

# THOMAS REID ESSAYS ON THE INTELLECTUAL POWERS OF MAN

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*A Critical Edition*

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memory, or any other faculty of judging which Nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect; but wisely suited to the present condition of man. We are liable to error and wrong judgment in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning. And the errors we fall into with regard to objects of sense are not corrected by reason, but by more accurate attention to the informations we may receive by our senses themselves.

Perhaps the pride of Philosophers may have given occasion to this error. Reason is the faculty wherein they assume a superiority to the unlearned. The informations of sense are common to the Philosopher and to the most illiterate: They put all men upon a level; and therefore are apt to be undervalued. We must, however, be beholden to the informations of sense for the greatest and most interesting part of our knowledge. The wisdom of Nature has made the most useful things most common, and they ought not to be despised on that account. Nature likewise forces our belief in those informations, and all the attempts of philosophy to weaken it are fruitless and vain.

I add only one observation to what has been said upon this subject. It is, that there seems to be a contradiction between what Philosophers teach concerning ideas, and their doctrine of the fallaciousness of the senses. We are taught that the office of the senses is only to give us the ideas of external objects. If this be so, there can be no fallacy in the senses. Ideas can neither be true nor false. If the senses testify nothing, they cannot give false testimony. If they are not judging faculties, no judgment can be imputed to them, whether false or true. There is, therefore, a contradiction between the common doctrine concerning ideas and that of the fallaciousness of the senses. Both may be false, as I believe they are, but both cannot be true.

### ESSAY III. OF MEMORY.

#### CHAP. I.

*Things obvious and certain with regard to Memory.*

IN the gradual progress of man, from infancy to maturity, there is a certain order in which his faculties are unfolded, and this seems to be the best order we can follow in treating of them.

The external senses appear first; memory soon follows, which we are now to consider.

It is by memory that we have an immediate knowledge of things past: The senses give us information of things only as they exist in the present moment; and this information, if it were not preserved by memory, would vanish instantly, and leave us as ignorant as if it had never been.

Memory must have an object. Every man who remembers must remember something, and that which he remembers is called the object of his remembrance. In this, memory agrees with perception, but differs from sensation, which has no object but the feeling itself.

Every man can distinguish the thing remembered from the remembrance of it. We may remember any thing which we have seen, or heard, or known, or done, or suffered; but the remembrance of it is a particular act of the mind which now exists, and of which we are conscious. To confound these two is an absurdity, which a thinking man could not be led into, but by some false hypothesis which hinders him from reflecting upon the thing which he would explain by it.

In memory we do not find such a train of operations connected by our constitution as in perception. When we perceive an object by our senses, there is, first, some impression made by the object upon the organ of sense, either immediately or by means of some medium. By this an impression is made upon the nerves and brain, in consequence of which we feel some sensation; and that sensation is attended by that conception and belief of the external object which we call perception. These operations are so connected in our constitution, that it is difficult to disjoin them in our conceptions, and to attend to each without confounding it with the others. But in the operations of

memory we are free from this embarrassment; they are easily distinguished from all other acts of the mind, and the names which denote them are free from all ambiguity.

The object of memory, or thing remembered, must be something that is past; as the object of perception and of consciousness must be something which is present: What now is, cannot be an object of memory; neither can that which is past and gone be an object of perception or of consciousness.

Memory is always accompanied with the belief of that which we remember, as perception is accompanied with the belief of that which we perceive, and consciousness with the belief of that whereof we are conscious. Perhaps in infancy, or in a disorder of mind, things remembered may be confounded with those which are merely imagined; but in mature years, and in a sound state of mind, every man feels that he must believe what he distinctly remembers, though he can give no other reason of his belief, but that he remembers the thing distinctly; whereas, when he merely imagines a thing ever so distinctly, he has no belief of it upon that account.

This belief, which we have from distinct memory, we account real knowledge, no less certain than if it was grounded on demonstration; no man in his wits calls it in question, or will hear any argument against it. The testimony of witnesses in causes of life and death depends upon it, and all the knowledge of mankind of past events is built on this foundation.

There are cases in which a man's memory is less distinct and determinate, and where he is ready to allow that it may have failed him; but this does not in the least weaken its credit, when it is perfectly distinct.

Memory implies a conception and belief of past duration; for it is impossible that a man should remember a thing distinctly, without believing some interval of duration, more or less, to have passed between the time it happened, and the present moment; and I think it is impossible to show how we could acquire a notion of duration if we had no memory.

Things remembered must be things formerly perceived or known. I remember the transit of Venus over the sun in the year 1769. I must therefore have perceived it at the time it happened, otherwise I could not now remember it. Our first acquaintance with any object of thought cannot be by remembrance. Memory can only produce a

continuance or renewal of a former acquaintance with the thing remembered.

The remembrance of a past event is necessarily accompanied with the conviction of our own existence at the time the event happened. I cannot remember a thing that happened a year ago, without a conviction as strong as memory can give, that I, the same identical person who now remember that event, did then exist.

What I have hitherto said concerning memory, I consider as principles which appear obvious and certain to every man who will take the pains to reflect upon the operations of his own mind. They are facts of which every man must judge by what he feels; and they admit of no other proof but an appeal to every man's own reflection. I shall therefore take them for granted in what follows, and shall first draw some conclusions from them, and then examine the theories of Philosophers concerning memory, and concerning duration, and our personal identity, of which we acquire the knowledge by memory.

## CHAP. II.

### *Memory an original Faculty.*

FIRST, I think it appears that memory is an original faculty given us by the Author of our being, of which we can give no account, but that we are so made.

The knowledge which I have of things past by my memory, seems to me as unaccountable as an immediate knowledge would be of things to come; and I can give no reason why I should have the one and not the other, but that such is the will of my Maker. I find in my mind a distinct conception and a firm belief of a series of past events; but how this is produced I know not. I call it memory, but this is only giving a name to it; it is not an account of its cause. I believe most firmly what I distinctly remember; but I can give no reason of this belief. It is the inspiration of the Almighty that gives me this understanding.

When I believe the truth of a mathematical axiom, or of a mathematical proposition, I see that it must be so: Every man who has the same conception of it sees the same. There is a necessary and an evident connection between the subject and the predicate of

the proposition; and I have all the evidence to support my belief which I can possibly conceive.

When I believe that I washed my hands and face this morning, there appears no necessity in the truth of this proposition. It might be, or it might not be. A man may distinctly conceive it without believing it at all. How then do I come to believe it? I remember it distinctly. This is all I can say. This remembrance is an act of my mind. Is it impossible that this act should be, if the event had not happened? I confess I do not see any necessary connection between the one and the other. If any man can show such a necessary connection, then I think that belief which we have of what we remember will be fairly accounted for; but if this cannot be done, that belief is unaccountable, and we can say no more but that it is the result of our constitution.

Perhaps it may be said, that the experience we have had of the fidelity of memory is a good reason for relying upon its testimony. I deny not that this may be a reason to those who have had this experience, and who reflect upon it. But I believe there are few who ever thought of this reason, or who found any need of it. It must be some very rare occasion that leads a man to have recourse to it; and in those who have done so, the testimony of memory was believed before the experience of its fidelity, and that belief could not be caused by the experience which came after it.

We know some abstract truths, by comparing the terms of the proposition which expresses them, and perceiving some necessary relation or agreement between them. It is thus I know that two and three make five; that the diameters of a circle are all equal. Mr LOCKE having discovered this source of knowledge, too rashly concluded that all human knowledge might be derived from it; and in this he has been followed very generally; by Mr HUME in particular.

But I apprehend, that our knowledge of the existence of things contingent can never be traced to this source. I know that such a thing exists, or did exist. This knowledge cannot be derived from the perception of a necessary agreement between existence and the thing that exists, because there is no such necessary agreement; and therefore no such agreement can be perceived either immediately, or by a chain of reasoning. The thing does not exist necessarily, but by the will and power of him that made it; and there is no contradiction that follows from supposing it not to exist.

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Whence I think it follows, that our knowledge of the existence of our own thoughts, of the existence of all the material objects about us, and of all past contingencies, must be derived, not from a perception of necessary relations or agreements, but from some other source.

Our Maker has provided other means for giving us the knowledge of these things; means which perfectly answer their end, and produce the effect intended by them. But in what manner they do this, is, I fear, beyond our skill to explain. We know our own thoughts, and the operations of our minds, by a power which we call consciousness: But this is only giving a name to this part of our frame. It does not explain its fabric, nor how it produces in us an irresistible conviction of its informations. We perceive material objects and their sensible qualities by our senses; but how they give us this information, and how they produce our belief in it, we know not. We know many past events by memory; but how it gives this information, I believe, is inexplicable.

It is well known what subtle disputes were held through all the scholastic ages, and are still carried on about the prescience of the Deity. ARISTOTLE had taught, that there can be no certain foreknowledge of things contingent; and in this he has been very generally followed, upon no other grounds, as I apprehend, but that we cannot conceive how such things should be foreknown, and therefore conclude it to be impossible. Hence has arisen an opposition and supposed inconsistency between Divine prescience and human liberty. Some have given up the first in favour of the last, and others have given up the last in order to support the first.

It is remarkable, that these disputants have never apprehended that there is any difficulty in reconciling with liberty the knowledge of what is past, but only of what is future. It is prescience only, and not memory, that is supposed to be hostile to liberty, and hardly reconcilable to it.

Yet I believe the difficulty is perfectly equal in the one case and in the other. I admit, that we cannot account for prescience of the actions of a free agent. But I maintain that we can as little account for memory of the past actions of a free agent. If any man thinks he can prove that the actions of a free agent cannot be foreknown, he will find the same arguments of equal force to prove that the past actions of a free agent cannot be remembered. It is true, that what is past did

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certainly exist. It is no less true, that what is future will certainly exist. I know no reasoning from the constitution of the agent, or from his circumstances, that has not equal strength, whether it be applied to his past or to his future actions. The past was, but now is not. The future will be, but now is not. The present is equally connected, or unconnected with both.

The only reason why men have apprehended so great disparity in cases so perfectly like, I take to be this, That the faculty of memory in ourselves convinces us from fact, that it is not impossible that an intelligent being, even a finite being, should have certain knowledge of past actions of free agents, without tracing them from any thing necessarily connected with them. But having no prescience in ourselves corresponding to our memory of what is past, we find great difficulty in admitting it to be possible even in the Supreme Being.

A faculty which we possess in some degree, we easily admit that the Supreme Being may possess in a more perfect degree; but a faculty, which has nothing corresponding to it in our constitution, we will hardly allow to be possible. We are so constituted as to have an intuitive knowledge of many things past; but we have no intuitive knowledge of the future. We might perhaps have been so constituted as to have an intuitive knowledge of the future, but not of the past; nor would this constitution have been more unaccountable than the present, though it might be much more inconvenient. Had this been our constitution, we should have found no difficulty in admitting that the Deity may know all things future, but very much in admitting his knowledge of things that are past.

Our original faculties are all unaccountable. Of these memory is one. He only who made them, comprehends fully how they are made, and how they produce in us not only a conception, but a firm belief and assurance of things which it concerns us to know.

### CHAP. III.

#### *Of Duration.*

FROM the principles laid down in the first chapter of this Essay, I think it appears, that our notion of duration, as well as our belief of it, is got by the faculty of memory. It is essential to every thing remembered that it be something which is past: and we cannot

conceive a thing to be past, without conceiving some duration, more or less, between it and the present. As soon therefore as we remember any thing, we must have both a notion and a belief of duration. It is necessarily suggested by every operation of our memory; and to that faculty it ought to be ascribed. This is therefore a proper place to consider what is known concerning it.

Duration, extension, and number, are the measures of all things subject to mensuration. When we apply them to finite things which are measured by them, they seem of all things to be the most distinctly conceived, and most within the reach of human understanding.

Extension having three dimensions, has an endless variety of modifications, capable of being accurately defined; and their various relations furnish the human mind with its most ample field of demonstrative reasoning. Duration having only one dimension, has fewer modifications; but these are clearly understood; and their relations admit of measure, proportion, and demonstrative reasoning.

Number is called discrete quantity, because it is compounded of units, which are all equal and similar, and it can only be divided into units. This is true, in some sense, even of fractions of unity, to which we now commonly give the name of number. For in every fractional number the unit is supposed to be subdivided into a certain number of equal parts, which are the units of that denomination, and the fractions of that denomination are only divisible into units of the same denomination. Duration and extension are not discrete, but continued quantity. They consist of parts perfectly similar, but divisible without end.

In order to aid our conception of the magnitude and proportions of the various intervals of duration, we find it necessary to give a name to some known portion of it, such as an hour, a day, a year. These we consider as units, and by the number of them contained in a larger interval, we form a distinct conception of its magnitude. A similar expedient we find necessary to give us a distinct conception of the magnitudes and proportions of things extended. Thus, number is found necessary, as a common measure of extension and duration. But this perhaps is owing to the weakness of our understanding. It has even been discovered, by the sagacity of Mathematicians, that this expedient does not in all cases answer its intention. For there are proportions of continued quantity, which cannot be perfectly

expressed by numbers; such as that between the diagonal and side of a square, and many others.

5 The parts of duration have to other parts of it the relations of prior and posterior, and to the present they have the relations of past and future. The notion of past is immediately suggested by memory, as has been before observed. And when we have got the notions of present and past, and of prior and posterior, we can from these frame a notion of the future; for the future is that which is posterior to the present. Nearness and distance are relations equally applicable to time and to place. Distance in time, and distance in place, are things so different in their nature, and so like in their relation, that it is difficult to determine whether the name of distance is applied to both in the same or an analogical sense.

10 The extension of bodies which we perceive by our senses, leads us necessarily to the conception and belief of a space which remains immovable when the body is removed. And the duration of events which we remember leads us necessarily to the conception and belief of a duration, which would have gone on uniformly, though the event had never happened.

20 Without space there can be nothing that is extended. And without time there can be nothing that hath duration. This I think undeniable. And yet we find that extension and duration are not more clear and intelligible than space and time are dark and difficult objects of contemplation.

25 As there must be space wherever any thing extended does or can exist, and time when there is or can be any thing that has duration, we can set no bounds to either, even in our imagination. They defy all limitation. The one swells in our conception to immensity, the other to eternity.

30 An eternity past is an object which we cannot comprehend; but a beginning of time, unless we take it in a figurative sense, is a contradiction. By a common figure of speech, we give the name of time to those motions and revolutions by which we measure it, such as days and years. We can conceive a beginning of these sensible measures of time, and say that there was a time when they were not, a time undistinguished by any motion or change; but to say that there was a time before all time, is a contradiction.

All limited duration is comprehended in time, and all limited extension in space. These, in their capacious womb, contain all finite

existences, but are contained by none. Created things have their particular place in space, and their particular place in time; but time is every where, and space at all times. They embrace each the other, and have that mysterious union which the schoolmen conceived between soul and body. The whole of each is in every part of the other.

5 We are at a loss to what category or class of things we ought to refer them. They are not beings, but rather the receptacles of every created being, without which it could not have had the possibility of existence. Philosophers have endeavoured to reduce all the objects of human thought to these three classes, of substances, modes, and relations. To which of them shall we refer time, space and number, the most common objects of thought?

10 Sir ISAAC NEWTON thought, that the Deity, by existing every where, and at all times, constitutes time and space, immensity and eternity. This probably suggested to his great friend Dr CLARKE what he calls the argument *a priori* for the existence of an immense and eternal Being. Space and time, he thought, are only abstract or partial conceptions of an immensity and eternity, which forces itself upon our belief. And as immensity and eternity are not substances, they must be the attributes of a Being who is necessarily immense and eternal. These are the speculations of men of superior genius. But whether they be as solid as they are sublime, or whether they be the wanderings of imagination in a region beyond the limits of human understanding, I am unable to determine.

25 The schoolmen made eternity to be a *nunc stans*, that is, a moment of time that stands still. This was to put a spoke into the wheel of time, and might give satisfaction to those who are to be satisfied by words without meaning. But I can as easily believe a circle to be a square as time to stand still.

30 Such paradoxes and riddles, if I may so call them, men are involuntarily led into when they reason about time and space, and attempt to comprehend their nature. They are probably things, of which the human faculties give an imperfect and inadequate conception. Hence difficulties arise which we in vain attempt to overcome, and doubts which we are unable to resolve. Perhaps some faculty which we possess not, is necessary to remove the darkness which hangs over them, and makes us so apt to bewilder ourselves when we reason about them.

## CHAP. IV.

*Of Identity.*

5 THE conviction which every man has of his identity, as far back as his memory reaches, needs no aid of philosophy to strengthen it, and no philosophy can weaken it, without first producing some degree of insanity.

10 The Philosopher, however, may very properly consider this conviction as a phenomenon of human nature worthy of his attention. If he can discover its cause, an addition is made to his stock of knowledge: If not, it must be held as a part of our original constitution, or an effect of that constitution produced in a manner unknown to us.

15 We may observe, first of all, that this conviction is indispensably necessary to all exercise of reason. The operations of reason, whether in action or in speculation, are made up of successive parts. The antecedent are the foundation of the consequent, and without the conviction that the antecedent have been seen or done by me, I could have no reason to proceed to the consequent, in any speculation, or in any active project whatever.

20 There can be no memory of what is past without the conviction that we existed at the time remembered. There may be good arguments to convince me that I existed before the earliest thing I can remember; but to suppose that my memory reaches a moment farther back than my belief and conviction of my existence, is a contradiction.

25 The moment a man loses this conviction, as if he had drunk the water of Lethe, past things are done away; and, in his own belief, he then begins to exist. Whatever was thought, or said, or done, or suffered, before that period, may belong to some other person; but he can never impute it to himself, or take any subsequent step that supposes it to be his doing.

30 From this it is evident, that we must have the conviction of our own continued existence and identity, as soon as we are capable of thinking or doing any thing, on account of what we have thought, or done, or suffered before; that is, as soon as we are reasonable creatures.

That we may form as distinct a notion as we are able of this

phenomenon of the human mind, it is proper to consider what is meant by identity in general, what by our own personal identity, and how we are led into that invincible belief and conviction which every man has of his own personal identity, as far as his memory reaches.

5 Identity in general, I take to be a relation between a thing which is known to exist at one time, and a thing which is known to have existed at another time. If you ask whether they are one and the same, or two different things, every man of common sense understands the meaning of your question perfectly. Whence we may infer with certainty, that every man of common sense has a clear and distinct notion of identity.

10 If you ask a definition of identity, I confess I can give none; it is too simple a notion to admit of logical definition: I can say it is a relation, but I cannot find words to express the specific difference between this and other relations, though I am in no danger of confounding it with any other. I can say that diversity is a contrary relation, and that similitude and dissimilitude are another couple of contrary relations, which every man easily distinguishes in his conception from identity and diversity.

20 I see evidently that identity supposes an uninterrupted continuance of existence. That which hath ceased to exist, cannot be the same with that which afterwards begins to exist; for this would be to suppose a being to exist after it ceased to exist, and to have had existence before it was produced, which are manifest contradictions. Continued uninterrupted existence is therefore necessarily implied in identity.

25 Hence we may infer, that identity cannot, in its proper sense, be applied to our pains, our pleasures, our thoughts, or any operation of our minds. The pain felt this day is not the same individual pain which I felt yesterday, though they may be similar in kind and degree, and have the same cause. The same may be said of every feeling, and of every operation of mind: They are all successive in their nature like time itself, no two moments of which can be the same moment.

30 It is otherwise with the parts of absolute space. They always are, and were, and will be the same. So far, I think, we proceed upon clear ground in fixing the notion of identity in general.

35 It is perhaps more difficult to ascertain with precision the meaning of personality; but it is not necessary in the present subject: It is sufficient for our purpose to observe, that all mankind place their



personality in something that cannot be divided, or consist of parts. A part of a person is a manifest absurdity.

When a man loses his estate, his health, his strength, he is still the same person, and has lost nothing of his personality. If he has a leg or an arm cut off, he is the same person he was before. The amputated member is no part of his person, otherwise it would have a right to a part of his estate, and be liable for a part of his engagements: It would be entitled to a share of his merit and demerit, which is manifestly absurd. A person is something indivisible, and is what LEIBNITZ calls a *monad*.

My personal identity, therefore, implies the continued existence of that indivisible thing which I call myself. Whatever this self may be, it is something which thinks, and deliberates, and resolves, and acts, and suffers. I am not thought, I am not action, I am not feeling; I am something that thinks, and acts, and suffers. My thoughts, and actions, and feelings, change every moment; they have no continued, but a successive existence; but that *self* or *I*, to which they belong, is permanent, and has the same relation to all the succeeding thoughts, actions, and feelings, which I call mine.

Such are the notions that I have of my personal identity. But perhaps it may be said, this may all be fancy without reality. How do you know; what evidence have you, that there is such a permanent self which has a claim to all the thoughts, actions, and feelings, which you call yours?

To this I answer, that the proper evidence I have of all this is remembrance. I remember that twenty years ago I conversed with such a person; I remember several things that passed in that conversation; my memory testifies not only that this was done, but that it was done by me who now remember it: If it was done by me, I must have existed at that time, and continued to exist from that time to the present: If the identical person whom I call myself, had not a part in that conversation, my memory is fallacious; it gives a distinct and positive testimony of what is not true. Every man in his senses believes what he distinctly remembers, and every thing he remembers convinces him that he existed at the time remembered.

Although memory gives the most irresistible evidence of my being the identical person that did such a thing, at such a time, I may have other good evidence of things which befel me, and which I do not remember: I know who bare me, and suckled me, but I do not  
remember these events

It may here be observed, (though the observation would have been unnecessary, if some great Philosophers had not contradicted it) that it is not my remembering any action of mine that makes me to be the person who did it. This remembrance makes me to know assuredly that I did it; but I might have done it, though I did not remember it. That relation to me, which is expressed by saying that I did it, would be the same, though I had not the least remembrance of it. To say that my remembering that I did such a thing, or, as some chuse to express it, my being conscious that I did it, makes me to have done it, appears to me as great an absurdity as it would be to say, that my belief that the world was created, made it to be created.

When we pass judgment on the identity of other persons besides ourselves, we proceed upon other grounds, and determine from a variety of circumstances, which sometimes produce the firmest assurance, and sometimes leave room for doubt. The identity of persons has often furnished matter of serious litigation before tribunals of justice. But no man of a sound mind ever doubted of his own identity, as far as he distinctly remembered.

The identity of a person is a perfect identity; wherever it is real, it admits of no degrees; and it is impossible that a person should be in part the same, and in part different; because a person is a *monad*, and is not divisible into parts. The evidence of identity in other persons besides ourselves, does indeed admit of all degrees, from what we account certainty, to the least degree of probability. But still it is true, that the same person is perfectly the same, and cannot be so in part, or in some degree only.

For this cause, I have first considered personal identity, as that which is perfect in its kind, and the natural measure of that which is imperfect.

We probably at first derive our notion of identity from that natural conviction which every man has from the dawn of reason of his own identity and continued existence. The operations of our minds are all successive, and have no continued existence. But the thinking being has a continued existence, and we have an invincible belief, that it remains the same when all its thoughts and operations change.

Our judgements of the identity of objects of sense seem to be formed much upon the same grounds as our judgments of the identity of other persons besides ourselves.

Wherever we observe great similarity, we are apt to presume

identity, if no reason appears to the contrary. Two objects ever so like, when they are perceived at the same time, cannot be the same: But if they are presented to our senses at different times, we are apt to think them the same, merely from their similarity.

5 Whether this be a natural prejudice, or from whatever cause it proceeds, it certainly appears in children from infancy; and, when we grow up, it is confirmed in most instances by experience: For we rarely find two individuals of the same species that are not distinguishable by obvious differences.

10 A man challenges a thief whom he finds in possession of his horse or his watch, only on similarity. When the watchmaker swears that he sold this watch to such a person, his testimony is grounded on similarity. The testimony of witnesses to the identity of a person is commonly grounded on no other evidence.

15 Thus it appears, that the evidence we have of our own identity, as far back as we remember, is totally of a different kind from the evidence we have of the identity of other persons, or of objects of sense. The first is grounded on memory, and gives undoubted certainty. The last is grounded on similarity, and on other circumstances, which in many cases are not so decisive as to leave no room for doubt.

20 It may likewise be observed, that the identity of objects of sense is never perfect. All bodies, as they consist of innumerable parts that may be disjoined from them by a great variety of causes, are subject to continual changes of their substance, increasing, diminishing, changing insensibly. When such alterations are gradual, because language could not afford a different name for every different state of such a changeable being, it retains the same name, and is considered as the same thing. Thus we say of an old regiment, that it did such a thing a century ago, though there now is not a man alive who then belonged to it. We say a tree is the same in the seed-bed and in the forest. A ship of war, which has successively changed her anchors, her tackle, her sails, her masts, her planks, and her timbers, while she keeps the same name, is the same.

35 The identity therefore which we ascribe to bodies, whether natural or artificial, is not perfect identity; it is rather something, which, for the convenience of speech, we call identity. It admits of a great change of the subject, providing the change be gradual, sometimes even of a total change. And the changes which in common language are made consistent with identity differ from those that are thought to destroy

it, not in kind, but in number and degree. It has no fixed nature when applied to bodies; and questions about the identity of a body are very often questions about words. But identity, when applied to persons, has no ambiguity, and admits not of degrees, or of more and less: It is the foundation of all rights and obligations, and of all accountability; and the notion of it is fixed and precise.

#### CHAP. V.

10 *Mr LOCKE's Account of the Origin of our Ideas,  
and particularly of the Idea of Duration.*

It was a very laudable attempt of Mr LOCKE "to enquire into the original of those ideas, notions, or whatever you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind, and the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished with them."<sup>1</sup> No man was better qualified for this investigation; and I believe no man ever engaged in it with a more sincere love of truth. His success, though great, would, I apprehend, have been greater, if he had not too early formed a system or hypothesis upon this subject, without all the caution and patient induction, which is necessary in drawing general conclusions from facts.

25 The sum of his doctrine I take to be this, "That all our ideas or notions may be reduced to two classes, the simple and the complex: That the simple are purely the work of Nature, the understanding being merely passive in receiving them: That they are all suggested by two powers of the mind, to wit, sensation and reflection; and that they are the materials of all our knowledge. That the other class of complex ideas are formed by the understanding itself, which being once stored with simple ideas of sensation and reflection, has the power to repeat, to compare, and to combine them even to an almost infinite variety, and so can make at pleasure new complex ideas: But that it is not in the power of the most exalted wit, or enlarged understanding, by any quickness or variety of thought, to invent or frame one new simple idea in the mind, not taken in by the two ways before mentioned. That as our power over the material world reaches

1. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), I.i.3, p. 44.

only to the compounding, dividing, and putting together, in various forms, the matter which God has made, but reaches not to the production or annihilation of a single atom; so we may compound, compare, and abstract the original and simple ideas which Nature has given us; but are unable to fashion in our understanding any simple idea, not received in by our senses from external objects, or by reflection from the operations of our own mind about them.<sup>2</sup>

This account of the origin of all our ideas is adopted by Bishop BERKELEY and Mr HUME; but some very ingenious Philosophers, who have a high esteem of LOCKE's Essay, are dissatisfied with it.

Dr HUTCHESON of Glasgow, in his Enquiry into the Ideas of Beauty and Virtue,<sup>3</sup> has endeavoured to show that these are original and simple ideas, furnished by original powers, which he calls the sense of beauty and the moral sense.

Dr PRICE, in his Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals, has observed very justly, that if we take the words *sensation* and *reflection*, as Mr LOCKE has defined them in the beginning of his excellent Essay, it will be impossible to derive some of the most important of our ideas from them; and that, by the understanding, that is by our judging and reasoning power, we are furnished with many simple and original notions.<sup>4</sup>

Mr LOCKE says, that, by reflection, he would be understood to mean "the notice which the mind takes of its own operations, and the manner of them."<sup>5</sup> This, I think, we commonly call consciousness; from which, indeed, we derive all the notions we have of the operations of our own minds; and he often speaks of the operations of our own minds, as the only objects of reflection.

When reflection is taken in this confined sense, to say, that all our ideas are ideas either of sensation or reflection, is to say, that every thing we can conceive is either some object of sense, or some operation of our own minds, which is far from being true.

But the word reflection is commonly used in a much more extensive sense; it is applied to many operations of the mind, with more

2. Locke, *Essay*, II.ii.1-2, pp. 119-20.

3. Francis Hutcheson, *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (London, 1725).

4. Richard Price, *A Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, ed. D. D. Raphael (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), Sect. II, pp. 17-18.

5. *Locke, Essay*, II.ii.1-2, p. 119.

propriety than to that of consciousness. We reflect, when we remember, or call to mind what is past, and survey it with attention. We reflect, when we define, when we distinguish, when we judge, when we reason, whether about things material or intellectual.

When reflection is taken in this sense, which is more common, and therefore more proper than the sense which Mr LOCKE has put upon it, it may be justly said to be the only source of all our distinct and accurate notions of things. For, although our first notions of material things are got by the external senses, and our first notions of the operations of our own minds by consciousness, these first notions are neither simple nor clear. Our senses and our consciousness are continually shifting from one object to another; their operations are transient and momentary, and leave no distinct notion of their objects, until they are recalled by memory, examined with attention, and compared with other things.

This reflection is not one power of the mind; it comprehends many; such as recollection, attention, distinguishing, comparing, judging. By these powers our minds are furnished not only with many simple and original notions, but with all our notions, which are accurate and well defined, and which alone are the proper materials of reasoning. Many of these, are neither notions of the objects of sense, nor of the operations of our own minds, and therefore neither ideas of sensation, nor of reflection, in the sense that Mr LOCKE gives to reflection. But if any one chuses to call them ideas of reflection, taking the word in the more common and proper sense, I have no objection.

Mr LOCKE seems to me to have used the word reflection sometimes in that limited sense which he has given to it in the definition before mentioned, and sometimes to have fallen unawares into the common sense of the word; and by this ambiguity his account of the origin of our ideas is darkened and perplexed.

Having premised these things in general of Mr LOCKE's theory of the origin of our ideas or notions, I proceed to some observations on his account of the idea of duration.

"Reflection, he says upon the train of ideas, which appear one after another in our minds, is that which furnishes us with the idea of succession; and the distance between any two parts of that succession, is that we call duration."<sup>6</sup>

6. Locke, *Essay*, II.xiv.3, p. 182.

If it be meant that the idea of succession is prior to that of duration, either in time, or in the order of nature, this, I think, is impossible, because succession, as Dr PRICE justly observes, presupposes duration, and can in no sense be prior to it; and therefore it would be more proper to derive the idea of succession from that of duration.<sup>7</sup>

But how do we get the idea of succession? It is, says he, by reflecting upon the train of ideas, which appear one after another in our minds.

Reflecting upon the train of ideas can be nothing but remembering it, and giving attention to what our memory testifies concerning it; for if we did not remember it, we could not have a thought about it. So that it is evident that this reflection includes remembrance, without which there could be no reflection on what is past, and consequently no idea of succession.

It may here be observed, that if we speak strictly and philosophically, no kind of succession can be an object either of the senses, or of consciousness; because the operations of both are confined to the present point of time, and there can be no succession in a point of time; and on that account the motion of a body, which is a successive change of place, could not be observed by the senses alone without the aid of memory.

As this observation seems to contradict the common sense and common language of mankind, when they affirm that they see a body move, and hold motion to be an object of the senses, it is proper to take notice, that this contradiction between the Philosopher and the vulgar is apparent only, and not real. It arises from this, that Philosophers and the vulgar differ in the meaning they put upon what is called the *present* time, and are thereby led to make a different limit between sense and memory.

Philosophers give the name of the *present* to that indivisible point of time, which divides the future from the past: But the vulgar find it more convenient in the affairs of life, to give the name of *present* to a portion of time, which extends more or less, according to circumstances, into the past or the future. Hence we say, the present hour, the present year, the present century, though one point only of these periods can be present in the philosophical sense.

It has been observed by Grammarians, that the present tense in verbs is not confined to an indivisible point of time, but is so far

7. Price, *Review of the Principal Questions in Morals*, p. 24.

extended as to have a beginning, a middle, and an end; and that in the most copious and accurate languages, these different parts of the present are distinguished by different forms of the verb.

As the purposes of conversation make it convenient to extend what is called the present, the same reason leads men to extend the province of sense, and to carry its limit as far back as they carry the present. Thus a man may say, I saw such a person just now; it would be ridiculous to find fault with this way of speaking, because it is authorised by custom, and has a distinct meaning: But if we speak philosophically, the senses do not testify what we saw, but only what we see; what I saw last moment I consider as the testimony of sense, though it is now only the testimony of memory.

There is no necessity in common life of dividing accurately the provinces of sense and of memory; and therefore we assign to sense, not an indivisible point of time, but that small portion of time which we call the present, which has a beginning, a middle, and an end.

Hence it is easy to see, that though in common language we speak with perfect propriety and truth, when we say, that we see a body move, and that motion is an object of sense, yet when as Philosophers we distinguish accurately the province of sense from that of memory, we can no more see what is past, though but a moment ago, than we can remember what is present; so that speaking philosophically, it is only by the aid of memory that we discern motion, or any succession whatsoever: We see the present place of the body; we remember the successive advance it made to that place: The first can then only give us a conception of motion, when joined to the last.

Having considered the account given by Mr LOCKE, of the idea of succession, we shall next consider how, from the idea of succession, he derives the idea of duration.

“The distance, he says, between any parts of that succession, or between the appearance of any two ideas in our minds, is that we call duration.”<sup>8</sup>

To conceive this the more distinctly, let us call the distance between an idea and that which immediately succeeds it, one element of duration; the distance between an idea and the second that succeeds it, two elements, and so on: If ten such elements make duration, then

8. Locke, *Essay*, II.xiv.3, p. 182.

one must make duration, otherwise duration must be made up of parts that have no duration, which is impossible.

For, suppose a succession of as many ideas as you please, if none of these ideas have duration, nor any interval of duration be between one and another, then it is perfectly evident there can be no interval of duration between the first and the last, how great soever their number be. I conclude therefore, that there must be duration in every single interval or element of which the whole duration is made up. Nothing indeed is more certain than that every elementary part of duration must have duration, as every elementary part of extension must have extension.

Now it must be observed, that in these elements of duration, or single intervals of successive ideas, there is no succession of ideas, yet we must conceive them to have duration; whence we may conclude with certainty, that there is a conception of duration, where there is no succession of ideas in the mind.

We may measure duration by the succession of thoughts in the mind, as we measure length by inches or feet; but the notion or idea of duration must be antecedent to the mensuration of it, as the notion of length is antecedent to its being measured.

Mr LOCKE draws some conclusions from his account of the idea of duration, which may serve as a touchstone to discover how far it is genuine. One is, that if it were possible for a waking man to keep only one idea in his mind without variation, or the succession of others, he would have no perception of duration at all; and the moment he began to have this idea, would seem to have no distance from the moment he ceased to have it.

Now that one idea should seem to have no duration, and that a multiplication of that *no duration* should seem to have duration, appears to me as impossible as that the multiplication of nothing should produce something.

Another conclusion which the author draws from this theory is, that the same period of duration appears long to us, when the succession of ideas in our mind is quick, and short when the succession is slow.

There can be no doubt but the same length of duration appears in some circumstances much longer than in others; the time appears long when a man is impatient under any pain or distress, or when he is eager in the expectation of some happiness: On the other hand, when

he is pleased and happy in agreeable conversation, or delighted with a variety of agreeable objects that strike his senses, or his imagination, time flies away, and appears short.

According to Mr LOCKE's theory, in the first of these cases, the succession of ideas is very quick, and in the last very slow: I am rather inclined to think that the very contrary is the truth. When a man is racked with pain, or with expectation, he can hardly think of any thing but his distress; and the more his mind is occupied by that sole object, the longer the time appears. On the other hand, when he is entertained with cheerful music, with lively conversation, and brisk sallies of wit, there seems to be the quickest succession of ideas, but the time appears shortest.

I have heard a military officer, a man of candour and observation, say, that the time he was engaged in hot action always appeared to him much shorter than it really was. Yet I think it cannot be supposed, that the succession of ideas was then slower than usual.

If the idea of duration were got merely by the succession of ideas in our minds, that succession must to ourselves appear equally quick at all times, because the only measure of duration is the number of succeeding ideas; but I believe every man capable of reflection will be sensible, that at one time his thoughts come slowly and heavily, and at another time have a much quicker and livelier motion.

I know of no ideas or notions that have a better claim to be accounted simple and original than those of space and time. It is essential both to space and time to be made up of parts, but every part is similar to the whole, and of the same nature. Different parts of space, as it has three dimensions, may differ both in figure and in magnitude; but time having only one dimension, its parts can differ only in magnitude; and, as it is one of the simplest objects of thought, the conception of it must be purely the effect of our constitution, and given us by some original power of the mind.

The sense of seeing, by itself, gives us the conception and belief of only two dimensions of extension, but the sense of touch discovers three; and reason, from the contemplation of finite extended things, leads us necessarily to the belief of an immensity that contains them.

In like manner, memory gives us the conception and belief of finite intervals of duration. From the contemplation of these, reason leads us necessarily to the belief of an eternity, which comprehends all things that have a beginning and end. Our conceptions, both of space

and time, are probably partial and inadequate, and therefore we are apt to lose ourselves, and to be embarrassed in our reasonings about them.

Our understanding is no less puzzled when we consider the minutest parts of time and space than when we consider the whole. We are forced to acknowledge, that in their nature they are divisible without end or limit; but there are limits beyond which our faculties can divide neither the one nor the other.

It may be determined by experiment, what is the least angle under which an object may be discerned by the eye, and what is the least interval of duration that may be discerned by the ear. I believe these may be different in different persons: But surely there is a limit which no man can exceed: And what our faculties can no longer divide is still divisible in itself, and, by beings of superior perfection, may be divided into thousands of parts.

I have reason to believe, that a good eye in the prime of life may see an object under an angle not exceeding half a minute of a degree, and I believe there are some human eyes still more perfect. But even this degree of perfection will appear great, if we consider how small a part of the retina of the eye it must be which subtends an angle of half a minute.

Supposing the distance between the centre of the eye and the retina to be six or seven tenths of an inch, the subtense of an angle of half a minute to that radius, or the breadth of the image of an object seen under that angle, will not be above the ten thousandth part of an inch. This shews such a wonderful degree of accuracy in the refracting power of a good eye, that a pencil of rays coming from one point of the object shall meet in one point of the retina, so as not to deviate from that point the ten thousandth part of an inch. It shews, likewise, that such a motion of an object as makes its image on the retina to move the ten thousandth part of an inch, is discernible by the mind.

In order to judge to what degree of accuracy we can measure short intervals of time, it may be observed, that one who has given attention to the motion of a Second pendulum, will be able to beat seconds for a minute with a very small error. When he continues this exercise long, as for five or ten minutes, he is apt to err, more even than in proportion to the time, for this reason, as I apprehend, that it is difficult to attend long to the moments as they pass, without wandering after some other object of thought.

I have found, by some experiments, that a man may beat seconds for one minute, without erring above one second in the whole sixty; and I doubt not but by long practice he might do it still more accurately. From this I think it follows, that the sixtieth part of a second of time is discernible by the human mind.

#### CHAP. VI.

##### *Of Mr LOCKE's Account of our personal Identity.*

IN a long chapter upon identity and diversity, Mr LOCKE has made many ingenious and just observations, and some which I think cannot be defended. I shall only take notice of the account he gives of our own personal identity. His doctrine upon this subject has been censured by Bishop BUTLER, in a short essay subjoined to his Analogy, with whose sentiments I perfectly agree.

Identity, as was observed chap. 4. of this Essay, supposes the continued existence of the being of which it is affirmed, and therefore can be applied only to things which have a continued existence. While any being continues to exist, it is the same being; but two beings which have a different beginning or a different ending of their existence, cannot possibly be the same. To this I think Mr LOCKE agrees.

He observes very justly, that to know what is meant by the same person, we must consider what the word *person* stands for; and he defines a person to be an intelligent being, endowed with reason and with consciousness, which last he thinks inseparable from thought.

From this definition of a person, it must necessarily follow, that while the intelligent being continues to exist and to be intelligent, it must be the same person. To say that the intelligent being is the person, and yet that the person ceases to exist, while the intelligent being continues, or that the person continues while the intelligent being ceases to exist, is to my apprehension a manifest contradiction.

One would think that the definition of a person should perfectly ascertain the nature of personal identity, or wherein it consists, though it might still be a question how we come to know and be assured of our personal identity.

Mr LOCKE tells us however, "that personal identity, that is, the sameness of a rational being, consists in consciousness alone, and, as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past

action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person. So that whatever hath the consciousness of present and past actions, is the same person to whom they belong."<sup>9</sup>

5 This doctrine hath some strange consequences, which the author was aware of. Such as, that if the same consciousness can be transferred from one intelligent being to another, which he thinks we cannot shew to be impossible, then two or twenty intelligent beings may be the same person. And if the intelligent being may lose the consciousness of the actions done by him, which surely is possible, then he is not the person that did those actions; so that one intelligent being may be two or twenty different persons, if he shall so often lose the consciousness of his former actions.

10 There is another consequence of this doctrine, which follows no less necessarily, though Mr LOCKE probably did not see it. It is, that a man may be, and at the same time not be, the person that did a particular action.

15 Suppose a brave officer to have been flogged when a boy at school, for robbing an orchard, to have taken a standard from the enemy in his first campaign, and to have been made a general in advanced life: Suppose also, which must be admitted to be possible, that when he took the standard, he was conscious of his having been flogged at school, and that when made a general he was conscious of his taking the standard, but had absolutely lost the consciousness of his flogging.

20 These things being supposed, it follows, from Mr LOCKE's doctrine, that he who was flogged at school is the same person who took the standard, and that he who took the standard is the same person who was made a general. Whence it follows, if there be any truth in logic, that the general is the same person with him who was flogged at school. But the general's consciousness does not reach so far back as his flogging, therefore, according to Mr LOCKE's doctrine, he is not the person who was flogged. Therefore the general is, and at the same time is not the same person with him who was flogged at school.<sup>10</sup>

25 Leaving the consequences of this doctrine to those who have leisure to trace them, we may observe, with regard to the doctrine itself,

9. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.9, p. 335.

10. In MS 2131/6/III/5, 2, Reid states that he got this argument from his friend George Cambell, presumably in private discussion or correspondence.

5 *First*, That Mr LOCKE attributes to consciousness the conviction we have of our past actions, as if a man may now be conscious of what he did twenty years ago. It is impossible to understand the meaning of this, unless by consciousness be meant memory, the only faculty by which we have an immediate knowledge of our past actions.

10 Sometimes, in popular discourse, a man says he is conscious that he did such a thing, meaning that he distinctly remembers that he did it. It is unnecessary, in common discourse, to fix accurately the limits between consciousness and memory. This was formerly shewn to be the case with regard to sense and memory: And therefore distinct remembrance is sometimes called sense, sometimes consciousness, without any inconvenience.

15 But this ought to be avoided in philosophy, otherwise we confound the different powers of the mind, and ascribe to one what really belongs to another. If a man can be conscious of what he did twenty years or twenty minutes ago, there is no use for memory, nor ought we to allow that there is any such faculty. The faculties of consciousness and memory are chiefly distinguished by this, that the first is an immediate knowledge of the present, the second an immediate knowledge of the past.

20 When, therefore, Mr LOCKE's notion of personal identity is properly expressed, it is, that personal identity consists in distinct remembrance: For, even in the popular sense, to say that I am conscious of a past action, means nothing else than that I distinctly remember that I did it.

25 *Secondly*, It may be observed, that, in this doctrine, not only is consciousness confounded with memory, but, which is still more strange, personal identity is confounded with the evidence which we have of our personal identity.

30 It is very true, that my remembrance that I did such a thing is the evidence I have that I am the identical person who did it. And this, I am apt to think, Mr LOCKE meant: But to say that my remembrance that I did such a thing, or my consciousness, makes me the person who did it, is, in my apprehension, an absurdity too gross to be entertained by any man who attends to the meaning of it: For it is to attribute to memory or consciousness a strange magical power of producing its object, though that object must have existed before the memory or consciousness which produced it.



Consciousness is the testimony of one faculty; memory is the testimony of another faculty: And to say that the testimony is the cause of the thing testified, this surely is absurd, if any thing be, and could not have been said by Mr LOCKE, if he had not confounded the testimony with the thing testified.

5 When a horse that was stolen is found and claimed by the owner, the only evidence he can have, or that a judge or witnesses can have that this is the very identical horse which was his property, is similitude. But would it not be ridiculous from this to infer that the identity of a horse consists in similitude only? The only evidence I have that I am the identical person who did such actions is, that I remember distinctly I did them; or, as Mr LOCKE expresses it, I am conscious I did them. To infer from this, that personal identity consists in consciousness, is an argument, which, if it had any force, would prove the identity of a stolen horse to consist solely in similitude.

*Thirdly*, Is it not strange that the sameness or identity of a person should consist in a thing which is continually changing, and is not any two minutes the same?

20 Our consciousness, our memory, and every operation of the mind, are still flowing like the water of a river, or like time itself. The consciousness I have this moment, can no more be the same consciousness I had last moment, than this moment can be the last moment. Identity can only be affirmed of things which have a continued existence. Consciousness, and every kind of thought, is transient and momentary, and has no continued existence; and therefore, if personal identity consisted in consciousness, it would certainly follow, that no man is the same person any two moments of his life; and as the right and justice of reward and punishment is founded on personal identity, no man could be responsible for his actions.

30 But though I take this to be the unavoidable consequence of Mr LOCKE's doctrine concerning personal identity, and though some persons may have liked the doctrine the better on this account, I am far from imputing any thing of this kind to Mr LOCKE. He was too good a man not to have rejected with abhorrence a doctrine which he believed to draw this consequence after it.

*Fourthly*, There are many expressions used by Mr LOCKE in speaking of personal identity, which to me are altogether unintelligible, unless we suppose that he confounded that sameness or

identity, which we ascribe to an individual, with the identity which in common discourse is often ascribed to many individuals of the same species.

5 When we say that pain and pleasure, consciousness and memory, are the same in all men, this sameness can only mean similarity, or sameness of kind; but that the pain of one man can be the same individual pain with that of another man, is no less impossible than that one man should be another man; the pain felt by me yesterday, can no more be the pain I feel to-day, than yesterday can be this day; and the same thing may be said of every passion and of every operation of the mind: The same kind or species of operation may be in different men, or in the same man at different times; but it is impossible that the same individual operation should be in different men, or in the same man at different times.

15 When Mr LOCKE therefore speaks of "the same consciousness being continued through a succession of different substances," when he speaks of "repeating the idea of a past action, with the same consciousness we had of it at the first," and of "the same consciousness extending to actions past and to come,"<sup>11</sup> these expressions are to me unintelligible, unless he means not the same individual consciousness, but a consciousness that is similar, or of the same kind.

20 If our personal identity consists in consciousness, as this consciousness cannot be the same individually any two moments, but only of the same kind, it would follow, that we are not for any two moments the same individual persons, but the same kind of persons.

25 As our consciousness sometimes ceases to exist, as in sound sleep, our personal identity must cease with it. Mr LOCKE allows, that the same thing cannot have two beginnings of existence, so that our identity would be irrecoverably gone every time we cease to think, if it was but for a moment.

## CHAP. VII.

### *Theories concerning Memory.*

35 THE common theory of ideas, that is of images in the brain or in the mind, of all the objects of thought, has been very generally applied to

11. Locke, *Essay*, II.xxvii.10, p. 336.



account for the faculties of memory and imagination, as well as that of perception by the senses.

The sentiments of the Peripatetics are expressed by ALEXANDER APHRODISIENSIS, one of the earliest Greek Commentators on ARISTOTLE, in these words, as they are translated by Mr HARRIS in his Hermes, "Now what fancy or imagination is, we may explain as follows: We may conceive to be formed within us, from the operations of our senses about sensible objects, some impression, as it were, or picture in our original sensorium, being a relict of that motion caused within us by the external object; a relict, which when the external object is no longer present, remains, and is still preserved, being as it were its image, and which, by being thus preserved, becomes the cause of our having memory: Now such a sort of relict, and as it were impression, they call fancy or imagination."<sup>12</sup>

Another passage from ALCINOUS of the *doctrines of PLATO*, chap. 4. shews the agreement of the ancient Platonists and Peripatetics in this theory, "When the form or type of things is imprinted on the mind by the organs of the senses, and so imprinted as not to be deleted by time, but preserved firm and lasting, its preservation is called memory."<sup>13</sup>

Upon this principle ARISTOTLE imputes the shortness of memory in children to this cause, that their brain is too moist and soft to retain impressions made upon it: And the defect of memory in old men he imputes, on the contrary, to the hardness and rigidity of the brain, which hinders its receiving any durable impression.

This ancient theory of the cause of memory is defective in two respects: *First*, If the cause assigned did really exist, it by no means accounts for the phenomenon: And, *secondly*, There is no evidence, nor even probability, that that cause exists.

It is probable, that in perception some impression is made upon the brain as well as upon the organ and nerves, because all the nerves terminate in the brain, and because disorders and hurts of the brain are found to affect our powers of perception when the external organ

12. James Harris, *Hermes or a Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Universal Grammar*, 2nd edn rev. and corr. (London, 1765), Book 3, p. 358, n. (d). Harris' reference for this passage is: 'Alex. Aphrod. de Anima, p. 135. b. Edit. Ald.'

13. Alcinous, *The Handbook of Platonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), ch. 4. 'The Judging of Truth and Theory of Knowledge', p. 6.

and nerve are sound; but we are totally ignorant of the nature of this impression upon the brain: It can have no resemblance to the object perceived, nor does it in any degree account for that sensation and perception which are consequent upon it. These things have been argued in the second Essay, and shall now be taken for granted, to prevent repetition.

If the impression upon the brain be insufficient to account for the perception of objects that are present, it can as little account for the memory of those that are past.

So that if it were certain, that the impressions made on the brain in perception remain as long as there is any memory of the object; all that could be inferred from this is, that, by the laws of Nature, there is a connection established between the impression, and the remembrance of that object. But how the impression contributes to this remembrance, we should be quite ignorant; it being impossible to discover how thought of any kind should be produced, by an impression on the brain, or upon any part of the body.

To say that this impression is memory, is absurd, if understood literally. If it is only meant that it is the cause of memory, it ought to be shown how it produces this effect, otherwise memory remains as unaccountable as before.

If a Philosopher should undertake to account for the force of gunpowder, in the discharge of a musket, and then tell us gravely, that the cause of this phenomenon is the drawing of the trigger, we should not be much wiser by this account. As little are we instructed in the cause of memory, by being told that it is caused by a certain impression on the brain. For supposing, that impression on the brain were as necessary to memory as the drawing of the trigger is to the discharge of the musket, we are still as ignorant as we were how memory is produced; so that, if the cause of memory, assigned by this theory, did really exist, it does not in any degree account for memory.

Another defect in this theory is, that there is no evidence; nor probability that the cause assigned does exist; that is, that the impression made upon the brain in perception remains after the object is removed.

That impression, whatever be its nature, is caused by the impression made by the object upon the organ of sense, and upon the nerve. Philosophers suppose, without any evidence, that when the object is removed, and the impression upon the organ and nerve ceases, the

impression upon the brain continues, and is permanent; that is, that when the cause is removed the effect continues. The brain surely does not appear more fitted to retain an impression than the organ and nerve.

5 But granting that the impression upon the brain continues after its cause is removed, its effects ought to continue while it continues; that is, the sensation and perception should be as permanent as the impression upon the brain, which is supposed to be their cause. But here again the Philosopher makes a second supposition, with as little evidence, but of a contrary nature, to wit, that, while the cause remains, the effect ceases.

10 If this should be granted also, a third must be made, That the same cause, which at first produced sensation and perception, does afterwards produce memory; an operation essentially different, both from sensation and perception.

15 A fourth supposition must be made, That this cause, though it be permanent, does not produce its effect at all times; it must be like an inscription which is sometimes covered with rubbish, and on other occasions made legible: For the memory of things is often interrupted for a long time, and circumstances bring to our recollection what had been long forgot. After all, many things are remembered which were never perceived by the senses, being no objects of sense, and therefore which could make no impression upon the brain by means of the senses.

25 Thus, when Philosophers have piled one supposition upon another, as the giants piled the mountains, in order to scale the heavens, all is to no purpose, memory remains unaccountable; and we know as little how we remember things past, as how we are conscious of the present.

30 But here it is proper to observe, that although impressions upon the brain give no aid in accounting for memory, yet it is very probable, that, in the human frame, memory is dependent on some proper state or temperament of the brain.

Although the furniture of our memory bears no resemblance to any temperament of brain whatsoever, as indeed it is impossible it should; yet Nature may have subjected us to this law, that a certain constitution or state of the brain is necessary to memory. That this is really the case, many well known facts lead us to conclude.

It is possible, that, by accurate observation, the proper means may be discovered of preserving that temperament of the brain which is

favourable to memory, and of remedying the disorders of that temperament. This would be a very noble improvement of the medical art. But if it should ever be attained, it would give no aid to understand how one state of the brain assists memory, and another hurts it.

5 I know certainly, that the impression made upon my hand by the prick of a pin occasions acute pain. But can any Philosopher show how this cause produces the effect? The nature of the impression is here perfectly known; but it gives no help to understand how that impression affects the mind; and if we knew as distinctly that state of the brain which causes memory, we should still be as ignorant as before how that state contributes to memory. We might have been so constituted, for any thing that I know, that the prick of a pin in the hand, instead of causing pain, should cause remembrance; nor would that constitution be more unaccountable than the present.

15 The body and mind operate on each other, according to fixed laws of Nature; and it is the business of a Philosopher to discover those laws by observation and experiment: But, when he has discovered them, he must rest in them as facts, whose cause is inscrutable to the human understanding.

20 Mr LOCKE, and those who have followed him, speak with more reserve than the ancients, and only incidentally, of impressions on the brain as the cause of memory, and impute it rather to our retaining in our minds the ideas, got either by sensation or reflection.

25 This, Mr LOCKE says, may be done two ways; "First, by keeping the idea for some time actually in view, which is called *contemplation*. Secondly, by the power to revive again in our minds those ideas, which, after imprinting, have disappeared, or have been, as it were, laid out of sight; and this is memory, which is, as it were, the storehouse of our ideas."<sup>14</sup>

30 To explain this more distinctly, he immediately adds the following observation: "But our ideas being nothing but actual perceptions in the mind, which cease to be any thing, when there is no perception of them, this laying up of our ideas in the repository of the memory, signifies no more but this, that the mind has a power, in many cases, to revive perceptions which it once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before; and in this sense it

14. Locke, *Essay*, II.x.1-2, pp. 149-50.

is, that our ideas are said to be in our memories, when indeed they are actually no where; but only there is an ability in the mind, when it will, to revive them again, and, as it were, paint them anew upon itself, though some with more, some with less difficulty, some more lively, and others more obscurely."<sup>15</sup>

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In this account of memory, the repeated use of the phrase, *as it were*, leads one to judge that it is partly figurative; we must therefore endeavour to distinguish the figurative part from the philosophical. The first being addressed to the imagination, exhibits a picture of memory, which, to have its effect, must be viewed at a proper distance, and from a particular point of view. The second being addressed to the understanding, ought to bear a near inspection, and a critical examination.

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The analogy between memory and a repository, and between remembering and retaining, is obvious, and is to be found in all languages, it being very natural to express the operations of the mind by images taken from things material. But in philosophy we ought to draw aside the veil of imagery, and to view them naked.

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When therefore memory is said to be a repository or storehouse of ideas, where they are laid up when not perceived, and again brought forth as there is occasion, I take this to be popular and rhetorical. For the author tells us, that when they are not perceived, they are nothing, and no where, and therefore can neither be laid up in a repository, nor drawn out of it.

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But we are told, "That this laying up of our ideas in the repository of the memory signifies no more than this, that the mind has a power to revive perceptions, which it once had, with this additional perception annexed to them, that it has had them before." This I think must be understood literally and philosophically.

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But it seems to me as difficult to revive things that have ceased to be any thing, as to lay them up in a repository, or to bring them out of it. When a thing is once annihilated, the same thing cannot be again produced, though another thing similar to it may. Mr LOCKE, in another place, acknowledges, that the same thing cannot have two beginnings of existence; and that things that have different beginnings are not the same, but diverse. From this it follows, that an ability to revive our ideas or perceptions, after they have ceased to be, can

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15. Locke, *Essay*, II.x.2, p. 150.

signify no more but an ability to create new ideas or perceptions similar to those we had before.

They are said "to be revived, with this additional perception, that we have had them before." This surely would be a fallacious perception, since they could not have two beginnings of existence; nor could we believe them to have two beginnings of existence. We can only believe, that we had formerly ideas or perceptions very like to them, though not identically the same. But whether we perceive them to be the same, or only like to those we had before, this perception, one would think, supposes a remembrance of those we had before, otherwise the similitude or identity could not be perceived.

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Another phrase is used to explain this reviving of our perceptions. "The mind, as it were, paints them anew upon itself." There may be something figurative in this; but making due allowance for that, it must imply, that the mind, which paints the things that have ceased to exist, must have the memory of what they were, since every painter must have a copy either before his eye, or in his imagination and memory.

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These remarks upon Mr LOCKE's account of memory are intended to show, that his system of ideas gives no light to this faculty, but rather tends to darken it; as little does it make us understand how we remember, and by that means have the certain knowledge of things past.

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Every man knows what memory is, and has a distinct notion of it: But when Mr LOCKE speaks of a power to revive in the mind those ideas, which, after imprinting, have disappeared, or have been, as it were, laid out of sight, one would hardly know this to be memory, if he had not told us. There are other things which it seems to resemble at least as much. I see before me the picture of a friend. I shut my eyes, or turn them another way; and the picture disappears, or is, as it were, laid out of sight. I have a power to turn my eyes again towards the picture, and immediately the perception is revived. But is, this memory? no surely; yet it answers the definition as well as memory itself can do.

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We may observe, that the word perception is used by Mr LOCKE in too indefinite a way, as well as the word idea.

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Perception, in the chapter upon that subject, is said to be the first faculty of the mind exercised about our ideas. Here we are told that ideas are nothing but perceptions: Yet I apprehend it would sound

oddly to say, that perception is the first faculty of the mind exercised about perception; and still more strangely to say, that ideas are the first faculty of the mind exercised about our ideas. But why should not ideas be a faculty as well as perception, if both are the same?

5 Memory is said to be a power to revive our perceptions. Will it not follow from this, that every thing that can be remembered is a perception? If this be so, it will be difficult to find any thing in nature but perceptions.

10 Our ideas, we are told, are nothing but actual perceptions; but in many places of the Essay, ideas are said to be the objects of perception, and that the mind, in all its thoughts and reasonings, has no other immediate object which it does or can contemplate but its own ideas. Does it not appear from this, either that Mr LOCKE held the operations of the mind to be the same thing with the objects of those operations, or that he used the word idea sometimes in one sense and sometimes in another, without any intimation, and probably without any apprehension of its ambiguity? It is an article of Mr HUME's philosophy, that there is no distinction between the operations of the mind and their objects. But I see no reason to impute this opinion to Mr LOCKE. I rather think, that, notwithstanding his great judgment and candour, his understanding was entangled by the ambiguity of the word idea, and that most of the imperfections of his Essay are owing to that cause.

20 Mr HUME saw farther into the consequences of the common system concerning ideas than any author had done before him. He saw the absurdity of making every object of thought double, and splitting it into a remote object, which has a separate and permanent existence, and an immediate object, called an idea or impression, which is an image of the former, and has no existence, but when we are conscious of it. According to this system, we have no intercourse with the external world, but by means of the internal world of ideas, which represents the other to the mind.

30 He saw it was necessary to reject one of these worlds as a fiction, and the question was, Which should be rejected? Whether all mankind, learned and unlearned, had feigned the existence of the external world without good reason? or whether Philosophers had feigned the internal world of ideas, in order to account for the intercourse of the mind with the external? Mr HUME adopted the first of these opinions, and employed his reason and eloquence in support of it.

Bishop BERKELEY had gone so far in the same track as to reject the material world as fictitious; but it was left to Mr HUME to complete the system.

5 According to his system, therefore, impressions and ideas in his own mind are the only things a man can know, or can conceive: Nor are these ideas representatives, as they were in the old system. There is nothing else in nature, or at least within the reach of our faculties, to be represented. What the vulgar call the perception of an external object, is nothing but a strong impression upon the mind. What we call the remembrance of a past event, is nothing but a present impression or idea, weaker than the former. And what we call imagination, is still a present idea, but weaker than that of memory.

10 That I may not do him injustice, these are his words in his Treatise of Human Nature, page 193.

15 "We find by experience, that when any impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea; and this it may do after two different ways, either when in its new appearance it retains a considerable degree of its first vivacity, and is somewhat intermediate betwixt an impression and an idea, or when it entirely loses that vivacity, and is a perfect idea. The faculty by which we repeat our impressions in the first manner, is called the memory, and the other the imagination."<sup>16</sup>

20 Upon this account of memory and imagination I shall make some remarks.

25 *First*, I wish to know, what we are here to understand by experience? It is said, we find all this by experience; and I conceive nothing can be meant by this experience but memory. Not that memory which our author defines, but memory in the common acceptation of the word. According to vulgar apprehension, memory is an immediate knowledge of something past. Our author does not admit that there is any such knowledge in the human mind. He maintains that memory is nothing but a present idea or impression. But, in defining what he takes memory to be, he takes for granted that kind of memory which he rejects. For can we find by experience, that an impression, after its first appearance to the mind, makes a second, and a third, with different degrees of strength and vivacity, if we have not so distinct a

16. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds L. A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Niddich, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), I.i.3, pp. 8-9.

remembrance of its first appearance, as enables us to know it, upon its second and third, notwithstanding that, in the interval, it has undergone a very considerable change?

All experience supposes memory; and there can be no such thing as experience, without trusting to our own memory, or that of others. So that it appears from Mr HUME's account of this matter, that he found himself to have that kind of memory, which he acknowledges and defines, by exercising that kind which he rejects.

*Secondly*, What is it we find by experience or memory? It is, "That when an impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea, and that after two different ways."

If experience informs us of this, it certainly deceives us; for the thing is impossible, and the author shews it to be so. Impressions and ideas are fleeting perishable things, which have no existence, but when we are conscious of them. If an impression could make a second and a third appearance to the mind, it must have a continued existence during the interval of these appearances, which Mr HUME acknowledges to be a gross absurdity. It seems then, that we find, by experience, a thing which is impossible. We are imposed upon by our experience, and made to believe contradictions.

Perhaps it may be said, that these different appearances of the impression are not to be understood literally, but figuratively; that the impression is personified, and made to appear at different times, and in different habits, when no more is meant, but that an impression appears at one time; afterwards a thing of a middle nature, between an impression and an idea, which we call memory, and last of all a perfect idea, which we call imagination: that this figurative meaning agrees best with the last sentence of the period, where we are told, that memory and imagination are faculties, whereby we repeat our impressions in a more or less lively manner. To repeat an impression is a figurative way of speaking, which signifies making a new impression similar to the former.

If, to avoid the absurdity implied in the literal meaning, we understand the Philosopher in this figurative one, then his definitions of memory and imagination, when stripped of the figurative dress, will amount to this, That memory is the faculty of making a weak impression, and imagination the faculty of making an impression still weaker, after a corresponding strong one. These definitions of memory and imagination labour under two defects; *first*, That they

convey no notion of the thing defined; and, *secondly*, That they may be applied to things of a quite different nature from those that are defined.

When we are said to have a faculty of making a weak impression after a corresponding strong one, it would not be easy to conjecture that this faculty is memory. Suppose a man strikes his head smartly against the wall, this is an impression; now he has a faculty by which he can repeat this impression with less force, so as not to hurt him; this, by Mr HUME's account, must be memory. He has a faculty by which he can just touch the wall with his head, so that the impression entirely loses its vivacity. This surely must be imagination; at least it comes as near to the definition given of it by Mr HUME as any thing I can conceive.

*Thirdly*, We may observe, that when we are told that we have a faculty of repeating our impressions in a more or less lively manner, this implies that we are the efficient causes of our ideas of memory and imagination; but this contradicts what the author says a little before, where he proves, by what he calls a convincing argument, that impressions are the cause of their corresponding ideas. The argument that proves this had need indeed to be very convincing; whether we make the idea to be a second appearance of the impression, or a new impression similar to the former.

If the first be true, then the impression is the cause of itself. If the second, then the impression after it is gone, and has no existence, produces the idea. Such are the mysteries of Mr HUME's philosophy.

It may be observed, that the common system, that ideas are the only immediate objects of thought, leads to scepticism with regard to memory, as well as with regard to the objects of sense, whether those ideas are placed in the mind or in the brain.

Ideas are said to be things internal and present, which have no existence but during the moment they are in the mind. The objects of sense are things external, which have a continued existence. When it is maintained, that all that we immediately perceive is only ideas or phantasms, how can we, from the existence of those phantasms, conclude the existence of an external world corresponding to them?

This difficult question seems not to have occurred to the Peripatetics. DES CARTES saw the difficulty, and endeavoured to find out arguments by which, from the existence of our phantasms or ideas, we might infer the existence of external objects. The same course was

followed by MALEBRANCHE, ARNAULD, and LOCKE; but BERKELEY and HUME easily refuted all their arguments, and demonstrated that there is no strength in them.

The same difficulty with regard to memory naturally arises from the system of ideas; and the only reason why it was not observed by Philosophers, is, because they give less attention to the memory than to the senses: For since ideas are things present, how can we, from our having a certain idea presently in our mind, conclude that an event really happened ten or twenty years ago corresponding to it?

There is the same need of arguments to prove, that the ideas of memory are pictures of things that really did happen, as that the ideas of sense are pictures of external objects which now exist. In both cases, it will be impossible to find any argument that has real weight. So that this hypothesis leads us to absolute scepticism, with regard to those things which we most distinctly remember, no less than with regard to the external objects of sense.

It does not appear to have occurred either to LOCKE or to BERKELEY, that their system has the same tendency to overturn the testimony of memory as the testimony of the senses.

Mr HUME saw farther than both, and found this consequence of the system of ideas perfectly corresponding to his aim of establishing universal scepticism. His system is therefore more consistent than theirs, and the conclusions agree better with the premises.

But if we should grant to Mr HUME, that our ideas of memory afford no just ground to believe the past existence of things which we remember, it may still be asked, How it comes to pass that perception and memory are accompanied with belief, while bare imagination is not? Though this belief cannot be justified upon his system, it ought to be accounted for as a phænomenon of human nature.

This he has done, by giving us a new theory of belief in general; a theory which suits very well with that of ideas, and seems to be a natural consequence of it, and which at the same time reconciles all the belief that we find in human nature to perfect scepticism.

What then is this belief? It must either be an idea, or some modification of an idea; we conceive many things which we do not believe. The idea of an object is the same whether we believe it to exist, or barely conceive it. The belief adds no new idea to the conception; it is therefore nothing but a modification of the idea of the thing believed, or a different manner of conceiving it. Hear himself:

“All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity. Our ideas are copied from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. When you would vary the idea of a particular object, you can only increase or diminish its force and vivacity: If you make any other change upon it, it represents a different object or impression. The case is the same as in colours. A particular shade of any colour may acquire a new degree of liveliness or brightness, without any other variation: But when you produce any other variation, it is no longer the same shade or colour. So that as belief does nothing but vary the manner in which we conceive any object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity. An opinion, therefore, or belief, may be most accurately defined a lively idea, related to or associated with a present impression.”<sup>17</sup>

This theory of belief is very fruitful of consequences, which Mr HUME traces with his usual acuteness, and brings into the service of his system. A great part of his system indeed is built upon it; and it is of itself sufficient to prove what he calls his hypothesis, “that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than of the cogitative part of our natures.”<sup>18</sup>

It is very difficult to examine this account of belief with the same gravity with which it is proposed. It puts one in mind of the ingenious account given by MARTINUS SCRIBLERUS of the power of syllogism, by making the *major* the male, and the *minor* the female, which being coupled by the middle *term*, generate the conclusion.<sup>19</sup> There is surely no science in which men of great parts and ingenuity have fallen into such gross absurdities as in treating of the powers of the mind. I cannot help thinking, that never any thing more absurd was gravely maintained by any Philosopher, than this account of the nature of belief, and of the distinction of perception, memory, and imagination.

The belief of a proposition is an operation of mind of which every man is conscious, and what it is he understands perfectly, though, on

17. Hume, *Treatise*, I.iii.7, p. 96.

18. Hume, *Treatise*, I.iv.1, p. 183.

19. *The Memoirs of the Extraordinary Life, Works, and Discoveries of Martinus Scriblerus* (1741), ed. Charles Kerby-Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), ch. vii, p. 121.

the same modification more properly. Whatever modification of the idea he makes belief to be, whether its vivacity, or some other without a name, to make perception, memory, and imagination, to be the different degrees of that modification, is chargeable with the absurdities we have mentioned.

Before we leave this subject of memory, it is proper to take notice of a distinction which ARISTOTLE makes between memory and reminiscence, because the distinction has a real foundation in nature, though in our language I think we do not distinguish them by different names.

Memory is a kind of habit which is not always in exercise with regard to things we remember, but is ready to suggest them when there is occasion. The most perfect degree of this habit is, when the thing presents itself to our remembrance spontaneously, and without labour, as often as there is occasion. A second degree is, when the thing is forgot for a longer or shorter time, even when there is occasion to remember it, yet at last some incident brings it to mind without any search. A third degree is, when we cast about and search for what we would remember, and so at last find it out. It is this last, I think, which ARISTOTLE calls reminiscence, as distinguished from memory.

Reminiscence, therefore, includes a will to recollect something past, and a search for it. But here a difficulty occurs. It may be said, that what we will to remember we must conceive, as there can be no will without a conception of the thing willed. A will to remember a thing, therefore, seems to imply that we remember it already, and have no occasion to search for it. But this difficulty is easily removed. When we will to remember a thing, we must remember something relating to it, which gives us a relative conception of it; but we may, at the same time, have no conception what the thing is, but only what relation it bears to something else. Thus, I remember that a friend charged me with a commission to be executed at such a place; but I have forgot what the commission was. By applying my thought to what I remember concerning it, that it was given by such a person, upon such an occasion, in consequence of such a conversation, I am led, in a train of thought, to the very thing I had forgot, and recollect distinctly what the commission was.

ARISTOTLE says, that brutes have not reminiscence, and this I think is probable; but, says he, they have memory. It cannot, indeed,

account of its simplicity, he cannot give a logical definition of it. If he compares it with strength or vivacity of his ideas, or with any modification of ideas, they are so far from appearing to be one and the same, that they have not the least similitude.

That a strong belief and a weak belief differ only in degree, I can easily comprehend; but that belief and no belief should differ only in degree, no man can believe who understands what he speaks: For this is in reality to say that something and nothing differ only in degree, or that nothing is a degree of something.

Every proposition that may be the object of belief, has a contrary proposition that may be the object of a contrary belief. The ideas of both, according to Mr HUME, are the same, and differ only in degrees of vivacity. That is, contraries differ only in degree; and so pleasure may be a degree of pain, and hatred a degree of love. But it is to no purpose to trace the absurdities that follow from this doctrine, for none of them can be more absurd than the doctrine itself.

Every man knows perfectly what it is to see an object with his eyes, what it is to remember a past event, and what it is to conceive a thing which has no existence. That these are quite different operations of his mind, he is as certain as that sound differs from colour, and both from taste; and I can as easily believe that sound, and colour, and taste, differ only in degree, as that seeing, and remembering, and imagining, differ only in degree.

Mr HUME, in the third volume of his *Treatise of Human Nature*, is sensible that his theory of belief is liable to strong objections, and seems, in some measure, to retract it; but in what measure, it is not easy to say. He seems still to think that belief is only a modification of the idea, but that vivacity is not a proper term to express that modification. Instead of it he uses some analogical phrases to explain that modification, such as "apprehending the idea more strongly, or taking faster hold of it."<sup>20</sup>

There is nothing more meritorious in a Philosopher than to retract an error upon conviction; but in this instance I humbly apprehend Mr HUME claims that merit upon too slight a ground: For I cannot perceive that the apprehending an idea more strongly, or taking faster hold of it, expresses any other modification of the idea than what was before expressed by its strength and vivacity, or even that it expresses

20. Hume, *Treatise*, Appendix, pp. 624-7.



be doubted but they have something very like to it, and in some instances in a very great degree. A dog knows his master after long absence. A horse will trace back a road he has once gone as accurately as a man; and this is the more strange, that the train of thought which he had in going must be reversed in his return. It is very like to some prodigious memories we read of, where a person, upon hearing an hundred names or unconnected words pronounced, can begin at the last, and go backwards to the first, without losing or misplacing one. Brutes certainly may learn much from experience, which seems to imply memory.

Yet I see no reason to think that brutes measure time as men do, by days, months, or years, or that they have any distinct knowledge of the interval between things which they remember, or of their distance from the present moment. If we could not record transactions according to their dates, human memory would be something very different from what it is, and perhaps resemble more the memory of brutes.

## ESSAY IV. OF CONCEPTION.

### CHAP. I.

*Of Conception, or simple Apprehension in General.*

CONCEIVING, imagining, apprehending, understanding, having a notion of a thing, are common words used to express that operation of the understanding, which the Logicians call *simple apprehension*. The having an idea of a thing, is in common language used in the same sense, chiefly I think since Mr LOCKE's time.

Logicians define simple apprehension to be the bare conception of a thing without any judgment or belief about it.<sup>1</sup> If this were intended for a strictly logical definition, it might be a just objection to it, that conception and apprehension are only synonymous words; and that we may as well define conception by apprehension, as apprehension by conception; but it ought to be remembered, that the most simple operations of the mind cannot be logically defined. To have a distinct notion of them, we must attend to them as we feel them in our own minds. He that would have a distinct notion of a scarlet colour, will never attain it by a definition; he must set it before his eye, attend to it, compare it with the colours that come nearest to it, and observe the specific difference, which he will in vain attempt to define.

Every man is conscious that he can conceive a thousand things, of which he believes nothing at all; as a horse with wings, a mountain of gold; but although conception may be without any degree of belief, even the smallest belief cannot be without conception. He that believes, must have some conception of what he believes.

Without attempting a definition of this operation of the mind, I shall endeavour to explain some of its properties; consider the theories about it; and take notice of some mistakes of Philosophers concerning it.

1. It may be observed, that conception enters as an ingredient in

1. See, for example, Gershom Carmichael, *A Short Introduction to Logic* (1722), in *Natural Rights on the Threshold of the Scottish Enlightenment: The Writings of Gershom Carmichael*, eds James Moore and Michael Silverthorne (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2002), pp. 293-4; Francis Hutcheson, *Logicae compendium* (Glasgow, 1756), p. 16.