

something similar in the operations of the mind. Many Philosophers resolve almost every operation of mind into impressions and feelings, words manifestly borrowed from the sense of touch. And it is very natural to conceive contiguity necessary between that which makes the impression, and that which receives it; between that which feels, and that which is felt. And though no Philosopher will now pretend to justify such analogical reasoning as this; yet it has a powerful influence upon the judgment, while we contemplate the operations of our minds, only as they appear through the deceitful medium of such analogical notions and expressions.

When we lay aside those analogies, and reflect attentively upon our perception of the objects of sense, we must acknowledge, that, though we are conscious of perceiving objects, we are altogether ignorant how it is brought about; and know as little how we perceive objects as how we were made. And if we should admit an image in the mind, or contiguous to it, we know as little how perception may be produced by this image as by the most distant object. Why therefore should we be led, by a theory which is neither grounded on evidence, nor, if admitted, can explain any one phænomenon of perception, to reject the natural and immediate dictates of those perceptive powers, to which, in the conduct of life, we find a necessity of yielding implicit submission?

There remains only one other argument that I have been able to find urged against our perceiving external objects immediately. It is proposed by Mr HUME, who, in the Essay already quoted, after acknowledging that it is an universal and primary opinion of all men, that we perceive external objects immediately, subjoins what follows.

“But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception; and that the senses are only the inlets through which these images are received, without being ever able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration. It was therefore nothing but its image which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man who reflects, ever doubted that the existences which we consider, when we say *this house*, and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies

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and representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent. So far then, we are necessitated, by reasoning, to depart from the primary instincts of nature, and to embrace a new system with regard to the evidence of our senses."⁸⁷

5 We have here a remarkable conflict between two contradictory opinions, wherein all mankind are engaged. On the one side stand all the vulgar, who are unpractised in philosophical researches, and guided by the uncorrupted primary instincts of nature. On the other side, stand all the Philosophers ancient and modern; every man without exception who reflects. In this division, to my great humiliation, I find myself classed with the vulgar.

The passage now quoted is all I have found in Mr HUME's writings upon this point; and indeed there is more reasoning in it than I have found in any other author; I shall therefore examine it minutely.

15 *First*, He tells us, That "this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception."

20 The phrase of being present to the mind has some obscurity; but I conceive he means being an immediate object of thought; an immediate object, for instance, of perception, of memory, or of imagination. If this be the meaning, (and it is the only pertinent one I can think of), there is no more in this passage but an assertion of the proposition to be proved, and an assertion that philosophy teaches it. 25 If this be so, I beg leave to dissent from philosophy till she gives me reason for what she teaches. For though common sense and my external senses demand my assent to their dictates upon their own authority, yet philosophy is not entitled to this privilege. But that I 30 may not dissent from so grave a personage without giving a reason, I give this as the reason of my dissent. I see the sun when he shines; I remember the battle of Culloden; and neither of these objects is an image or perception.

He tells us in the next place, "That the senses are only the inlets through which these images are received."

I know that ARISTOTLE and the schoolmen taught, that images or species flow from objects, and are let in by the senses, and strike

⁸⁷ Hume, *Second Enquiry*, Sect. XII, Part I, p. 152.

upon the mind; but this has been so effectually refuted by DES
 CARTES, by MALEBRANCHE, and many others, that nobody
 now pretends to defend it. Reasonable men consider it as one of the
 most unintelligible and unmeaning parts of the ancient system. To
 5 what cause is it owing that modern Philosophers are so prone to fall
 back into this hypothesis, as if they really believed it? For of this
 proneness I could give many instances besides this of Mr HUME; and
 I take the cause to be, that images in the mind, and images let in by
 the senses, are so nearly allied, and so strictly connected, that they
 10 must stand or fall together. The old system consistently maintained
 both: But the new system has rejected the doctrine of images let in by
 the senses, holding, nevertheless, that there are images in the mind;
 and, having made this unnatural divorce of two doctrines which
 ought not to be put asunder, that which they have retained often leads
 15 them back involuntarily to that which they have rejected.

Mr HUME surely did not seriously believe that an image of sound
 is let in by the ear, an image of smell by the nose, an image of hardness
 and softness, of solidity and resistance, by the touch. For, besides the
 absurdity of the thing, which has often been shown, Mr HUME, and
 20 all modern Philosophers maintain, that the images which are the
 immediate objects of perception have no existence when they are not
 perceived; whereas, if they were let in by the senses, they must be,
 before they are perceived, and have a separate existence.

He tells us farther, that philosophy teaches, that the senses are
 25 unable to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and
 the object. Here, I still require the reasons that philosophy gives for
 this; for, to my apprehension, I immediately perceive external objects,
 and this I conceive is the immediate intercourse here meant.

Hitherto I see nothing that can be called an argument. Perhaps it
 30 was intended only for illustration. The argument, the only argument
 follows:

The table which we see, seems to diminish as we remove farther
 from it; but the real table which exists independent of us suffers no
 alteration: It was therefore nothing but its image which was presented
 35 to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason.

To judge of the strength of this argument, it is necessary to attend
 to a distinction which is familiar to those who are conversant in the
 mathematical sciences, I mean the distinction between real and
 apparent magnitude. The real magnitude of a line is measured by

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 capacity. This magnitude is an object of touch only, and not of sight;
 nor could we even have had any conception of it, without the sense of
 touch; and Bishop BERKELEY, on that account, calls it *tangible*
 5 *magnitude*.⁸⁸

Apparent magnitude is measured by the angle which an object
 subtends at the eye. Supposing two right lines drawn from the eye to
 the extremities of the object making an angle, of which the object is
 the subtense, the apparent magnitude is measured by this angle. This
 10 apparent magnitude is an object of sight, and not of touch. Bishop
 BERKELEY calls it *visible magnitude*.⁸⁹

If it is asked, what is the apparent magnitude of the sun's diameter?
 the answer is, that it is about thirty-one minutes of a degree. But if it is
 15 asked, what is the real magnitude of the sun's diameter? the answer
 must be, so many thousand miles, or so many diameters of the earth.
 From which it is evident, that real magnitude, and apparent magni-
 tude, are things of a different nature, though the name of magnitude
 is given to both. The first has three dimensions, the last only two. The
 20 first is measured by a line, the last by an angle.

From what has been said, it is evident that the real magnitude of a
 body must continue unchanged, while the body is unchanged. This we
 grant. But is it likewise evident, that the apparent magnitude must
 continue the same while the body is unchanged? So far otherwise, that
 25 every man who knows any thing of mathematics can easily demon-
 strate, that the same individual object, remaining in the same place,
 and unchanged, must necessarily vary in its apparent magnitude,
 according as the point from which it is seen is more or less distant;
 and that its apparent length or breadth will be nearly in a reciprocal
 30 proportion to the distance of the spectator. This is as certain as the
 principles of geometry.

We must likewise attend to this, that though the real magnitude of
 a body is not originally an object of sight, but of touch, yet we learn
 by experience to judge of the real magnitude in many cases by sight.
 35 We learn by experience to judge of the distance of a body from the eye

88. George Berkeley, *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709; 4th edn, London, 1732), paras 55 and 61.

89. Berkeley, *Theory of Vision*, paras 53-4.

within certain limits; and from its distance and apparent magnitude taken together, we learn to judge of its real magnitude.

5 And this kind of judgment, by being repeated every hour, and almost every minute of our lives, becomes, when we are grown up, so ready and so habitual, that it very much resembles the original perceptions of our senses, and may not improperly be called *acquired perception*.

10 Whether we call it judgment or acquired perception is a verbal difference. But it is evident, that, by means of it, we often discover by one sense things which are properly and naturally the objects of another. Thus I can say without impropriety, I hear a drum, I hear a great bell, or I hear a small bell; though it is certain that the figure or size of the sounding body is not originally an object of hearing. In like manner, we learn by experience how a body of such a real magnitude, and at such a distance appears to the eye: But neither its real magnitude, nor its distance from the eye, are properly objects of sight, any more than the form of a drum, or the size of a bell, are properly objects of hearing.

20 If these things be considered, it will appear, that Mr HUME's argument hath no force to support his conclusion, nay, that it leads to a contrary conclusion. The argument is this, the table we see seems to diminish as we remove farther from it; that is, its apparent magnitude is diminished; but the real table suffers no alteration, to wit, in its real magnitude; therefore it is not the real table we see: I admit both the premises in this syllogism, but I deny the conclusion. The syllogism has what the Logicians call two middle terms: Apparent magnitude is the middle term in the first premise; real magnitude in the second. Therefore, according to the rules of logic, the conclusion is not justly drawn from the premises; but, laying aside the rules of logic, let us examine it by the light of common sense.

30 Let us suppose, for a moment, that it is the real table we see: Must not this real table seem to diminish as we remove farther from it? It is demonstrable that it must. How then can this apparent diminution be an argument that it is not the real table? When that which must happen to the real table, as we remove farther from it, does actually happen to the table we see, it is absurd to conclude from this, that it is not the real table we see. It is evident therefore, that this ingenious author has imposed upon himself by confounding real magnitude with apparent magnitude, and that his argument is a mere sophism.

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I observed that Mr HUME's argument not only has no strength to support his conclusion, but that it leads to the contrary conclusion; to wit, that it is the real table we see; for this plain reason, that the table we see has precisely that apparent magnitude which it is demonstrable the real table must have when placed at that distance.

This argument is made much stronger by considering, that the real table may be placed successively at a thousand different distances; and in every distance, in a thousand different positions; and it can be determined demonstratively, by the rules of geometry and perspective, what must be its apparent magnitude, and apparent figure, in each of those distances and positions. Let the table be placed successively in as many of those different distances, and different positions, as you will, or in them all; open your eyes and you shall see a table precisely of that apparent magnitude, and that apparent figure, which the real table must have in that distance, and in that position. Is not this a strong argument that it is the real table you see?

In a word, the appearance of a visible object is infinitely diversified, according to its distance and position. The visible appearances are innumerable, when we confine ourselves to one object, and they are multiplied according to the variety of objects. Those appearances have been matter of speculation to ingenious men, at least since the time of EUCLID. They have accounted for all this variety, on the supposition, that the objects we see are external, and not in the mind itself. The rules they have demonstrated about the various projections of the sphere, about the appearances of the planets in their progressions, stations, and retrogradations, and all the rules of perspective, are built on the supposition that the objects of sight are external. They can each of them be tried in thousands of instances. In many arts and professions innumerable trials are daily made; nor were they ever found to fail in a single instance. Shall we say that a false supposition, invented by the rude vulgar, has been so lucky in solving an infinite number of phenomena of nature? This surely would be a greater prodigy than philosophy ever exhibited: Add to this, that upon the contrary hypothesis, to wit, that the objects of sight are internal, no account can be given of any one of those appearances, nor any physical cause assigned why a visible object should, in any one case, have one apparent figure and magnitude rather than another.

Thus I have considered every argument I have found advanced to

prove the existence of ideas, or images of external things, in the mind: And if no better arguments can be found, I cannot help thinking, that the whole history of philosophy has never furnished an instance of an opinion so unanimously entertained by Philosophers upon so slight grounds.

A *third* reflection I would make upon this subject is, That Philosophers, notwithstanding their unanimity as to the existence of ideas, hardly agree in any one thing else concerning them. If ideas be not a mere fiction, they must be, of all objects of human knowledge, the things we have best access to know, and to be acquainted with; yet there is nothing about which men differ so much.

Some have held them to be self-existent, others to be in the Divine Mind, others in our own minds, and others in the brain or *sensorium*; I considered the hypothesis of images in the brain, in the fourth chapter of this Essay. As to images in the mind, if any thing more is meant by the image of an object in the mind than the thought of that object, I know not what it means. The distinct conception of an object may, in a metaphorical or analogical sense, be called an *image* of it in the mind. But this image is only the conception of the object, and not the object conceived. It is an act of the mind, and not the object of that act.

Some Philosophers will have our ideas, or a part of them, to be innate; others will have them all to be adventitious: Some derive them from the senses alone; others from sensation and reflection: Some think they are fabricated by the mind itself; others that they are produced by external objects; others that they are the immediate operation of the Deity; others say, that impressions are the causes of ideas, and that the causes of impressions are unknown: Some think that we have ideas only of material objects, but none of minds, of their operations, or of the relations of things; others will have the immediate object of every thought to be an idea: Some think we have abstract ideas, and that by this chiefly we are distinguished from the brutes; others maintain an abstract idea to be an absurdity, and that there can be no such thing: With some they are the immediate objects of thought, with others the only objects.

A *fourth* reflection is, That ideas do not make any of the operations of the mind to be better understood, although it was probably with that view that they have been first invented, and afterwards so generally received.

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