perceptions were in question, might speak of 'different things'. But can't anyone see that all the dispute is about a word—namely, a dispute over whether what is perceived by different people can have the term 'same' applied to it? Or suppose a house whose outer walls remain unaltered while the rooms are all pulled down and new ones built in their place. If you were to say that we still have 'the same' house, and I said it was not the same, wouldn't we nevertheless perfectly agree in our *thoughts* about the house considered in itself? Wouldn't all the difference consist in a sound? If you were to say that in that case we *do* differ in our notions, because your idea of the house includes the simple abstracted idea of *identity* whereas mine does not, I would tell you that I don't know what you mean by that 'abstracted idea of identity'; and I would invite you to look into your own thoughts, and be sure that you understood yourself.—Why so silent, Hylas? Are you not yet satisfied that men can dispute about identity and nonidentity without any real difference in their thoughts and opinions, apart from names? Take this further thought with you: that this point still stands, whether matter exists or not. For the materialists themselves admit that what we immediately perceive by our senses are our own ideas. So your difficulty—that no two see the same thing—holds as much against the materialists as against me.

Hyl: But they suppose that an idea represents and copies an external thing, and they can say truly that several people 'perceive the same thing' meaning that their ideas all copy a single external thing.

Phil: You earlier gave up on those things that ideas were said to copy; but let that pass. Anyway, on my principles also you can suppose that ideas are copies of something external—by which I mean external to one's own mind, though indeed it must be supposed to exist in that mind which includes all things. This thing-that-is-copied serves all the ends of identity—providing a basis for saying 'they perceived the same thing'—as well as if it existed out of a mind. And I am sure you won't say that it is less intelligible than the other.

Hyl: You have indeed clearly satisfied me that there is basically no difficulty in this point; or that if there is, it counts equally against both opinions.

Phil: But something that counts equally against two contradictory opinions can't be a disproof of either of them.

Hyl: I agree. But after all, Philonous, when I consider the substance of what you say against scepticism, it amounts to no more than this: *We are sure that we really see, hear, feel; in a word, we are sure that we are affected with sensible impressions.*

Phil: And what more should we be concerned with? I see this cherry, I feel it, I taste it; and I am sure *nothing* cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted; so the cherry is not *nothing* and it is therefore real. Take away the sensations of softness, moisture, redness, tartness, and you take away the cherry. Since it is not a thing distinct from sensations, a cherry—I

repeat—is nothing but a heap of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by various senses. These ideas are united into one thing (or have one name given to them) by the mind, because they are observed to accompany each other. Thus when the palate is affected with a certain taste, the sight is affected with a red colour, the sense of touch with roundness, softness, etc. Thus, when I see and feel and taste in certain particular ways, I am sure that the cherry exists, or is real; because I don't think its reality is anything apart from those sensations. But if by the word 'cherry' you mean an unknown nature distinct from all those sensible qualities, and by its 'existence' you mean something distinct from its being perceived, then indeed I agree that neither you nor I nor anyone else can be sure that it exists.

Hyl: But what would you say, Philonous, if I brought the very same reasons against the existence of sensible things *in a mind* that you have offered against their existing *in a material substratum*?

Phil: When I see your reasons I'll tell you what I have to say to them.

Hyl: Is the mind extended or unextended?

Phil: Unextended, without doubt.

Hyl: Do you say the things you perceive are *in* your mind?

Phil: They are.

Hyl: Again, have I not heard you speak of sensible *impressions*?

Phil: I believe you may have.

Hyl: Explain to me now, Philonous, how there can possibly be room for all those trees and houses to exist *in* your mind! Can extended things be contained in something that has no size because it is unextended? And are we to imagine *impressions* made on a thing that has no solidity? Obviously not! You can't say that objects are *in* your mind as books are *in* your study; or that things are impressed or *imprinted* on your mind as the shape of a seal is *imprinted* on wax. In what sense therefore are we to understand those expressions? Explain this to me if you can; and I shall then be able to answer all those questions you earlier put to me about my substratum.

Phil: Come on, Hylas! When I speak of objects as existing 'in' the mind or 'imprinted' on the senses, I don't mean these in the crude literal sense, as when bodies are said to exist 'in' a place or a seal to make an 'impression' upon wax. I mean only that the mind comprehends or perceives them; and that it is affected from outside, or by some being other than itself. This is my explanation of your difficulty; I would like to know how it can help to make intelligible your thesis of an unperceiving material substratum.

Hyl: No, if that's all there is to it, I admit that I don't see what use can be made of it. But are you not guilty of some misuse of language in this?

Phil: None at all. I have merely followed what is authorized by common custom, which as you know is what sets the rules for language. For nothing is more usual than for philosophers to speak of the immediate objects of the understanding as things existing 'in' the mind. And this fits with the general analogy of language: most mental operations are signified by words borrowed from sensible things, as can be seen in the terms 'comprehend' [contain, understand], 'reflect' [bounce back, look inward], 'discourse', etc.. When these are applied to the mind, they must not be taken in their crude original sense. [The word 'discourse' comes from Latin meaning 'run to and fro', and in Berkeley's day it could mean 'reasoning'.]

Hyl: You have, I admit, satisfied me about this. But there still remains one great difficulty, which I don't see how you can overcome. Indeed, it is of such importance that even if you can solve all others, if you can't find a solution for this difficulty you mustn't expect to make a convert out of me.

Phil: Let me know this mighty difficulty.

Hyl: The scriptural account of the creation appears to me to be utterly incompatible with your notions. Moses tells us of a creation: a creation of what? of ideas? No, certainly, but of *things*, of real things, solid corporeal substances. Get your principles to conform with this and I shall perhaps agree with you about them in general.

Phil: Moses mentions the sun, moon, and stars, earth and sea, plants and animals: I do not question that all these do really exist, and were in the beginning created by God. If by 'ideas' you mean fictions and fancies of the mind, then the sun, moon, etc. are no ideas. If by 'ideas' you mean immediate objects of the understanding, or sensible things that can't exist unperceived or out of a mind, then those things are ideas. But it matters little whether you call them 'ideas' or not. That difference is only about a name. And whether that name be retained or rejected, the sense, the truth, and reality of things continues the same. In common talk, the objects of our senses are not called 'ideas', but 'things'. You'll have no quarrel with me if you go on calling them 'things', provided you don't attribute to them any absolute external existence. So I accept that the creation was a creation of things, of real things. This is not in the least inconsistent with my principles, as is evident from what I have just been saying, and would have been evident to you without that, if you hadn't forgotten what I so often said before. As for solid corporeal substances, please show where Moses makes any mention of *them*; and if they should be mentioned by him or any other inspired writer, it would still be up to you to show that in such texts those words were not used in the common meaning, as referring to things falling under our senses, but in the philosophical meaning as standing for matter, or an unknown something, with an absolute mind-independent existence. When you have proved these points, then (and not till then) you may bring the authority of Moses into our dispute.

Hyl: It is useless to dispute about a point that is so clear. I am content to refer it to your own conscience. Can't you see that your views conflict in a special way with Moses' account of the creation?

Phil: If any possible sense that can be given to the first chapter of Genesis can be conceived as consistently with my principles as with any others, then that chapter has no special conflict with mine. And any such sense can be conceived by *you*, because you believe what I believe. Besides spirits, all you conceive are ideas, and the existence of these I do not deny. And you ·like me· don't claim that they exist outside the mind.

Hyl: Please let me see any sense in which you can understand that chapter.

Phil: Why, I imagine that if I had been present at the creation, I would have seen things *come into existence*—that is, *become perceptible*—in the order described by Moses. I have always believed Moses' account of the creation, and I don't find that my manner of believing it has altered in any way. When things are said to begin or end their existence, we mean this with regard not to God but to his creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or (the same thing) have an eternal existence in his mind; but when things that were previously imperceptible to creatures are by a decree of God made perceptible to them, then are they said to ·'come into existence', in the sense that they· begin a relative existence with respect to created minds. So when I read Moses' account of the creation, I understand that the various parts of the world gradually became perceivable to finite spirits that were endowed with proper faculties; so that when such spirits were present, the things were in truth perceived by them. This is the literal, obvious sense suggested to me by the words of the holy scripture; and in it there is no mention and no thought of substratum, instrument, occasion, or absolute existence. And if you look into it I am sure you will find that most plain, honest men who believe the creation never think of those things any more than I do. What metaphysical sense *you* may understand the creation story in, only you can tell.

Hyl: But, Philonous, you seem not to be aware ·of a terrific problem confronting you, arising from the fact· that according to you created things in the beginning had only a relative existence, and thus a hypothetical existence; that is to say, they existed *if* there were men to perceive them. You do not allow them any actuality of absolute existence that would have enabled God to create them and not taken the further step of creating men. Isn't it, therefore, according to you plainly impossible that the creation of any inanimate creatures should precede the creation of man? And isn't this directly contrary to Moses' account?

Phil: In answer to that I say, first, created beings might begin to exist in the mind of other created intelligences besides men. To prove any contradiction between Moses' account and my notions you must first show that there was no other order of finite created spirits in existence before men. For my second reply, let us think of the creation as it was at the end of the fourth day, a collection of plants of all sorts, produced by an invisible power, in a desert where nobody was present. I say that this way of thinking about the creation is consistent with my principles, since they deprive you of nothing sensible and nothing

imaginable; that it exactly suits with the common, natural, uncorrupted notions of mankind; that it brings out the dependence of all things on God, and consequently has all the good effect or influence which that important article of our faith could possibly have in making men humble, thankful, and resigned to their creator. I say, furthermore, that in this naked conception of things, with words stripped off, you won't find any notion of what you call the 'actuality of absolute existence'. You may indeed raise a dust with those terms, and so lengthen our dispute to no purpose. But I entreat you calmly to look into your own thoughts, and then tell me if they are not useless and unintelligible jargon.

Hyl: I admit that I have no very clear notion annexed to them. But what do you say to this? Don't you make the existence of sensible things consist in their being in a mind? And weren't all things eternally in the mind of God? Didn't they therefore exist from all eternity, according to you? How could something that was eternal be created in time? Can anything be clearer or better reasoned than this?

Phil: Don't you also think that God knew all things from eternity?

Hyl: I do.

Phil: Consequently they always had an existence in the divine intellect.

Hyl: This I acknowledge.

Phil: By your own admission, therefore, nothing is new, nothing begins to be, in respect of the mind of God. So we are agreed on that point.

Hyl: Then what are we to make of the creation?

Phil: May we not understand it to have been entirely in respect of *finite* spirits? On that understanding of it, things (with regard to us) can properly be said to *begin their existence, or be created*, when God decreed they should *become perceptible to intelligent creatures* in the order and manner which he then established and which we now call 'the laws of nature'. You may call this a relative or hypothetical existence if you please. But so long as •it supplies us with the most natural, obvious, and literal sense of Moses' history of the creation; so long as •it answers all the religious ends of that great article of faith; in a word, so long as •you can assign no other sense or meaning in place of it; why should we reject this? Is it to comply with a ridiculous sceptical desire to make everything nonsense and unintelligible? I am sure you can't say it is for the glory of God. For even if it were possible and conceivable that the physical world should have an absolute existence outside the mind of God, as well as of the minds of all created spirits, how could this display either the immensity or the omniscience of the Deity, or the necessary and immediate dependence of all things on him? Wouldn't it indeed seem rather to detract from those attributes?

Hyl: Well, let us look into this decree of God's that things should become perceptible. Isn't it clear, Philonous, that either •God carried out that decree from all eternity or •at

some particular time he began to will what he had not actually willed before but only planned to will? If the former, then there could be no creation or beginning of existence for finite things. If the latter, then we must think that something new happened to God, which implies a sort of change; and all change points to imperfection.

Phil: Please think what you are doing! Isn't it obvious that this objection counts equally against a creation in *any* sense; indeed, that it counts against every other act of God's that we can discover by the light of nature? We can't conceive any act of God's otherwise than as performed in time, and having a beginning. God is a being of transcendent and unlimited perfections; so finite spirits can't understand his nature. It is not to be expected, therefore, that any man, whether materialist or immaterialist, should have exactly correct notions of the Deity, his attributes, and his ways of doing things. So if you want to infer anything against me, your difficulty must not be drawn from the inadequateness of our conceptions of the divine nature, which is unavoidable on any system; it must rather come from my denial of matter, of which there is not one word said or hinted in what you have just objected.

Hyl: I have to agree that the only difficulties you have to clear up are ones that arise from the non-existence of matter, and are special to that thesis. You are right about that. But I simply can't bring myself to think there is no such special conflict between the creation and your opinion; though I am not clear about where exactly it is.

Phil: What more do you want? Don't I acknowledge a twofold state of things, the one copied or natural, the other copied-from and eternal? The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God. Isn't this in harmony with what theologians generally say? Is anything more than this necessary in order to conceive the creation? But you suspect some special conflict, though you cannot locate it. To take away all possibility of doubt about all this, just consider this one point. Either you can't conceive the creation on any hypothesis whatsoever, in which case you have no ground for dislike or complaint against my thesis in particular; or you can conceive the creation, and in that case why not conceive it on my principles, since that would not take away anything conceivable? My principles have all along allowed you the full scope of sense, imagination, and reason. So anything that you could previously apprehend, either immediately or mediately by your senses or by inferences from your senses, anything you could perceive, imagine, or understand, remains still with you ·on my principles·. If therefore the notion you have of the creation by other principles is intelligible, you still have it upon mine; if it is not intelligible, I don't think it is a notion at all, and so the loss of it is no loss. And indeed it seems to me quite clear that the supposition of matter—something perfectly unknown and inconceivable—can't enable us to conceive *anything*. And I hope I don't need to prove to you that the inference from *The creation is inconceivable without matter* to *Matter exists* is no good if the existence of matter does not make the creation conceivable.

Hyl: I admit, Philonous, you have almost satisfied me on this point of the creation.

Phil: I wonder why you are not entirely satisfied. You tell me indeed of an inconsistency between Moses' history and immaterialism; but you don't know where it lies. Is this reasonable, Hylas? Can you expect me to solve a difficulty without knowing what it is? But setting that aside, wouldn't anyone think you are sure that the received notions of materialists are consistent with holy scripture?

Hyl: And so I am.

Phil: Ought the historical part of scripture to be understood in a plain, obvious sense, or in a sense that is metaphysical and out of the way?

Hyl: In the plain sense, doubtless.

Phil: When Moses speaks of 'plants', 'earth', 'water', etc., as having been created by God, don't you think that what this suggests to every unphilosophical reader are the sensible things commonly signified by those words?

Hyl: I can't help thinking so.

Phil: And doesn't the doctrine of materialists deny a real existence to all ideas, that is, all things perceived by sense?

Hyl: I have already agreed to this.

Phil: According to them, therefore, the creation was not the creation of sensible things that have only a •relative existence, but of certain unknown natures that have an •absolute existence—so that they could exist even if there were no spirit to perceive them.

Hyl: True.

Phil: Isn't it evident, therefore, that the friends of matter destroy the plain obvious sense of Moses, with which their notions are utterly inconsistent; and instead of it force on us I know not what, something equally unintelligible to themselves and me?

Hyl: I can't contradict you.

Phil: Moses tells us of a creation. A creation of what? of unknown essences, of occasions, or substratums? No, certainly; but of things that are obvious to the senses. You must first reconcile this with your notions, if you want me to be reconciled to them.

Hyl: I see you can attack me with my own weapons.

Phil: Then as to absolute existence: was there ever known a more poverty-stricken notion than that? It is something so abstracted and unintelligible that you have frankly admitted to being unable to conceive it, much less to explain anything with its help. But even if we allow that matter exists and that the notion of absolute existence is as clear as daylight,

has this ever been known to make the creation more credible? On the contrary, hasn't it provided the atheists and infidels down through the centuries with their most plausible argument *against* a creation? This thesis:

A corporeal substance which has an absolute existence outside the minds of spirits was produced out of nothing by the mere will of a spirit, has been seen as so contrary to all reason, so impossible and absurd, that not only the most celebrated among the ancients, but even a variety of modern and Christian philosophers, have thought matter ·not to have been created at all, but· to have existed for ever along with God. Put these points together, and *then* judge whether materialism disposes men to believe in the creation of things!

Hyl: I admit, Philonous, that I don't think it does. This creation objection is the last one I can think of; and I have to admit that you have sufficiently answered it as well as the rest. All that remains for me to overcome is a sort of unaccountable resistance that I find in myself towards your notions.

Phil: When a man is swayed to one side of a question, without knowing why, don't you think that this must be the effect of prejudice, which always accompanies old and rooted notions? In this respect, indeed, I can't deny that the belief in matter has very much the advantage over the contrary opinion, in the minds of educated men.

Hyl: I admit that it seems to be as you say.

Phil: Well, then, as a counter-balance to this weight of prejudice, let us throw into the scale the great advantages that arise from the belief in immaterialism, in regard to both religion and human learning. •The existence of a God, and the imperishable nature of the soul, those great articles of religion, aren't they proved with the clearest and most immediate evidence? When I say the existence of a God, I do not mean an obscure, general cause of things, of which we have no conception, but *God* in the strict and proper sense of the word. A being whose spirituality, omnipresence, providence, omniscience, infinite power, and goodness, are as conspicuous as the existence of sensible things, of which (despite the fallacious claims and pretended doubts of sceptics) there is no more reason to doubt than of our own existence. Then with relation to human knowledge, •in natural science what intricacies, what obscurities, what contradictions, has the belief in matter led men into! To say nothing of the numberless disputes about its extent, continuity, homogeneity, gravity, divisibility, etc., don't they claim to explain everything in terms of bodies operating on bodies according to the laws of motion? And yet can they understand how one body might move another? Furthermore, even if there were no difficulty in

reconciling the notion of an inert being ·such as *matter*· with the notion of a cause;

or in

conceiving how a quality might pass from one body to another (·this being one theory about how one body can move another, namely by passing some motion along to it·);

yet by all their strained thoughts and extravagant suppositions have the materialists been able to understand the mechanical production of any one animal or plant body? Can they through the laws of motion account for sounds, tastes, smells, or colours, or for the regular course of events? Have they through physical principles accounted for the intricate ways in which even the most inconsiderable parts of the universe hang together? If on the other hand we set aside matter and corporeal causes, and admit only the effectiveness of an all-perfect mind, don't all the effects of nature become easy and intelligible? •If the phenomena are nothing but ideas, the choice is obvious: God is a spirit, but matter is unintelligent and unperceiving. •If the phenomena point to an unlimited power in their cause: God is active and omnipotent, but matter is an inert mass. •If the order, regularity, and usefulness of the effects of nature can never be sufficiently admired: God is infinitely wise and provident, but matter does not have plans and designs. These surely are great advantages in physics. Not to mention that the belief in a *distant* God naturally disposes men to be slack in their moral actions, which they would be more cautious about if they thought God to be immediately present and acting on their minds without the interposition of matter or unthinking 'second causes'. Then •in metaphysics: what difficulties concerning thinghood in the abstract, substantial forms, 'hylarchic principles', 'plastic natures', substance and accident, principle of individuation, possibility of matter's thinking, the origin of ideas, the question of how two independent substances as widely different as spirit and matter could act upon each other! What difficulties, I say, and what endless treatises concerning these and innumerable other similar points do we escape by supposing only spirits and ideas? Even •mathematics becomes much easier and clearer if we take away the absolute existence of extended things. The most shocking paradoxes and intricate speculations in the mathematical sciences depend on the infinite divisibility of finite extended things, and that depends on the supposition of absolutely existing extended things. But what need is there to insist on particular sciences? Isn't the opposition to all systematic knowledge whatsoever—that frenzy of the ancient and modern sceptics—built on the same foundation? Can you produce so much as *one* argument against the reality of bodies, or on behalf of that professed utter ignorance of their natures, which does not presuppose that their reality consists in an external absolute existence? Once that presupposition is made, the objections from the change of colours in a pigeon's neck, or the broken appearance of an oar in the water, do have weight. But objections like those vanish if we do not maintain the existence of absolute external originals, but place the reality of things in ideas. Although these ideas are fleeting and changeable, they are changed not at random but according to the fixed order of nature. For it is *that*—the orderliness of our sequences of ideas—that the constancy and truth of things consists in. That is what secures all the concerns of life, and distinguishes what is real from the irregular visions of the imagination.

Hyl: I agree with all you have just said, and must admit that nothing can incline me to embrace your opinion more than the advantages that I see come with it. I am by nature lazy, and this [= accepting immaterialism] would greatly simplify knowledge. What doubts, what hypotheses, what labyrinths of confusion, what fields of disputation, what an ocean of false learning, can be avoided by that single notion of immaterialism!

Phil: Is there now anything further to be done? You may remember that you promised to accept whatever opinion appeared on examination to be the most agreeable to common sense and furthest from scepticism. This, by your own admission, is the opinion that denies matter, or the absolute existence of bodily things. And we have gone further: this opinion has been proved in several ways, viewed from different angles, pursued in its consequences, and defended against all objections to it. Can there be a greater evidence of its truth? or could it have *all* the marks of a true opinion and yet be false?

Hyl: I admit that right now I am entirely satisfied in all respects. But how can I be sure that I shall go on fully assenting to your opinion, and that no new objection or difficulty will turn up?

Phil: Tell me, Hylas, when in other cases a point has been clearly proved, do you withhold your assent on account of objections or difficulties it may be liable to? When you are confronted with a mathematical demonstration [= ‘rigorously valid proof’], do you hold out against it because of the *difficulties* involved in the doctrine of incommensurable quantities, of the angle of contact, of the asymptotes to curves, or the like? Or will you disbelieve the providence of God because there are some particular things which you know not how to reconcile with it? If there are *difficulties in* immaterialism, there are at the same time direct and evident *proofs of* it. But for the existence of matter there is not one proof, and far more numerous and insurmountable objections count against it. Anyway, where are those mighty difficulties you insist on? Alas! you don’t know where or what they are; they are merely something that may possibly turn up in the future. If this entitles you to withhold your full assent, you should never assent to any proposition, however free from objections it may be, and however clearly and solidly demonstrated.

Hyl: You have satisfied me, Philonous.

Phil: As armament against all future objections, do bear in mind that something which bears equally hard on two contradictory opinions cannot be a proof against either of them. So whenever any difficulty ·in immaterialism· occurs to you, see if you can find a solution for it on the hypothesis of the materialists. Don’t be deceived by *words*; but test your own *thoughts*. And if you don’t find it easier with the help of materialism, it obviously can’t be an objection against immaterialism. If you had followed this rule all along, you would probably have spared yourself much trouble in objecting ·because none of your objections conforms to the rule·. I challenge you to show *one* of your difficulties that is explained by matter; indeed, *one* that is not made even worse by supposing matter, and consequently counts against materialism rather than for it. In each particular case you should consider whether the difficulty arises from the non-existence of matter. If it doesn’t, then arguing from it to the falsity of immaterialism is ·arguing from a premise to a conclusion that has nothing to do with it·—no better than arguing from ‘Extension is infinitely divisible’ to ‘God does not have foreknowledge’! And yet if you think back I believe you will find this to have been often, if not always, the case ·in our conversation·. Be careful also not to argue by begging the question [that is, giving an argument that at the outset assumes the truth of the conclusion]. One is apt to say ‘The unknown substances ought to be regarded as real things, rather than the ideas in our minds; and for all we know the

unthinking external substance may operate as a cause or instrument in the production of our ideas'. But doesn't this assume that there are such external substances? And isn't this begging the question? But above all things you should beware of misleading yourself by that common fallacy which is called 'mistaking the question'—that is, offering against one proposition an argument which really counts only against a quite different proposition. You often talked as if you thought I maintained the non-existence of sensible things; whereas in truth no-one can be more thoroughly assured of their existence than I am, and it is you who doubt—no; it is you who positively *deny*—that they exist. Everything that is seen, felt, heard, or in any way perceived by the senses is a real being according to the principles I embrace, but not according to the principles that used to be yours. Remember that the matter you used to defend is an unknown something (if indeed it can even be called a 'something'), which is completely stripped of all sensible qualities, and can neither be perceived through the senses or grasped by the mind. Remember, I say, that your *matter* is not any object that is hard or soft, hot or cold, blue or white, round or square, etc. For I affirm that all *these* things *do* exist; though I do indeed deny that they exist in any way except by being perceived, or that they exist out of all minds whatsoever. Think about these points; consider them attentively and keep them in view. Otherwise you won't be clear about the state of the question; and in that case your objections will always be wide of the mark, and instead of counting against my views they may possibly be directed (as more than once they have been) against yours.

Hyl: I have to admit, Philonous, that nothing seems to have kept me from agreeing with you more than this same mistaking the question that you have just warned me against. When you deny *matter* I am tempted at first glance to think that you are denying the things we see and feel; but on reflection I find there is no ground for that. How about keeping the word 'matter', and applying it to sensible things? This could be done without any change in your views; and believe me it would reconcile your views to some people who are upset more by your use of words than by your opinions.

Phil: With all my heart: retain the word 'matter', and apply it to the objects of sense, if you please, provided you don't credit them with existing apart from being perceived. I shall never quarrel with you over an expression. 'Matter' and 'material substance' are terms introduced by philosophers; and as used by them they imply a sort of independence, or an existence distinct from being perceived by a mind. But common people don't use these terms, or if they do it is to signify the immediate objects of sense. One would think, therefore, that so long as the names of all particular things are retained, and also such terms as 'sensible', 'substance', 'body', and 'stuff', the word 'matter' would never be missed in common talk. And in philosophical discourses it seems best to leave it out altogether, since the use of that general confused term—more perhaps than any other one factor—has favoured and strengthened the depraved tendency of the mind towards atheism.

Hyl: Well now, Philonous, since I am content to give up the notion of an unthinking substance exterior to the mind, I think you should allow me the privilege of using the word 'matter' as I please, to signify a collection of sensible qualities existing only in the mind. I freely grant that strictly speaking there is no other substance than spirit. But I

have been accustomed to the term 'matter' for so long that I don't know how to get on without it. To say

There is no matter in the world is still shocking to me.

Whereas to say

There is no matter, if by 'matter' is meant an unthinking substance existing outside the mind; but if by 'matter' is meant some sensible thing whose existence consists in being perceived, then there is matter

comes across quite differently, and this formulation will bring men to your notions with little difficulty. For, after all, the controversy about matter in the strict sense of 'matter' is not a dispute between you and ordinary folk. It lies altogether between you and the philosophers, whose principles are admittedly nowhere near so natural or so agreeable to the common sense of mankind and to holy scripture as yours are. All our desires are directed towards gaining happiness or avoiding misery. But what have happiness or misery, joy or grief, pleasure or pain, to do with absolute existence, or with unknown entities, abstracted from all relation to us? It is obvious that things concern us only insofar as they are pleasing or displeasing; and they can please or displease only to the extent that they are perceived. Beyond that, we are not concerned; and in this respect you leave things as you found them. But still there is something new in this doctrine of yours. It is clear to me that I do not now think with the philosophers, nor do I entirely think with the common people. I would like to know where I stand now—to know precisely what you have added to my former notions or altered in them.

Phil: I do not claim to be a setter-up of new notions. All I am trying to do is to bring together and place in a clearer light a truth that used to be shared between •the common people and •the philosophers: the former being of the opinion that •the things they immediately perceive are the real things. and the latter that •the things they immediately perceive are ideas which exist only in the mind. These two notions, when put together, constitute the substance of what I advance.

Hyl: For a long time I have distrusted my senses: I thought I saw things by a dim light, and through false glasses. Now the glasses are removed, and a new light breaks in upon my understanding. I am clearly convinced that I see things as they are, and am no longer troubled about their unknown natures or absolute existence. This is the state I find myself in at present, though indeed I don't yet fully grasp the line of argument that brought me to it. You set out upon the same principles that Academics, Cartesians, and similar sects usually do; and for a long time it looked as if you were advancing their philosophical scepticism; but in the end your conclusions are directly opposite to theirs.

Phil: Hylas, look at the water of that fountain, how it is forced upwards, in a round column, to a certain height, at which it breaks and falls back into the basin from which it rose. Its ascent, as well as its descent, come from the same uniform law or principle of gravitation. In just that way the same principles which at first view lead to scepticism then, when pursued to a certain point, bring men back to common sense.