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TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE

By David Hume

Book I: The understanding

Part i: Ideas, their origin, composition, connection, abstraction, etc.

Section 1: The origin of our ideas

All the perceptions of the human mind fall into two distinct kinds, which I shall call ‘impressions’ and ‘ideas’. These differ in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind and make their way into our thought or consciousness. The perceptions that enter with most force and violence we may name ‘impressions’; and under this name I bring all our sensations, passions, and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul [= ‘mind’; no religious implications]. By ‘ideas’ I mean the faint images of the others in thinking and reasoning: for example, all the perceptions aroused by your reading this book—apart from perceptions arising from sight and touch, and apart from the immediate pleasure or uneasiness your reading may cause in you. I don’t think I need to say much to explain this distinction: everyone will readily perceive for himself the difference between feeling (·impressions·) and thinking (·ideas·). The usual degrees ·of intensity· of these are easily distinguished, though there may be particular instances where they come close to one another. Thus, in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may become like our impressions; as on the other hand it sometimes happens that our impressions are so faint and low that we can’t distinguish them from our ideas. But although ideas and impressions are fairly similar in a few cases, they are in general so very different that no-one can hesitate to classify them as different and to give to each a special name to mark the difference. [In this work, ‘name’ is often used to cover not only proper names but also general terms such as ‘idea’.]¹

Another division of our perceptions should be noted; this one cuts across the line between impressions and ideas. It is the division into *simple* and *complex*. Simple perceptions—that is, simple impressions and ideas—are ones that don’t allow any distinction or separation ·among their parts·. Complex perceptions, on the contrary, can be distinguished into parts. Though a particular colour, taste, and smell, are qualities all united together in this apple, it’s easy to perceive that they aren’t the same as one another

¹ I hope you will allow me to use the words ‘impression’ and ‘idea’ in senses different from their usual ones. Perhaps, indeed, I am restoring ‘idea’ to its original sense, from which Mr Locke has perverted it by making it stand for all our perceptions. By the term ‘impression’ I don’t mean anything about *how* our lively perceptions are produced in the soul; I merely label the perceptions themselves; and for this I don’t know any particular name, in English or any other language.

and can least be distinguished from each other—and so one's total perception of the apple is *complex*.

Having through these divisions ordered and arranged our subject-matter (perceptions), we can now set ourselves to consider more accurately their qualities and relations. The first fact that springs to my attention is that our impressions greatly *resemble* our ideas in every respect except their degree of force and liveliness. Perceptions of one kind seem to be, in a way, reflections of perceptions of the other kind; so that all the perceptions of the mind do double duty, appearing both as impressions and as ideas. When I shut my eyes and think of my study, the ideas I form are exact representations of the impressions I felt when I was in my study; every detail in one is to be found in the other. And I find the same resemblance and representation when I survey my other perceptions: ideas and impressions seem always to correspond to each other. This remarkable fact holds my attention for a moment.

Surveying the field more accurately, I find I have been swept along by how things first appeared to me, and that I must—with help from the simple/complex distinction—limit this general thesis that all our ideas and impressions are resembling. I observe that many of our complex ideas never had impressions that corresponded to them: I can imagine a city such as the New Jerusalem, with golden pavements and ruby walls, though I never saw such a thing. And I observe that many of our complex impressions are never exactly copied by ideas: I have seen Paris, but I can't form an idea of that city that perfectly represents all its streets and houses in all their detail.

So I perceive that although there is in general a great resemblance between our complex impressions and ideas, it is not true across the board that they are exact copies of each other. Now let us consider how the case stands with our simple perceptions. After the most accurate examination I am capable of, I venture to say that here the rule holds without exception: that every simple idea has a simple impression that resembles it, and every simple impression has a corresponding idea. The idea of red that we form in the dark differs only in degree of intensity, not in nature, from the impression of red that strikes our eyes in sunshine. You can satisfy yourself that I am right about this by going over as many of your simple impressions and ideas as you like; it's impossible to prove my point by going over all of them! But if anyone should deny this universal resemblance between simple impressions and simple ideas, I don't know how to convince him except by asking him to show a simple impression that *doesn't* have a corresponding idea, or a simple idea that has no corresponding impression. If he doesn't answer this challenge—and it's certain that he can't—then his silence and our own observation will suffice to establish our conclusion.

Thus we find that all simple ideas and impressions resemble each other; and as the complex are formed from simple ones we can say generally that these two sorts of perception exactly correspond. Having uncovered this relation, which requires no further examination, I am curious to find some of the other qualities of impressions and ideas. Let us consider what brings them into existence: as between impressions and ideas, which are causes and which are effects?

The full examination of this question is the subject of this book; so I shall here content myself with establishing one general proposition:

All our simple ideas, when they first appear, are derived from simple impressions which correspond to them and which they exactly represent.

In looking for phenomena to support this proposition, I can find only two kinds; but the phenomena of each kind are obvious, numerous, and conclusive.

·As a preliminary to the first kind of phenomenon·, I first go over again in my mind and make myself certain of the proposition that I have already asserted, that every simple impression is •attended with a corresponding idea, and every simple idea is •attended with a corresponding impression. From this •constant conjunction of resembling perceptions I immediately conclude that there is a great *connection* between our corresponding impressions and ideas, and that the existence of the one has a considerable *influence* on the existence of the other. Such a constant conjunction in such an infinite number of instances can't arise from chance, but clearly proves a *dependence of the impressions on the ideas or of the ideas on the impressions*. Wanting to know which way the dependence runs, I consider the order in which these ·simple impressions and ideas· first appear; and I find by constant experience that the simple impressions always come first—it is never the other way around. To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present objects ·that are that colour or taste·—that is, I give him those impressions. I don't do anything as absurd as trying to give the child the impression by arousing in him the idea! When our ideas occur they don't produce the corresponding impressions; we don't see any colour or feel any sensation merely by *thinking* of them. On the other hand we find that every impression—whether of mind or body—is followed by an idea that resembles it in every way except its degree of force and liveliness. The •constant conjunction of our resembling perceptions is a convincing proof that the one are the •causes of the other; and the fact that the impression always comes first is an equal proof that impressions are the causes of our ideas, not vice versa.

This is confirmed by another plain and convincing phenomenon, namely: whenever someone happens to lack the faculty that gives rise to impressions of some kind—e.g. when someone is born blind or deaf—he lacks not only impressions of that kind but also the corresponding ideas; so that his mind never shows the least traces of either of them. This holds not only where the relevant organs of sensation are entirely destroyed, but also when they haven't yet been put into action to produce a particular impression; we can't form an accurate idea of the taste of a pineapple without having actually tasted it.

But there is one phenomenon that goes the other way, and may prove that it is not absolutely impossible for ideas to occur in advance of their corresponding impressions. I think you'll agree that the various ideas of colours that enter by the eyes are really different from each other, though there are resemblances amongst them; similarly for ideas of sounds that are conveyed by the ·sense of· hearing. If this is true of •different colours, it must equally hold for the •different shades of the same colour that each of them produces a distinct idea that is independent of the others. (If not, then it is possible by the continual gradation of shades to run a colour imperceptibly into what is most remote from it. ·We can create a sequence of colours, each barely perceptibly different from its neighbours, with some colour at the start of the sequence and a totally different one at the end·. If you won't allow any of the intervening pairs of neighbours to be different, you can't without absurdity say that the colours at the ends of the sequence are different—which they patently are·.) Now take the case of someone who has had the use of his eyesight for thirty years, and has become perfectly well acquainted with colours of all kinds except for one particular shade of blue, which he has happened never to have

encountered. Let all the different shades of blue except that single one be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest. Obviously, he will perceive a blank in the sequence where that shade is missing, and will be aware that the qualitative gap between neighbours is greater at that place than anywhere else in the sequence. Now I ask: Can he fill this gap from his own imagination, raising up in his mind the idea of that particular shade, even though an impression of it had never been conveyed to him by his senses?

I think most people will agree that he can; and this may serve as a proof that simple ideas are not *always* derived from corresponding impressions. But this instance is so particular and singular [those are Hume's adjectives] that it is hardly worth noticing, and isn't enough on its own to require us to alter our general maxim. But I ought to mention that the principle that *impressions come before ideas* is subject not only to the exception (about the missing shade of blue) that I have just sketched but also to another limitation, namely: just as our ideas are images [= 'copies'] of our impressions, so we can form secondary ideas that are images of primary ones; and my own theory allows for this.

This is not strictly speaking an *exception to the rule* that impressions come first, but rather an *explanation of it*. Ideas produce the images of themselves in new secondary ideas; but as the first or primary ideas are derived from impressions, it still remains true that all our simple ideas come from their corresponding impressions—either immediately or as secondary ideas through the mediation of primary ideas. This, then, is the first principle I establish in the science of human nature. Don't despise it because it looks simple. It is a remarkable fact that the present question about which comes first, impressions or ideas, is the very one that has created so much noise when expressed as the question of whether there are any innate ideas, or whether all ideas are derived from sensation and reflection. Notice that when philosophers want to show the ideas of extension and colour not to be innate, all they do is to show that those ideas are conveyed by our senses. To show that the ideas of passion and desire are not innate they observe that we have a prior experience of these emotions in ourselves. Now, if we carefully examine these arguments we shall find that they prove only that ideas are preceded by other more lively perceptions, from which they are derived and which they represent. I hope this clear statement of the question will remove all disputes about it, and will render this principle of more use in our reasonings than it seems to have been up to now.

Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

By David Hume

- 2. The origin of ideas
- 4. Sceptical doubts about the operations of the understanding
- 12. The Sceptical Philosophy (Conclusion)

Most of the principles and reasonings contained in this volume were published in a work in three volumes called *A Treatise of Human Nature*—a work which the author had planned before he left college, and which he wrote and published not long after. Its failure made him aware of his error in publishing too early, and he reworked the whole

thing in the following pieces, in which he hopes he has corrected some careless slips in his reasoning, and more in his expression of his views, in the *Treatise*. [The ‘pieces’ are the present work, the *Dissertation on the Passions* and the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, which were all published together.] Yet several writers who have honoured the author’s philosophy with answers have taken care to aim their guns only at that youthful work, which the author never acknowledged, having published it anonymously, and they have boasted of the victories they thought they had won against it. This behaviour is flatly contrary to all the rules of honesty and fairness, and a striking example of those debating tricks that bigoted zealots think it is all right for them to employ. From now on the author wants the following pieces to be regarded as the sole source for his philosophical opinions and principles.

Section 2: The origin of ideas

Everyone will freely admit that the perceptions of the mind when a man feels the pain of excessive heat or the pleasure of moderate warmth are considerably unlike what he feels when he later remembers this sensation or earlier looks forward to it in his imagination. Memory and imagination may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses, but they can’t create a perception that has as much force and liveliness as the one they are copying. Even when they operate with greatest vigour, the most we will say is that they represent their object so vividly that we could *almost* say we feel or see it. Except when the mind is out of order because of disease or madness, memory and imagination can never be so lively as to create perceptions that are indistinguishable from the ones we have in seeing or feeling. The most lively thought is still dimmer than the dullest sensation.

A similar distinction runs through all the other perceptions of the mind. A real fit of anger is very different from merely thinking of that emotion. If you tell me that someone is in love, I understand your meaning and form a correct conception of the state he is in; but I would never mistake that conception for the turmoil of actually being in love! When we think back on our past sensations and feelings, our thought is a faithful mirror that copies its objects truly; but it does so in colours that are fainter and more washed-out than those in which our original perceptions were clothed. To tell one from the other you don’t need careful thought or philosophical ability.

So we can divide the mind’s perceptions into two classes, on the basis of their different degrees of force and liveliness. The less forcible and lively are commonly called ‘thoughts’ or ‘ideas’. The others have no name in our language or in most others, presumably because we don’t need a general label for them except when we are doing philosophy. Let us, then, take the liberty of calling them ‘impressions’, using that word in a slightly unusual sense. By the term ‘impression’, then, I mean *all our more lively perceptions when we hear or see or feel or love or hate or desire or will*. These are to be distinguished from ideas, which are *the fainter perceptions of which we are conscious when we reflect on [= ‘look inwards at’] our impressions*.

It may seem at first sight that human thought is utterly unbounded: it not only escapes all human power and authority – as when a poor man thinks of becoming wealthy overnight, or when an ordinary citizen thinks of being a king, – but is not even confined within the limits of nature and reality. It is as easy for the imagination to form monsters and to join incongruous shapes and appearances as it is to conceive the most natural and

familiar objects. And while the body must creep laboriously over the surface of one planet, thought can instantly transport us to the most distant regions of the universe—and even further. What never was seen or heard of may still be *conceived*; nothing is beyond the power of thought except what implies an absolute contradiction.

But although our thought seems to be so free, when we look more carefully we'll find that it is really confined within very narrow limits, and that all this creative power of the mind amounts merely to the ability to combine, transpose, enlarge, or shrink the materials that the senses and experience provide us with. When we think of a golden mountain, we only join two consistent ideas—*gold* and *mountain*—with which we were already familiar. We can conceive a virtuous horse because our own feelings enable us to conceive virtue, and we can join this with the shape of a horse, which is an animal we know. In short, all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward senses or from our inward feelings: all that the mind and will do is to mix and combine these materials. Put in philosophical terminology: *all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones.*

Here are two arguments that I hope will suffice to prove this. (1) When we analyse our thoughts or ideas—however complex or elevated they are—we always find them to be made up of simple ideas that were copied from earlier feelings or sensations. Even ideas that at first glance seem to be the furthest removed from that origin are found on closer examination to be derived from it. The idea of God—meaning an infinitely intelligent, wise, and good Being—comes from extending beyond all limits the qualities of goodness and wisdom that we find in our own minds. However far we push this enquiry, we shall find that every idea that we examine is copied from a similar impression. Those who maintain that this isn't universally true and that there are exceptions to it have only one way of refuting it—but it should be easy for them, if they are right. They need merely to produce an idea that they think isn't derived from this source. It will then be up to me, if I am to maintain my doctrine, to point to the impression or lively perception that corresponds to the idea they have produced.

(2) If a man can't have some kind of sensation because there is something wrong with his eyes, ears etc., he will never be found to have corresponding ideas. A blind man can't form a notion of colours, or a deaf man a notion of sounds. If either is cured of his deafness or blindness, so that the sensations can get through to him, the ideas can then get through as well; and then he will find it easy to conceive these objects. The same is true for someone who has never experienced an object that will give a certain kind of sensation: a Laplander or Negro has no notion of the taste of wine because he has never had the sensation of tasting wine. Similarly with inward feelings. It seldom if ever happens that a person has *never felt* or is *wholly* incapable of some human feeling or emotion, but the phenomenon I am describing does occur with feelings as well, though in lesser degree. A gentle person can't form any idea of determined revenge or cruelty; nor can a selfish one easily conceive the heights of friendship and generosity. Everyone agrees that non-human beings may have many senses of which we can have no conception, because the ideas of them have never been introduced to us in the only way in which an idea can get into the mind, namely through actual feeling and sensation.

(There is, however, one counter-example that may prove that it is not absolutely impossible for an idea to occur without a corresponding impression. I think it will be granted that the various distinct ideas of colour that enter the mind through the eye (or

those of sound, which come in through the ear) really are different from each other, though they resemble one another in certain respects. If that holds for different colours, it must hold equally for the different shades of a single colour; so each shade produces a distinct idea, independent of the rest. (We can create a continuous gradation of shades, running from red at one end to green at the other, with each member of the series shading imperceptibly into its neighbour. If the immediate neighbours in the sequence are not different from one another, then red is not different from green, which is absurd.) Now, suppose that a sighted person has become perfectly familiar with colours of all kinds, except for one particular shade of blue (for instance), which he happens never to have met with. Let all the other shades of blue be placed before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest: it is obvious that he will notice a blank in the place where the missing shade should go. That is, he will be aware that there is a greater quality-distance between that pair of neighbouring shades than between any other neighbour-pair in the series. Can he fill the blank from his own imagination, calling up in his mind the idea of that particular shade, even though it has never been conveyed to him by his senses? Most people, I think, will agree that he can. This seems to show that simple ideas are not always, in every instance, derived from corresponding impressions. Still, the example is so singular that it is hardly worth noticing, and on its own it isn't a good enough reason for us to alter our general maxim.)

So here is a proposition that not only seems to be simple and intelligible in itself, but could if properly used make every dispute equally intelligible by banishing all that nonsensical jargon that has so long dominated metaphysical reasonings. ·Those reasonings are beset by three troubles·. (1) All ideas, especially abstract ones, are naturally faint and obscure, so that the mind has only a weak hold on them. (2) Ideas are apt to be mixed up with other ideas that resemble them. (3) We tend to assume that a given word is associated with a determinate idea just because we have used it so often, even if in using it we have not had any distinct meaning for it. In contrast with this, (1) all our impressions—that is, all our outward or inward sensations—are strong and vivid. (2) The boundaries between them are more exactly placed, and (3) it is harder to make mistakes about them. So when we come to suspect that a philosophical term is being used without any meaning or idea (as happens all too often), we need only to ask: From what impression is that supposed idea derived? If none can be pointed out, that will confirm our suspicion ·that the term is meaningless, that is, has no associated idea·. By bringing ideas into this clear light we may reasonably hope to settle any disputes that arise about whether they exist and what they are like.²

² Philosophers who have denied that there are any innate ideas probably meant only that all ideas were copies of our impressions; though I have to admit that the terms in which they expressed this were not chosen with enough care, or defined with enough precision, to prevent all mistakes about their doctrine. For what is meant by 'innate'? If 'innate' is equivalent to 'natural', then all the perceptions and ideas of the mind must be granted to be innate or natural, in whatever sense we take the latter word, whether in opposition to what is uncommon, what is artificial, or what is miraculous. If innate means 'contemporary with our birth', the dispute seems to be frivolous—there is no point in enquiring *when* thinking begins, whether before, at, or after our birth. Again, the word 'idea' seems commonly to be taken in a very loose sense by Locke and others, who use it to stand for any of our perceptions, sensations *and passions*, as well as thoughts. I would like to know what it can mean to assert that self-love, or resentment of injuries, or the passion between the sexes, is not innate!

Section 4: Sceptical doubts about the operations of the understanding Part 1

All the objects of human reason or enquiry fall naturally into two kinds, namely *relations of ideas* and *matters of fact*. The first kind include geometry, algebra, and arithmetic, and indeed every statement that is either intuitively or demonstratively certain. *That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the other two sides* expresses a relation between those figures. *That three times five equals half of thirty* expresses a relation between those numbers. Propositions of this kind can be discovered purely by thinking, with no need to attend to anything that actually exists anywhere in the universe. The truths that Euclid demonstrated would still be certain and selfevident even if there never were a circle or triangle in nature.

Matters of fact, which are the second objects of human reason, are not established in the same way; and we cannot have such strong grounds for thinking them true. The contrary of every matter of fact is still *possible*, because it doesn't imply a contradiction and is conceived by the mind as easily and clearly as if it conformed perfectly to reality. *That the sun will not rise tomorrow* is just as intelligible as—and no more contradictory than—the proposition *that the sun will rise tomorrow*. It would therefore be a waste of time to try to *demonstrate* [= 'prove absolutely rigorously'] its falsehood. If it were demonstratively false, it would imply a contradiction and so could never be clearly conceived by the mind.

So it may be worth our time and trouble to try to answer this: What sorts of grounds do we have for being sure of matters of fact—propositions about what exists and what is the case—that are not attested by our present senses or the records of our memory? It is a notable fact that neither ancient philosophers nor modern ones have attended much to this important question; so in investigating it I shall be marching through difficult terrain with no guides or signposts; and that may help to excuse any errors I commit or doubts that I raise. Those errors and doubts may even be useful: they may make people curious and eager to learn, and may destroy that ungrounded and unexamined *confidence* that people have in their opinions—a confidence that is the curse of all reasoning and free enquiry. If we find things wrong with commonly accepted philosophical views, that needn't discourage us, but rather can spur us on to try for something more full and satisfactory than has yet been published.

All reasonings about matters of fact seem to be based on the relation of *cause and effect*, which is the only relation that can take us beyond the evidence of our memory and senses. If you ask someone why he believes some matter of fact which is not now present to him—for instance that his friend is now in France—he will give you a reason; and this reason will be some other fact, such as that he has received a letter from his friend or that

But admitting the words 'impressions' and 'ideas' in the sense explained above, and understanding by 'innate' what is *original or not copied from any previous perception*, then we can assert that all our impressions are innate and none of our ideas are innate.

Frankly, I think that Mr. Locke was tricked into this question by the schoolmen [= mediaeval Aristotelians], who have used undefined terms to drag out their disputes to a tedious length without ever touching the point at issue. A similar ambiguity and circumlocution seem to run through all that great philosopher's reasonings on this.

his friend had planned to go to France. Someone who finds a watch or other machine on a desert island will conclude that there have been men on that island. All our reasonings concerning fact are like this. When we reason in this way, we suppose that the present fact is *connected* with the one that we infer from it. If there were nothing to bind the two facts together, the inference of one from the other would be utterly shaky. Hearing the sounds of someone talking rationally in the dark assures us of the presence of some person. Why? Because such sounds are the effects of the human constitution, and are closely connected with it. All our other reasonings of this sort, when examined in detail, turn out to be based on the relation of cause and effect. The causal chain from the evidence to the 'matter of fact' conclusion may be short or long. And it may be that the causal connection between them isn't direct but collateral—as when one sees light and infers heat, not because either causes the other but because the two are collateral effects of a single cause, namely fire.

So if we want to understand the basis of our confidence about matters of fact, we must find out how we come to know about cause and effect.

I venture to assert, as true without exception, that knowledge about causes is never acquired through *a priori* reasoning, and always comes from our experience of finding that particular objects are constantly associated with one other. [When Hume is discussing cause and effect, his word 'object' often covers *events* as well as *things*.] Present an object to a man whose skill and intelligence are as great as you like; if the object is of a kind that is entirely new to him, no amount of studying of its perceptible qualities will enable him to discover any of its causes or effects. Adam, even if his reasoning abilities were perfect from the start, could not have inferred from the fluidity and transparency of water that it could drown him, or from the light and warmth of fire that it could burn him. The qualities of an object that appear to the senses never reveal the causes that produced the object or the effects that it will have; nor can our reason, unaided by experience, ever draw any conclusion about real existence and matters of fact.

The proposition that *causes and effects are discoverable not by reason but by experience* will be freely granted (1) with regard to objects that we remember having once been altogether unknown to us; for in those cases we remember the time when we were quite unable to tell what would arise from those objects. Present two smooth pieces of marble to a man who has no knowledge of physics—he will not be able to work out that they will stick together in such a way that it takes great force to separate them by pulling them directly away from one another, while it will be easy to slide them apart. (2) Events that are not much like the common course of nature are also readily agreed to be known only by experience; and nobody thinks that the explosion of gunpowder, or the attraction of a magnet, could ever be discovered by arguments *a priori*—that is, by simply thinking about the matter, without bringing in anything known from experience. (3) Similarly, when an effect is thought to depend on an intricate machinery or secret structure of parts we don't hesitate to attribute all our knowledge of it to experience. No one would assert that he can give the ultimate reason why milk or bread is nourishing for a man but not for a lion or a tiger.

But this same proposition—that causes and effects cannot be discovered by reason—may seem less obvious when it is applied to events of kinds (1) that we have been familiar with all our lives, (2) that are very like the whole course of nature, and (3) that are supposed to depend on the simple perceptible qualities of objects and not on

any secret structure of parts. We are apt to imagine that we could discover *these* effects purely through reason, without experience. We fancy that if we had been suddenly brought into this world, we could have known straight off that when one billiard ball strikes another it will make it move—knowing this for certain, without having to try it out on billiard balls. Custom has such a great influence! At its strongest it not only hides our natural ignorance but even conceals *itself*: just because custom is so strongly at work, we are not aware of its being at work at all.

If you are not yet convinced that absolutely all the laws of nature and operations of bodies can be known only by experience, consider the following. If we are asked to say what the effects will be of some object, without consulting past experience of it, how can the mind go about doing this? It must invent or imagine some event as being the object's effect; and clearly this invention must be entirely arbitrary. The mind can't possibly find the effect *in* the supposed cause, however carefully we examine it, for the effect is totally different from the cause and therefore can never be discovered in it. Motion in the second billiard ball is a distinct event from motion in the first, and nothing in the first ball's motion even hints at motion in the second. A stone raised into the air and left without any support immediately falls; but if we consider this situation *a priori* we shall find nothing that generates the idea of a downward rather than an upward or some other motion in the stone.

Just as the first imagining or inventing of a particular effect is arbitrary if it isn't based on experience, the same holds for the supposed tie or connection between cause and effect—the tie that binds them together and makes it impossible for that cause to have any effect but that one. Suppose for example that I see one billiard ball moving in a straight line towards another: even if the contact between them should *happen* to suggest to me the idea of motion in the second ball, aren't there a hundred different events that I can conceive might follow from that cause? May not both balls remain still? May not the first bounce straight back the way it came, or bounce off in some other direction? All these suppositions are consistent and conceivable. Why then should we prefer just one, which is no more consistent or conceivable than the rest? Our *a priori* reasonings will never reveal any basis for this preference.

In short, every effect is a distinct event from its cause. So it can't be discovered *in* the cause, and the first invention or conception of it *a priori* must be wholly arbitrary. Furthermore, even after it has been suggested, the linking of it with the cause must still appear as arbitrary, because plenty of other possible effects must seem just as consistent and natural from reason's point of view. So there isn't the slightest hope of reaching any conclusions about causes and effects without the help of experience.

That is why no reasonable scientist has ever claimed to know the ultimate cause of any natural process, or to show clearly and in detail what goes into the causing of any single effect in the universe. It is agreed that the most human reason can achieve is to make the principles that govern natural phenomena simpler, bringing many particular effects together under a few general causes by reasoning from analogy, experience and observation. But if we try to discover the causes of these general causes, we shall be wasting our labour. These ultimate sources and principles are totally hidden from human enquiry. Probably the deepest causes and principles that we shall ever discover in nature are these four: •elasticity, •gravity, •cohesion of parts ·which makes the difference between a pebble and a pile of dust·, and •communication of motion by impact ·as when

one billiard ball hits another. We shall be lucky if by careful work we can explain particular phenomena in terms of these four, or something close to them. The perfect philosophy of the natural kind [= 'the perfect physics'] only staves off our ignorance a little longer; just as, perhaps, the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind [= 'the most perfect *philosophy*', in the 21st century sense of the word] serves only to show us more of how ignorant we are. So both kinds of philosophy eventually lead us to a view of human blindness and weakness—a view that confronts us at every turn despite our attempts to get away from it.

Although geometry is rightly famous for the accuracy of its reasoning, when it is brought to the aid of physics it can't lead us to knowledge of ultimate causes, thereby curing the ignorance I have been discussing. Every part of applied mathematics works on the assumption that nature operates according to certain established laws; and abstract reasonings are used either to help experience to discover these laws or to work out how the laws apply in particular cases where exactness of measurement is relevant. Here is an example. It is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that *the force of any moving body is proportional to its mass and to its velocity*; so we can get a small force to overcome the greatest obstacle if we can devise a machine that will increase the velocity of the force so that it overwhelms its antagonist. Geometry helps us to apply this law by showing us how to work out the sizes and shapes of all the parts of the machine that we make for this purpose; but the law itself is something we know purely from experience, and no amount of abstract reasoning could lead us one step towards the knowledge of it. When we reason *a priori*, considering some object or cause merely as it appears to the mind and independently of any observation of its behaviour, it could never prompt us to think of any *other* item, such as its effect. Much less could it show us the unbreakable connection between them. It would take a very clever person to discover by reasoning that heat makes crystals and cold makes ice without having had experience of the effects of heat and cold!

Part 2 (of Section 4)

But we haven't yet found an acceptable answer to the question that I initially asked. Each solution raises new questions that are as hard to answer as the first one was, and that lead us on to further enquiries. To the question *What is the nature of all our reasonings concerning matter of fact?* the proper answer seems to be that they are based on the relation of cause and effect. When it is further asked, *What is the foundation of all our reasonings about cause and effect?* we can answer in one word, *experience*. But if we persist with questions, and ask, *What are inferences from experience based on?* this raises a new question that may be harder still. Philosophers—for all their air of superior wisdom—are given a hard time by people who persist with questions, pushing them from every corner into which they retreat, finally bringing them to some dangerous dilemma [= 'a choice between two alternatives which both seem wrong']. The best way for us to avoid such an embarrassment is not to claim too much in the first place, and even to find the difficulty for ourselves before it is brought against us as an objection. In this way we can make a kind of merit even of our ignorance!

In this section I shall settle for something easy, offering only a •negative answer to the question I have raised about what inferences from experience are based on. It is

this: even after we have experience of the operations of cause and effect, *the conclusions we draw from that experience are not based on reasoning or on any process of the understanding*. I shall try to explain and defend this answer.

It must be granted that nature has kept us at a distance from all its secrets, and has allowed us to know only a few superficial qualities of objects, concealing from us the powers and energies on which the influence of the objects entirely depends. Our senses tell us about the colour, weight and consistency of bread; but neither the senses nor reason can ever tell us about the qualities that enable bread to nourish a human body. Sight or touch gives us an idea of the *motion* of bodies; but as for the amazing *force* that keeps a body moving for ever unless it collides with other bodies - we cannot have the remotest conception of that. Despite this ignorance of natural powers³ and principles, however, we always assume that the same sensible qualities [= 'qualities that can be seen or felt or heard etc.'] will have the same secret powers, and we expect them to have the same effects that we have found them to have in our past experience. If we are given some stuff with the colour and consistency of bread that we have eaten in the past, we don't hesitate to repeat the experiment of eating it, confidently expecting it to nourish and support us. That is what we do every morning at the breakfast table: confidently *experimenting* with bread-like stuff by eating it! I would like to know what the basis is for this process of thought. Everyone agrees that a thing's sensible qualities are not connected with its secret powers in any way that we know about, so that the mind isn't led to a conclusion about their constant and regular conjunction through anything it knows of their nature. All that past experience can tell us, directly and for sure, concerns the behaviour of the particular objects we observed, at the particular time when we observed them. My experience directly and certainly informs me that *that* fire consumed coal *then*; but it is silent about the behaviour of the same fire a few minutes later, and about other fires at any time. Why should this experience be extended to future times and to other objects, which for all we know may only *seem* similar?—that is what I want to know. The bread that I formerly ate nourished me; that is, a body with such and such sensible qualities did at that time have such and such secret powers. But does it follow that other bread must also nourish me at other times, and that the same perceptible qualities must always be accompanied by the same secret powers? It does not seem to follow necessarily. Anyway, it must be admitted that in such a case as this the mind draws a conclusion; it takes a certain step, goes through a process of thought or inference, which needs to be explained. These two propositions are far from being the same:

I have found that such and such an object has always had such and such an effect.

I foresee that other objects which appear similar will have similar effects.

The second proposition is always inferred from the first; and if you wish I shall grant that it is rightly inferred. But if you insist that the inference is made by a chain of reasoning, I challenge you to produce the reasoning. The connection between these propositions is not intuitive [that is, the second does not self-evidently and *immediately* follow from the first]. If the inference is to be conducted through reason alone, it must be with help from some intermediate step. But when I try to think what that intermediate step might be, I am defeated. Those who assert that it really exists and is the origin of all our conclusions about matters of fact owe us an account of what it is.

³ The word 'power' is here used in a loose and popular sense. Using it more accurately would add strength to this argument. See Section 7.

·They haven't given any account of this, which I take to be evidence that none can be given. If many penetrating and able philosophers try and fail to discover a connecting proposition or intermediate step through which the understanding can perform this inference from past effects to future ones, my negative line of thought about this will eventually be found entirely convincing. But as the question is still new, the reader may not trust his own abilities enough to conclude that because he can't find a certain argument it doesn't exist. In that case I need to tackle a harder task than I have so far undertaken—namely, going through all the branches of human knowledge one by one, trying to show that none can give us such an argument.

All reasonings fall into two kinds: (1) demonstrative reasoning, or that concerning relations of ideas, and (2) factual reasoning, or that concerning matters of fact and existence. That no demonstrative arguments are involved in (2) seems evident; since there is no outright contradiction in supposing that the course of nature will change so that an object that seems like ones we have experienced will have different or contrary effects from theirs. Can't I clearly and distinctly conceive that snowy stuff falling from the clouds might taste salty or feel hot? Is there anything unintelligible about supposing that all the trees will flourish in December and lose their leaves in June? Now, if something is intelligible and can be distinctly conceived, it implies no contradiction and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract *a priori* reasoning.

So if there are arguments to justify us in trusting past experience and making it the standard of our future judgment, these arguments can only be *probable*; that is, they must be of the kind (2) that concern matters of fact and real existence, to put it in terms of the classification I have given. But probable reasoning, if I have described it accurately, can't provide us with the argument we are looking for. According to my account, all arguments about existence are based on the relation of cause and effect; our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and in drawing conclusions from experience we assume that the future will be like the past. So if we try to prove *this* assumption by probable arguments, i.e. arguments regarding existence, we shall obviously be going in a circle, taking for granted the very point that is in question.

In reality, all arguments from experience are based on the similarities that we find among natural objects—which lead us to expect that the effects of the objects will also be similar. Although only a fool or a madman would ever challenge the authority of experience or reject it as a guide to human life, still perhaps a philosopher may be allowed to ask what it is about human nature that gives this mighty authority to experience and leads us to profit from the similarities that nature has established among different objects. Our inferences from experience all boil down to this: *From causes that appear similar we expect similar effects*. If this were based on reason, we could draw the conclusion as well after •a single instance as after •a long course of experience. But that isn't in fact how things stand. Nothing so similar as eggs; yet no-one expects them all to taste the same! When we become sure of what will result from a particular event, it is only because we have experienced many events of that kind, all with the same effects. Now, where is that process of reasoning that infers from one instance a conclusion that was not inferred from a hundred previous instances just like this single one? I ask this •for the sake of information as much as •with the intention of raising difficulties. I can't find—I can't *imagine*—any such reasoning. But I am willing to learn, if anyone can teach me.

It may be said that from a number of uniform experiences we *infer a connection* between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; but this seems to raise the same difficulty in different words. We still have to ask what process of argument *this* inference is based on. Where is the intermediate step, the interposing ideas, which join propositions that are so different from one another? It is agreed that the colour, consistency and other sensible qualities of bread don't appear to be inherently connected with the secret powers of nourishment and life-support. If they were, we could infer these secret powers from a first encounter with those qualities, without the aid of long previous experience; and this contradicts what all philosophers believe and contradicts plain matters of fact. Start by thinking of us in our natural state of ignorance, in which we know nothing about the powers and influence of anything. How does experience cure this ignorance? All it does is to show us that certain ·similar· objects had similar effects; it teaches us that those particular objects had such and such powers and forces at those particular times. When a new object with similar perceptible qualities is produced, we expect similar powers and forces and look for a similar effect. We expect for instance that stuff with the colour and consistency of bread will nourish us. But this surely is a movement of the mind that needs to be explained. When a man says

‘I have found in all •past instances such and such sensible qualities conjoined with such and such secret powers’,

and then goes on to say

‘Similar sensible qualities •will always be combined with similar secret powers’,
he isn't guilty of merely repeating himself; these propositions are in no way the same.

‘The second proposition is inferred from the first’, you may say; but you must admit that the inference isn't intuitive [= ‘can't be seen at a glance to be valid’], and it isn't demonstrative either [= ‘can't be carried through by a series of steps each of which can be seen at a glance to be valid’]. What kind of inference is it, then? To call it ‘experiential’ is to assume the point that is in question. For all inferences from experience are based on the assumption that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be combined with similar sensible qualities. As soon as the suspicion is planted that the course of nature may change, so that the past stops being a guide to the future, all experience becomes useless and can't support any inference or conclusion. So no arguments from experience can *support* this resemblance of the past to the future, because all such arguments are *based on* the assumption of that resemblance. However regular the course of things has been, that fact on its own doesn't prove that the future will also be regular. It's no use your claiming to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently all their effects and influence, may change without any change in their sensible qualities. This happens •sometimes with regard to •some objects: Why couldn't it happen •always with regard to •all? What logic, what process of argument, secures you against this? You may say that I don't *behave* as though I had doubts about this; but that would reflect a misunderstanding of why I am raising these questions. When I am considering how to act, I am quite satisfied that the future will be like the past; but as a philosopher with an *enquiring*—I won't say *sceptical*—turn of mind, I want to know what this confidence is based on. Nothing I have read, no research I have done, has yet been able to remove my difficulty. Can I do better than to put the difficulty before the public,

even though I may not have much hope of being given a solution? In this way we shall at least be aware of our ignorance, even if we don't increase our knowledge.

It would be inexcusably arrogant to conclude that because I haven't discovered a certain argument it doesn't really exist. Even if learned men down the centuries have searched for something without finding it, perhaps it would still be rash to conclude with confidence that the subject must surpass human understanding. Even though we examine all the sources of our knowledge and conclude that they are unfit for a given subject, we may still suspect that the list of sources is not complete or our examination of them not accurate. With regard to our present subject, however, there are reasons to think that my conclusion is certainly right and that I am not arrogant in thinking so.

It is certain that the most ignorant and stupid peasants, even infants, indeed even brute beasts, improve by experience and learn the qualities of natural objects by observing their effects. When a child has felt pain from touching the flame of a candle, he will be careful not to put his hand near any candle, and will expect a similar effect from any cause that is similar in its appearance. If you assert that the child's understanding comes to this conclusion through a process of argument, it is fair for me to demand that you produce that argument, and you have no excuse for refusing to comply. You can't say that the argument has eluded you because it is so difficult and complex, because you have just said that a mere infant finds it easy! So if you hesitate for a moment, or if after reflection you produce any intricate or profound argument, you have in effect given up your side in this dispute: you have as good as admitted that *it is not through reasoning that we are led to suppose the future to resemble the past and to expect similar effects from apparently similar causes*. This is the proposition that I intended to establish in the present section. If I am right about it, I don't claim it as any great discovery. If I am wrong, then there *is* an argument ·from past to future· which was perfectly familiar to me long before I was out of my cradle, yet now I can't discover it. What a backward scholar I must be!

Section 12. The Sceptical Philosophy (Conclusion)

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The slightest enquiry into the natural powers of the human mind, and the comparison of •those powers with •the topics the mind studies, will be enough to make anyone willing to limit the scope of his enquiries in the way I have proposed. Let us then consider what are the proper subjects of science and enquiry.

It seems to me that the only objects of the abstract sciences—the ones whose results are rigorously proved—are quantity and number, and that it is mere sophistry and illusion to try to extend this more perfect sort of knowledge beyond these bounds. The component parts of quantity and number are entirely similar; ·for example, the area of a given triangle is made of the same elements as the area of a given square, so that the question of whether the two areas are equal can at least *come up*·. For this reason, the relations amongst the parts of quantity and number become intricate and involved; and nothing can be more intriguing, as well as useful, than to trace in various ways their equality or inequality through their different appearances. But all other ideas are

obviously distinct and different from each other; and so with them we can never go further—however hard we try—than to observe this diversity and come to the immediate, obvious conclusion that one thing is not another. If there *is* any difficulty in these decisions, it proceeds entirely from the indeterminate meaning of words, which is corrected by juster definitions. That *the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the other two sides* can't be known without a train of reasoning and enquiry. But to convince us that *where there is no property there can be no injustice* it is only necessary to define the terms and explain 'injustice' to be 'a violation of property'. This proposition is indeed merely an imperfect definition. Similarly with all those purported reasonings that may be found in every other branch of learning except the sciences of quantity and number. The latter sciences, it is safe to say, are the only proper objects of knowledge and demonstration.

All other enquiries of men regard only matter of fact and existence; and these obviously can't be demonstrated. Whatever *is* the case may *not be* the case. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The nonexistence of any existing thing is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. The proposition which affirms it not to exist, even if it is quite false, is just as conceivable and intelligible as that which affirms it to exist. The case is different with the sciences, properly so called [Hume means: the mathematical sciences]. Every mathematical proposition which is not true is confused and unintelligible. That *the cube root of 64 is equal to the half of 10* is a false proposition and can never be distinctly conceived. But that *Caesar never existed* may be a false proposition but still it is perfectly conceivable and implies no contradiction.

It follows that the existence of any thing can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect; and such arguments are based entirely on experience. If we reason *a priori*, anything may appear able to produce anything. The falling of a pebble may, for all we know, extinguish the sun; or the wish of a man may control the planets in their orbits. Only experience teaches us the nature and limits of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another.²¹ Such is the foundation of factual reasoning, which forms the greater part of human knowledge and is the source of all human action and behaviour.

Factual reasonings concern either particular or general facts. Everyday practical thinking is concerned only with the former, as is the whole of history, geography and astronomy.

The sciences that treat of general facts are politics, natural philosophy [= 'physics'], physic [= 'medicine'], chemistry, etc. where the qualities, causes and effects of a whole species of objects are investigated.

Divinity or theology proves the existence of a god and the immortality of souls, so the reasonings which compose it partly concern particular facts and partly general ones. In so far as is supported by experience theology has a foundation in reason, but its best and most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.

Morals and artistic criticism are in the domain of taste and feeling rather than of intellectual thought. Beauty, whether moral or natural, is felt rather than perceived. If we do reason about it and try to fix standards of judgment, we must bring in *facts* that can be the objects of reasoning and enquiry—e.g. facts about the general taste of mankind.

When we go through libraries, convinced of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume—of divinity or school metaphysics, for

instance—let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning about quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experiential reasoning about matters of fact and existence?* No. Then throw it in the fire, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.

TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE

Part iii: Knowledge and Probability

Section 14: The idea of necessary connection

Having thus explained *how* we reason beyond our immediate impressions, and conclude that such and such causes must have such and such effects, we must now retrace our steps and pick up again the question that first occurred to us, and that we dropped along the way (in section 2). The question is: What is our idea of *necessity*, when we say that two objects are *necessarily* connected? As I have often said already, if we claim to have such an idea we must find some impression that gives rise to it, because we have no idea that isn't derived from an impression. So I ask myself: In what objects is necessity commonly supposed to lie? And finding that it is always ascribed to *causes* and *effects*, I turn my attention to two objects that are supposed to be related as cause and effect, and examine them in all the situations in which they can occur. I see at once that they are contiguous in time and place, and that the one we call 'cause' precedes the one we call 'effect'. In *no* instance can I go any further: I can't find any third relation between these objects. So I take a broader view, and consider a number of instances in which I find objects of one kind always existing in relations of contiguity and succession with objects of another kind. At first sight this seems to be pointless: the reflection on several instances only repeats the same objects, so it can't give rise to any new idea. But on further enquiry I find that the repetition is *not* the same in every respect. It produces a new impression ·that I don't get from any single instance·, and through that impression it gives me the idea ·of necessity· which I am at present examining. For after a frequent repetition I find that on the appearance of one of the objects, custom *makes* the mind think of its usual attendant, and to think of it more vividly on account of its relation to the first object. So it is this impression, this being-made-to-think-of-the-effect, that gives me the idea of necessity.

I'm sure that you will have no trouble accepting this result, as being an obvious consequence of principles that I have already established and have often employed in my reasonings. This obviousness, both of the first principles and of the inferences from them, may seduce you into incautiously accepting the conclusion, making you imagine that it contains nothing extraordinary or worth thinking about. But although such casualness may make my reasoning easier to accept, it will also make it easier to forget; so I think I should warn you that I have just now examined one of the most elevated questions in philosophy, the one that seems to involve the interests of all the sciences—namely the question about *the power and efficacy of causes*. That warning will naturally rouse your attention and make you ask for a fuller account of my doctrine, as well as of the arguments on which it is based. This request is so reasonable that I can't refuse to comply with it, especially because I have hopes that the more my principles are examined the more forceful and convincing they will be.

There is no question which, on account of its importance as well as its difficulty, has caused more disputes among both ancient and modern philosophers than this one about the •efficacy of causes, •the quality that *makes* an effect follow a cause. But before they embarked on these disputes, I think, they would have done well to examine what *idea* we have of the •efficacy they are arguing about. This is what I find principally lacking in their reasonings, and what I shall here try to provide.

I begin by observing that the words ‘efficacy’, ‘agency’, ‘power’, ‘force’, ‘energy’, ‘necessity’, ‘connection’, and ‘productive quality’, are all nearly synonymous, which makes it absurd to employ any of them in defining any of the others. This observation rejects at once all the common definitions that philosophers have given of ‘power’ and ‘efficacy’. Our search for the idea must be directed not to these definitions but to the impressions from which it was originally derived. If it is a compound idea, it must arise from compound impressions. If simple, from simple ones.

I believe that the most widely accepted and most popular [here = ‘appropriate for ordinary folk who lack philosophical skills and knowledge’] explanation of our idea of power is to say this:

We find from experience that various new productions occur in the world of matter, such as the motions and variations of bodies; and we conclude that there must somewhere be a power capable of producing them; and this reasoning brings us at last to the idea of power and efficacy. (Thus Mr. Locke, in his chapter on Power)

But to be convinced that this explanation is more popular than philosophical we need only to remember two very obvious principles. First, •that reason alone can never give rise to any original idea, and secondly •that reason, as distinct from experience, can never make us conclude that a cause or productive quality is absolutely required for every beginning of existence. I have explained these two points already, so I shan’t go on about them here.

I shall only infer from them that since reason can never give rise to the idea of *efficacy*, that idea must be derived from experience—from particular instances of this efficacy which get into the mind through the common channels of sensation or reflection. . . . If we claim to have a sound idea of this efficacy, we must produce some *instance* in which the efficacy is plainly revealed to the mind and its operations are obvious to our consciousness or sensation. If we evade this demand, we are admitting that the •so-called• idea •of efficacy• is impossible and imaginary; since the only other escape is to plead that the idea is an innate one, and •that escape-route is blocked because• the theory of innate ideas has been already refuted and is now almost universally rejected in the learned world. What we have to do, then, is to find some natural cause-effect pair in which the mind can grasp—clearly, unambiguously, and securely—how the cause operates and what gives it its efficacy.

We don’t get much encouragement in this from the enormous variation that we find in the opinions of philosophers who have claimed to explain the secret force and energy of causes. Various philosophers have variously contended that bodies operate by
 their substantial form,
 their accidents or qualities,
 their matter and form,
 their form and accidents,

certain powers and faculties distinct from all the above. Further, all these opinions are mixed and varied in a thousand different ways, creating a strong presumption that none of them is solid or credible, and that there are simply no grounds for thinking that any of the known qualities of matter has any kind of efficacy. This presumption gains strength when we consider that substantial forms and accidents and faculties are *not* really among the known properties of bodies, but are perfectly unintelligible and inexplicable. Obviously philosophers would never have had recourse to such obscure and uncertain notions if they had met with any satisfaction in ideas that are clear and intelligible; especially in such an affair as this, which must be an object of the simplest understanding if not of the senses. The bottom line is this: we can conclude that it is impossible in any one instance of a cause-effect pair to show what it is that contains the force and agency of the cause; and that in this respect the most refined understandings are on a par with the plain man in the street. If you think you can refute this assertion, you needn't take the trouble of inventing any long arguments; all you need to do is to show us an instance of a cause where we discover the power or operating force. We often have to use this kind of challenge, as being almost the only means of proving a negative in philosophy.

The failures of their attempts to pin down this *power* has finally obliged philosophers to conclude that the ultimate force and efficacy of Nature is perfectly unknown to us, and that it is no use looking for it among the known qualities of matter. They are almost unanimous about this; where their opinions differ it is in what they infer from it.

Some of them, especially the Cartesians, have satisfied themselves that we are acquainted with *the whole essence* of matter, which they say consists in *extension*. Now, extension doesn't imply actual motion, but only mobility; so they naturally conclude that when matters moves, the energy that produces the motion can't lie in the extension, which means (for them) that it can't lie in the matter. So, they conclude, matter is not endowed with any efficacy, and can't possibly (unaided) communicate motion or produce any of the effects that we ascribe to it.

This conclusion leads them to another which they regard as entirely inescapable. They argue like this:

Matter is in itself entirely inactive and deprived of any power to produce or continue or communicate motion; but these effects are evident to our senses, and the power that produces them must be *somewhere*. So it must lie in God, the divine being who contains in his nature all excellency and perfection. So God is the first mover of the universe: he not only first created matter and gave it its initial push, but also through a continuing exertion of his omnipotence he keeps it in existence and gives it all those motions and configurations and qualities with which it is endowed.

This opinion is certainly very interesting, and well worth our attention; but if you think for a moment about *why* it has come up for us in our present inquiry, you will see that we needn't examine it in detail here. We have settled it as a principle that, as all ideas are derived from some previous perceptions, we can't have any idea of power and efficacy unless instances can be produced in which this power is perceived to exert itself. These instances can never be discovered in *body*, so the Cartesians have relied on their principle of innate ideas and had recourse to a God whom they think to be the only *active* being in

the universe, and the immediate cause of every alteration in matter. But given the falsity of the principle of innate ideas, the supposition of a God can't be of any use to us in accounting for the idea of agency which we can't find among the objects that are presented to our senses or those that we are internally conscious of in our own minds. For if every idea is derived from an impression, the idea of a God must come from the same origin; and if no impression, either of sensation or reflection, implies any force or efficacy, it is equally impossible to discover or even imagine any such active force in God. So when these Cartesian philosophers argue that

No efficacious force can be discovered in matter, so no such force should be attributed to matter,

they ought by parity of reasoning to argue No efficacious force can be discovered in God, so no such force should be attributed to God. If they regard that conclusion as absurd and impious, as indeed it is, I shall tell them how they can avoid it—namely, admitting at the outset that they have no adequate *idea* of power or efficacy in any object, since they can't discover a single instance of it in bodies or in minds, in divine natures or in creaturely ones.

The same conclusion is unavoidable on the hypothesis of those who maintain the efficacy of subordinate causes, and credit matter with having a power or energy that is real but *derivative*. For they grant that this energy doesn't lie in any of the known qualities of matter, so for them as for the Cartesians the difficulty still remains about the origin of the *idea* of it. If we really have an idea of power we can attribute power to an unknown quality; but

the idea couldn't be derived from a quality that we don't know, and there is nothing in known qualities that could produce the idea,

so it follows that it is mere self-deception for us to imagine we have any idea of this kind in the way we ordinarily think we do. All ideas are derived from and represent impressions. We never have any impression that contains any power or efficacy. So we never have any idea of power.

Some have asserted that we feel an energy or power in our own mind, and that having acquired the idea of power in this way we transfer that quality to matter, where we can't immediately discover it. The motions of our body and the thoughts and sentiments of our mind (they say) obey the will, and we needn't look beyond that for a sound notion of force or power. But to convince us of how fallacious this reasoning is, we need only notice that the will—which they are taking to be a cause—doesn't have a discoverable connection with its effects any more than any material cause has one with *its* effect. We are so far from perceiving the connection between an act of volition and a bodily movement that it is generally agreed that the powers and essence of thought and matter come nowhere near to providing an explanation for the relation between willing to make a certain movement and making it. And the will's power over our mind is no more intelligible. In that case too the effect is distinguishable and separable from the cause, and couldn't be foreseen without the experience of their constant conjunction. We can effectively command our thoughts up to a certain point, but not beyond that; and it is only by consulting experience that can know where the boundaries to our authority lie. (For example, I can *think about horses* just by choosing to think about horses; but I can't *rapidly run through thoughts of the first nineteen prime numbers* or *believe that the earth is flat* just by choosing to do so; and it is only from experience that I know what I can do

just by choosing to and what I can't—none of it 'stands to reason', none of it can be seen to be expectable given the nature of the will's command over thoughts.) In short, so far as our present topic goes, the actions of the mind are like the actions of matter: all we perceive is constant conjunction, and we can't reason beyond it. . . . We have no chance of attaining an idea of force by consulting our own minds.⁴

It has been established as a certain principle that general or abstract ideas are nothing but individual ones looked at in a certain way, and that when we reflect on any object we have to bring into our thought its particular degrees of quantity and quality—just as the object itself has to have particular degrees of quantity and quality. So if we have any idea of *power in general* we must also be able to conceive some specific kind of power; and as power can't exist alone but is always regarded as an attribute of some existing thing, we must be able to place this power in some particular thing and to conceive that thing as having a real force and energy by which such and such a particular effect *necessarily* results from its operation. We must •conceive the connection between the cause and the effect distinctly and in detail, and •see from a simple view of one of them that it *must* be followed or preceded by the other. **This is the true manner of conceiving a particular power in a particular body;** . . . and it is perfectly obvious that the human mind •can't do any such thing, that is, it •can't form an idea of two objects that will enable it to conceive any connection between them, or comprehend distinctly the power or efficacy by which they are united. Such a connection would amount to a demonstration, and would imply the absolute impossibility for the one object not to follow, or to be conceived not to follow on the other; and that kind of connection has already been rejected in all cases. If you disagree, and think you have acquired a notion of power in some particular object, please point out to me the object. Until someone does that—and nobody will!—I have to conclude that since we can never distinctly conceive how any •particular power can possibly reside in any particular object, we deceive ourselves in imagining we can form any such •general idea.

From all this we may infer that when we
 •talk of any being, whether divine or creaturely, as having a 'power' or 'force' that is exactly right for some effect, or
 •speak of a 'necessary connection' between objects, and suppose that this connection depends on an 'efficacy' or 'energy' that some of these objects possess,
 we really have no clear meaning for any of these expressions, and are merely using common words without any clear and determinate ideas. Perhaps the expressions never have meanings; but it is more probable that they do have proper meanings which they lose in these contexts through being wrongly used. So let us return to our subject, to see if we can discover the nature and origin of the ideas that we attach to the expressions •when we are using them properly.

As we confront a particular cause-effect pair, we can't just by considering either or both of those objects •perceive the tie that unites them, or •say for sure that there is a connection between them. So it is not from any one instance that we arrive at the idea of

⁴ Our ideas of God are similarly imperfect, but this can't have any effect on either religion or morals. The order of the universe proves that there is an omnipotent mind, that is, a mind whose will is *constantly accompanied* by the obedience of every creature and being. That's all that is needed as a basis for all the articles of religion; we don't need to form a distinct idea of God's force and energy.

cause and effect, of a necessary connection, of power, of force, of energy, of efficacy. •If all we ever saw were particular conjunctions of objects, each conjoined pair being entirely different from each of the others, we could never form any such ideas.

But •when we observe numerous instances in which the same •kinds of• objects are conjoined, we immediately conceive a connection between them, and begin to draw an inference from one to another. So this •multiplicity of resembling instances constitutes the *essence* of power or connection, and is the source from which the idea of it arises. To understand the idea of power, then, we must consider this •multiplicity—and that is all I shall want for a solution of the difficulty we have been wrestling with. I reason thus:-

The repetition of perfectly similar instances can't on its own give rise to an original idea different from what is to be found in any particular instance; I have pointed this out already, and it obviously follows from my basic principle that all ideas are copied from impressions. But the idea of *power* is a new original idea that isn't to be found in any one instance, and yet it arises from the repetition of numerous instances; so it follows that the repetition doesn't have that effect on its own, but must either (1) reveal or (2) produce something new that *is* the source of that idea. . . .

(1) But the repetition of similar objects in similar relations of succession and contiguity obviously doesn't •reveal anything new in any one of them, since we can't draw any inference from it or make it a subject of either demonstrative or probable reasonings (as I proved in section 6). Indeed, even if we *could* draw an inference, it wouldn't make any difference in the present case. That is because no kind of reasoning can give rise to a new idea such as the idea of *power* is; when we reason we must *already* have clear ideas to serve as the objects of our reasoning. The conception always precedes the understanding; and where one is obscure the other is uncertain, where one fails the other must fail also.

(2) It is certain that this repetition of similar objects in similar situations •produces nothing new in these objects or in any external body. For you will readily agree that the different instances we have of the conjunction of resembling causes and effects are in themselves entirely independent •of one another•, and that the passing on of motion that I see result from the present collision of two billiard balls is totally distinct from what I saw result from such a collision a year ago. These collisions have no influence on each other: they are entirely separated by time and place, and one of them could have existed and communicated motion even if the other had never occurred. So:

Nothing new is either •revealed or •produced in any objects by their constant conjunction, and by the uninterrupted resemblance of their relations of succession and contiguity.

Yet it is from this resemblance that the ideas of *necessity*, of *power*, and of *efficacy* are derived.

So these ideas don't represent anything that does or can belong to the objects that are constantly conjoined.

Look at this argument from any angle you like—you will find it to be perfectly unanswerable. Similar instances are the first source of our idea of power or necessity; but their similarity doesn't give them any influence on each other or on any external object. We must therefore look in some other direction to find the origin of that idea.

Though the numerous resembling instances that give rise to the idea of power have no influence on each other, and can never produce in the object any new quality that

could be the model for that idea, our *observation* of this resemblance produces a new impression *in our mind*, and that is the idea's real model. For after we have observed the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a *determination* of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive the latter in a stronger light on account of that determination. [Feeling a 'determination' to form a certain idea is just feeling oneself being *made* to form the idea. Most of Hume's uses of 'determine' etc. have been rendered here by 'make' etc., but in the present section 'determination' is allowed to stand.] **This determination is the only effect of the resemblance**, and so it must *be* the power or efficacy the idea of which is derived from the resemblance. The numerous instances of resembling conjunctions lead us into the notion of power and necessity. These instances are in themselves totally distinct from each other and have no union except in our mind, which observes them and collects their ideas. So necessity is the effect of *this observation*, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind—a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another. If we don't view it in this way we can never arrive at the most distant notion of it, or be able to attribute it either to external or internal objects, to spirit or body, to causes or effects.

•The necessary connection between causes and effects is the basis of our inference from one to the other. The basis of our inference is •the transition •in our minds• arising from the accustomed union. These, therefore, are the same: •the necessary connection between causes and effects *is* the move our mind makes from an impression of the cause to a lively idea of the effect, or perhaps it is not the move itself but rather our being *made or determined* to make the move•.

The idea of necessity arises from some impression. No impression conveyed by our •outer• senses can give rise to it. So it must be derived from some internal impression, some impression of reflection. The only internal impression that has anything to do with the present business is •the impression of• the propensity that custom produces in us to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. **This, therefore, is the essence of necessity.** The bottom line is this: necessity is something that exists in the mind, not in objects, and we can't ever form the remotest idea of it considered as a quality in bodies. Either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but the determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects (and vice versa) according to their experienced union.

Thus, just as •the necessity that makes twice two equal four lies only in •the act of the understanding by which we consider and compare these ideas, so also •the necessity or power that unites causes with effects lies in •the determination of the mind to pass from the one to the other. The efficacy or energy of causes doesn't belong to the causes themselves or to God or to the two together; it belongs entirely to the mind that considers the union of two or more objects in all past instances. It is here that the real *power* of causes is placed, along with their *connection* and *necessity*.

I am aware that this is the most violent of all the paradoxes that I have advanced or will advance in the course of this *Treatise*, and that only through solid proof and reasoning can I hope to get it accepted and to overcome the ingrained prejudices of mankind. Before people are reconciled to this doctrine, they will have *often* to repeat to themselves •the central line of argument•:

The simple view of any two objects or actions, however they are related, can never give us any idea of power or of a connection between them.

This idea arises from the repetition of their union.

The repetition doesn't reveal anything or cause anything in the objects; its only influence is on the mind, through the customary transition that it produces. Therefore: this customary transition is the same as the power and necessity, which are therefore qualities of perceptions rather than of objects, and are internally felt by the soul rather than perceived externally in bodies.

Any extraordinary claim is usually met with astonishment, which immediately changes into the highest degree of admiration or contempt, depending on whether we approve or disapprove of what is said. I am much afraid that although the above reasoning seems to me the shortest and most decisive imaginable, the bias of the mind will persist in the general run of readers, giving them a prejudice against the present doctrine.

This bias against it is easily accounted for. It is widely recognized that the mind has a great propensity to *spread itself* on external objects: when some objects cause internal impressions that always occur at the same time that the objects appear to the senses, the mind conjoins these impressions with the objects. For example, as certain sounds and smells are always found to accompany certain visible objects, we naturally imagine that the sounds and smells are in the objects, even being in the same place, though in fact the qualities are the wrong sorts of thing to be conjoined with objects, and really don't exist in any place. I shall return to this in iv.5. All I need say here is that this propensity ·that the mind has for spreading itself on external objects· is what makes us suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind that considers them. . . .

But although this is the only reasonable account we can give of necessity, the contrary notion is so riveted in the mind by the forces I have mentioned that I am sure my views will be treated by many as extravagant and ridiculous.

What! the efficacy of causes lies in the determination of the mind? As if causes didn't operate entirely independently of the mind, and wouldn't continue their operation even if no minds existed to think about them or reason about them! •Thought may well depend on •causes for its operation, but •causes don't depend on •thought. ·To suppose otherwise· is to reverse the order of Nature and give a secondary role to what is really primary. To every operation there is an appropriate power, which must belong to the body that operates. If we remove the power from one cause, we must ascribe it to another; but to remove it from all causes and bestow it on a being that relates to the cause and the effect only by perceiving them is a gross absurdity and contrary to the most certain principles of human reason.

All I can say in reply to these arguments is that they are like a blind man's claiming to find a great many absurdities in the supposition that the colour of scarlet is not the same as the sound of a trumpet, or that light is not the same as solidity! If we really have no idea of power or efficacy in any object, or of any real connection between causes and effects, it won't do much good to 'prove' that efficacy is necessary in all operations. People who say such things don't understand their own meanings, and ignorantly run together ideas that are entirely distinct from each other. I willingly allow that both material and immaterial objects may have various qualities of which we know nothing; and if we choose to call these 'power' or 'efficacy', that won't matter much to the world. But when we use the terms 'power' and 'efficacy' not as •meaning those unknown qualities, but rather as •signifying something of which we *do* have a clear idea, and which

is incompatible with the objects to which we attribute it, obscurity and error begin to occur and we are led astray by a false philosophy. That is what happens when we transfer •the determination of the thought to •external objects and credit *them* with a real intelligible connection between them, this being ·an objectivised analogue of· a quality that can belong only to the observing mind.

As for the point that the operations of Nature are independent of our thought and reasoning, I agree; which is why I have remarked

- that objects have the relations of contiguity and succession to each other,
- that similar objects can be observed to have similar relations in many instances, and
- that all this is independent of the operations of the understanding.

But if we go beyond that and ascribe a *power* or *necessary connection* to these objects, we are ascribing something that we can never observe in them, and have to derive the idea of it from what we feel internally when we think about them. I carry this doctrine so far that I am ready to apply it to ·the causal claim involved in· my present line of thought. ·I do that in the following paragraph·.

When an object is presented to us, it immediately gives the mind a lively idea of the object that is usually found to accompany it, and this determination of the mind forms the necessary connection of these objects. But when we step back and attend not to •the objects but to •our perceptions of them, we still have a causal claim to consider, namely that the impression (of one object) is the cause and the lively idea (of another object) is the effect; and *their* necessary connection is the new determination that we feel to pass from the idea of the impression to the idea of the lively idea. The force that unites our internal perceptions is as unintelligible—as incapable of being seen as necessitating, just by hard thinking—as is the force that unites external objects, and is known to us only by experience. Now, I have already sufficiently examined and explained the nature and effects of experience: it never gives us any insight into the internal structure or operating force of objects, but only accustoms the mind to pass from ·an impression of· one to ·a lively idea of· another.

It is now time to gather up all the parts of this reasoning, and assemble them into an exact definition of the relation of cause and effect, which is our present topic. This order of exposition - *first* examining our inference from the cause-effect relation and *then* explaining the relation itself - would have been inexcusable if it had been possible to proceed in any other way. But as the nature of •the relation depends so much on that of •the inference, I have had to advance in this seemingly preposterous manner, using certain terms before being able exactly to define them or fix their meaning. I shall now correct this fault by giving a precise definition of cause and effect.

There are two definitions we can give for this relation, which differ only in that they present different views of the same object; one makes us consider cause-effect as a •philosophical relation (a mere comparison of two ideas), the other makes us consider it as a •natural relation (an association between two ideas). We can define a ‘cause’ to be

An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are similarly precedent and contiguous to objects that resemble the latter.

If you find this to be defective because in addition to the cause and the effect it brings in something extraneous (·namely, other objects that resemble them·), we can substitute this other definition in its place:

A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and united with it in such a way that the idea of one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of one to form a livelier idea of the other.

If you reject this too for the same reason—·because in addition to the cause and the effect it brings something extraneous (namely our impressions and ideas of them)·—I can only ask you to replace it by a better definition. I have to admit that I can't do that. [Hume then goes on to repeat his theory and his reasons for it, concluding:] However extraordinary my views ·about cause-effect· may appear, I think it is useless to trouble myself with any further enquiry or reasoning on the subject, and shall now rely on them as on established maxims.

Before leaving this subject I shall draw some corollaries from my theory—ones that will enable us to remove four prejudices and popular errors that have held sway in philosophy. (1) We can learn from my doctrine that all causes are of the same kind, and that there is no basis for distinguishing ·making· causes from ·enabling· causes, or for sorting out causes according to whether they are

efficient,
formal,
material,
exemplary, or
final.

[The efficient cause of a coin is the stamping of a die on hot metal, its formal cause is its roundness etc., its material cause is the metal it is made of, and its final cause is the commercial end for which the coin was made. The notion of 'exemplary cause', employed by some mediaeval philosophers wishing to combine Plato with Christianity, can't be briefly explained here.] Our idea of efficiency ·or *making*· is derived from the constant conjunction of two ·kinds of· objects; when this is observed the cause is efficient; and where it is not, there is no cause of any kind. For the same reason we must deny that there is any essential difference between *cause* and *occasion*. If constant conjunction is implied in what we call 'occasion', it is a real cause. If not, it isn't a ·natural· relation at all, and can't give rise to any argument or reasoning. [Some philosophers, notably Malebranche, held that created things cannot really act on one another, and that what happens in a collision is that God causes one object to move *on the occasion* of its being bumped into by another body.]

(2) The same course of reasoning will make us conclude that just as there is only one kind of *cause*, so also there is only one kind of *necessity*, and that the common distinction between 'moral' and 'physical' necessity has no basis. This account I have given of necessity makes this clear. The constant conjunction of objects, along with the determination of the mind, constitutes *physical necessity*; and when these are absent what you have is *chance*. As objects must either be conjoined or not, and as the mind must either be determined or not to pass from one object to another, there can't be any middle case between chance and absolute necessity. You don't change the nature of the necessity by weakening this conjunction and determination. Even in the operation of bodies there are different degrees of constancy ·of going-together·, and different degrees of force ·exerted on the mind in its movement from impression to idea·, without producing different *kinds of causality*.

The distinction that is often made between ·having· power and exercising it is equally baseless.

(3) Perhaps I can now fully overcome all the natural reluctance to accept my earlier arguments in which I tried to prove that *the necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence* has no demonstrative or intuitive support. That conclusion won't appear strange in the light of my definitions. If we define a 'cause' to be

An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are similarly precedent and contiguous to objects that resemble the latter,

we can easily grasp that there is no absolute or metaphysical necessity that every beginning of existence should be preceded by such an object. And if we define a 'cause' to be

An object precedent and contiguous to another, and united with it in the imagination in such a way that the idea of one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of one to form a livelier idea of the other, we shall have even less difficulty in assenting to my opinion. Such an influence on the mind—so far from being something we can be sure *must* go with every beginning of existence—is in itself perfectly extraordinary and incomprehensible, and it is only from experience and observation that we are certain that it ever occurs.

(4) We can never have reason to believe in the existence of something of which we can't form an idea. All our reasonings about existence are derived from causation, so they are derived from the experienced conjunction of objects and not from any exercise of pure thinking. So the same experience ·that grounds our causal reasoning· must give us a notion of these objects ·whose existence we reason to·; so there can't be any mystery in our conclusions—that is, we can't soundly argue for the existence of an I-know-not-what of which we don't have an idea. . . .

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TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE

Book I: The understanding

Part ii: The Ideas of Space and Time

Section 6: The Ideas of Existence and External Existence

It may be a good idea, before we leave this subject, to explain the ideas of existence and of external existence, which have their difficulties as well as the ideas of space and time. This will help to prepare us for the examination of knowledge and

probability, when we understand perfectly all the particular ideas that can enter into our reasoning.

Every impression or idea of every kind, in consciousness and in memory, is conceived as existent; and obviously the most perfect idea . . . of being is derived from this consciousness. This gives rise to a splendidly clear and conclusive dilemma: that since we never remember any idea or impression without attributing existence to it, the idea of existence must either be •derived from a distinct impression that is conjoined with every perception or object of our thought or be •the very same as the idea of the perception or object.

This dilemma is an obvious consequence of the principle that every idea arises from a similar impression, so there is no doubt about how we should choose between the horns of the dilemma. So far from there being any distinct impression attending every •other• impression and every idea, I don't think that any two distinct impressions are inseparably conjoined. Though certain sensations may at one time be united, we quickly find they can be separated and can appear apart. And thus, though every impression and idea we remember is considered as existent, the idea of existence is not derived from any particular impression.

The •idea of existence, then, is identical with •the idea of whatever it is that we conceive to be existent. To reflect on something •simply, and to reflect on it •as existent, are exactly the same procedure. When the idea of existence is conjoined with the idea of an object, it adds nothing to it. Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent. Any idea we please to form is the idea of a being; and the idea of a being is any idea we please to form.

If you oppose this, you are obliged to point out the distinct impression from which your idea of entity [= 'existing thing'] is derived, and to prove that this impression is inseparable from every perception we believe to be existent. This, we can say without hesitation, is impossible.

My reasoning •in section 7i• about •the so-called 'distinction of reason'—the distinction of ideas without any real difference—won't do anything for us here. That kind of distinction is based on the fact that a single simple idea may resemble several different ideas •in different respects•. But no object can resemble a second object with respect to its existence while differing from a third in that respect, since every object that is presented •as a candidate for comparison• must necessarily be existent.

Similar reasoning will account for the idea of external existence. It is a philosophical commonplace as well as a pretty obvious truth that nothing is ever really present to the mind except its perceptions—its impressions and ideas—and that external objects become known to us only through the perceptions they give rise to. To hate, to love, to think, to feel, to see—all this is just to perceive.

Now, since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since every idea is derived from something that was previously present to the mind; it follows that we can't so much as conceive or form an idea of anything that is specifically different [= 'different in fundamental kind'] from ideas and impressions. Look outside yourself as much as you can; chase your imagination to the heavens or to the outer limits of the universe; you'll never really advance a step beyond yourself, and you can't conceive any kind of existent other than the perceptions that have appeared within the narrow compass

of your mind. This is the universe of the imagination, and we have no ideas of anything that is not produced there.

The furthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, taking them to be specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them without claiming to comprehend the objects themselves. Generally speaking, we don't suppose them to be specifically different; we take them to differ from our perceptions only in respect of some of their relations, connections, and durations. But of this more fully hereafter—Next.

TREATISE OF HUMAN NATURE

Book I: The understanding

Part iv: The Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy

Section 2: Scepticism with regard to the senses

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

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

Why do we attribute a **continued** existence to objects even when they aren't present to the senses? and

Why do we suppose objects to have an existence **distinct** from the mind and perception?

In the second question, I am using 'distinct from' to refer to object's spatial position as well as its causal relations—its external position as well as the independence of its existence and operation.

These two questions, about the continued and distinct existence of body, are intimately connected. For if the objects of our senses continue to exist even when they are not perceived, their existence is of course independent of the perception and in that sense distinct from it; and conversely, if their existence is independent of the perception and in that sense distinct from it, they must continue to exist even when they are not perceived. But though a decision on either of the questions also decides the other as well, it will be easier for us to discover the sources in human nature from which the decision arises if we treat continuity separately from distinctness. So I shall inquire whether the opinion that bodies have a continued existence is produced by the senses, by reason, or by the imagination, and shall inquire into the analogous question regarding the opinion

that bodies exist •distinct from the mind. These are the only questions that are intelligible on the present subject. As for the notion of external existence, when understood to mean that bodies exist and are of a categorially different sort from our perceptions, I have already shown its absurdity in ii.6.

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

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

So if our senses suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must do it by presenting their impressions as *being* those very existences, this being a kind of fallacy and illusion. In this connection I point out that all sensations are felt by the mind as what they really are; when we *wonder whether* they present themselves as distinct objects or only as impressions, we aren't asking about their nature but about their •relations and •situation—specifically, about whether they are •related to us by causation or resemblance, and whether they are •located somewhere other than where we are•. Now, if the senses presented our impressions as being objects that are *external to and independent of ourselves*, they must be able to relate the objects to ourselves, which means that we ourselves must appear to our senses. So that is the question we now have to face: *how far are we ourselves the objects of our senses?*

No question in philosophy is more abstruse than the one about •personal• identity—about the nature of the uniting principle that •makes a •number of items• constitute •one person. So far from being able to answer it merely through our senses, we must—and in section 6 I shall—have recourse to the most profound metaphysics to give a satisfactory answer to it; and in common life it is obvious that these ideas of *self* and *person* are never very fixed or determinate. So it is absurd to suggest that *the senses* can ever distinguish ourselves from external objects.

And a further point:- All impressions (external and internal), passions, affections, sensations, pains, and pleasures are originally on the same footing; and whatever differences we may observe among them, they *all* appear in their true colours *as impressions or perceptions* •and not as objects distinct from ourselves•. Indeed, it is hardly possible that it should be otherwise: it isn't conceivable that our senses should be able to deceive us about the situation and relations of our impressions, any more than about their nature. For since all the actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by

consciousness, they must in every detail appear to be what they are, and be what they appear. It is impossible that something that enters the mind as *really* a perception should *appear* to be something different. If that could happen, it would mean that we might be mistaken even about what we are most intimately conscious of.

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

It may be said that we can set aside the metaphysical question about the identity of a thinking substance, and thus also the question of bodies as existing •independently of us, and deal affirmatively with the question about their •external existence, through the following argument:

My own body evidently belongs to me, and as various impressions appear exterior to *my body* I suppose them to be exterior to *me*. The paper on which I am now writing is beyond my hand. The table is beyond the paper. The walls of the room beyond the table. And in looking towards the window I see a great extent of fields and buildings beyond my room. From all this it can be inferred that all I need are my senses, with no help from any other faculty, to be convinced of the •external existence of body.

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

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

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

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

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

Both philosophers and ordinary folk suppose the first of these to have a distinct continued existence. Only common people regard the second in that way. Both philosophers and common folk, again, regard the third as merely perceptions and thus as being interrupted and dependent in their existence.

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

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

•REASON•

Notice that when people attribute a distinct continued existence to sounds and colours, they do this without ever consulting reason or testing our opinions by any philosophical principles. Indeed, whatever convincing arguments philosophers may think they can produce to establish the belief in objects that are independent of the mind, these arguments are known to only a very few; it is not by *them* that children, peasants, and most of mankind are induced to attribute independent objects to some impressions and deny them to others. Thus, we find that all the conclusions that common people arrive at about this are *directly contrary* to those that are confirmed by philosophy! For philosophy informs us that everything that appears to the mind is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted and dependent on the mind; whereas common people confuse perceptions with objects, and attribute a distinct continued existence (objects) to the very things they feel or see (perceptions). This opinion is entirely *unreasonable*, therefore, and so it must come from some faculty other than the understanding, i.e. other than *reason*. To which I would add this:- As long as we take our perceptions and objects to be the same, we can't infer the existence of the objects from the existence of the perceptions, or form any argument from the relation of cause and effect, which is the only one that can assure us of any matter of fact. And even after we distinguish perceptions from objects, it will soon appear that we still can't reason from the existence of one to the existence of the other. All this shows that our reason doesn't and couldn't possibly, on any supposition,

give us an assurance of the continued and distinct existence of body. That opinion must be entirely owing to the imagination, which must now be the subject of our enquiry. The discussion of the imagination's role in producing the belief in continued bodies that are distinct from us will occupy more than half of the length of this section.

•IMAGINATION: FIRST ATTEMPTS•

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

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

Having rejected these common opinions, we must search for some other theory revealing the special qualities in some impressions that makes us attribute to them a distinct and continued existence. After a little examination we shall find that all the objects to which we attribute a continued existence have a peculiar **constancy** that distinguishes them from the impressions •that we don't regard as existing continuously, through gaps in our perception, because we think that their• existence depends on our perception. The mountains and houses and trees that I see at this moment have always appeared to me in the same order, and when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head I soon after find them return to me without the least alteration. My bed and table, my books and papers, present themselves in the same uniform manner, and don't change because of interruptions in my seeing or perceiving them. This is the case with *all* the impressions whose objects are supposed to have an external existence, and it doesn't hold for *any* other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary.

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

me think that the former cause the latter; and that requires that the fire stayed in existence throughout. This is the 'kind of reasoning from causation' to which I referred.) So this **coherence** in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their **constancy**.

Having found that the belief in the continued existence of body depends on the coherence and constancy of certain impressions, I now ask *how* these qualities give rise to this extraordinary opinion. To begin with coherence: although the internal impressions that we regard as fleeting and perishing also have a certain coherence or regularity in their appearances, it is of a somewhat different kind from what we find in bodies. We find by experience that our passions have a mutual connection with and dependence on each other; but we never find ourselves having to suppose that they have existed and operated when they were not perceived, in order to preserve the same dependence and connection of which we have had experience. It is not like that with external objects. *They* require a continued existence if they are not to lose much of the regularity of their operation. I am sitting here in my room with my face to the fire, and all the objects that strike my senses are within a few yards of me. (It is true that my memory informs me of the existence of many other objects; but what it tells me is only about their *past* existence, and neither it nor my senses tell me that those things have continued in existence until now.) So here I am, turning over these thoughts, when suddenly I hear a noise as of a door turning on its hinges, and a moment later I see a porter coming towards me. This gives rise to many new reflections and reasonings in which three things predominate. I have never observed that this kind of noise could come from anything but the motion of a door; so I conclude that the present phenomenon is a contradiction to all past experience unless the door that I remember on the other side of the room still exists. I have always found that human bodies have a quality that I call 'gravity' which prevents them from floating in the air, which is what this porter must have done to arrive at my chamber unless the stairs that I remember have survived my absence from them. I receive a letter which, when I open it, I see by the handwriting and signature to have come from a friend, and in it he says he is six hundred miles away. Obviously I can't account for this phenomenon, consistently with my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us, and supposing the effects and continued existence of coaches and ferries, according to my memory and observation. Looked at in a certain way, these phenomena of the porter and letter are contradictions to common experience, and may be regarded as objections to the maxims we form about the connections of causes and effects. I am accustomed to hearing a certain sound and at the same time seeing a certain object in motion. On this occasion I have received one of these impressions without the other. These observations are contrary unless I suppose that the door still exists and that it was opened without my perceiving it; and this supposition, which at first was entirely arbitrary and hypothetical, becomes more strong and convincing through being the only one that lets me reconcile the contradiction. At almost every moment of my life there is a similar instance presented to me, leading me to suppose the continued existence of objects in order to connect their past appearances with their present ones, giving them such a union with each other as I have found by experience to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances. Thus I am naturally led to regard the world as something real and durable, and as preserving its existence even when I don't perceive it.

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

it is impossible that •any habit should ever be acquired other than through the regular succession of these perceptions, and impossible that •any habit should ever exceed that degree of regularity.

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

Section 6: Personal identity

Some philosophers believe this:

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

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

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

Furthermore, if we retain this hypothesis about the self, what are we to say about all our particular perceptions? They are all different, distinguishable, and separable from one other—they can be separately thought about, and can exist separately—with no need for anything to support their existence. In what way do they *belong* to self? How are they connected with it? For my part, when I look inward at what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure, or the like. I never catch myself *without* a perception, and never observe anything *but* the perception. When I am without perceptions for a while, as in sound sleep, for that period I am not aware of myself and can truly be said not to exist. If all my perceptions were removed by death, and I could not think, feel, see, love or hate after my body had decayed, I would be entirely annihilated—I cannot see that anything more would be needed to turn me into nothing. If anyone seriously and thoughtfully claims to have a different notion of himself, I can't reason with him any longer. I have to admit that he may be right about himself, as I am about myself. He may perceive something simple and continued that he calls himself, though I am certain there is no such thing in me.

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