Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues

GEORGE BERKELEY
1685–1753

Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues

The 1734 text

Rendered into modern English with AI (Claude) and edited



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Principles of Human Knowledge and Three Dialogues · George Berkeley (1685–1753)

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CONTENTS

Introduction vii

Principles of Human Knowledge 1

Preface 1
Introduction: against abstract ideas 2
How ideas become general 9
Language as the source of the error 14
To be is to be perceived 19
Primary and secondary qualities 22
Material substance examined 26
Ideas, spirits and the laws of nature 30
Objections answered 34
Do things vanish unperceived? 38
Matter, natural causes and science 41
Matter as occasion or unknown something 50
Objections from religion 57
Consequences: skepticism and atheism 58
Abstraction in time, motion and morals 64
Natural philosophy 66
Newton on absolute space and motion 70
Mathematics and number 75
Geometry and the infinitely small 78
The case against matter summed up 83
Knowledge of spirits 84
Other minds and God 89
Nature, evil and the presence of God 91

First Dialogue 97

Heat and pain 102
Tastes, smells and sounds 108
Colors 113

Primary qualities 119
Object and sensation 127
Material substratum 131
The unperceived tree 134
Ideas as copies of things 138

Second Dialogue 145
Traces in the brain 146
The world in an infinite mind 148
Seeing all things in God 152
Matter as cause, instrument, occasion 154
Matter as an unknown something 161

Third Dialogue 169
Common sense restored 172
How we know spirits 174
Real things and dreams 177
Further objections 182
Science and novelty 186
The same thing 190
The creation 197
The advantages of immaterialism 205
Keeping the word matter 209

INTRODUCTION

Does anything exist that no mind perceives? George Berkeley answered no. In *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710) he argued that the things we see and touch are nothing but ideas, that their being is to be perceived — *esse est percipi* — and that there is no "matter" behind them. What exists is minds and their ideas, and the order of nature is the steady work of God.

The book was met with ridicule, so three years later Berkeley made the case again as a conversation. In the *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (1713), Hylas (from the Greek for "matter") defends common-sense materialism and Philonous ("lover of mind") leads him, step by step, to see that the denial of matter is the real defense of common sense against scepticism.

Both works are given here in the revised text Berkeley published together in 1734. The right-hand column is Berkeley in modern English; the left is his original text.

Principles of Human Knowledge

Berkeley attacks abstract ideas and argues that to be is to be perceived: there is no matter, only minds and their ideas.

PREFACE

Pref. What I am publishing here has seemed to me, after long and careful inquiry, plainly true and worth knowing—especially for those who are infected with skepticism, or who need a proof of the existence and immateriality of God, or of the natural immortality of the soul. Whether it is so or not, I am content to let the reader judge impartially, since I do not think I have any further stake in the success of what I have written than its agreement with the truth. But so that the truth may not suffer, I ask the reader to suspend judgment until he has read the whole thing through at least once, with as much attention and thought as the subject seems to deserve. Some passages, taken by themselves, are very open (and this could not be helped) to gross misinterpretation, and to being charged with the most absurd consequences, which on a reading of the whole will turn out not to follow from them. Likewise, even if the whole is read, but read hastily, my meaning is very likely to be mistaken. But to a thoughtful reader, I flatter myself, it will be clear and obvious throughout.

As for the air of novelty and strangeness that some of the following notions may seem to have, I hope no apology is needed on that account. Anyone must surely be either very weak, or very little acquainted with the sciences, who would reject a truth that can be demonstrated for no other reason than that it is newly known and contrary to the prejudices of mankind.

I thought it fitting to say this much in advance, in order to head off, if possible, the hasty condemnations of a sort of people who are all too ready to condemn an opinion before they properly understand it.

INTRODUCTION: AGAINST ABSTRACT IDEAS

Berkeley argues that the mind cannot form abstract general ideas, as Locke claimed it could.

Int.1 Since philosophy is nothing but the study of wisdom and truth, one might reasonably expect that those who have spent the most time and effort on it would enjoy greater calm and serenity of mind, greater clarity and certainty of knowledge, and be less troubled by doubts and difficulties than other people. Yet in fact we see that the unlearned mass of mankind, who walk the highroad of plain common sense and are governed by the dictates of nature, are for the most part at ease and untroubled. To them nothing familiar seems inexplicable or hard to understand. They do not complain that their senses lack evidence, and they are in no danger at all of becoming skeptics. But no sooner do we leave sense and instinct to follow the light of a higher principle—to reason, meditate, and reflect on the nature of things—than a thousand doubts spring up in our minds about things we previously seemed to understand fully. Prejudices and errors of the senses reveal themselves to us on every side; and as we try to correct these by reason, we are drawn without noticing it into strange paradoxes, difficulties, and inconsistencies, which multiply and grow as we go further in speculation. At last, having wandered through many tangled mazes, we find ourselves just where we started—or, what is worse, we settle into a hopeless skepticism.

Int.2 The cause of this is thought to be the obscurity of things, or the natural weakness and imperfection of our understanding. It is said that we have few faculties, and that nature designed them for the support and comfort of life, not to penetrate into the inner essence and constitution of things. Besides, since the

human mind is finite, it is no wonder if, when it deals with things that partake of infinity, it runs into absurdities and contradictions from which it can never extricate itself; for it is the nature of the infinite not to be comprehended by what is finite.

Int.3 But perhaps we are being too kind to ourselves in placing the fault in our faculties in the first place, rather than in the wrong use we make of them. It is hard to suppose that correct deductions from true principles should ever end in consequences that cannot be maintained or made consistent. We should believe that God has dealt more generously with the children of men than to give them a strong desire for knowledge that He had placed entirely out of their reach. That would not fit the usual kind ways of Providence, which, whatever appetites it has planted in its creatures, generally supplies them with means that, if used properly, will not fail to satisfy them. On the whole, I am inclined to think that by far the greater part, if not all, of the difficulties that have so far occupied philosophers and blocked the way to knowledge are entirely our own doing. We have first raised a dust, and then complain that we cannot see.

Int.4 My purpose, then, is to try to discover what the principles are that have brought all this doubt and uncertainty, all these absurdities and contradictions, into the various schools of philosophy—so much so that the wisest men have thought our ignorance incurable, supposing it to arise from the natural dullness and limits of our faculties. And surely it is a task well worth the effort to make a strict inquiry into the first principles of human knowledge, and to sift and examine them from every side—especially since there is some reason to suspect that the obstacles and difficulties that hold up and entangle the mind in its search for truth do not spring so much from any darkness and complexity in the objects, or from a natural defect in the understanding, as from false principles that have been insisted on, and might have been avoided.

Int.5 However difficult and discouraging this attempt may seem, when I consider how many great and extraordinary men have gone before me in similar projects, I am still not without

hope. For the widest views are not always the clearest, and someone who is short-sighted is forced to bring the object closer, and may perhaps, by close and narrow inspection, make out what had escaped far better eyes.

Int.6 To prepare the reader's mind to grasp what follows more easily, it is proper to say something first, by way of introduction, about the nature and abuse of language. But unraveling this matter leads me to anticipate my plan to some extent, by noting what seems to have played a chief part in making speculation tangled and confused, and to have caused countless errors and difficulties in almost every branch of knowledge. That is the opinion that the mind has a power of forming *abstract* ideas or notions of things. Anyone who is not a complete stranger to the writings and disputes of philosophers must admit that no small part of them is spent on abstract ideas. These are thought in a special way to be the object of the sciences called logic and metaphysics, and of everything that passes for the most abstract and lofty learning. In all of these one will hardly find any question treated in a way that does not assume that abstract ideas exist in the mind, and that the mind is well acquainted with them.

Int.7 Everyone agrees that the *qualities* or *modes* of things never really exist each one apart by itself, separated from all others, but are mixed and blended together, as it were, several in the same object. But, we are told, the mind is able to consider each quality singly, or abstracted from the other qualities it is united with, and in that way forms *abstract ideas* for itself. For example, sight perceives an object that is extended, colored, and moving. The mind breaks this mixed or compound idea down into its simple constituent parts and views each by itself, excluding the rest, and so forms the abstract ideas of extension, color, and motion. Not that it is possible for color or motion to exist without extension; the claim is only that the mind can form for itself, by abstraction, the idea of color without extension, and of motion without both color and extension.

Int.8 Again, the mind observes that in the particular extensions perceived by sense there is something common and alike in all, and other things peculiar to each—this or that shape or size—which distinguish them from one another. It then considers apart, or singles out by itself, what is common, and makes from it a most abstract idea of extension, which is neither line, surface, nor solid, and has no shape or size, but is an idea entirely cut off from all of these. In the same way, by leaving out of the particular colors perceived by sense whatever distinguishes them from one another, and keeping only what is common to all, the mind makes an idea of color in the abstract, which is neither red, nor blue, nor white, nor any other definite color. And likewise, by considering motion abstractly—not only apart from the body that moves, but also apart from the path it traces, and from all particular directions and speeds—the abstract idea of motion is formed, which corresponds equally to every particular motion whatever that may be perceived by sense.

Int.9 And just as the mind forms abstract ideas of *qualities* or *modes*, so, by the same kind of precision, or mental separation, it arrives at abstract ideas of the more compound *beings* that include several coexisting qualities. For example, the mind observes that Peter, James, and John resemble one another in certain shared features of shape and other qualities. It leaves out of the complex or compound idea it has of Peter, James, and any other particular man whatever is peculiar to each, keeps only what is common to all, and so makes an abstract idea in which all the particulars equally share—abstracting entirely from, and cutting off, all the circumstances and differences that might tie it to any particular existence. This, it is said, is how we come by the abstract idea of *man*—or, if you prefer, humanity, or human nature. It is true that color is included in it, because there is no man who does not have some color; but then it can be neither white, nor black, nor any particular color, because there is no one particular color that all men share. Likewise stature is included, but it is neither tall stature, nor short stature, nor even middle stature, but something abstracted from all of these. And

so on for the rest. Moreover, since there is a great variety of other creatures that share in some parts, but not all, of the complex idea of man, the mind leaves out the parts peculiar to human beings, keeps only those common to all living creatures, and forms the idea of *animal*. This abstracts not only from all particular men, but also from all birds, beasts, fish, and insects. The constituent parts of the abstract idea of animal are body, life, sensation, and spontaneous motion. By *body* is meant body without any particular shape or form, since there is no one shape or form common to all animals; without any covering, whether hair, feathers, scales, etc., and yet not naked either—hair, feathers, scales, and nakedness being the distinguishing properties of particular animals, and for that reason left out of the abstract idea. For the same reason the spontaneous motion must be neither walking, nor flying, nor crawling. It is nevertheless a motion—but what that motion is, is not easy to conceive.

Int.10 Whether others have this wonderful faculty of abstracting their ideas, they can best tell. For my part, I do find that I have a faculty of imagining, or representing to myself, the ideas of the particular things I have perceived, and of combining and dividing them in various ways. I can imagine a man with two heads, or the upper parts of a man joined to the body of a horse. I can consider the hand, the eye, the nose, each by itself, abstracted or separated from the rest of the body. But then whatever hand or eye I imagine, it must have some particular shape and color. Likewise the idea of a man that I form for myself must be of a man who is white, or black, or brown; straight or stooped; tall, short, or of middle height. I cannot by any effort of thought conceive the abstract idea described above. And it is equally impossible for me to form the abstract idea of a motion distinct from the body that moves, which is neither fast nor slow, neither curved nor straight; and the same may be said of all other abstract general ideas whatever. To be plain: I admit that I am able to abstract in one sense—as when I consider some particular parts or qualities separated from others that they are united with in some object, but without which they could really

exist. But I deny that I can abstract from one another, or conceive separately, qualities that cannot possibly exist separated in that way; or that I can form a general notion by abstracting from particulars in the manner just described. These last two are the proper senses of *abstraction*. And there are grounds to think that most people will admit they are in the same position as I am. The general run of simple and unlearned people never claim to have abstract notions. It is said that these notions are difficult, and cannot be attained without effort and study. We may therefore reasonably conclude that, if there are any such notions, they are confined to the learned.

Int.11 I now go on to examine what can be said in defense of the doctrine of abstraction, and to try to discover what it is that inclines speculative thinkers to embrace an opinion that seems so remote from common sense. A recent and deservedly respected philosopher has, no doubt, given it a great deal of support, by seeming to think that having abstract general ideas is what makes the widest difference in understanding between man and beast. "The having of general ideas," he says, "is what puts a complete distinction between man and the other animals, and is an excellence that the faculties of animals can by no means attain.[1] For it is evident that we observe no trace in them of using general signs for universal ideas; from which we have reason to think that they do not have the faculty of abstracting, or making general ideas, since they have no use of words or any other general signs. And a little later: "Therefore, I think, we may suppose that it is in this that the species of animals are distinguished from men: this is the proper difference that separates them entirely, and that in the end widens into so great a distance. For if they have any ideas at all, and are not mere machines (as some would have them), we cannot deny that they have some reason.[2] It seems as evident to me that some of them

1 The philosopher is John Locke (1632–1704); the quotation is from his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690).

2 "Mere machines": Descartes and his followers held that animals are automata without thought or feeling.

do reason in certain instances as that they have sense; but only with particular ideas, just as they receive them from their senses. Even the best of them are confined within those narrow bounds, and do not (I think) have the faculty of enlarging them by any kind of abstraction."—*Essay on Human Understanding*, Book II, chapter 11, sections 10 and 11. I readily agree with this learned author that the faculties of animals can by no means attain to abstraction. But then, if this is made the distinguishing property of that kind of creature, I fear a great many of those who pass for men must be counted among them. The reason given here for thinking we have no grounds to suppose animals have abstract general ideas is that we observe in them no use of words or any other general signs. This rests on the assumption that using words implies having general ideas—from which it follows that people who use language are able to abstract or generalize their ideas. That this is the author's meaning and argument will appear further from his answer to the question he raises in another place: "Since all things that exist are only particulars, how do we come by general terms?" His answer is: "Words become general by being made the signs of general ideas."—*Essay on Human Understanding*, Book III, chapter 3, section 6. But it seems that a word becomes general by being made the sign, not of an abstract general idea, but of several particular ideas, any one of which it suggests to the mind without preference. For example, when it is said that "the change of motion is proportional to the force impressed," or that "whatever has extension is divisible," these propositions are to be understood of motion and extension in general. Yet it does not follow that they suggest to my thoughts an *idea* of motion without a body moving, or without any definite direction and speed; or that I must conceive an *abstract general idea* of extension that is neither line, surface, nor solid, neither large nor small, black, white, nor red, nor of any other definite color. All that is implied is that whatever particular motion I consider—whether fast or slow, vertical, horizontal, or slanting, and in whatever object—the

axiom holds equally true of it.[3] And the other axiom holds equally of every particular extension, whether it is a line, a surface, or a solid, and whatever its size or shape.

HOW IDEAS BECOME GENERAL

A particular idea or word becomes general by standing for all the particulars of its kind.

Int.12 By observing how ideas become general, we can better judge how words become so. And here it should be noted that I do not deny absolutely that there are *general ideas*, but only that there are any *abstract general ideas*. For in the passages we have quoted that mention general ideas, it is always assumed that they are formed by abstraction, in the way described in sections 8 and 9. Now, if we are going to attach a meaning to our words, and speak only of what we can conceive, I believe we shall admit that an idea which, considered in itself, is particular becomes general by being made to represent or stand for all other particular ideas of the same sort. Let me make this plain with an example. Suppose a geometer is demonstrating the method of cutting a line into two equal parts. He draws, say, a black line an inch long. This line, which in itself is a particular line, is nevertheless general *with regard to what it signifies*, since, as it is used there, it represents all particular lines whatever; so that what is demonstrated of it is demonstrated of all lines—or, in other words, of a line in general. And just as *that particular line* becomes general by being made a sign, so the *name* "line," which taken by itself is particular, is made general by being a sign. And just as the former owes its generality not to its being the sign of an abstract or general line, but of all the particular straight lines that could possibly exist, so the latter must be thought to get its generality from the same cause—namely, the various particular lines that it stands for without preference.

Int.13 To give the reader a still clearer view of the nature of abstract ideas, and of the uses they are thought necessary for, I

3 The first proposition is Newton's second law of motion, from the *Principia* (1687).

will add one more passage from the *Essay on Human Understanding*, which runs as follows: "Abstract ideas are not so obvious or easy to children, or to the still untrained mind, as particular ones. If they seem so to grown men, it is only because constant and familiar use has made them so. For when we reflect carefully on them, we shall find that general ideas are fictions and contrivances of the mind that carry difficulty with them, and do not present themselves as easily as we tend to imagine. For example, does it not take some effort and skill to form the general idea of a triangle (which is far from the most abstract, comprehensive, and difficult)? For it must be neither oblique nor right-angled, neither equilateral, isosceles, nor scalene, but all and none of these at once. In effect, it is something imperfect that cannot exist—an idea in which some parts of several different and inconsistent ideas are put together. It is true that the mind, in this imperfect state, needs such ideas, and hurries to them as fast as it can, for the convenience of communication and the enlargement of knowledge, to both of which it is naturally much inclined. But still, there is reason to suspect that such ideas are marks of our imperfection. At least this is enough to show that the most abstract and general ideas are not the ones the mind is first and most easily acquainted with, nor the ones its earliest knowledge deals with."—Book IV, chapter 7, section 9. If anyone has the faculty of forming in his mind such an idea of a triangle as is described here, it is useless to try to argue him out of it, and I would not attempt it. All I ask is that the reader find out fully and for certain whether he has such an idea or not. And this, it seems to me, can be no hard task for anyone. What could be easier than for anyone to look a little into his own thoughts, and there test whether he has, or can come to have, an idea that corresponds to the description given here of the general idea of a triangle—which is neither oblique nor right-angled, equilateral, isosceles nor scalene, but all and none of these at once?

Int.14 Much is said here of the difficulty that abstract ideas carry with them, and of the effort and skill needed to form

them. And everyone agrees that it takes great toil and labor of the mind to free our thoughts from particular objects and raise them to those lofty speculations that deal with abstract ideas. The natural conclusion from all this would seem to be that so difficult a thing as forming abstract ideas was not necessary for *communication*, which is so easy and familiar to all sorts of people. But, we are told, if they seem obvious and easy to grown men, it is only because constant and familiar use has made them so. Now, I would very much like to know at what time people are occupied in overcoming that difficulty and equipping themselves with these necessary aids to speech. It cannot be when they are grown up, for then, it seems, they are not aware of any such effort. So it must be the business of their childhood. And surely the great and repeated labor of forming abstract notions will be found a hard task for that tender age. Is it not hard to imagine that a couple of children cannot chatter together about their candies and rattles and the rest of their little toys until they have first stitched together countless inconsistencies, and so formed abstract general ideas in their minds, and attached them to every common name they use?

Int.15 Nor do I think abstract ideas are one bit more necessary for the *enlargement of knowledge* than for communication. I know it is a point much insisted on that all knowledge and demonstration are about universal notions, and with this I fully agree. But it does not seem to me that those notions are formed by abstraction in the way described above. *Universality*, so far as I can understand it, does not consist in the absolute, positive nature or conception of anything, but in the relation it bears to the particulars it signifies or represents. It is by virtue of this relation that things, names, or notions, which are *particular* in their own nature, are *made universal*. Thus, when I demonstrate any proposition about triangles, it is to be supposed that I have in view the universal idea of a triangle. This should not be understood to mean that I could form an *idea* of a triangle that was neither equilateral, nor scalene, nor isosceles, but only that the particular triangle I am considering, whatever sort it may be, stands for

and represents all straight-sided triangles whatever equally, and is universal in that sense. All of this seems very plain and free of any difficulty.

Int.16 But here it will be asked how we can know that any proposition is true of all particular triangles unless we have first seen it demonstrated of the abstract idea of a triangle, which fits all of them equally. For just because a property can be shown to belong to some one particular triangle, it does not follow that it belongs equally to any other triangle that is not the same as it in every respect. For example, having demonstrated that the three angles of an isosceles right triangle are equal to two right angles, I cannot conclude from this that the property belongs to all other triangles, which have neither a right angle nor two equal sides. It seems, then, that to be certain this proposition is universally true, we must either make a separate demonstration for every particular triangle, which is impossible, or else demonstrate it once and for all of the abstract idea of a triangle, in which all the particulars share without distinction, and by which they are all equally represented. My answer is this: although the idea I have in view while I make the demonstration is, say, that of an isosceles right triangle whose sides are of a definite length, I can nevertheless be certain that it extends to all other straight-sided triangles, of whatever sort or size. And that is because neither the right angle, nor the equality of the sides, nor their definite length plays any part at all in the demonstration. It is true that the diagram I have in view includes all these particulars; but there is not the slightest mention of *them* in the proof of the proposition. It is not said that the three angles are equal to two right angles because one of them is a right angle, or because the sides that enclose it are of the same length. This shows well enough that the right angle might have been oblique, and the sides unequal, and the demonstration would still have held good. And it is for this reason that I conclude that what I demonstrated of a particular right-angled isosceles triangle is true of any oblique-angled or scalene one—and not because I demonstrated the proposition of the abstract idea of a triangle.

And here it must be admitted that a person may *consider* a shape merely as a triangle, without attending to the particular qualities of its angles or the relations of its sides. *To that extent he can abstract.* But this will never prove that he can form an abstract, general, inconsistent *idea* of a triangle. In the same way we may consider Peter insofar as he is a man, or insofar as he is an animal, without forming the abstract idea of either man or animal described earlier, since not everything that is perceived is being considered.

Int.17 It would be an endless as well as a useless task to follow the Schoolmen, those great masters of abstraction, through all the many inextricable labyrinths of error and dispute into which their doctrine of abstract natures and notions seems to have led them. What quarrels and controversies, what learned dust has been raised over these matters, and what mighty benefit mankind has derived from it all, are things too well known today to need dwelling on. And it would have been well if the bad effects of that doctrine had been confined to those who profess it most openly.[4] Consider the great effort, industry, and talent that for so many ages have been spent on cultivating and advancing the sciences; and that, in spite of all this, by far the greater part of them remain full of darkness and uncertainty, and of disputes that seem likely never to end; that even those thought to rest on the clearest and most compelling demonstrations contain paradoxes that human understanding cannot possibly reconcile; and that, taken all together, only a very small portion of them provides any real benefit to mankind, beyond being a harmless diversion and amusement. When people consider all this, I say, it tends to throw them into despair and complete contempt for all study. But this may perhaps come to an end once we look at the false principles that have gained ground in the world. Among all of these there is none, I think, that has a wider influence over the thoughts of speculative men than this one of *abstract general ideas*.

4 The Schoolmen: the scholastic philosophers and theologians of the medieval universities.

LANGUAGE AS THE SOURCE OF THE ERROR

Berkeley traces belief in abstract ideas to words and urges attending to ideas without them.

Int.18 I come now to consider the *source* of this prevailing notion, and that seems to me to be *language*. And surely nothing less widespread than reason itself could have been the source of an opinion so universally accepted. The truth of this appears from other reasons, and also from the plain admission of the ablest champions of abstract ideas, who acknowledge that they are made for the sake of naming. From this it clearly follows that if there had been no such thing as speech or universal signs, no one would ever have thought of abstraction. See Book III, chapter 6, section 39, and elsewhere in the *Essay on Human Understanding*.

Let us examine how words have contributed to the origin of that mistake. First, then, it is thought that every name has, or ought to have, only one precise and settled meaning. This inclines people to think that there are certain abstract, definite ideas that make up the true and only immediate meaning of each general name, and that it is through these abstract ideas that a general name comes to signify any particular thing. In truth, however, there is no such thing as one precise and definite meaning attached to any general name; they all signify, without distinction, a great number of particular ideas. All this plainly follows from what has already been said, and will be clear to anyone after a little reflection. It will be objected that every name that has a definition is thereby restricted to one definite meaning. For example, a triangle is defined as "a plane surface enclosed by three straight lines," and this limits the name to signifying one definite idea and no other. My answer is that the definition does not say whether the surface is large or small, black or white, nor whether the sides are long or short, equal or unequal, nor at what angles they are inclined to one another. In all these respects there may be great variety, and so there is no

one settled idea that limits the meaning of the word "triangle." It is one thing to keep a name constantly to the same *definition*, and another to make it stand everywhere for the same *idea*: the first is necessary, the second useless and impracticable.

Int.19 But to give a further account of how words came to produce the doctrine of abstract ideas, it must be observed that it is a commonly accepted opinion that language has no other purpose than communicating our ideas, and that every meaningful name stands for an idea. Given this, and given also that it is certain that names which are not thought to be altogether meaningless do not always point to particular conceivable ideas, it is straightaway concluded that they stand for abstract notions. That there are many names in use among speculative thinkers that do not always suggest to others definite, particular ideas—or, in truth, anything at all—nobody will deny. And a little attention will reveal that it is not necessary (even in the strictest reasoning) for meaningful names that stand for ideas to arouse in the understanding, every time they are used, the ideas they were made to stand for. In reading and conversation, names are for the most part used as letters are in algebra, where, although each letter marks a particular quantity, it is not necessary, in order to proceed correctly, that at every step each letter should bring to mind the particular quantity it was assigned to stand for.

Int.20 Besides, communicating the ideas marked by words is not the chief and only purpose of language, as is commonly supposed. There are other purposes: arousing some passion, prompting someone to an action or deterring them from it, putting the mind in some particular frame. In many cases communicating ideas is merely a means to these ends, and sometimes it is left out entirely when they can be achieved without it—as I think happens not infrequently in the everyday use of language. I ask the reader to reflect for himself and see whether it does not often happen, in hearing or reading a discourse, that the passions of fear, love, hatred, admiration, contempt, and the like arise in his mind immediately upon perceiving certain words,

without any ideas coming in between. At first, indeed, the words may have prompted ideas that were suited to produce those emotions. But, unless I am mistaken, it will be found that once language has become familiar, hearing the sounds or seeing the letters is often followed immediately by those passions which at first used to be produced by way of ideas that are now left out altogether. May we not, for example, be moved by the promise of a *good thing*, even though we have no idea of what it is? Or is it not enough to be threatened with danger to arouse dread, even though we do not think of any particular evil likely to happen to us, nor form for ourselves an idea of danger in the abstract? If anyone adds even a little reflection of his own to what has been said, I believe it will be evident to him that general names are often used quite properly without the speaker intending them as marks of ideas in his own mind that he wants them to raise in the mind of the hearer. Even proper names themselves do not seem always to be spoken with the intention of bringing before us the ideas of the individuals they are supposed to mark. For example, when a Schoolman tells me "Aristotle has said it," all I take him to mean is to dispose me to accept his opinion with the deference and submission that custom has attached to that name. And in the minds of those who are used to surrendering their judgment to the authority of that philosopher, this effect may be produced so instantly that no idea of his person, writings, or reputation could possibly come first. Countless examples of this kind could be given, but why should I dwell on things that everyone's experience, I have no doubt, will abundantly suggest to him?

Int.21 We have, I think, shown that abstract ideas are impossible. We have considered what has been said for them by their ablest champions, and tried to show that they are of no use for the purposes for which they are thought necessary. And lastly, we have traced them to the source from which they flow, which is evidently language.

No one can deny that words are extremely useful: through them, the whole stock of knowledge gathered by the combined

labors of inquiring people in every age and nation can be brought into view and made the possession of a single person. But at the same time it must be admitted that most branches of knowledge have been strangely confused and obscured by the abuse of words, and by the general ways of speaking in which they are expressed. Since, then, words are so apt to mislead the understanding, whatever ideas I consider, I will try to look at them bare and naked, keeping out of my thoughts, as far as I can, the names that long and constant use has so tightly joined to them. From this I can expect the following advantages:

Int.22 *First*, I can be sure to stay clear of all purely verbal controversies. These weeds have sprung up in almost all the sciences and have been a major obstacle to the growth of true and sound knowledge. *Second*, this seems a sure way to free myself from that fine and subtle net of abstract ideas which has so miserably confused and entangled people's minds, with this peculiar feature: the finer and more ingenious a person's intelligence, the deeper he was likely to be snared and the tighter he was held. *Third*, as long as I confine my thoughts to my own ideas, stripped of words, I do not see how I can easily be mistaken. The objects I consider, I know clearly and completely. I cannot be deceived into thinking I have an idea that I do not have. I cannot imagine that any of my own ideas are alike or unlike when they are not truly so. To discern the agreements and disagreements between my ideas, and to see which ideas are included in a compound idea and which are not, nothing more is needed than attentive perception of what goes on in my own understanding.

Int.23 But gaining all these advantages presupposes a complete escape from the deception of words, which I hardly dare promise myself: it is so difficult to dissolve a union begun so early, and strengthened by so long a habit, as the one between words and ideas. This difficulty seems to have been greatly increased by the doctrine of *abstraction*. For as long as people thought *abstract* ideas were attached to their words, it is not surprising that they used words in place of ideas. They found it impossible to set the word aside and keep the *abstract* idea in mind, since

that idea was in itself perfectly inconceivable. This seems to me the main reason why those who have so emphatically urged others to set aside all use of words in their meditations, and to contemplate their bare ideas, have nevertheless failed to do it themselves. Lately many have become very aware of the absurd opinions and meaningless disputes that grow out of the abuse of words. To remedy these evils, they give good advice: that we attend to the ideas signified and draw our attention away from the words that signify them. But however good the advice they have given others, it is plain they could not properly follow it themselves, as long as they thought that the only immediate use of words was to signify ideas, and that the immediate meaning of every general name was a determinate abstract idea.

Int.24 But once these are known to be mistakes, a person can more easily avoid being misled by words. Someone who knows he has only *particular* ideas will not puzzle himself in vain trying to find and conceive the *abstract* idea attached to a name. And someone who knows that names do not always stand for ideas will spare himself the labor of looking for ideas where there are none to be had. It is therefore to be wished that everyone would do his utmost to get a clear view of the ideas he means to consider, separating from them all the clothing and clutter of words that do so much to blind the judgment and divide the attention. In vain do we extend our view into the heavens and probe the depths of the earth; in vain do we consult the writings of learned men and trace the dim footsteps of antiquity. We need only draw back the curtain of words to see the fairest tree of knowledge, whose fruit is excellent and within reach of our hand.

Int.25 Unless we take care to clear the first principles of knowledge from the confusion and deception of words, we may reason about them endlessly to no purpose; we may draw consequences from consequences and be none the wiser. The farther we go, the more hopelessly we will lose ourselves, and the deeper we will be entangled in difficulties and mistakes. So I ask whoever intends to read the following pages to make my

words the occasion of his own thinking, and to try to follow the same train of thought in reading them that I had in writing them. In this way it will be easy for him to discover whether what I say is true or false. He will be in no danger at all of being deceived by my words. And I do not see how he can be led into error by considering his own naked, undisguised ideas.

TO BE IS TO BE PERCEIVED

Sensible things are collections of ideas, and their existence consists in being perceived by a mind.

§1 It is evident to anyone who surveys the *objects of human knowledge* that they are either *ideas* actually imprinted on the senses; or ideas perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind; or, finally, *ideas* formed with the help of memory and imagination, by compounding, dividing, or simply representing those originally perceived in the ways just mentioned. By sight I have the ideas of light and colors, with their various degrees and variations. By touch I perceive hard and soft, heat and cold, motion and resistance, and of all these more and less, in quantity or degree. Smell supplies me with odors, the palate with tastes, and hearing conveys sounds to the mind in all their variety of tone and composition.

And since several of these are observed to go along with each other, they come to be marked by one name and so to be regarded as one *thing*. For example, a certain color, taste, smell, shape, and consistency, having been observed to go together, are counted as one distinct thing, signified by the name "apple." Other collections of ideas make up a stone, a tree, a book, and similar sensible things, which, as they are pleasing or unpleasant, arouse the passions of love, hatred, joy, grief, and so on.

§2 But besides all that endless variety of ideas or objects of knowledge, there is also something that knows or perceives them and performs various operations on them, such as willing, imagining, and remembering. This perceiving, active being is what I call *mind*, *spirit*, *soul*, or *myself*. By these words I do not

mean any one of my ideas, but a thing entirely distinct from them, in which they exist, or, what is the same thing, by which they are perceived; for the existence of an idea consists in its being perceived.

§3 Everyone will grant that neither our thoughts, nor our passions, nor the ideas formed by the imagination exist outside the mind. And it seems no less evident that the various sensations, or ideas imprinted on the senses, however blended or combined (that is, whatever objects they make up), cannot exist otherwise than in a mind that perceives them. I think anyone can gain an intuitive knowledge of this who attends to what is meant by the word *exist* when it is applied to sensible things. I say the table I write on exists; that is, I see and feel it. If I were out of my study, I would say it existed, meaning that if I were in my study I could perceive it, or that some other spirit actually does perceive it. There was an odor: that is, it was smelled. There was a sound: that is, it was heard. There was a color or shape: that is, it was perceived by sight or touch. This is all I can understand by these and similar expressions. As for what is said about the *absolute* existence of unthinking things, without any relation to their being perceived, that seems perfectly unintelligible. Their *esse* is *percipi*: their being is to be perceived. Nor is it possible for them to have any existence outside the minds or thinking things that perceive them.[5]

§4 It is indeed an opinion that strangely prevails among people that houses, mountains, rivers, and in a word all sensible objects, have an existence, natural or real, distinct from their being perceived by the understanding. But however confidently and widely this principle may be held, anyone who can bring himself to question it will, unless I am mistaken, see that it involves an obvious contradiction. For what are the objects just mentioned but the things we perceive by sense? And what do we perceive besides our own ideas or sensations? And is it not

5 *Esse est percipi*, Latin for "to be is to be perceived": Berkeley's central thesis about sensible things.

plainly contradictory that any one of these, or any combination of them, should exist unperceived?

§5 If we examine this belief thoroughly, it will perhaps be found to depend at bottom on the doctrine of *abstract ideas*. For can there be a finer feat of abstraction than to distinguish the existence of sensible objects from their being perceived, so as to conceive them existing unperceived? Light and colors, heat and cold, extension and shapes (in a word, the things we see and feel): what are they but so many sensations, notions, ideas, or impressions on the senses? And is it possible to separate any of these from perception, even in thought? For my part, I could as easily separate a thing from itself. I can, indeed, divide in my thoughts, or conceive apart from each other, things that I may never have perceived divided in that way by sense. So I imagine the trunk of a human body without the limbs, or conceive the smell of a rose without thinking of the rose itself. To that extent, I will not deny, I can abstract, if it can properly be called *abstraction* when it extends only to conceiving separately objects that could really exist, or actually be perceived, apart. But my power of conceiving or imagining does not extend beyond the possibility of real existence or perception. So, just as it is impossible for me to see or feel anything without an actual sensation of that thing, it is equally impossible for me to conceive in my thoughts any sensible thing or object distinct from the sensation or perception of it.

§6 Some truths are so close and obvious to the mind that a person need only open his eyes to see them. I take this important one to be such: that all the choir of heaven and furnishings of the earth, in a word all the bodies that make up the mighty frame of the world, have no subsistence without a mind; that their *being* is to be perceived or known; and that consequently, as long as they are not actually perceived by me, or do not exist in my mind or in that of any other created spirit, they must either have no existence at all or else subsist in the mind of some Eternal Spirit. For it is perfectly unintelligible, and involves all the absurdity of abstraction, to attribute to any

single part of them an existence independent of a spirit. To be convinced of this, the reader need only reflect and try to separate in his own thoughts the *being* of a sensible thing from its *being perceived*.

§7 From what has been said it follows that there is no substance other than *spirit*, or that which perceives. But for a fuller proof of this point, consider that the sensible qualities are color, shape, motion, smell, taste, and the like, that is, the ideas perceived by sense. Now for an idea to exist in an unperceiving thing is an obvious contradiction, for to have an idea is the same as to perceive. So whatever color, shape, and similar qualities exist in must perceive them. Hence it is clear that there can be no unthinking substance or *substratum* of those ideas.

§8 But, you say, though the ideas themselves do not exist outside the mind, there may still be things like them, of which they are copies or resemblances, and these things exist outside the mind in an unthinking substance. I answer that an idea can be like nothing but an idea; a color or shape can be like nothing but another color or shape. If we look even a little into our thoughts, we will find it impossible to conceive a likeness except between our ideas. Again, I ask whether those supposed *originals*, or external things, of which our ideas are the pictures or representations, are themselves perceivable or not. If they are, then *they* are ideas, and we have made our point. But if you say they are not, I appeal to anyone whether it makes sense to assert that a color is like something invisible, that hard or soft is like something intangible, and so on for the rest.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

Shape, motion and extension are shown to be as mind-dependent as color, taste and sound.

§9 Some people distinguish between *primary* and *secondary* qualities. By the first they mean extension, shape, motion, rest, solidity or impenetrability, and number. By the second they mean all other sensible qualities, such as colors, sounds, tastes,

and so on. They admit that our ideas of the secondary qualities are not resemblances of anything existing outside the mind, or unperceived. But they hold that our ideas of the *primary qualities* are patterns or images of things that exist outside the mind, in an unthinking substance they call matter. By matter, then, we are to understand an inert, senseless substance in which extension, shape, and motion actually subsist. But it is evident from what we have already shown that extension, shape, and motion are only ideas existing in the mind; that an idea can be like nothing but another idea; and that consequently neither they nor their archetypes can exist in an unperceiving substance. Hence it is plain that the very notion of what is called *matter* or *corporeal substance* involves a contradiction.

§10 Those who assert that shape, motion, and the rest of the primary or original qualities exist outside the mind, in unthinking substances, at the same time admit that colors, sounds, heat, cold, and similar secondary qualities do not. These, they tell us, are sensations existing in the mind alone, which depend on and are caused by the differing size, texture, and motion of the tiny particles of matter. They take this for an undoubted truth, which they can demonstrate beyond all objection. Now if it is certain that those *original* qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities, and cannot be abstracted from them even in thought, it plainly follows that *they* exist only in the mind. But I ask anyone to reflect and try whether he can, by any abstraction of thought, conceive the extension and motion of a body without all its other sensible qualities. For my part, I see clearly that I cannot frame an idea of a body that is extended and moving without also giving it some color or other sensible quality, which is admitted to exist only in the mind. In short, extension, shape, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. So wherever the other sensible qualities are, these must be too: namely, in the mind and nowhere else.

§11 Again, *great* and *small*, *fast* and *slow*, are granted to exist nowhere outside the mind, since they are entirely relative and change as the structure or position of the sense organs varies. So

the extension that exists outside the mind is neither great nor small, and the motion neither fast nor slow; that is, they are nothing at all. But, you say, they are extension in general and motion in general. Here we see how much the belief in extended, movable substances existing outside the mind depends on that strange doctrine of *abstract ideas*. And here I cannot help remarking how closely the vague and indeterminate description of matter, or corporeal substance, into which the modern philosophers have been led by their own principles, resembles that antiquated and much-ridiculed notion of *materia prima* found in Aristotle and his followers. Solidity cannot be conceived without extension. Since it has been shown, then, that extension does not exist in an unthinking substance, the same must be true of solidity.[6]

§12 That *number* is entirely a creation of the mind, even if the other qualities are granted to exist outside it, will be evident to anyone who considers that the same thing is given a different number depending on how the mind regards it. So the same extension is one, or three, or thirty-six, depending on whether the mind considers it in relation to a yard, a foot, or an inch. Number is so visibly relative, and so dependent on human understanding, that it is strange anyone should give it an absolute existence outside the mind. We say one book, one page, one line, and so on; all these are equally units, though some contain several of the others. And in each case, it is plain, the unit refers to some particular combination of ideas put together *arbitrarily* by the mind.

§13 I know some hold that unity is a simple or uncompounded idea, accompanying all other ideas into the mind. I do not find that I have any such idea corresponding to the word *unity*; and if I did, I think I could not fail to find it. On the contrary, it should be the most familiar idea to my understanding, since it is said to accompany all other ideas and to be perceived by every route of sensation and reflection. To say no more, it is an *abstract idea*.

6 *Materia prima*: "prime matter," the formless, qualityless substrate of change in Aristotelian and scholastic philosophy.

§14 I will add further that, in the same way that modern philosophers prove certain sensible qualities to have no existence in matter, or outside the mind, the same can be proved of all other sensible qualities whatever. For instance, it is said that heat and cold are only states of the mind, and not at all patterns of real beings existing in the corporeal substances that cause them, because the same body that feels cold to one hand seems warm to the other. Now why may we not just as well argue that shape and extension are not patterns or resemblances of qualities existing in matter, since to the same eye at different positions, or to eyes of different structure at the same position, they appear different, and so cannot be images of anything fixed and determinate outside the mind? Again, it is proved that sweetness is not really in the tasted thing, because while the thing remains unchanged the sweetness turns to bitterness, as with a fever or an otherwise impaired palate. Is it not just as reasonable to say that motion is not outside the mind, since, as is admitted, if the succession of ideas in the mind becomes faster, the motion will appear slower, without any change in any external object?

§15 In short, let anyone consider the arguments thought to prove clearly that colors and tastes exist only in the mind, and he will find they can be used with equal force to prove the same of extension, shape, and motion. It must be admitted, though, that this way of arguing does not so much prove that there is no extension or color in an outward object as that we do not know by sense which is the object's true extension or color. But the preceding arguments plainly show that it is impossible for any color or extension at all, or any other sensible quality whatever, to exist in an unthinking subject outside the mind, or indeed for there to be any such thing as an outward object.

MATERIAL SUBSTANCE EXAMINED

The notion of matter as a support of qualities is empty, and nothing could prove it exists.

§16 But let us examine the accepted opinion a little. It is said that extension is a *mode* or *accident* of matter, and that matter is the *substratum* that supports it. Now I ask you to explain to me what is meant by matter's *supporting* extension. You say: I have no idea of matter, and so cannot explain it. I answer: though you have no positive idea of matter, if you mean anything at all you must at least have a relative idea of it. Though you do not know what it is, you must be supposed to know what relation it bears to accidents, and what is meant by its supporting them. Clearly *support* cannot be taken here in its usual or literal sense, as when we say that pillars support a building. In what sense, then, must it be taken?

§17 If we ask what the most careful philosophers say they mean by *material substance*, we will find them admitting that they attach no other meaning to those sounds than the idea of being in general, together with the relative notion of its supporting accidents. The general idea of being seems to me the most abstract and incomprehensible of all; and as for its supporting accidents, this, as we have just observed, cannot be understood in the ordinary sense of those words. It must therefore be taken in some other sense, but what that sense is they do not explain. So when I consider the two parts or branches that make up the meaning of the words *material substance*, I am convinced that no distinct meaning is attached to them. But why should we trouble ourselves any further discussing this material *substratum* or support of shape, motion, and other sensible qualities? Does it not assume that they have an existence outside the mind? And is that not a direct contradiction, and altogether inconceivable?

§18 But even if it were possible for solid, shaped, movable substances to exist outside the mind, corresponding to the ideas we have of bodies, how could we know it? We must know it either

by sense or by reason. As for our senses, through them we know only our sensations, ideas, or the things immediately perceived by sense, call them what you like; but they do not tell us that things exist outside the mind, or unperceived, resembling those that are perceived. The materialists themselves admit this. It remains, then, that if we have any knowledge at all of external things, it must come from reason inferring their existence from what is immediately perceived by sense. But what reason can lead us to believe, from what we perceive, in the existence of bodies outside the mind, since even the defenders of matter do not claim there is any necessary connection between those bodies and our ideas? I say it is granted on all sides (and what happens in dreams, delirium, and the like puts it beyond dispute) that we might possibly be affected with all the ideas we have now even if no bodies resembling them existed outside the mind. Hence it is evident that the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for producing our ideas, since it is granted that they are sometimes produced, and might possibly always be produced, in the same order we see them in now, without the involvement of such bodies.

§19 But though we might possibly have all our sensations without them, perhaps it may be thought easier to conceive and explain how our sensations are produced by supposing external bodies resembling them than otherwise; and so it might at least be probable that there are such things as bodies that cause their ideas in our minds. But this cannot be said either. For even if we grant the materialists their external bodies, they are, by their own admission, no nearer to knowing how our ideas are produced, since they confess they cannot comprehend how body can act on spirit, or how it could possibly imprint any idea on the mind. Hence it is evident that the production of ideas or sensations in our minds can be no reason for supposing matter or corporeal substances, since it is admitted to remain equally inexplicable with or without this supposition. So even if it were possible for bodies to exist outside the mind, to hold that they do must be a very shaky opinion, since it supposes, without any

reason at all, that God has created countless beings that are entirely useless and serve no purpose whatever.

§20 In short, if there were external bodies, we could never come to know it; and if there were not, we would have exactly the same reasons to think there were that we have now. Suppose (and no one can deny it is possible) that an intelligence, without the help of external bodies, were affected with the same train of sensations or ideas that you are, imprinted in the same order and with the same vividness in his mind. I ask whether that intelligence would not have every reason to believe in the existence of corporeal substances, represented by his ideas and causing them in his mind, that you can possibly have for believing the same thing. There can be no question of it. This one consideration should be enough to make any reasonable person doubt the strength of whatever arguments he thinks he has for the existence of bodies outside the mind.

§21 If it were necessary, after what has been said, to add any further proof against the existence of matter, I could point to several errors and difficulties (not to mention impieties) that have sprung from that belief. It has caused countless controversies and disputes in philosophy, and not a few of far greater importance in religion. But I will not go into the details here, both because I think arguments *a posteriori* are unnecessary to confirm what has been, unless I am mistaken, sufficiently demonstrated *a priori,* and because I will later have occasion to say something about them.[7]

§22 I am afraid I have given cause to think I am needlessly long-winded on this subject. For what is the point of dwelling on something that can be demonstrated with the utmost clarity in a line or two to anyone capable of the least reflection? You have only to look into your own thoughts and try whether you can conceive it possible for a sound, or shape, or motion, or color to exist outside the mind, or unperceived. This easy test may perhaps make you see that what you are arguing for is an outright

7 *A posteriori*: reasoning from effects or consequences; *a priori*: reasoning from principles, prior to experience.

contradiction. So much so that I am content to rest the whole case on this: if you can merely conceive it possible for one extended, movable substance, or in general for any one idea or anything like an idea, to exist otherwise than in a mind perceiving it, I will readily give up the cause. And as for that whole structure of external bodies you argue for, I will grant you its existence, even though you can neither give me any reason why you believe it exists nor assign it any use once it is supposed to exist. I say, the mere possibility of your opinion being true will count as an argument that it is true.

§23 But, you say, surely nothing is easier for me than to imagine trees, for instance, in a park, or books sitting in a closet, with nobody nearby to perceive them. I answer: you can, and there is no difficulty in it. But what is all this, I ask you, beyond framing in your mind certain ideas that you call *books* and *trees*, while at the same time leaving out the idea of anyone who might perceive them? But do you not yourself perceive or think of them the whole time? So this is beside the point. It shows only that you have the power of imagining, or forming ideas in your mind; it does not show that you can conceive it possible for the objects of your thought to exist outside the mind. To show that, you would have to conceive them existing unconceived or unthought of, which is an obvious contradiction. When we do our utmost to conceive the existence of external bodies, we are all the while only contemplating our own ideas. But the mind, taking no notice of itself, is deluded into thinking it can and does conceive bodies existing unthought of, or outside the mind, even though at that very moment they are apprehended by it, or exist in it. A little attention will reveal to anyone the truth and evidence of what is said here, and make it unnecessary to insist on any other proofs against the existence of *material substance*.

§24 The least inquiry into our own thoughts makes it quite obvious whether we can understand what is meant by the *absolute existence of sensible objects in themselves*, or *outside the mind*. To me it is evident that those words mark out either a direct contradiction or else nothing at all. And to convince others of this, I

know no quicker or fairer way than to ask them to attend calmly to their own thoughts. If this attention shows those expressions to be empty or contradictory, surely nothing more is needed to convince them. This, then, is what I insist on: that the *absolute existence of unthinking things* are words without meaning, or words that contain a contradiction. This is what I repeat and urge, and earnestly commend to the reader's careful thought.

IDEAS, SPIRITS AND THE LAWS OF NATURE

Ideas are passive; spirits alone act, and God produces the ideas of sense in regular order.

§25 All our ideas, sensations, notions, or the things we perceive, by whatever names they are distinguished, are visibly inactive: there is no power or agency contained in them. So one idea or object of thought cannot produce, or make any change in, another. To be satisfied that this is true, nothing more is needed than simply observing our ideas. For since they and every part of them exist only in the mind, it follows that there is nothing in them except what is perceived. But whoever attends to his ideas, whether of sense or of reflection, will not perceive any power or activity in them. So no such thing is contained in them. A little attention will show us that the very being of an idea implies passivity and inertness, so much so that it is impossible for an idea to do anything, or, strictly speaking, to be the cause of anything. Nor can it be the resemblance or pattern of any active being, as is evident from §8. From this it plainly follows that extension, shape, and motion cannot be the cause of our sensations. So to say that our sensations are the effects of powers resulting from the configuration, number, motion, and size of corpuscles must certainly be false.[8]

§26 We perceive a continual succession of ideas: some are newly aroused, others are changed or disappear entirely. So there is *some* cause of these ideas, on which they depend and

8 Corpuscles: the tiny particles of matter posited by the "corpuscularian" natural philosophy of Boyle and Locke.

which produces and changes them. That this cause cannot be any quality or idea or combination of *ideas* is clear from the preceding section. It must therefore be a *substance*. But it has been shown that there is no corporeal or material substance. It remains, then, that the cause of ideas is an incorporeal, active substance, or spirit.

§27 A spirit is one simple, undivided, active being. As it perceives ideas it is called the *understanding*, and as it produces or otherwise operates on them it is called the *will*. Hence no *idea* can be formed of a soul or spirit. For since all ideas whatever are passive and inert (see §25), they cannot represent to us, by way of image or likeness, that which acts. A little attention will make it plain to anyone that it is absolutely impossible to have an idea that is *like* that active principle of motion and change of ideas. Such is the nature of spirit, or that which acts, that it cannot be perceived in itself, but only through the effects it produces. If anyone doubts the truth of what is said here, let him simply reflect and try whether he can frame the idea of any power or active being; and whether he has ideas of two principal powers, marked by the names *will* and *understanding*, distinct from each other as well as from a third idea of substance or being in general, with a relative notion of its supporting or being the subject of these powers, which is signified by the name *soul* or *spirit*. This is what some hold. But as far as I can see, the words *will, soul, spirit* do not stand for different ideas, or in fact for any idea at all, but for something very different from ideas, which, being an agent, cannot be like, or be represented by, any idea whatever. It must be admitted at the same time, though, that we have some *notion* of soul, spirit, and the operations of the mind, such as willing, loving, and hating, insofar as we know or understand the meaning of these words.[9]

§28 I find I can arouse ideas in my mind at will, and vary and shift the scene as often as I see fit. It takes no more than *willing*, and immediately this or that idea arises in my imagination; and

9 Here Berkeley introduces "notion" as his technical term for our knowledge of spirits and their acts, as opposed to "ideas" of sensible things.

by the same power it is erased and makes way for another. This making and unmaking of ideas quite properly entitles us to call the mind active. This much is certain and grounded in experience. But when we talk of unthinking agents, or of ideas being aroused without an act of will, we are only playing with words.

§29 But whatever power I may have over my own thoughts, I find that the ideas actually perceived by sense do not depend in the same way on *my* will. When I open my eyes in broad daylight, it is not in my power to choose whether I will see or not, or to determine which particular objects will present themselves to my view; and the same holds for hearing and the other senses. The ideas imprinted on them are not creations of *my* will. There is therefore some other will or spirit that produces them.

§30 The ideas of sense are stronger, livelier, and more distinct than those of the imagination. They also have a steadiness, order, and coherence, and are not aroused at random, as those produced by human wills often are, but in a regular train or series, whose admirable connection amply testifies to the wisdom and benevolence of its Author. Now the fixed rules or established methods by which the Mind we depend on arouses in us the ideas of sense are called *the laws of nature*. These we learn by experience, which teaches us that such and such ideas are accompanied by such and such other ideas in the ordinary course of things.

§31 This gives us a kind of foresight that lets us regulate our actions for the benefit of life. Without it we would be forever at a loss: we could not know how to do anything that might bring us the slightest pleasure or remove the slightest pain of sense. That food nourishes, sleep refreshes, and fire warms us; that sowing at seed-time is the way to reap at harvest; and in general that such and such means lead to such and such ends—all this we know not by discovering any *necessary connection* between our ideas, but only by observing the *settled laws* of nature. Without them we would all be in uncertainty and confusion, and a grown man would no more know how to manage himself in the affairs of life than a newborn infant.

§32 And yet this consistent, uniform working, which so plainly displays the goodness and wisdom of that governing Spirit whose will constitutes the laws of nature, is so far from leading our thoughts to Him that it rather sends them wandering after second causes. For when we perceive certain ideas of sense constantly followed by other ideas, and we know this is not our own doing, we immediately attribute power and agency to the ideas themselves and make one the cause of another—than which nothing could be more absurd and unintelligible.[10] For example, having observed that when we perceive by sight a certain round, luminous shape we also perceive by touch the idea or sensation called heat, we conclude from this that the sun is the *cause* of heat. In the same way, perceiving that the motion and collision of bodies are accompanied by sound, we are inclined to think the sound the *effect* of the motion.

§33 The ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called *real things*. Those produced in the imagination, being less regular, vivid, and constant, are more properly called *ideas* or *images of* things, which they copy and represent. But our *sensations*, however vivid and distinct they may be, are still ideas: that is, they exist in the mind, or are perceived by it, just as truly as the ideas it frames itself. The ideas of sense are granted to have more reality in them—that is, to be stronger, more orderly, and more coherent than the creations of the mind; but this is no argument that they exist outside the mind. They are also less dependent on the spirit or thinking substance that perceives them, in that they are produced by the will of another, more powerful Spirit. Yet they are still *ideas*, and certainly no idea, whether faint or strong, can exist anywhere but in a mind that perceives it.

10 "Second causes": in scholastic language, created causes acting under God, the first cause.

OBJECTIONS ANSWERED

Berkeley replies to the charge that his principles turn the real world into illusions.

§34 Before going any further, we need to spend some time answering objections that are likely to be raised against the principles laid down so far. If in doing so I seem too long-winded to readers who grasp things quickly, I hope they will forgive me, since not everyone grasps matters of this kind equally well, and I want to be understood by everyone.

First, then, it will be objected that these principles banish from the world everything real and substantial in nature, and put in its place a fanciful scheme of *ideas*. Everything that exists exists only in the mind—that is, it is purely notional. What becomes, then, of the sun, moon, and stars? What are we to think of houses, rivers, mountains, trees, and stones—even of our own bodies? Are all these just so many fantasies and illusions of the imagination?—To all this, and to anything else of the same sort that may be objected, I answer that the principles set out above do not deprive us of a single thing in nature. Whatever we see, feel, hear, or in any way conceive or understand remains as secure as ever and as real as ever. There is a *rerum natura*, and the distinction between realities and fantasies keeps its full force. This is clear from §§29, 30, and 33, where we have shown what is meant by *real things* as opposed to *fantasies* or *ideas of our own making*. But both alike exist in the mind, and in that sense both are *ideas*.[11]

§35 I do not argue against the existence of any single thing we can apprehend, whether by sense or by reflection. That the things I see with my eyes and touch with my hands exist—really exist—I do not question in the least. The only thing whose existence we deny is what *philosophers* call matter, or corporeal substance. And denying it does no damage to the rest of mankind, who, I dare say, will never miss it. The atheist, indeed, will lose

11 *Rerum natura*: Latin, "a nature of things"—a real natural world.

the cover of an empty name to prop up his impiety, and the philosophers may find they have lost a great pretext for quibbling and dispute.

§36 If anyone thinks this detracts from the existence or reality of things, he is very far from understanding what has been set out in the plainest terms I could think of. Here is a summary of what has been said. There are spiritual substances—minds, or human souls—which will or produce ideas in themselves at pleasure. But these ideas are faint, weak, and unsteady compared with others they perceive by sense, which, being impressed on them according to certain rules or laws of nature, show themselves to be the effects of a Mind more powerful and wise than human spirits. These latter are said to have *more reality* in them than the former. By this is meant that they are more affecting, orderly, and distinct, and that they are not fictions of the mind perceiving them. In this sense the sun I see by day is the real sun, and the one I imagine by night is the idea of the former. In the sense of *reality* given here, it is clear that every plant, star, and mineral—in general, every part of the world system—is as much a *real being* on our principles as on any others. If anyone means something by the term *reality* different from what I mean, I ask him to look into his own thoughts and see.

§37 It will be pressed that this much at least is true: we do away with all *corporeal substances*. My answer is this. If the word *substance* is taken in the ordinary sense, for a *combination* of sensible qualities such as extension, solidity, weight, and the like, we cannot be accused of doing away with it. But if it is taken in the philosophical sense, for the support of accidents or qualities outside the mind, then I admit we do away with it—if one can be said to do away with something that never existed, not even in the imagination.

§38 "But after all," you say, "it sounds very harsh to say we eat and drink ideas, and are clothed with ideas." I admit it does, because in ordinary speech the word *idea* is not used to mean the various combinations of sensible qualities that are called

things; and any expression that departs from the familiar use of language will certainly seem harsh and ridiculous. But this does not affect the truth of the proposition, which in other words says no more than that we are fed and clothed with the things we perceive immediately by our senses. The hardness or softness, the color, taste, warmth, shape, and similar qualities that together make up the various kinds of food and clothing have been shown to exist only in the mind that perceives them; and that is all that is meant by calling them *ideas*. If this word were as commonly used as *thing*, it would sound no harsher or more ridiculous. I am not arguing about whether the expression is proper, but whether it is true. So if you agree with me that we eat and drink and are clothed with the immediate objects of sense, which cannot exist unperceived or outside the mind, I will readily grant that it is more proper, or more in keeping with custom, to call them *things* rather than *ideas*.

§39 If it is asked why I use the word *idea* and do not instead, following custom, call them *things*, I answer that I do so for two reasons. First, because the term *thing*, as distinguished from *idea*, is generally taken to mean something existing outside the mind. Second, because *thing* has a broader meaning than *idea*, covering spirits, or thinking things, as well as ideas. Since, therefore, the objects of sense exist only in the mind, and are also unthinking and inactive, I chose to mark them with the word *idea*, which implies those properties.

§40 But whatever we say, someone may reply that he will still believe his senses and never let any argument, however plausible, prevail over their certainty. So be it: rate the evidence of the senses as high as you like, and we will do the same. That what I see, hear, and feel exists—that is, is perceived by me—I no more doubt than I doubt my own existence. But I do not see how the testimony of the senses can be offered as proof of the existence of anything that is *not* perceived by the senses. We do not want anyone to turn skeptic and disbelieve his senses. On the contrary, we give them all the weight and assurance imaginable;

and there are no principles more opposed to skepticism than the ones we have laid down, as will be clearly shown later.

§41 *Second*, it will be objected that there is a great difference between, for instance, real fire and the idea of fire, between dreaming or imagining that one is burned and actually being burned. This and similar things may be urged against our views. —The answer to all of it is evident from what has already been said. I will only add here that if real fire is very different from the idea of fire, so too the real pain it causes is very different from the idea of that pain; and yet no one will claim that real pain is, or possibly could be, in an unperceiving thing, or outside the mind, any more than its idea.

§42 *Third*, it will be objected that we see things actually outside us, at a distance from us, which therefore do not exist in the mind, since it is absurd that things seen several miles away should be as near to us as our own thoughts.—In answer, I ask the reader to consider that in a dream we often perceive things as existing far away, and yet those things are acknowledged to exist only in the mind.

§43 But to clear up this point more fully, it may be worth considering how we perceive distance, and things placed at a distance, by sight. For the idea that we really *see* external space, and bodies actually existing in it, some nearer and others farther off, seems somewhat at odds with what has been said about their existing nowhere outside the mind. It was reflection on this difficulty that gave rise to my *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, published not long ago.[12] There it is shown that distance, or outness, is neither perceived immediately by sight in itself, nor grasped or judged by means of lines and angles or anything else necessarily connected with it. Rather, it is only suggested to our thoughts by certain visible ideas and sensations accompanying vision, which by their own nature have no likeness or relation whatever to distance or to things placed at a distance. But through a connection that experience teaches us,

12 Berkeley's *An Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* appeared in 1709, a year before the *Principles*.

they come to signify and suggest these things to us, in the same way that the words of any language suggest the ideas they are made to stand for. So much so that a man born blind and later made to see would not, at first sight, think the things he saw were outside his mind or at any distance from him. See section 41 of the treatise just mentioned.

§44 The ideas of sight and of touch form two entirely distinct and different kinds. The former are signs and forecasts of the latter. That the proper objects of sight neither exist outside the mind nor are images of external things was shown even in that treatise—although throughout it the contrary is assumed to be true of *tangible objects*. This was not because assuming that common error was needed to establish the view set out there, but because examining and refuting it lay outside my purpose in a discourse about *vision*. So, strictly speaking, when we apprehend distance, and things placed at a distance, by the ideas of sight, those ideas do not suggest or point out to us things actually existing at a distance. They only warn us what ideas of touch will be imprinted on our minds after such and such intervals of time, and as a result of such and such actions. It is evident, I say, from what has been said in the earlier parts of this treatise, and in section 147 and elsewhere in the *Essay* on vision, that visible ideas are the language by which the governing Spirit on whom we depend tells us what tangible ideas He is about to imprint on us if we produce this or that motion in our own bodies. For fuller information on this point I refer the reader to the *Essay* itself.

DO THINGS VANISH UNPERCEIVED?

Objects need not be annihilated when we stop looking, since another mind may perceive them.

§45 *Fourth,* it will be objected that these principles imply that things are annihilated and created anew every moment. The objects of sense exist only when they are perceived; so the trees are in the garden, or the chairs in the parlor, only as long as

someone is there to perceive them. When I shut my eyes, all the furniture in the room is reduced to nothing, and merely by opening them I create it again.—In answer to all this, I refer the reader to what was said in §§3, 4, and following, and ask him to consider whether he means anything by the actual existence of an idea other than its being perceived. For my part, after the most careful inquiry I could make, I cannot find that anything else is meant by those words. And I once again urge the reader to sound out his own thoughts and not let himself be taken in by words. If he can conceive it possible for either his ideas or their archetypes to exist without being perceived, then I give up my case. But if he cannot, he will admit it is unreasonable for him to stand up in defense of he knows not what, and to charge me with absurdity for not assenting to propositions that at bottom have no meaning.

§46 It is worth noting how far the accepted principles of philosophy are themselves open to these alleged absurdities. It is thought strangely absurd that when I close my eyelids all the visible objects around me should be reduced to nothing. Yet is this not what philosophers commonly acknowledge, when they all agree that light and colors, which alone are the proper and immediate objects of sight, are mere sensations that exist no longer than they are perceived? Again, some may find it quite incredible that things should be continually created; yet this very view is commonly taught in the Schools. For the Schoolmen, though they acknowledge the existence of matter, and that the whole structure of the world is made of it, nevertheless hold that it cannot survive without divine preservation, which they explain as a continual creation.

§47 Further, a little thought will show us that even if we allow the existence of matter or corporeal substance, it still follows unavoidably, from principles now generally accepted, that no particular body of any kind exists while it is not perceived. For it is evident from §11 and the sections following that the matter philosophers argue for is an incomprehensible something that has none of the particular qualities by which the bodies that fall

under our senses are distinguished from one another. To make this plainer, note that the infinite divisibility of matter is now universally accepted, at least by the most respected and important philosophers, who prove it beyond all exception on the accepted principles. It follows that in each particle of matter there is an infinite number of parts not perceived by sense. So the reason any particular body seems to be of finite size, or shows only a finite number of parts to sense, is not that it contains no more—since in itself it contains an infinite number of parts—but that sense is not sharp enough to discern them. In proportion, then, as sense is made sharper, it perceives a greater number of parts in the object; that is, the object appears larger. And its shape changes, since parts at its edges that were imperceptible before now appear to bound it with lines and angles very different from those perceived by a duller sense. And finally, after various changes of size and shape, when sense becomes infinitely sharp, the body will seem infinite. Throughout all this there is no change in the body, only in the sense. Each body, therefore, considered in itself, is infinitely extended, and so has no shape at all. It follows that, however certain we grant the existence of matter to be, it is just as certain that the materialists themselves are forced by their own principles to admit that neither the particular bodies perceived by sense, nor anything like them, exists outside the mind. Matter, I say, and each particle of it, is on their view infinite and shapeless; and it is the mind that frames all the variety of bodies that make up the visible world, none of which exists longer than it is perceived.

§48 But after all, on reflection, the objection raised in §45 will not be found to bear fairly on the principles we have set out, so as to be any real objection to our views. For though we do hold that the objects of sense are nothing but ideas, which cannot exist unperceived, we may not conclude from this that they exist only while they are perceived by *us*, since there may be some other spirit that perceives them when we do not. Wherever bodies are said to have no existence outside the mind,

I do not want to be understood as meaning this or that particular mind, but all minds whatever. It does not follow from these principles, then, that bodies are annihilated and created every moment, or do not exist at all in the intervals between *our* perceptions of them.

§49 *Fifth,* it may be objected that if extension and shape exist only in the mind, it follows that the mind is extended and shaped, since extension is a mode or attribute which (to speak with the Schools) is predicated of the subject in which it exists.—I answer that those qualities are in the mind only in so far as they are perceived by it; that is, not as a *mode* or *attribute,* but only as an *idea*. And it no more follows that the soul or mind is extended because extension exists in it alone than that it is red or blue because those colors are universally acknowledged to exist in it and nowhere else. As for what philosophers say about subject and mode, that seems quite groundless and unintelligible. For instance, in the proposition "a die is hard, extended, and square," they hold that the word *die* denotes a subject or substance distinct from the hardness, extension, and shape that are predicated of it and exist in it. This I cannot understand. To me a die seems to be nothing distinct from the things that are called its modes or accidents. To say a die is hard, extended, and square is not to attribute those qualities to a subject distinct from them and supporting them, but only to explain the meaning of the word *die*.

MATTER, NATURAL CAUSES AND SCIENCE

Berkeley argues that science loses nothing without matter and that nature's regularities are signs.

§50 *Sixth,* you will say that a great many things have been explained by matter and motion; take these away and you destroy the whole corpuscular philosophy and undermine the mechanical principles that have been applied with such success to account for the phenomena. In short, whatever progress has been made in the study of nature, by ancient or modern philo-

sophers, all rests on the assumption that corporeal substance, or matter, really exists.—To this I answer that there is not a single phenomenon explained on that assumption that could not be explained just as well without it, as could easily be shown by going through particular cases.[13] To explain the phenomena is simply to show why, on such and such occasions, we are affected with such and such ideas. But how matter could act on a spirit, or produce any idea in it, is something no philosopher will claim to explain; so it is evident that matter can be of no use in natural philosophy. Besides, those who try to account for things do so not by corporeal substance but by shape, motion, and other qualities, which are in truth nothing but ideas and therefore cannot be the cause of anything, as has already been shown. See §25.

§51 *Seventh*, it will then be asked whether it does not seem absurd to do away with natural causes and ascribe everything to the immediate action of spirits. On these principles we must no longer say that fire heats or water cools, but that a spirit heats, and so on. Wouldn't anyone who talked like that deserve to be laughed at?—I answer, he would. In such matters we ought to think with the learned and speak with the common people. Those who are convinced beyond doubt of the truth of the Copernican system still say "the sun rises," "the sun sets," or "comes to the meridian"; and if they adopted a different way of speaking in ordinary talk, it would certainly seem very ridiculous. A little reflection on what is said here will make it plain that accepting our views would bring no change or disturbance whatever to the ordinary use of language.

§52 In the ordinary affairs of life any phrases may be kept, so long as they produce in us the right feelings, or dispositions to act in the way our well-being requires, however false they may be if taken in a strict, theoretical sense. Indeed, this is unavoidable: since correctness is governed by custom, language is

13 The "corpuscular philosophy": the mechanical science of Boyle, Newton, and Locke, which explained natural phenomena by the size, shape, and motion of tiny particles.

suited to received opinions, which are not always the truest. So it is impossible, even in the most rigorous philosophical reasoning, to alter the bent and character of the language we speak so completely as never to give quibblers a pretext for alleging difficulties and inconsistencies. But a fair and candid reader will gather the sense from the aim, drift, and connection of a discourse, making allowance for the inexact ways of speaking that usage has made unavoidable.

§53 As for the view that there are no corporeal causes, it was held in the past by some of the Schoolmen, as it has been recently by others among the modern philosophers, who, though they allow that matter exists, hold that God alone is the immediate efficient cause of all things. These men saw that among all the objects of sense there was none that had any power or activity in it, and that consequently the same was true of whatever bodies they supposed to exist outside the mind resembling the immediate objects of sense.[14] But that they should suppose an innumerable multitude of created beings which, they admit, cannot produce a single effect in nature, and which therefore are made to no purpose at all, since God could have done everything just as well without them—this, I say, even if we allowed it to be possible, must still be a very strange and extravagant supposition.

§54 *Eighth*, some may think the universal, unanimous assent of mankind an unanswerable argument for matter, or for the existence of external things. Must we suppose the whole world mistaken? And if so, what cause can be given for so widespread and dominant an error?—I answer, first, that on close inquiry it may turn out that not as many people as is imagined really believe in the existence of matter or of things outside the mind. Strictly speaking, it is impossible to believe what involves a contradiction or has no meaning; and whether the expressions above are not of that sort, I leave to the reader's impartial examination. In

14 Berkeley probably has in mind the occasionalists, above all Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715), for whom God is the only true cause and created things are merely the "occasions" on which He acts.

one sense, indeed, people may be said to believe that matter exists: that is, they act as if the immediate cause of their sensations, which affects them every moment and is so close to them, were some senseless, unthinking being. But that they should clearly grasp any meaning signified by those words, and form a settled theoretical opinion about it, is something I cannot conceive. This is not the only case in which people deceive themselves by imagining they believe propositions they have often heard, though at bottom those propositions have no meaning.

§55 But second, however universally and steadfastly a view is held, this is only weak evidence of its truth to anyone who considers what a vast number of prejudices and false opinions are everywhere embraced with the utmost tenacity by the unreflective part of mankind, which is by far the greater part. There was a time when the antipodes and the motion of the earth were regarded as monstrous absurdities even by learned men; and if we consider how small a proportion the learned bear to the rest of mankind, we will find that even today those notions have gained only a very slight footing in the world.[15]

§56 But it is demanded that we give a cause for this prejudice and account for its prevalence in the world. My answer is this. People knew that they perceived various ideas of which they themselves were not the authors, since these were not produced from within and did not depend on the operation of their wills. This led them to hold that *those* ideas, or objects of perception, had an existence independent of and outside the mind, without ever dreaming that those words involved a contradiction. Philosophers, having seen plainly that the immediate objects of perception do not exist outside the mind, corrected the common mistake to some degree; but at the same time they fell into another that seems no less absurd: namely, that there are certain objects really existing outside the mind, or having an existence distinct from being perceived, of which our ideas are only images or likenesses, imprinted on the mind by those objects. And this view of the philosophers has the same origin as the

15 The antipodes: the idea that people live on the opposite side of a round earth.

former one: their awareness that *they* were not the authors of their own sensations, which they plainly knew were imprinted from outside and must therefore have *some* cause distinct from the minds on which they were imprinted.

§57 Why they should suppose the ideas of sense to be produced in us by things resembling them, rather than turn to *Spirit*, which alone can act, can be explained. First, because they did not see the contradiction involved both in supposing things like our ideas existing outside the mind and in attributing power or activity to them. Second, because the Supreme Spirit who produces those ideas in our minds is not marked out and bounded to our view by any particular finite collection of sensible ideas, as human agents are by their size, complexion, limbs, and motions. And third, because His operations are regular and uniform. Whenever the course of nature is interrupted by a miracle, people are ready to acknowledge the presence of a superior agent. But when we see things go on in the ordinary course, they prompt no reflection in us. Their order and linkage, though it is evidence of the greatest wisdom, power, and goodness in their Creator, is so constant and familiar to us that we do not think of them as the immediate effects of a *free Spirit*—especially since inconsistency and changeableness in acting, though an imperfection, is regarded as a mark of *freedom*.

§58 *Tenth*, it will be objected that the views we put forward are inconsistent with several sound truths of philosophy and mathematics. For example, the motion of the earth is now universally accepted by astronomers as a truth grounded on the clearest and most convincing reasons. But on these principles there can be no such thing.[16] For since motion is only an idea, it follows that if it is not perceived it does not exist; but the motion of the earth is not perceived by sense.—I answer that this doctrine, rightly understood, will be found to agree with the principles we have set out. For the question whether the earth moves comes down in reality to no more than this: whether we have reason to

16 Berkeley's text passes from the "eighth" objection (§54) to the "tenth" without a numbered ninth.

conclude, from what astronomers have observed, that if we were placed in such and such circumstances, at such and such a position and distance from both the earth and the sun, we would perceive the earth moving among the choir of the planets and looking in every respect like one of them. And this, by the established rules of nature, which we have no reason to distrust, is reasonably inferred from the phenomena.

§59 From our experience of the train and succession of ideas in our minds, we can often make—I will not say uncertain guesses, but sure and well-grounded predictions about the ideas we will be affected with as a result of a long series of actions, and we can judge correctly what would have appeared to us if we had been placed in circumstances very different from our present ones. This is what knowledge of nature consists in, and it can keep its usefulness and certainty in full consistency with what has been said. It will be easy to apply this to any similar objections that may be drawn from the size of the stars or from any other discoveries in astronomy or in nature.

§60 *Eleventh*, it will be asked what purpose is served by the intricate organization of plants and the mechanism of the parts of animals. Couldn't plants grow and put out leaves and blossoms, and animals perform all their motions, just as well without all that variety of internal parts so elegantly designed and assembled as with it? For these parts, being ideas, have nothing powerful or active in them, and no *necessary* connection with the effects ascribed to them. If it is a Spirit that immediately produces every effect by a *fiat*, or act of His will, we must think that everything fine and skillfully made in the works of man or nature is made in vain.[17] On this doctrine, though a craftsman has made the spring and wheels and every part of a watch, and fitted them together in a way he knew would produce the motions he intended, he must still think all this was done to no purpose, and that it is an Intelligence that moves the hand and points to the hour of the day. If so, why can't the Intelligence do it without *his* taking the trouble to make the parts and

17 *Fiat*: Latin, "let it be done"—a creative command.

put them together? Why wouldn't an empty case serve as well as another? And how is it that whenever a watch runs badly, some corresponding fault is found in the works, and once that is repaired by a skilled hand all is right again? The same may be said of all the clockwork of nature, much of which is so wonderfully fine and delicate that it can hardly be made out with the best microscope. In short, it will be asked how, on our principles, any tolerable account can be given, or any final cause assigned, for an innumerable multitude of bodies and machines, made with the most exquisite art, which in the common philosophy are given very fitting uses and serve to explain a great many phenomena.[18]

§61 To all this I answer, first, that even if there were some difficulties about the workings of Providence, and the uses it has assigned to the various parts of nature, that I could not solve by these principles, this objection would carry little weight against the truth and certainty of things that can be proved *a priori* with the utmost evidence and rigor of demonstration. Second, the accepted principles are not free of similar difficulties either. For it may still be asked why God should take these roundabout ways of bringing things about by instruments and machines, when no one can deny they could have been accomplished by the mere command of His will without all that *apparatus*. Indeed, if we look at it closely, we will find the objection can be turned back with greater force on those who hold that these machines exist outside the mind. For it has been made evident that solidity, bulk, shape, motion, and the like have no *activity* or *efficacy* in them by which they could produce a single effect in nature. See §25. Whoever supposes them to exist when they are not perceived (granting the supposition to be possible) plainly does so to no purpose, since the only use assigned to them as existing unperceived is that they produce the perceivable effects which in truth can be ascribed to nothing but Spirit.

§62 But to come closer to the difficulty, we must note that although constructing all those parts and organs is not abso-

18 A "final cause" is the purpose or end for which a thing exists.

lutely necessary for producing any effect, it is necessary for producing things in a constant, regular way, according to the laws of nature. Certain general laws run through the whole chain of natural effects. We learn them by observing and studying nature, and people apply them both to making artificial things for the use and ornament of life and to explaining the various phenomena. Such explanation consists only in showing how a particular phenomenon conforms to the general laws of nature, or, what is the same thing, in discovering the *uniformity* there is in the production of natural effects. Anyone who looks at the various cases where philosophers claim to account for appearances will see this. That there is a great and conspicuous *use* in these regular, constant methods of working observed by the Supreme Agent was shown in §31. And it is just as clear that a particular size, shape, motion, and arrangement of parts is necessary—not absolutely for producing any effect, but for producing it according to the standing mechanical laws of nature. For instance, it cannot be denied that God, or the Intelligence that sustains and governs the ordinary course of things, could, if He chose to work a miracle, cause all the motions on the dial of a watch even though nobody had ever made the works and put them inside. But if He is to act in keeping with the rules of mechanism that He established and maintains in the creation for wise ends, then the watchmaker's actions—by which *he* makes the works and adjusts them correctly—must come before the production of those motions. Likewise, any disorder in the motions must be accompanied by the perception of some corresponding disorder in the works, and once that is corrected, all is right again.

§63 It may indeed sometimes be necessary for the Author of Nature to display His overruling power by producing some appearance outside the ordinary run of things. Such exceptions to the general rules of nature are suited to surprise and awe people into acknowledging the Divine Being. But they must be used only seldom; otherwise there is an obvious reason why they would fail to have that effect. Besides, God seems to prefer

convincing our reason of His attributes through the works of nature—which reveal so much harmony and design in their make, and are such plain signs of wisdom and goodness in their Author—rather than astonishing us into belief in His existence through anomalous and surprising events.

§64 To put this matter in a still clearer light, I will point out that the objection raised in §60 really amounts to no more than this. *Ideas* are not produced haphazardly and at random; there is a certain order and connection among them, like that of cause and effect. There are also various combinations of them, made in a very regular and skillful way, which seem like so many instruments in the hand of nature. Hidden, as it were, behind the scenes, they work secretly to produce the appearances seen on the stage of the world, and they themselves can be detected only by the philosopher's inquiring eye. But since one idea cannot be the cause of another, what is the point of that connection? And since those instruments are merely *inefficacious* perceptions in the mind and play no part in producing natural effects, why are they made? In other words, what reason can be given why God, when we look closely into His works, should make us see so great a variety of ideas, so skillfully put together and so thoroughly in accordance with rule? It is not credible that He would go to the expense (if one may put it that way) of all that skill and regularity for no purpose.

§65 To all this my answer is, first, that the connection of ideas does not imply the relation of *cause* and *effect*, but only that of a mark or *sign* to the *thing signified*. The fire I see is not the cause of the pain I feel when I come near it, but the mark that warns me of it. In the same way, the noise I hear is not the effect of this or that motion or collision of the surrounding bodies, but the sign of it. Second, the reason why ideas are formed into machines—that is, into skillful and regular combinations—is the same as the reason for combining letters into words. For a few original ideas to be able to signify a great number of effects and actions, they must be combined in various ways. And for their use to be lasting and universal, these combinations must be

made by *rule* and with *wise design*. In this way a great deal of information is conveyed to us about what we should expect from this or that action, and what methods are right to take for bringing about this or that idea. And that, in effect, is all I take to be clearly meant when people say that by discerning the shape, texture, and mechanism of the inner parts of bodies, natural or artificial, we can come to know the various uses and properties that depend on them, or the nature of the thing.

§66 So it is evident that those things which, considered as causes cooperating or concurring in the production of effects, are altogether inexplicable and lead us into great absurdities, can be explained quite naturally, and given a proper and obvious use, when they are considered only as marks or signs for *our* information. And the proper work of the natural philosopher ought to be searching out and trying to understand these signs instituted by the Author of Nature—not claiming to explain things by *corporeal* causes. That doctrine seems to have estranged people's minds far too much from that Active Principle, that supreme and wise Spirit "in whom we live, and move, and have our being."[19]

MATTER AS OCCASION OR UNKNOWN SOMETHING

Berkeley rejects matter redefined as an unknown occasion of ideas or a mere something.

§67 *Twelfth,* it may perhaps be objected as follows. It is clear from what has been said that there can be no such thing as an inert, senseless, extended, solid, shaped, movable substance existing outside the mind, of the kind philosophers describe as matter. Yet suppose someone leaves out of his idea of matter the positive ideas of extension, shape, solidity, and motion, and says that by that word he means only an inert, senseless substance that exists outside the mind, or unperceived, and is the *occasion* of our ideas—the thing in whose presence God is pleased to excite ideas in us. Then it does not seem impossible that matter in this

19 Acts 17:28 (Paul's speech in Athens).

sense may exist. My answer to this is, first, that it seems no less absurd to suppose a substance without accidents than to suppose accidents without a substance. But second, even if we granted that this unknown substance may possibly exist, where could it be supposed to be? Everyone agrees that it does not exist in the mind. And it is just as certain that it does not exist in any place, since all place or extension exists only in the mind, as has already been proved. So it follows that it exists nowhere at all.

§68 Let us look a little at the description of matter we are given here. It neither acts, nor perceives, nor is perceived; for that is all that is meant by calling it an inert, senseless, unknown substance. This is a definition made up entirely of negatives, except for the relative notion of its standing under, or supporting. But then we must note that it supports nothing at all, and I ask you to consider how close this comes to describing a *nonentity*. "But," you say, "it is the *unknown occasion* in whose presence ideas are excited in us by the will of God." Now, I would like to know how anything can be present to us that is perceivable neither by sense nor by reflection, cannot produce any idea in our minds, is not extended at all, has no form, and exists in no place. The words "to be present," when used this way, must be taken in some abstract and strange sense that I am unable to understand.

§69 Again, let us examine what is meant by *occasion*. As far as I can tell from ordinary usage, the word means either the agent that produces an effect, or else something observed to accompany or precede it in the ordinary course of things. But when it is applied to matter as described above, it can be taken in neither sense. Matter is said to be passive and inert, and so it cannot be an agent or efficient cause. It is also unperceivable, since it lacks all sensible qualities, and so it cannot be the occasion of our perceptions in the second sense—as when burning my finger is said to be the occasion of the pain that goes with it. What, then, can be meant by calling *matter* an *occasion*? Either the term is used with no meaning at all, or with some meaning very far from its accepted one.

§70 You may say that matter, though we do not perceive it, is nevertheless perceived by God, for whom it is the occasion of exciting ideas in our minds. "For," you say, "since we observe that our sensations are imprinted in an orderly and constant way, it is only reasonable to suppose there are certain constant and regular occasions of their being produced." That is to say, there are certain permanent and distinct parcels of matter corresponding to our ideas. These do not excite ideas in our minds, or affect us directly in any way, since they are altogether passive and unperceivable to us. Yet to God, by whom they *are* perceived, they serve as so many occasions reminding Him when to imprint ideas on our minds and which ones, so that things may go on in a constant, uniform way.

§71 In answer to this, I note that with matter defined in this way, the question is no longer about the existence of a thing distinct from *spirit* and *idea*, from perceiving and being perceived. It is whether there are certain ideas (of I know not what sort) in the mind of God that serve as marks or notes directing Him how to produce sensations in our minds in a constant and regular way. It would be much as a musician is directed by the notes of music to produce the harmonious sequence and arrangement of sounds called a tune, even though those who hear the music do not perceive the notes and may know nothing about them. But this notion of matter seems too extravagant to deserve refutation. Besides, it is in effect no objection to what we have maintained, namely, that there is no senseless, unperceived substance.

§72 If we follow the light of reason, we will infer from the constant, uniform course of our sensations the goodness and wisdom of the Spirit who excites them in our minds. But that is all I can see that may reasonably be concluded from it. To me, I say, it is evident that the existence of a Spirit—infinitely wise, good, and powerful—is more than enough to explain all the appearances of nature. But as for *inert, senseless matter*, nothing I perceive has the slightest connection with it or leads me to think of it. And I would like to see anyone explain even the most trivial

phenomenon in nature by means of it, or show any kind of reason, even of the lowest degree of probability, for believing it exists—or even make any tolerable sense of that supposition. For as to its being an occasion, we have, I think, clearly shown that with respect to us it is no occasion. So it remains that it must be, if anything, the occasion for God to excite ideas in us; and we have just seen what that amounts to.

§73 It is worth reflecting a little on the motives that led people to suppose the existence of *material substance*, so that, having seen those motives or reasons gradually fade and expire, we may withdraw in proportion the assent that was based on them. First, then, it was thought that color, shape, motion, and the rest of the sensible qualities or accidents really existed outside the mind. For this reason it seemed necessary to suppose some unthinking *substratum*, or substance, in which they existed, since they could not be conceived to exist by themselves. Later, as time went on, people became convinced that colors, sounds, and the rest of the sensible, secondary qualities had no existence outside the mind. So they stripped this *substratum*, or material substance, of *those* qualities, leaving only the primary ones—shape, motion, and the like—which they still conceived to exist outside the mind and therefore to need a material support. But since it has been shown that not even these can possibly exist except in a spirit or mind that perceives them, it follows that we no longer have any reason to suppose that matter exists. Indeed, it is utterly impossible that there should be any such thing—as long as that word is taken to mean an *unthinking substratum* of qualities or accidents, in which they exist outside the mind.

§74 The materialists themselves admit that matter was thought of only in order to support accidents. With that reason entirely gone, one might expect the mind to give up, naturally and without any reluctance, the belief that rested on it alone. Yet the prejudice is riveted so deeply in our thoughts that we hardly know how to part with it. And so, since the *thing* itself cannot be defended, we are inclined at least to keep the *name*, which we

apply to I know not what abstract and indefinite notions of *being* or *occasion*—though without any show of reason, at least as far as I can see. For what is there on our side—what do we perceive among all the ideas, sensations, and notions imprinted on our minds by sense or reflection—from which we could infer the existence of an inert, thoughtless, unperceived occasion? And on the other side, on the part of an all-sufficient Spirit, what could there be that should make us believe, or even suspect, that He is directed by an inert occasion to excite ideas in our minds?

§75 It is a very remarkable example of the force of prejudice, and much to be regretted, that the human mind keeps so strong an attachment, against all the evidence of reason, to a stupid, thoughtless *Something*, which it puts in between as a kind of screen against the providence of God, pushing that providence further off from the affairs of the world. We do all we can to hold on to the belief in matter. When reason abandons us, we try to rest our opinion on the bare possibility of the thing, and we give free rein to an imagination unregulated by reason to make out that poor possibility. Yet the upshot of it all is that there are certain *unknown* ideas in the mind of God—for this, if anything, is all I take to be meant by *occasion* with respect to God. And at bottom this is no longer a contest over the thing, but over the name.

§76 So whether there are such ideas in the mind of God, and whether *they* may be called by the name *matter*, I will not dispute. But if you hold to the notion of an unthinking substance, or support, of extension, motion, and other sensible qualities, then to me it is most evidently impossible that there should be any such thing. For it is a plain contradiction that those qualities should exist in, or be supported by, an unperceiving substance.

§77 "But," you say, "even granting that there is no thoughtless support of extension and the other qualities or accidents we perceive, there may perhaps be some inert, unperceiving substance, or *substratum*, of some other qualities, as incomprehensible to us as colors are to someone born blind, because we have no sense suited to them. But if we had a new sense, we might no more doubt *their* existence than a blind person given sight

doubts the existence of light and colors." I answer, first, that if what you mean by the word *matter* is only the unknown support of unknown qualities, it does not matter whether there is such a thing or not, since it does not concern us in any way. And I do not see what advantage there is in arguing about we know not *what*, and we know not *why*.

§78 But second, if we had a new sense, it could only supply us with new ideas or sensations. And then we would have the same reason against *their* existing in an unperceiving substance that has already been given concerning shape, motion, color, and the like. *Qualities*, as has been shown, are nothing but *sensations* or *ideas*, which exist only in a mind that perceives them. And this is true not only of the ideas we are now acquainted with but of all possible ideas whatever.

§79 But you will insist: "What if I have no reason to believe in the existence of matter? What if I cannot give it any use, or explain anything by it, or even conceive what the word means? Still, it is no contradiction to say that matter *exists*, and that this matter is *in general* a *substance*, or *occasion of ideas*—even if trying to unfold the meaning of those words, or to hold to any particular explanation of them, may involve great difficulties." I answer that when words are used without meaning, you can put them together however you like without any danger of falling into a contradiction. You may say, for example, that *twice two* equals *seven*, as long as you declare that you are not taking the words of that proposition in their usual sense, but as marks of you know not what. And for the same reason you may say there is an inert, thoughtless substance without accidents that is the occasion of our ideas. We will understand exactly as much by the one proposition as by the other.

§80 *Finally*, you will say: "What if we give up the case for material substance and maintain that matter is an unknown *Something* —neither substance nor accident, spirit nor idea—inert, thoughtless, indivisible, immovable, unextended, existing in no place? For whatever may be urged against *substance* or *occasion*, or any other positive or relative notion of matter, has no force at all as

long as we hold to this negative definition of matter." I answer that you may, if you like, use the word *matter* in the same sense in which other people use *nothing*, and so make the two terms interchangeable in your way of speaking. For after all, that is what seems to me to result from that definition. When I consider its parts attentively, whether together or separately, I do not find that they have any kind of effect on or impression on my mind different from what the term *nothing* produces.

§81 You may reply that the definition just given does include something that sufficiently distinguishes it from nothing—namely, the positive abstract idea of *quiddity*, *entity*, or *existence*. I admit that those who claim the faculty of forming abstract general ideas do talk as if they had such an idea, which they say is the most abstract and general notion of all. To me it is the most incomprehensible of all. I see no reason to deny that there is a great variety of spirits of different orders and capacities, whose faculties, in both number and range, far exceed those that the Author of my being has given me.[20] And it would surely be the height of folly and presumption for me to try to determine, through my own few, limited, narrow inlets of perception, what ideas the inexhaustible power of the Supreme Spirit may imprint on them. For all I know, there may be countless sorts of ideas or sensations as different from one another, and from everything I have perceived, as colors are from sounds. But however ready I may be to admit how limited my understanding is with regard to the endless variety of spirits and ideas that may possibly exist, for anyone to claim a *notion* of entity or existence *abstracted* from *spirit* and *idea*, from perceiving and being perceived, is, I suspect, an outright contradiction and a mere playing with words.

20 Quiddity: scholastic term for the "whatness" or essence of a thing.

OBJECTIONS FROM RELIGION

Scripture and miracles are shown to be consistent with the denial of matter.

It remains for us to consider the objections that may be raised on behalf of religion.

§82 Some people think that, even granting that the arguments from reason for the real existence of bodies do not amount to demonstration, Holy Scripture is so clear on the point that it will fully convince every good Christian that bodies really exist and are something more than mere ideas. For Scripture relates countless facts that clearly presuppose the reality of timber and stone, mountains and rivers, cities, and human bodies. My answer is that no writings of any kind, sacred or secular, that use these and similar words in the ordinary sense, or so as to have a meaning, are in any danger of having their truth called into question by our doctrine. That all those things really exist—that there are bodies, even corporeal substances, when the phrase is taken in the ordinary sense—has been shown to agree with our principles. And the difference between *things* and *ideas*, *realities* and *chimeras*, has been clearly explained (see §§29, 30, 33, 36, etc.). And I do not think that either what philosophers call *matter*, or the existence of objects outside the mind, is mentioned anywhere in Scripture.

§83 Again, whether or not there are external things, everyone agrees that the proper use of words is to mark *our* conceptions, or things only as we know and perceive them. From this it plainly follows that nothing in the positions we have laid down is inconsistent with the correct use and meaning of language, and that discourse of every kind, so far as it is intelligible, remains undisturbed. But all this seems so obvious from what has been set out at length above that there is no need to press it further.

§84 "But," it will be urged, "miracles at least lose much of their force and significance on our principles. What are we to think of

Moses' rod? Was it not *really* turned into a serpent, or was there only a change of *ideas* in the minds of the spectators? And can it be supposed that our Savior did no more at the wedding feast in Cana than deceive the sight, smell, and taste of the guests, creating in them only the appearance, or idea, of wine?[21] The same may be said of all other miracles, which on these principles must be regarded as nothing but so many cheats or illusions of fancy." To this I reply that the rod was changed into a real serpent, and the water into real wine. That this does not in the least contradict what I have said elsewhere will be evident from §§34 and 35. But this matter of *real* and *imaginary* has already been explained so plainly and fully, and referred to so often, and the difficulties about it are so easily answered from what has gone before, that it would be an insult to the reader's intelligence to take up the explanation again here. I will only point out that if everyone at the table saw, smelled, tasted, and drank wine, and felt its effects, then for me there could be no doubt of its reality. So at bottom the doubt about real miracles has no place at all on our principles, but only on the accepted ones, and so it tells for rather than against what has been said.

CONSEQUENCES: SKEPTICISM AND ATHEISM

Denying matter removes the roots of skepticism, atheism and idolatry.

§85 Having finished with the objections—which I have tried to present in the clearest light, giving them all the force and weight I could—we now go on to consider our positions in their consequences. Some of these are apparent at first sight: for example, that several difficult and obscure questions, on which a great deal of speculation has been wasted, are banished from philosophy entirely. Can corporeal substance think? Is matter infinitely divisible? And how does it act on spirit? These and similar inquiries have endlessly occupied philosophers in every age. But since they depend on the existence of matter, they no longer have any place on our principles. There are many other

21 Exodus 4 and 7 (Moses' rod); John 2:1–11 (water into wine at Cana).

advantages, with regard to religion as well as the sciences, which anyone can easily deduce from what has been laid down. But this will appear more plainly in what follows.

§86 From the principles we have laid down it follows that human knowledge naturally falls under two heads: knowledge of *ideas* and knowledge of *spirits*. I will treat each of these in turn.

First, then, *ideas*, or *unthinking things*. Our knowledge of these has been badly obscured and confused, and we have been led into very dangerous errors, by supposing that the objects of sense have a twofold existence—one *intelligible*, or in the mind, the other *real* and outside the mind. In this way unthinking things are thought to have a natural existence of their own, distinct from being perceived by spirits. This notion, which, unless I am mistaken, has been shown to be utterly groundless and absurd, is the very root of skepticism. For as long as people thought that real things existed outside the mind, and that their knowledge was *real* only insofar as it *conformed to real things*, it follows that they could not be certain they had any real knowledge at all. For how can anyone know that the things perceived conform to things that are not perceived, or that exist outside the mind?

§87 Color, shape, motion, extension, and the like, considered only as so many *sensations* in the mind, are perfectly known, since there is nothing in them that is not perceived. But if they are regarded as notes or images referring to *things* or *archetypes existing outside the mind*, then we are all caught up in skepticism. We see only the appearances, not the real qualities of things. What the extension, shape, or motion of anything may be really and absolutely, or in itself, we cannot possibly know—only the proportion or relation they bear to our senses. The things stay the same while our ideas vary, and which of our ideas, if any at all, represents the true quality really existing in the thing is beyond our power to determine. So for all we know, everything we see, hear, and feel may be only a phantom and empty chimera, and may not agree at all with the real things existing *in rerum*

natura. All this skepticism follows from our supposing a difference between *things* and *ideas*, and supposing that things exist outside the mind, or unperceived. It would be easy to enlarge on this subject and show how the arguments skeptics have urged in every age depend on the supposition of external objects.

§88 As long as we attribute to unthinking things a real existence distinct from their being perceived, it is impossible for us to know with certainty not only the nature of any real unthinking being but even that it exists. That is why we see philosophers distrusting their senses and doubting the existence of heaven and earth, of everything they see or feel, even of their own bodies. And after all their labor and struggle of thought, they are forced to admit that we cannot attain any self-evident or demonstrative knowledge of the existence of sensible things. But all this doubt, which so bewilders and confuses the mind and makes philosophy ridiculous in the eyes of the world, vanishes if we attach a meaning to our words and do not amuse ourselves with the terms *absolute*, *external*, *exist*, and the like, which signify we know not what. I can no more doubt the existence of the things I actually perceive by sense than I can doubt my own existence. For it is a plain contradiction that any sensible object should be immediately perceived by sight or touch and at the same time have no existence in nature, since the very existence of an *unthinking being* consists in *being perceived*.

§89 Nothing seems more important for building a firm system of sound and real knowledge, proof against the assaults of skepticism, than to begin with a clear explanation of *what is meant* by *thing*, *reality*, and *existence*. For it is useless to argue about the real existence of things, or to claim any knowledge of it, as long as we have not fixed the meaning of those words. *Thing*, or *being*, is the most general name of all. It includes two kinds that are entirely distinct and different in nature, and that have nothing in common but the name—namely, *spirits* and *ideas*. The former are active, indivisible substances. The latter are inert, fleeting, dependent beings, which do not exist by themselves but are supported by, or exist in, minds or spiritual substances.

We grasp our own existence by inward feeling, or reflection, and that of other spirits by reason. We may be said to have some knowledge, or *notion*, of our own minds, of spirits and active beings, though strictly speaking we have no *ideas* of them. In the same way, we know and have a *notion* of relations between things or ideas. These relations are distinct from the ideas or things related, since we can perceive the latter without perceiving the former. It seems to me that *ideas*, *spirits*, and *relations* are all, each in its own kind, objects of human knowledge and subjects of discourse, and that the term *idea* would be improperly stretched if it were made to signify *everything* we know or have any notion of.

§90 Ideas imprinted on the senses are *real* things, or really exist. This we do not deny. But we deny that they *can* exist apart from the minds that perceive them, or that they are likenesses of any archetypes existing outside the mind. For the very being of a sensation or idea consists in being perceived, and an idea can be like nothing but an idea. Again, the things perceived by sense may be called *external* with regard to their origin, in that they are not produced from within by the mind itself but imprinted by a spirit distinct from the one that perceives them. Sensible objects may also be said to be "outside the mind" in another sense, namely when they exist in some other mind. So when I shut my eyes, the things I saw may still exist—but it must be in another mind.

§91 It would be a mistake to think that what is said here takes anything away from the reality of things. On the accepted principles, it is admitted that extension, motion, and in a word all sensible qualities need a support, since they cannot exist by themselves. But the objects perceived by sense are admitted to be nothing but combinations of those qualities, and so they cannot exist by themselves either. So far, everyone agrees. So in denying that the things perceived by sense exist independently of a substance or support in which they may exist, we take nothing away from the accepted view of their *reality*, and we introduce no novelty in that respect. The whole difference is this.

According to us, the unthinking beings perceived by sense have no existence distinct from being perceived, and so they cannot exist in any substance other than those unextended, indivisible substances, or *spirits*, which act and think and perceive them. Philosophers, by contrast, commonly hold that the sensible qualities exist in an inert, extended, unperceiving substance, which they call *matter*. To this they attribute a natural existence outside all thinking beings, or distinct from being perceived by any mind whatever—even the eternal Mind of the Creator, in which they suppose there are only ideas of the corporeal substances He created, if indeed they allow that these were *created* at all.

§92 For just as we have shown the doctrine of matter, or corporeal substance, to be the main pillar and support of skepticism, so too all the impious schemes of atheism and irreligion have been raised on the same foundation. Indeed, it has been thought so hard to conceive of matter being produced out of nothing that the most celebrated of the ancient philosophers, even among those who maintained the existence of a God, have thought matter to be uncreated and coeternal with Him. There is no need to recount what a friend *material substance* has been to atheists in every age. All their monstrous systems depend on it so visibly and necessarily that once this cornerstone is removed, the whole structure cannot help but fall to the ground. So much so that it is no longer worth giving particular consideration to the absurdities of each wretched sect of atheists.

§93 It is only natural that impious and irreverent people should readily go along with systems that favor their inclinations: systems that mock *immaterial substance* and suppose the soul to be divisible and subject to decay like the body; that exclude all freedom, intelligence, and design from the formation of things and put in their place a self-existent, stupid, unthinking substance as the root and origin of all beings. It is only natural, too, that they should listen to those who deny providence, or the oversight of a Superior Mind over the affairs of the world, and who attribute the whole course of events either to blind chance

or to fatal necessity arising from the impact of one body on another. On the other hand, when people of better principles see the enemies of religion laying such great stress on *unthinking matter*, and all of them working so hard and so ingeniously to reduce everything to it, I would think they should rejoice to see them deprived of their great support and driven from their only fortress. Without it, your Epicureans, Hobbists, and the like have not even the shadow of an excuse, and become the cheapest and easiest conquest in the world.[22]

§94 The existence of matter, or of unperceived bodies, has not only been the main support of atheists and fatalists; idolatry in all its various forms depends on the same principle. If people would only consider that the sun, moon, and stars, and every other object of the senses, are only so many sensations in their minds, with no existence beyond simply being perceived, they would surely never fall down and worship *their own ideas*. They would instead direct their homage to that eternal, invisible Mind which produces and sustains all things.

§95 The same absurd principle, by mixing itself into the articles of our faith, has caused Christians no small difficulties. Take the Resurrection: how many doubts and objections have Socinians and others raised about it? But don't the most plausible of them depend on the assumption that a body is called the *same* not with regard to its form, or to what is perceived by sense, but with regard to the material substance, which remains the same under different forms?[23] Take away this *material substance*—whose identity is what the whole dispute is about—and mean by *body* what every plain, ordinary person means by the word, namely what is immediately seen and felt, which is only a combination of sensible qualities or ideas. Then their most unanswerable objections come to nothing.

§96 Once matter is expelled from nature, it drags out with it so many skeptical and impious notions, such an incredible number

22 Epicureans: followers of Epicurus, who explained everything by atoms and the void. Hobbists: followers of Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679), the materialist author of *Leviathan*.

of disputes and puzzling questions—which have been thorns in the side of theologians as well as philosophers, and have made so much fruitless work for mankind—that even if the arguments we have brought against it are not found to amount to demonstration (as to me they clearly seem to), I am sure that all friends of knowledge, peace, and religion have reason to wish they did.

ABSTRACTION IN TIME, MOTION AND MORALS

Abstract ideas of time, extension and virtue are shown to breed confusion.

§97 Besides the external existence of the objects of perception, another great source of errors and difficulties in our knowledge of ideas is the doctrine of *abstract ideas*, as it was set out in the Introduction. The plainest things in the world, the ones we are most intimately acquainted with and know perfectly well, appear strangely difficult and incomprehensible when considered in an abstract way. Time, place, and motion, taken in particular or in the concrete, are things everybody knows; but after they have passed through the hands of a metaphysician, they become too abstract and refined to be grasped by people of ordinary sense. Tell your servant to meet you at such a *time*, in such a *place*, and he will never stop to deliberate on the meaning of those words. He finds not the least difficulty in conceiving that particular time and place, or the motion by which he is to get there. But if *time* is taken apart from all the particular actions and ideas that fill the day with variety, simply as the continuation of existence, or duration in the abstract, then it may perhaps baffle even a philosopher to comprehend it.

§98 For my own part, whenever I try to frame a simple idea of *time*, abstracted from the succession of ideas in my mind—a time that flows uniformly and is shared by all beings—I am lost and entangled in inextricable difficulties. I have no notion of it at all. I only hear others say that it is infinitely divisible, and

23 Socinians: followers of Lelio and Fausto Sozzini (16th century), anti-Trinitarian Christians who questioned several traditional doctrines.

speak of it in a way that leads me to strange thoughts about my own existence. For that doctrine forces one to think either that he passes countless ages without a thought, or else that he is annihilated at every moment of his life—both of which seem equally absurd. Time, therefore, being nothing when abstracted from the succession of ideas in our minds, it follows that the duration of any finite spirit must be measured by the number of ideas or actions that succeed one another in that same spirit or mind. Hence it plainly follows that the soul always thinks. And in truth, anyone who sets out to divide in his thoughts, or abstract, the *existence* of a spirit from its *thinking* will, I believe, find it no easy task.

§99 In the same way, when we try to abstract *extension* and *motion* from all other qualities and consider them by themselves, we immediately lose sight of them and fall into great extravagances. All of these depend on a double abstraction: first, it is supposed that extension, for example, can be abstracted from all other sensible qualities; and second, that the being of extension can be abstracted from its being perceived. But anyone who reflects, and takes care to understand what he is saying, will, unless I am mistaken, acknowledge that all sensible qualities are equally *sensations* and equally *real*; that where the extension is, the color is too—namely, in his mind—and that their archetypes can exist only in some other *mind*; and that the objects of sense are nothing but those sensations combined, blended, or (if one may put it this way) grown together into one. None of these can be supposed to exist unperceived.

§100 Everyone may think he knows what it is for a man to be happy, or for an object to be good. But to frame an abstract idea of happiness, cut off from every particular pleasure, or of goodness, cut off from everything that is good—this is something few can claim to do. So too a man may be just and virtuous without having precise ideas of justice and virtue. The opinion that these and similar words stand for general notions, abstracted from all particular persons and actions, seems to have made morality difficult and the study of it less useful to mankind. And in fact

the doctrine of *abstraction* has contributed not a little to spoiling the most useful parts of knowledge.

NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Science finds uniform laws in nature, which are the signs of God's will, not hidden causes.

§101 The two great provinces of theoretical science that deal with ideas received from sense and their relations are natural philosophy and mathematics. I will make some observations on each of these.

First I will say something about natural philosophy. It is on this subject that the skeptics triumph. The whole stock of arguments they bring to belittle our faculties and make mankind look ignorant and lowly is drawn mainly from this source: that we are under an invincible blindness as to the *true* and *real* nature of things. This they exaggerate and love to dwell on. We are miserably fooled by our senses, they say, and merely entertained with the outside and show of things. The real essence, the internal qualities and constitution, of even the humblest object is hidden from our view; there is something in every drop of water, every grain of sand, that is beyond the power of human understanding to fathom or comprehend. But it is evident from what has been shown that all this complaint is groundless, and that false principles have led us so far as to distrust our senses and to think we know nothing of things we understand perfectly.

§102 One great reason we declare ourselves ignorant of the nature of things is the common opinion that everything contains *within itself* the cause of its properties—that there is in each object an inner essence, which is the source from which its observable qualities flow and on which they depend. Some have claimed to account for appearances by occult qualities; but lately they have mostly been traced to mechanical causes, namely the shape, motion, weight, and other such qualities of imperceptible particles. In truth, however, there is no agent or

efficient cause other than *spirit*, since it is evident that motion, like all other *ideas*, is completely inert. See §25. Hence any attempt to explain the production of colors or sounds by shape, motion, size, and the like must be labor in vain. And accordingly we see that attempts of that kind are not at all satisfactory. The same may be said in general of all cases where one idea or quality is named as the cause of another. I need not say how many hypotheses and speculations are cut out, and how much the study of nature is shortened, by this doctrine.

§103 The great mechanical principle now in fashion is *attraction*. That a stone falls to the earth, or the sea swells toward the moon, may seem to some to be sufficiently explained by it. But how are we enlightened by being told that this is done by attraction? Is it that the word signifies the manner of the tendency—that it happens by the mutual drawing of bodies rather than by their being pushed or thrust toward each other? But nothing is settled about the manner or action, and for all we know it might just as truly be called *impulse* or *thrust* as *attraction*. Again, we see that the parts of steel hold firmly together, and this too is explained by attraction. But here, as in the other cases, I do not see that anything is signified besides the effect itself. As for the manner of the action by which it is produced, or the cause that produces it, these are not even aimed at.

§104 Admittedly, if we survey the various phenomena and compare them, we may notice some likeness and agreement among them. For example, in the falling of a stone to the ground, in the rising of the sea toward the moon, and in cohesion and crystallization, there is something alike: namely, a union or mutual approach of bodies. So none of these or similar phenomena need seem strange or surprising to someone who has carefully observed and compared the effects of nature. For only what is uncommon—a thing by itself, outside the ordinary course of our observation—is thought strange. That bodies should tend toward the center of the earth is not thought strange, because we perceive it at every moment of our lives. But that they should have a similar gravitation toward the center of the moon may seem odd

and inexplicable to most people, because it is seen only in the tides. A philosopher, however, whose thoughts take in a wider range of nature, has observed a certain similarity of appearances, in the heavens as well as on earth, which indicates that countless bodies have a mutual tendency toward one another. He calls this by the general name *attraction*, and whatever can be brought under it he thinks is properly accounted for. Thus he explains the tides by the attraction of the globe of land and sea toward the moon, which to him does not seem odd or anomalous but only a particular instance of a general rule or law of nature.

§105 If, then, we consider the difference between natural philosophers and other people with regard to their knowledge of phenomena, we will find that it consists not in a more exact knowledge of the efficient cause that produces them—for that can be nothing other than the *will of a spirit*—but only in a greater breadth of understanding, by which analogies, harmonies, and agreements are discovered in the works of nature, and particular effects are explained, that is, brought under general rules (see §62). These rules, grounded on the analogy and uniformity observed in the production of natural effects, are highly pleasing to the mind, and it seeks them out, because they extend our view beyond what is present and near us. They enable us to make very probable conjectures about things that may have happened at great distances of time and place, as well as to predict things to come—a kind of striving toward omniscience that the mind is very fond of.

§106 But we should proceed cautiously in such matters. For we are apt to lay too much weight on analogies and, to the detriment of truth, to indulge the mind's eagerness to extend its knowledge into general theorems. Gravitation, or mutual attraction, for example: because it appears in many instances, some are immediately ready to pronounce it *universal*, and to say that to attract and be attracted by every other body is an essential quality inherent in all bodies whatever. Yet it is evident that the fixed stars have no such tendency toward one another. And

gravitation is so far from being *essential* to bodies that in some cases a quite contrary principle seems to show itself, as in the vertical growth of plants and the elasticity of the air. There is nothing necessary or essential in the matter; it depends entirely on the will of the Governing Spirit, who causes certain bodies to stick together or tend toward each other according to various laws, while He keeps others at a fixed distance, and to some He gives a quite contrary tendency to fly apart, just as He sees fit.

§107 From what has been laid down, I think we may draw the following conclusions. First, it is plain that philosophers waste their time when they look for any natural efficient cause distinct from a *mind* or *spirit*. Second, since the whole creation is the work of a *wise and good Agent*, it would seem fitting for philosophers to turn their thoughts (contrary to what some hold) to the final causes of things. And I must confess I see no reason why pointing out the various ends to which natural things are adapted, and for which they were originally designed with unspeakable wisdom, should not be thought one good way of accounting for them, and entirely worthy of a philosopher. Third, nothing that has been laid down gives any reason why natural history should not still be studied, and observations and experiments made. That these are useful to mankind, and let us draw general conclusions, is not the result of any unchangeable dispositions or relations between things themselves, but only of God's goodness and kindness to men in governing the world. See §§30 and 31. Fourth, by careful observation of the phenomena within our view, we may discover the general laws of nature and deduce the other phenomena from them. I do not say *demonstrate*. For all deductions of that kind depend on the assumption that the Author of Nature always acts uniformly, in constant observance of the rules *we* take as principles—which we cannot know with certainty.

§108 It appears from §66 and following that the steady, consistent methods of nature may quite fittingly be called the Language of its Author, by which He reveals His attributes to our view and directs us how to act for the convenience and happi-

ness of life. Those who frame general rules from the phenomena, and afterward derive the phenomena from those rules, seem to be considering signs rather than causes. A person may understand natural signs perfectly well without knowing their analogy, or being able to say by what rule a thing is so or so. And just as it is quite possible to write badly through too strict an observance of general rules of grammar, so in arguing from general laws of nature it is not impossible that we may stretch the analogy too far and so fall into mistakes.

§109 When reading other books, a wise man will choose to fix his thoughts on the sense and put it to use, rather than spend them on grammatical remarks about the language. So in reading the volume of nature, it seems beneath the dignity of the mind to insist on exactness in reducing each particular phenomenon to general rules, or showing how it follows from them. We should set ourselves nobler aims: to refresh and elevate the mind with a view of the beauty, order, extent, and variety of natural things; from there, by proper inferences, to enlarge our notions of the grandeur, wisdom, and goodness of the Creator; and finally, as far as we can, to make the various parts of the creation serve the ends they were designed for—God's glory, and the sustenance and comfort of ourselves and our fellow creatures.

NEWTON ON ABSOLUTE SPACE AND MOTION

Berkeley argues that all motion is relative and that absolute space is an abstraction.

§110 It will readily be granted that the best key to this analogy, or natural science, is a certain celebrated treatise on *mechanics*. At the opening of that justly admired treatise, time, space, and motion are divided into *absolute* and *relative*, *true* and *apparent*, *mathematical* and *common*. This distinction, as the author explains it at length, assumes that these quantities exist outside the mind, and that they are ordinarily conceived in relation to

sensible things, to which nevertheless in their own nature they bear no relation at all.[24]

§111 As for *time*, taken there in an absolute or abstract sense as the duration or continuance of the existence of things, I have nothing more to add after what has already been said on the subject (§§97 and 98). For the rest, this celebrated author holds that there is an *absolute space*, which, being imperceptible to sense, remains in itself uniform and immovable; and that relative space is its measure, which, being movable and defined by its position relative to sensible bodies, is commonly taken for immovable space. *Place* he defines as the part of space occupied by a body; and as the space is absolute or relative, so is the place. *Absolute motion* is said to be the moving of a body from one absolute place to another, just as relative motion is from one relative place to another. And because the parts of absolute space do not fall under our senses, we are obliged to use their sensible measures instead, and so to define both place and motion with respect to bodies we regard as immovable. But, it is said, in philosophical matters we must abstract from our senses, since it may be that none of the bodies that seem to be at rest truly are, and the same thing that is moved relatively may really be at rest. Likewise one and the same body may be at once in relative rest and in relative motion, or even moved with contrary relative motions at the same time, depending on how its place is defined. All this ambiguity is found in apparent motions, but not at all in true or absolute ones, which should therefore alone be considered in philosophy. And true motions, we are told, are distinguished from apparent or relative ones by the following properties. First, in true or absolute motion, all parts that keep the same position with respect to the whole share in the motion of the whole. Second, when the place is moved, what is placed in it is also moved, so that a body moving in a place that is itself in motion shares in the motion of its place. Third, true motion is never produced or changed except

24 The treatise is Isaac Newton's *Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy* (the *Principia*, 1687); the distinctions come from the Scholium to its definitions.

by force impressed on the body itself. Fourth, true motion is always changed by force impressed on the body moved. Fifth, in merely relative circular motion there is no centrifugal force, whereas in true or absolute circular motion it is proportional to the quantity of motion.

§112 But notwithstanding what has been said, I must confess it does not seem to me that there can be any motion other than *relative*. So to conceive motion, at least two bodies must be conceived, whose distance or position in relation to each other is varied. Hence if only one body existed, it could not possibly be moved. This seems evident, because the idea I have of motion necessarily includes relation.

§113 But though in every motion we must conceive more than one body, it may be that only one is moved: namely, the one on which the force causing the change in the distance or position of the bodies is impressed. For however some may define relative motion—calling a body *moved* when it changes its distance from some other body, whether or not the force or action causing that change was impressed on it—still, since relative motion is what is perceived by sense and attended to in the ordinary affairs of life, it would seem that every person of common sense knows what it is as well as the best philosopher. Now I ask anyone whether, in his sense of motion as he walks along the streets, the stones he passes over can be said to *move* because they change their distance from his feet. It seems to me that although motion includes a relation of one thing to another, it is not necessary that each term of the relation be named from it. Just as a man may think of something that does not think, so a body may be moved toward or away from another body that is not on that account itself in motion.

§114 As the place happens to be defined in different ways, the motion related to it varies. A man in a ship may be said to be at rest relative to the sides of the vessel, and yet to move relative to the land. Or he may move eastward relative to the one and westward relative to the other. In the common affairs of life, people never go beyond the earth to define the place of any body, and

what is at rest with respect to *it* is considered to be at rest *absolutely*. But philosophers, who have a wider range of thought and more accurate notions of the system of things, find that even the earth itself moves. So, in order to fix their notions, they seem to conceive the physical world as finite, and its outermost unmoved walls or shell as the place by which they measure true motions. If we probe our own conceptions, I believe we will find that all the absolute motion we can form an idea of is at bottom nothing other than relative motion defined in this way. For, as has already been observed, absolute motion, excluding *all* external relation, is incomprehensible; and all the properties, causes, and effects ascribed above to absolute motion will, unless I am mistaken, be found to fit this kind of relative motion. As for the claim that centrifugal force does not belong at all to relative circular motion, I do not see how this follows from the experiment brought to prove it. See Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, in the Scholium to Definition VIII. For the water in the vessel, at the time when it is said to have the greatest relative circular motion, has, I think, no motion at all, as is plain from the preceding section.[25]

§115 For a body to be called *moved*, it is required, first, that it change its distance or position with respect to some other body, and second, that the force causing that change be applied to it. If either of these is missing, I do not think a body can be said to be in motion in keeping with the sense of mankind or the proper use of language. I grant, indeed, that we can think a body is moving when we see it change its distance from some other body, even though no force is applied to it (in which sense there may be apparent motion). But that is because we imagine the force causing the change of distance to be applied to, or impressed on, the body we think is moving. This shows only that we are capable of mistaking a thing for being in motion when it is not—and that is all.

25 Newton's "bucket" experiment: water in a spinning bucket at first stays flat, then climbs the sides as it comes to rotate with the bucket—offered as evidence of absolute rotation.

§116 From what has been said, it follows that the philosophical study of motion does not imply the existence of an *absolute space* distinct from the space that is perceived by sense and related to bodies. That such space cannot exist outside the mind is clear on the same principles that demonstrate the same of all other objects of sense. And perhaps, if we look closely, we will find that we cannot even form an idea of *pure space excluding all body*. This, I must confess, seems impossible, since it would be a most abstract idea. When I produce a motion in some part of my body, if it is free, without resistance, I say there is *space*. But if I meet resistance, I say there is *body*; and in proportion as the resistance to motion is less or greater, I say the space is more or less *pure*. So when I speak of pure or empty space, it is not to be supposed that the word *space* stands for an idea distinct from body and motion, or conceivable without them. We are, admittedly, apt to think that every noun stands for a distinct idea that can be separated from all others, and this has caused endless mistakes. So when I suppose the whole world annihilated except my own body and say there still remains *pure space*, all I mean is that I conceive it possible for the limbs of my body to be moved in every direction without the least resistance. But if my body too were annihilated, there could be no motion, and consequently no space. Some may perhaps think that the sense of sight gives them the idea of pure space. But it is plain from what I have shown elsewhere that the ideas of space and distance are not obtained by that sense. See the *Essay concerning Vision*.

§117 What is set down here seems to put an end to all the disputes and difficulties that have arisen among the learned about the nature of *pure space*. But its chief advantage is that it frees us from a dangerous dilemma, to which several who have thought about the subject believe themselves driven: namely, of thinking either that real space is God, or else that there is something besides God that is eternal, uncreated, infinite, indivisible, and unchangeable. Both of these may rightly be thought pernicious and absurd notions. It is certain that not a few theologians, as well as philosophers of great note, have concluded that space

must be *divine*, because they found it difficult to conceive either its limits or its annihilation. And some recently have made a particular point of showing that the incommunicable attributes of God apply to it. However unworthy of the Divine Nature this doctrine may seem, I do not see how we can escape it as long as we hold to the received opinions.[26]

MATHEMATICS AND NUMBER

Arithmetic concerns signs, not abstract numbers, and is valuable for its practical use.

§118 So much for natural philosophy. We now turn to an inquiry into that other great branch of theoretical knowledge, namely mathematics. However celebrated these sciences may be for their clarity and certainty of demonstration, which is hardly found anywhere else, they still cannot be assumed to be entirely free from mistakes if some hidden error lurks in their principles that their practitioners share with the rest of mankind. Mathematicians, though they deduce their theorems from a great height of evidence, have first principles that are limited to the consideration of quantity. And they do not rise to any inquiry into those higher maxims that influence all the particular sciences, every one of which, mathematics included, consequently shares in the errors those maxims involve. We do not deny that the principles laid down by mathematicians are true, and that their way of deducing from those principles is clear and incontestable. But we hold that there may be certain erroneous maxims of wider scope than the object of mathematics, and for that reason not expressly mentioned, though silently assumed, throughout the whole course of that science; and that the bad effects of those hidden, unexamined errors spread through all its branches. To put it plainly, we suspect that mathematicians, like other people, are caught up in the errors arising from the

26 Probably Henry More and Samuel Clarke, who associated space with God's immensity; Newton spoke similarly of space as God's "sensorium."

doctrine of abstract general ideas and of the existence of objects outside the mind.

§119 Arithmetic has been thought to have as its object abstract ideas of *number*, and to understand their properties and mutual relations is supposed to be no small part of theoretical knowledge. The belief in the pure and intellectual nature of numbers in the abstract has made them esteemed by those philosophers who seem to have aimed at an uncommon refinement and elevation of thought. It has put a value on the most trivial numerical speculations, which are of no practical use and serve only for amusement, and so has infected some minds to the point that they have dreamed of mighty *mysteries* hidden in numbers and tried to explain natural things by them. But if we examine our own thoughts and consider what has been laid down, we may perhaps come to think little of those high flights and abstractions, and to regard all inquiries about numbers as so many *difficiles nugae*, insofar as they do not serve practice and promote the benefit of life.[27]

§120 We considered unity in the abstract earlier, in §13, and from that and what was said in the Introduction it plainly follows that there is no such idea. But since number is defined as a *collection of units*, we may conclude that if there is no such thing as unity, or a unit, in the abstract, there are no *ideas* of number in the abstract signified by the names and figures of numbers. So the theories of arithmetic, if they are abstracted from the names and figures, as well as from all use and practice and from the particular things counted, can be supposed to have no object at all. From this we can see how entirely the science of numbers is subordinate to practice, and how barren and trivial it becomes when considered as a matter of mere speculation.

§121 However, since there may be some who, misled by the attractive appearance of discovering abstract truths, waste their time on arithmetical theorems and problems of no use, it will not be amiss to consider more fully and expose the emptiness of that pretension. This will plainly appear if we look at arithmetic

27 *Difficiles nugae*: "laborious trifles" (Martial, *Epigrams* 2.86).

in its infancy and observe what originally led people to study that science, and what purpose they directed it to. It is natural to think that at first, to aid memory and help in calculation, people used counters, or, in writing, single strokes, dots, or the like, each of which was made to signify a unit—that is, some one thing of whatever kind they needed to count. Later they found shorter ways of making one character stand for several strokes or dots. And finally the notation of the Arabs or Indians came into use, in which, by repeating a few characters or figures and varying the meaning of each figure according to the place it occupies, all numbers can be expressed most neatly. This seems to have been done in imitation of language, so that an exact analogy holds between the notation by figures and by names: the nine simple figures correspond to the first nine number names, and the places in the one correspond to the denominations in the other. And in keeping with these conditions of the simple and positional value of figures, methods were devised for finding, from the given figures or marks of the parts, what figures, placed in what way, are proper to denote the whole, or *vice versa*. And having found the figures sought, since the same rule or analogy is observed throughout, it is easy to read them into words, and so the number becomes perfectly known. For the number of any particular things is said to be known when we know the name or figures (in their proper arrangement) that belong to them according to the established analogy. For once these signs are known, we can by the operations of arithmetic know the signs of any part of the particular sums they signify. And so, by computing in signs (because of the connection established between them and the distinct multitudes of things, one of which is taken as a unit), we can correctly add up, divide, and proportion the very things we mean to count.

§122 In arithmetic, therefore, we attend not to the *things* but to the *signs*—which, however, are not attended to for their own sake, but because they direct us how to act with regard to things and how to deal with them properly. Now, in keeping with what we observed earlier about words in general (Introduction, §19),

it happens here too that abstract ideas are thought to be signified by number names or characters, whenever these do not suggest ideas of particular things to our minds. I will not at present go into a more detailed discussion of this subject. I will only observe that it is evident from what has been said that the things that pass for abstract truths and theorems about numbers are in reality concerned with no object distinct from particular countable things—except only names and characters, which originally came to be considered for no other reason than their being *signs*, able to represent aptly whatever particular things people needed to count. It follows that studying them for their own sake would be just as wise, and to just as good a purpose, as if a man, neglecting the true use, original intention, and service of language, were to spend his time on irrelevant criticisms of words, or on purely verbal reasonings and controversies.

GEOMETRY AND THE INFINITELY SMALL

Berkeley denies that finite extension is infinitely divisible and criticizes infinitesimals.

§123 From numbers we go on to speak of *extension*, which, considered as relative, is the object of geometry. The *infinite* divisibility of *finite* extension, though it is not expressly laid down as either an axiom or a theorem in the elements of that science, is nonetheless assumed everywhere throughout it, and is thought to have so inseparable and essential a connection with the principles and demonstrations of geometry that mathematicians never call it into doubt or raise the least question about it. And just as this notion is the source of all those amusing geometrical paradoxes that so directly contradict the plain common sense of mankind, and are admitted with such reluctance into a mind not yet corrupted by learning, so it is the chief cause of all that fine and extreme subtlety that makes the study of mathematics so difficult and tedious. Hence, if we can show that no *finite* extension contains innumerable parts, or is infinitely divisible, we will at once clear the science of geometry of a great number

of difficulties and contradictions that have always been considered a reproach to human reason, and at the same time make mastering it a matter of much less time and effort than it has been until now.

§124 Every particular finite extension that can be an object of our thought is an *idea* existing only in the mind, and consequently each part of it must be perceived. If, therefore, I cannot *perceive* innumerable parts in any finite extension I consider, it is certain they are not contained in it. But it is evident that I cannot distinguish innumerable parts in any particular line, surface, or solid, whether I perceive it by sense or picture it to myself in my mind. So I conclude that they are not contained in it. Nothing can be plainer to me than that the extensions I have in view are nothing other than my own ideas; and it is no less plain that I cannot break any one of my ideas down into an infinite number of other ideas—that is, that they are not infinitely divisible. If by *finite extension* something distinct from a finite idea is meant, I declare that I do not know what that is, and so can neither affirm nor deny anything about it. But if the terms *extension*, *parts*, and the like are taken in any conceivable sense—that is, as *ideas*—then to say that a finite quantity or extension consists of infinitely many parts is so obvious a contradiction that everyone recognizes it as such at first sight. And it could never win the assent of any reasonable creature who was not brought to it by gentle and gradual steps, as a converted Gentile is brought to believe in transubstantiation. Ancient and deep-rooted prejudices often turn into principles. And once propositions have acquired the force and standing of a *principle*, not only they themselves but also whatever can be deduced from them are thought exempt from all examination. And there is no absurdity so gross that the human mind cannot, by this means, be prepared to swallow it.

§125 Someone whose understanding is already committed to the doctrine of abstract general ideas may be persuaded that, whatever is thought of the ideas of sense, *extension in the abstract* is infinitely divisible. And someone who thinks that the objects

of sense exist outside the mind may, on that basis, be brought to admit that a line only an inch long can contain innumerable parts that really exist, though they are too small to be discerned. These errors are grafted into the minds of geometers as much as into those of other people, and they have a similar influence on their reasoning. It would not be hard to show that the arguments from geometry used to support the infinite divisibility of extension are founded on them. For now we will only note, in general terms, why mathematicians are all so fond of that doctrine and cling to it so tightly.

§126 It was observed elsewhere (Introduction, §15) that the theorems and demonstrations of geometry deal with universal ideas, and it was explained there in what sense this should be understood: namely, that the particular lines and shapes in the diagram are taken to stand for innumerable others of different sizes. In other words, the geometer considers them in abstraction from their size. This does not mean that he forms an abstract idea. It means only that he does not care what the particular size is, whether large or small, but regards it as irrelevant to the demonstration. It follows that a line in the diagram only an inch long must be spoken of as though it contained ten thousand parts, since it is regarded not in itself but as universal. And it is universal only in what it signifies: it *represents* innumerable lines greater than itself, in which ten thousand parts or more may be distinguished, though there may be no more than an inch in *it*. In this way the properties of the lines signified are transferred to the sign (by a very common figure of speech), and are then mistakenly thought to belong to the sign considered in its own nature.

§127 Because there is no number of parts so great that there could not be a line containing more, the inch-long line is said to contain more parts than any number that can be named. That is true, not of the inch taken by itself, but only of the things it signifies. But people do not keep that distinction in their thoughts, and so they slide into believing that the small particular line drawn on paper contains innumerable parts in itself. There is no

such thing as the ten-thousandth part of an inch. But there is a ten-thousandth part of a mile, or of the earth's diameter, which that inch may signify. So when I draw a triangle on paper and take one side, say no more than an inch long, as the radius, I consider it as divided into 10,000 or 100,000 parts, or more. The ten-thousandth part of that line, considered in itself, is nothing at all, and so it can be ignored without any error or inconvenience. But these drawn lines are only marks standing for greater quantities, of which a ten-thousandth part may be quite considerable. It follows that, to avoid significant errors in practice, the radius must be taken as having 10,000 parts or more.

§128 From what has been said, it is clear why, for any theorem to become universal in its use, we must speak of the lines drawn on paper as though they contained parts that in fact they do not. If we examine the matter thoroughly in doing this, we may find that we cannot conceive an inch itself as consisting of, or divisible into, a thousand parts, but only some other line, far longer than an inch, that the inch represents. And we may find that when we say a line is *infinitely divisible*, we must mean *a line that is infinitely long*. What we have observed here seems to be the main reason why geometry has thought it necessary to suppose the *infinite* divisibility of *finite extension*.

§129 One would think that the many absurdities and contradictions that followed from this false principle would have been counted as so many demonstrations against it. But by some logic I cannot fathom, it is held that proofs *a posteriori* are not to be admitted against propositions concerning infinity. As though it were not impossible even for an infinite mind to reconcile contradictions; or as if anything absurd and self-contradictory could be necessarily connected with truth, or follow from it. But anyone who considers how weak this excuse is will think it was invented on purpose to indulge the laziness of the mind, which would rather settle into an idle skepticism than take the trouble to carry out a rigorous examination of the principles it has always accepted as true.

§130 Lately, speculation about infinites has run so high, and grown into such strange notions, that it has caused no small doubts and disputes among the geometers of our time. Some of great reputation are not content to hold that finite lines can be divided into an infinite number of parts. They go further and maintain that each of those infinitesimals can itself be subdivided into an infinity of other parts, or infinitesimals of the second order, and so on *ad infinitum*. These people, I say, assert that there are infinitesimals of infinitesimals of infinitesimals, without ever coming to an end. So according to them an inch does not merely contain an infinite number of parts, but an infinity of an infinity of an infinity, *ad infinitum*, of parts. Others hold that all orders of infinitesimals below the first are nothing at all. They think, with good reason, that it is absurd to imagine any positive quantity or part of extension that, even multiplied infinitely, could ever equal the smallest given extension. And yet on the other hand it seems no less absurd to think that the square, cube, or other power of a positive real root should itself be nothing at all. But those who accept infinitesimals of the first order and deny all the later orders are obliged to maintain exactly that.[28]

§131 Do we not have reason, then, to conclude that *both* sides are wrong, and that there are in fact no infinitely small parts, and no infinite number of parts contained in any finite quantity? But you will say that if this doctrine prevails, the very foundations of geometry will be destroyed, and those great men who raised that science to such astonishing heights have been building a castle in the air all along. To this it may be replied that whatever in geometry is useful and benefits human life still stands firm and unshaken on our principles. Considered as a practical science, geometry will gain rather than suffer from what has been said. But showing this properly may be the business of another occasion. As for the rest, even if it should follow that some of the more intricate and subtle parts of speculative

28 Berkeley has in view the calculus of Newton and Leibniz and its defenders; he later pressed this attack in *The Analyst* (1734).

mathematics could be pared away without any harm to truth, I do not see what damage mankind would suffer from that. On the contrary, I think it would be highly desirable for people of great ability and dogged application to draw their thoughts away from those amusements and turn them to the study of things that lie closer to the concerns of life, or that have a more direct influence on conduct.

§132 It may be said that several theorems, undoubtedly true, have been discovered by methods that make use of infinitesimals, which could never have happened if their existence involved a contradiction. I answer that on thorough examination it will not be found that in any case it is necessary to use or conceive *infinitesimal* parts of *finite* lines, or even quantities smaller than the *minimum sensibile*. Indeed, it will be clear that this is never done, since it is impossible.[29]

THE CASE AGAINST MATTER SUMMED UP

Berkeley reviews why the hypothesis of spirits and ideas alone should be accepted.

§133 From what we have laid down, it is clear that very many important errors have arisen from the false principles attacked in the earlier parts of this treatise. At the same time, the opposites of those mistaken doctrines turn out to be extremely fruitful principles, from which flow innumerable consequences highly beneficial to true philosophy as well as to religion. In particular, it has been shown that *matter*, or *the absolute existence of corporeal objects*, is where the most open and destructive enemies of all knowledge, whether human or divine, have always placed their chief strength and confidence. And surely, if distinguishing the real existence of unthinking things from their being perceived, and granting them an existence of their own outside the minds of spirits, explains not a single thing in nature, but on the contrary raises a great many inexplicable difficulties; if the supposi-

29 *Minimum sensibile*: the smallest perceivable quantity, below which nothing can be perceived by sense.

tion of matter is entirely unsupported, resting on not even one reason; if its consequences cannot stand the light of examination and free inquiry, but take shelter behind the dark and vague excuse that *infinites are incomprehensible*; if, moreover, getting rid of *this* matter brings not the slightest bad consequence; if it is not even missed in the world, but everything is conceived just as well without it, indeed much more easily; if, finally, skeptics and atheists are silenced forever once we suppose only spirits and ideas, and this scheme of things agrees perfectly with both reason and religion—then I think we may expect it to be accepted and firmly embraced, even if it were proposed only as a *hypothesis* and the existence of matter were granted to be possible, though I think we have clearly demonstrated that it is not.

§134 It is true that, as a consequence of the foregoing principles, several disputes and speculations that are counted no small part of learning are rejected as useless. This may prejudice those who have already become deeply engaged and made great progress in studies of that kind against our views, however strongly. But we hope that others will not think it a fair reason to dislike the principles and doctrines laid down here that they shorten the labor of study and make the human sciences clearer, more concise, and more attainable than they were before.

KNOWLEDGE OF SPIRITS

We have no idea of spirit but a notion of it, and the soul is naturally immortal.

§135 Having finished what we meant to say about the knowledge of *ideas*, our plan leads us next to treat of *spirits*. Here, perhaps, human knowledge is not as deficient as is commonly imagined. The main reason given for thinking us ignorant of the nature of spirits is that we have no *idea* of it. But surely it should not be regarded as a defect in the human understanding that it does not perceive the idea of spirit, if it is plainly impossible that there should be any such idea. And this, if I am not mistaken, was demonstrated in §27. To that I will add here that a spirit has

been shown to be the only substance or support in which unthinking beings or ideas can exist. But that this *substance* which supports or perceives ideas should itself be an idea, or be like an idea, is evidently absurd.

§136 It may be said that we lack a *sense* (as some have imagined) suited to knowing substances with, and that if we had one, we could know our own soul as we know a triangle. To this I answer that if we were given a new sense, we could only receive some new *sensations* or *ideas of sense* through it. But I do not think anyone will say that what he means by the words *soul* and *substance* is just some particular kind of idea or sensation. We may therefore conclude that, all things duly considered, it is no more reasonable to think our faculties defective because they do not supply us with an *idea* of spirit, or active thinking substance, than it would be to blame them for being unable to grasp a *round square*.

§137 The opinion that spirits are to be known in the way an idea or sensation is known has given rise to many absurd and unorthodox doctrines, and to much skepticism about the nature of the soul. It is even likely that this opinion has led some people to doubt whether they had any soul at all distinct from their body, since on inquiry they could not find that they had an idea of it. That an *idea,* which is inactive and whose existence consists in being perceived, should be the image or likeness of an agent that exists by itself seems to need no refutation beyond simply paying attention to what those words mean. But perhaps you will say that although an idea cannot resemble a spirit in its thinking, acting, or existing by itself, it may resemble it in some other respects; and that an idea or image need not be like its original in every respect.

§138 I answer: if it does not resemble it in the respects mentioned, it cannot possibly represent it in any other. Just leave out the power of willing, thinking, and perceiving ideas, and nothing else remains in which the idea could be like a spirit. For by the word *spirit* we mean only that which thinks, wills, and perceives; this, and this alone, is what the term signifies. If, then, no

degree of those powers can possibly be represented in an idea, it is evident that there can be no idea of a spirit.

§139 But it will be objected that if the words *soul*, *spirit*, and *substance* signify no *idea*, they are entirely empty and have no meaning. I answer that those words do mean or signify a real thing, which is neither an idea nor like an idea, but that which perceives ideas, and wills, and reasons about them. What I am *myself*, what I refer to by the word *I*, is the same as what is meant by *soul*, or *spiritual substance*. It may be said that this is only quibbling over a word: since what other names directly signify is by common agreement called *ideas*, there is no reason why what the name *spirit* or *soul* signifies should not share the same label. I answer that all the unthinking objects of the mind have this in common: they are entirely passive, and their existence consists only in being perceived. A *soul* or *spirit*, on the other hand, is an active being, whose existence consists not in being perceived but in perceiving ideas and thinking. So, to prevent equivocation and the confusing of natures that are completely different and unlike, we must distinguish between *spirit* and *idea*. See §27.

§140 In a broad sense, indeed, we may be said to have an idea, or rather a notion, of *spirit*. That is, we understand the meaning of the word; otherwise we could not affirm or deny anything of it. Moreover, just as we conceive the ideas in the minds of other spirits by means of our own ideas, which we suppose to resemble them, so we know other spirits by means of our own soul, which in that sense is their image or idea. It stands in the same relation to other spirits as the blueness or heat that I perceive stands to the ideas perceived by someone else.

§141 It must not be supposed that those who assert the natural immortality of the soul think it absolutely incapable of being annihilated, even by the infinite power of the Creator who first gave it being. They mean only that it cannot be broken up or dissolved by the ordinary laws of nature or motion. Those, indeed, who hold that the human soul is only a thin vital flame, or a system of animal spirits, make it as perishable and corruptible as

the body. For nothing is more easily dispersed than such a being, and it is naturally impossible for it to survive the ruin of the tabernacle in which it is enclosed.[30] And this view has been eagerly embraced and cherished by the worst part of mankind, as the most effective antidote against every impression of virtue and religion. But it has been made evident that bodies, whatever their structure or texture, are merely passive ideas in the mind, which is further removed from them and more different from them than light is from darkness. We have shown that the soul is indivisible, incorporeal, and unextended, and it is therefore incorruptible. Nothing can be clearer than that the motions, changes, decays, and dissolutions that we constantly see happening to natural bodies (which is what we mean by the *course of nature*) cannot possibly affect an active, simple, uncompounded substance. Such a being therefore cannot be dissolved by the force of nature; that is to say, *the human soul* is *naturally immortal*.

§142 After what has been said, it is clear, I suppose, that our souls are not to be known in the same way as senseless, inactive objects, or by way of an *idea*. *Spirits* and *ideas* are so completely different that when we say "they exist," "they are known," and the like, these words must not be thought to signify anything common to both natures. There is nothing alike or shared between them. And to expect that by some multiplying or enlarging of our faculties we might become able to know a spirit as we know a triangle seems as absurd as hoping to *see a sound*. I stress this because I think it may be important for clearing up several significant questions, and for preventing some very dangerous errors about the nature of the soul.

We cannot, I think, strictly be said to have an *idea* of an active being, or of an action, although we can be said to have a *notion* of them. I have some knowledge or notion of *my mind* and its acts concerning ideas, inasmuch as I know or understand what is meant by these words. Whatever I know, I have some notion

30 "Animal spirits": in the physiology of the time, fine fluids thought to flow through the nerves. "Tabernacle" is the body, as in 2 Corinthians 5:1–4.

of. I will not say that the terms *idea* and *notion* cannot be used interchangeably, if people insist on it. But it makes for clarity and precision to distinguish very different things by different names. It should also be noted that, since all *relations* involve an act of the mind, we cannot properly be said to have an idea of the relations and connections between things, but rather a notion of them. But if, in the modern fashion, the word *idea* is extended to *spirits*, *relations*, and *acts*, that is, after all, merely a matter of words.

§143 It will not be out of place to add that the doctrine of *abstract ideas* has played no small part in making intricate and obscure those sciences that deal particularly with spiritual things. People have imagined that they could frame abstract notions of the *powers* and *acts* of the mind, and consider them cut off both from the mind or spirit itself and from their respective objects and effects. As a result, a great number of dark and ambiguous terms, supposed to stand for abstract notions, have been brought into metaphysics and ethics, and from these have grown endless confusions and disputes among the learned.

§144 But nothing seems to have done more to draw people into controversies and mistakes about the nature and operations of the mind than the habit of speaking of those things in terms borrowed from sensible ideas. For example, the will is called the *motion* of the soul. This instills the belief that the human mind is like a ball in motion, driven and determined by the objects of sense as necessarily as the ball is by the stroke of a racket. From this arise endless doubts and errors with dangerous consequences in morality. All of these, I have no doubt, could be cleared up, and the truth would appear plain, uniform, and consistent, if only philosophers could be persuaded to withdraw into themselves and attentively consider what they themselves mean.

OTHER MINDS AND GOD

We know other minds through their effects, and God far more evidently through all of nature.

§145 From what has been said, it is clear that we cannot know the existence of *other spirits* except through their operations, or the ideas they excite in us. I perceive various motions, changes, and combinations of ideas that tell me there are certain particular agents, like myself, which accompany them and play a part in producing them. So the knowledge I have of other spirits is not immediate, as my knowledge of my ideas is. It depends on the mediation of ideas, which I refer to agents or spirits distinct from myself, as their effects or accompanying signs.

§146 But though there are some things that convince us that human agents play a part in producing them, it is evident to everyone that the things called the works of nature, that is, by far the greater part of the ideas or sensations we perceive, are *not* produced by, or dependent on, the wills of *human beings*. There is therefore some other Spirit that causes them, since it is contradictory that they should exist by themselves. See §29. But suppose we attentively consider the constant regularity, order, and linkage of natural things; the astonishing magnificence, beauty, and perfection of the larger parts of creation and the exquisite design of the smaller ones, together with the exact harmony and correspondence of the whole; and above all the never sufficiently admired laws of pain and pleasure, and the instincts or natural inclinations, appetites, and passions of animals. If, I say, we consider all these things, and at the same time attend to the meaning and force of the attributes One, Eternal, Infinitely Wise, Good, and Perfect, we will clearly perceive that they belong to the Spirit just mentioned, "who works all in all" and "by whom all things consist."[31]

§147 So it is evident that God is known as certainly and immediately as any other mind or spirit distinct from ourselves. We

31 The quotations are from 1 Corinthians 12:6 and Colossians 1:17.

may even assert that the existence of God is perceived far more evidently than the existence of human beings, because the effects of nature are infinitely more numerous and significant than those attributed to human agents. There is not a single mark that indicates a human being, or an effect produced by one, that does not more strongly prove the existence of that Spirit who is the Author of Nature. For it is evident that, in affecting other persons, the human will has no other object than simply the motion of the limbs of one's own body. But that such a motion should be accompanied by, or excite, any idea in the mind of another depends wholly on the will of the Creator. It is He alone who, "upholding all things by the word of His power," maintains the communication between spirits by which they are able to perceive one another's existence. And yet this pure and clear light, which enlightens everyone, is itself invisible.[32]

§148 It seems to be a common excuse among the unthinking crowd that they cannot *see* God. If only we could see Him, they say, as we see a man, we would believe that He exists, and believing, obey His commands. But alas, we need only open our eyes to see the Sovereign Lord of all things, with a *fuller* and clearer view than we have of any of our fellow creatures. I do not imagine that we see God (as some would have it) by a direct and immediate view, or that we see corporeal things not by themselves but by seeing what represents them in the essence of God. That doctrine, I must confess, is incomprehensible to me. But I will explain what I mean.[33] A human spirit or person is not perceived by sense, since it is not an idea. So when we see the color, size, shape, and motions of a man, we perceive only certain sensations or ideas excited in our own minds. These, presented to our view in various distinct collections, serve to indicate to us the existence of finite, created spirits like ourselves. So it is clear that we do not see a man, if by *man* is meant what lives, moves, perceives, and thinks as we do. We see

32 Hebrews 1:3; the "light which enlightens everyone" echoes John 1:9.
33 Seeing all things in God is Malebranche's doctrine, from *The Search after Truth* (1674–75).

only a certain collection of ideas, which leads us to think there is a distinct principle of thought and motion, like ourselves, accompanying it and represented by it. And we see God in the same way. The only difference is this: whereas some one finite and narrow collection of ideas indicates a particular human mind, wherever we turn our view we perceive, at all times and in all places, clear signs of the Divinity. Everything we see, hear, feel, or in any way perceive by sense is a sign or effect of the power of God, as is our perception of those very motions that are produced by human beings.

§149 It is therefore clear that nothing can be more evident to anyone capable of the least reflection than the existence of God: a Spirit who is intimately present to our minds, producing in them all that variety of ideas or sensations that continually affect us, on whom we are absolutely and entirely dependent, in short, one "in whom we live, and move, and have our being."[34] That so very few people reach by reason the discovery of this great truth, which lies so near and so obvious to the mind, is a sad instance of human stupidity and inattention. Though they are surrounded by such clear manifestations of the Deity, they are so little affected by them that they seem, as it were, blinded by an excess of light.

NATURE, EVIL AND THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Berkeley answers objections from nature and evil and closes with the duty of piety.

§150 But you will say: Has nature no part in producing natural things? Must they all be attributed to the immediate and sole operation of God? I answer: if by *nature* is meant only the *visible series* of effects or sensations imprinted on our minds according to certain fixed and general laws, then it is clear that nature, taken in this sense, cannot produce anything at all. But if by *nature* is meant some being distinct from God, as well as from the laws of nature and the things perceived by sense, I must con-

34 Acts 17:28.

fess that the word is to me an empty sound, with no intelligible meaning attached to it. Nature in this sense is an idle fantasy, introduced by those pagans who lacked a proper understanding of the omnipresence and infinite perfection of God. But it is harder to account for its being accepted among Christians, who profess belief in the Holy Scriptures. For Scripture constantly attributes to the immediate hand of God those effects that pagan philosophers usually ascribe to nature. "The Lord, He causes the vapors to ascend; He makes lightnings with rain; He brings forth the wind out of His treasures" (Jeremiah 10:13). "He turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night" (Amos 5:8). "He visits the earth, and makes it soft with showers; He blesses the springing thereof, and crowns the year with His goodness, so that the pastures are clothed with flocks, and the valleys are covered over with grain" (see Psalm 65). Yet although this is the constant language of Scripture, we have some strange reluctance to believe that God concerns Himself so closely with our affairs. We would gladly suppose Him to be far away, and put some blind, unthinking deputy in His place, though (if we may believe Saint Paul) "He is not far from every one of us."[35]

§151 It will no doubt be objected that the slow and gradual methods observed in the production of natural things do not seem to have the *immediate* hand of an Almighty Agent as their cause. Besides, monstrous births, premature births, fruit blighted in the blossom, rain falling in deserts, the miseries that befall human life, and the like, are so many arguments that the whole frame of nature is not directly driven and supervised by a Spirit of infinite wisdom and goodness. But the answer to this objection is largely clear from §62. It is plain that these methods of nature are absolutely necessary for working by the simplest and most general rules, and in a steady and consistent way, which shows both the wisdom and the goodness of God. Such is the skillful design of this mighty machine of nature that, while its motions and various phenomena strike our senses, the hand

35 Saint Paul's words are from Acts 17:27.

that drives the whole is itself imperceptible to people of flesh and blood. "Truly," says the prophet, "you are a God who hides Himself" (Isaiah 45:15). But though the Lord conceals Himself from the eyes of the sensual and lazy, who will not spend the least effort of thought, to an unbiased and attentive mind nothing can be more plainly legible than the intimate presence of an all-wise Spirit, who shapes, regulates, and sustains the whole system of being. It is clear from what we have observed elsewhere that operating according to general and fixed laws is so necessary for guiding us in the affairs of life, and for letting us into the secrets of nature, that without it all the reach and scope of thought, all human shrewdness and planning, could serve no purpose whatever. It would even be impossible for there to be any such faculties or powers in the mind. See §31. This one consideration far outweighs whatever particular inconveniences may arise from it.

§152 We should also consider that the very blemishes and defects of nature have their use: they create a pleasing kind of variety and enhance the beauty of the rest of creation, as the shadows in a picture serve to set off its brighter and better-lit parts. We would also do well to ask whether our charging the Author of Nature with imprudence, for the waste of seeds and embryos and the accidental destruction of plants and animals before they reach maturity, is not the effect of a prejudice formed by our familiarity with powerless and thrifty mortals. In a *human being*, indeed, careful management of things he cannot obtain without much effort and labor may be considered wisdom. But we must not imagine that the inexpressibly fine machine of an animal or plant costs the great Creator any more effort or trouble to produce than a pebble does. Nothing is more evident than that an omnipotent Spirit can produce anything equally well by a mere *fiat*, or act of His will. So it is clear that the splendid abundance of natural things should not be interpreted as weakness or extravagance in the agent who produces them, but should rather be seen as evidence of the richness of His power.

§153 As for the mixture of pain or discomfort in the world, which results from the general laws of nature and the actions of finite, imperfect spirits, this is, in our present state, indispensable to our well-being. But our outlook is too narrow. We take into our thoughts the idea of some one particular pain, for instance, and count it as *evil*. But if we widen our view to take in the various purposes, connections, and dependencies of things; on what occasions and in what proportions we are affected by pain and pleasure; the nature of human freedom; and the purpose for which we are put into the world, then we will be forced to acknowledge that particular things which, considered in themselves, appear evil have the nature of good when considered as linked with the whole system of beings.

§154 From what has been said, it will be obvious to any thoughtful person that it is only through lack of attention and breadth of mind that any supporters of atheism or of the Manichaean heresy are to be found. Small and unreflecting souls may indeed mock the works of Providence, whose beauty and order they either lack the capacity to understand or will not take the trouble to. But those who have any soundness and breadth of thought, and are also used to reflecting, can never sufficiently admire the divine traces of wisdom and goodness that shine throughout the order of nature.[36] But what truth shines so strongly on the mind that we cannot avoid seeing it by turning our thoughts away and willfully shutting our eyes? Is it any wonder, then, if most people, who are always intent on business or pleasure and little used to fixing or opening the eye of the mind, do not have all the conviction and evidence of the existence of God that might be expected of rational creatures?

§155 We should rather wonder that people can be found so stupid as to neglect so evident and momentous a truth, than that, neglecting it, they remain unconvinced of it. And yet it is to be feared that too many people of talent and leisure, living in Christian countries, have sunk into a kind of atheism merely through

36 The Manichaeans held that the world is governed by two opposed principles, one good and one evil.

an idle and dreadful negligence. For it is utterly impossible that a soul pierced and enlightened by a thorough sense of the omnipresence, holiness, and justice of that almighty Spirit should persist in remorselessly breaking His laws. We ought, therefore, to meditate earnestly and dwell on these important points, so that we may be convinced beyond all doubt "that the eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good; that He is with us and keeps us in all places where we go, and gives us bread to eat and clothing to put on"; that He is present to and aware of our innermost thoughts; and that we depend on Him absolutely and immediately. A clear view of these great truths cannot fail to fill our hearts with an awed watchfulness and holy fear, which is the strongest incentive to virtue and the best guard against vice.[37]

§156 For, after all, what deserves first place in our studies is the consideration of GOD and our DUTY. Promoting this was the main aim and purpose of my labors, and I will consider them entirely useless and ineffective if, by what I have said, I cannot inspire my readers with a devout sense of the presence of God, and, having shown the falseness or emptiness of the barren speculations that are the chief occupation of learned men, dispose them better to revere and embrace the saving truths of the Gospel, which to know and to practice is the highest perfection of human nature.

37 Proverbs 15:3 and Genesis 28:15, 20.

First Dialogue

Philonous leads Hylas to concede that every sensible quality, primary as well as secondary, exists only in the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.1 Good morning, Hylas. I didn't expect to find you out so early.[1]

HYLAS D1.2 It is rather unusual. But my thoughts were so taken up with a subject I was discussing last night that, finding I couldn't sleep, I decided to get up and take a walk in the garden.

PHILONOUS D1.3 It's a good thing: it lets you see what innocent and agreeable pleasures you miss every morning. Could there be a pleasanter time of day, or a more delightful season of the year? That purple sky, those wild but sweet notes of the birds, the fragrant bloom on the trees and flowers, the gentle influence of the rising sun: these and a thousand nameless beauties of nature fill the soul with secret raptures. And its faculties, being fresh and lively at this hour, are suited to the meditations that the solitude of a garden and the calm of the morning naturally incline us to. But I'm afraid I am interrupting your thoughts, for you seemed very intent on something.

HYLAS D1.4 It's true, I was, and I'd be grateful if you'd let me go on in the same vein. Not that I want in any way to deprive myself of your company, for my thoughts always flow more easily in conversation with a friend than when I'm alone. But my request is that you let me share my reflections with you.

1 The speakers' names are Greek: Hylas from *hylē*, "matter," and Philonous, "lover of mind." Hylas defends material substance; Philonous speaks for Berkeley.

PHILONOUS D1.5 With all my heart. It's what I would have asked for myself if you hadn't got there first.

HYLAS D1.6 I was thinking about the strange fate of those men who in every age, whether from a wish to set themselves apart from ordinary people or from some inexplicable turn of mind, have claimed either to believe nothing at all or to believe the most extravagant things in the world. This might be tolerable, if their paradoxes and skepticism didn't bring with them consequences that harm mankind in general. But here's the trouble. When people with less leisure see those who are supposed to have spent their whole lives in the pursuit of knowledge professing total ignorance of everything, or advancing views that clash with plain and commonly accepted principles, they will be tempted to harbor doubts about the most important truths, which until then they had held sacred and beyond question.

PHILONOUS D1.7 I entirely agree with you about the harmful tendency of the affected doubts of some philosophers and the fantastic notions of others. Lately I have even gone so far in this way of thinking that I have given up several of the lofty notions I picked up in their schools in favor of ordinary opinions. And I give you my word: since this revolt from metaphysical notions to the plain dictates of nature and common sense, I find my understanding remarkably enlightened, so that I can now easily grasp a great many things that before were all mystery and riddle.

HYLAS D1.8 I'm glad to find there was nothing in the reports I heard about you.

PHILONOUS D1.9 Tell me, what were they?

HYLAS D1.10 In last night's conversation you were described as someone who holds the most extravagant opinion that ever entered the mind of man: namely, that there is no such thing as *material substance* in the world.

PHILONOUS D1.11 That there is no such thing as what *philosophers* call *material substance*, I am seriously convinced. But if I were

shown anything absurd or skeptical in this, I would then have the same reason to renounce it that I think I now have to reject the opposite opinion.

HYLAS D1.12 What! Can anything be more fantastic, more contrary to common sense, or a more obvious piece of skepticism, than to believe there is no such thing as *matter*?

PHILONOUS D1.13 Gently, good Hylas. What if it turns out that you, who hold that there is, are by virtue of that opinion a greater skeptic, and maintain more paradoxes and contradictions of common sense, than I, who believe no such thing?

HYLAS D1.14 You could sooner persuade me that the part is greater than the whole than that, to avoid absurdity and skepticism, I should ever be obliged to give up my opinion on this point.

PHILONOUS D1.15 Well then, are you willing to accept as true whichever opinion, on examination, turns out to agree best with common sense and to be furthest from skepticism?

HYLAS D1.16 With all my heart. Since you want to raise disputes about the plainest things in nature, I'm willing for once to hear what you have to say.

PHILONOUS D1.17 Tell me, Hylas, what do you mean by a *skeptic*?

HYLAS D1.18 I mean what everyone means: someone who doubts everything.

PHILONOUS D1.19 Then someone who has no doubt about some particular point can't be considered a skeptic with regard to that point.

HYLAS D1.20 I agree.

PHILONOUS D1.21 Does doubting consist in embracing the affirmative or the negative side of a question?

HYLAS D1.22 Neither. Anyone who understands English knows that *doubting* means being suspended between the two.

PHILONOUS D1.23 Then someone who denies a point can no more be said to doubt it than someone who affirms it with the same degree of confidence.

HYLAS D1.24 True.

PHILONOUS D1.25 And so, for his denial, he is no more to be counted a skeptic than the other.

HYLAS D1.26 I admit it.

PHILONOUS D1.27 How is it, then, Hylas, that you declare me a *skeptic* because I deny what you affirm, namely, the existence of matter? For all you know, I am as firm in my denial as you are in your affirmation.

HYLAS D1.28 Wait, Philonous, I was a little off in my definition; but not every false step a man makes in argument should be held against him. I did say that a *skeptic* was someone who doubted everything; but I should have added: or who denies the reality and truth of things.

PHILONOUS D1.29 What things? Do you mean the principles and theorems of the sciences? But these, as you know, are universal intellectual notions, and so are independent of matter. So denying matter doesn't imply denying them.

HYLAS D1.30 I grant that. But are there no other things? What about distrusting the senses, denying the real existence of sensible things, or claiming to know nothing about them? Isn't that enough to call a man a *skeptic*?

PHILONOUS D1.31 Shall we examine, then, which of us is the one who denies the reality of sensible things, or professes the greatest ignorance of them? Since, if I understand you rightly, he is to be counted the greater *skeptic*.

HYLAS D1.32 That's what I want.

PHILONOUS D1.33 What do you mean by sensible things?

HYLAS D1.34 Things that are perceived by the senses. Can you imagine I mean anything else?

PHILONOUS [D1.35] Forgive me, Hylas, if I want to grasp your notions clearly, since that may shorten our inquiry a great deal. So let me ask you a further question. Are only those things perceived by the senses that are perceived immediately? Or can things properly be called *sensible* that are perceived mediately, that is, only through the intervention of other things?

HYLAS [D1.36] I don't quite understand you.

PHILONOUS [D1.37] When I read a book, what I immediately perceive are the letters; but mediately, or by means of these, the notions of God, virtue, truth, and so on are suggested to my mind. Now, there's no doubt that the letters are truly sensible things, or perceived by sense. But I'd like to know whether you take the things they suggest to be sensible too.

HYLAS [D1.38] Certainly not. It would be absurd to think *God* or *virtue* sensible things, though they may be signified and suggested to the mind by sensible marks, with which they have an arbitrary connection.

PHILONOUS [D1.39] It seems, then, that by *sensible things* you mean only those that can be perceived *immediately* by sense?

HYLAS [D1.40] Right.

PHILONOUS [D1.41] Doesn't it follow from this that, though I see one part of the sky red and another blue, and my reason clearly concludes from this that there must be some cause of that difference in colors, still that cause can't be called a sensible thing, or said to be perceived by the sense of sight?

HYLAS [D1.42] It does.

PHILONOUS [D1.43] In the same way, though I hear a variety of sounds, I can't be said to hear the causes of those sounds?

HYLAS [D1.44] You can't.

PHILONOUS [D1.45] And when by touch I perceive a thing to be hot and heavy, I can't say with any truth or accuracy that I feel the cause of its heat or weight?

HYLAS D1.46 To head off any more questions of this kind, I'll tell you once and for all that by *sensible things* I mean only those that are perceived by sense, and that in truth the senses perceive nothing they don't perceive *immediately*, for they make no inferences. So deducing causes or occasions from effects and appearances, which alone are perceived by sense, belongs entirely to reason.

PHILONOUS D1.47 This point, then, is agreed between us: that *sensible things are only those that are immediately perceived by sense*. Now tell me further whether we immediately perceive by sight anything besides light, colors and shapes; or by hearing, anything but sounds; by the palate, anything besides tastes; by smell, anything besides odors; or by touch, anything more than tangible qualities.

HYLAS D1.48 We don't.

PHILONOUS D1.49 It seems, then, that if you take away all sensible qualities, nothing sensible remains?

HYLAS D1.50 I grant it.

PHILONOUS D1.51 So sensible things are nothing but so many sensible qualities, or combinations of sensible qualities?

HYLAS D1.52 Nothing else.

HEAT AND PAIN

Philonous argues that intense heat is a kind of pain, so it cannot exist in an unperceiving substance.

PHILONOUS D1.53 *Heat*, then, is a sensible thing?

HYLAS D1.54 Certainly.

PHILONOUS D1.55 Does the *reality* of sensible things consist in their being perceived? Or is it something distinct from their being perceived, something with no relation to the mind?

HYLAS D1.56 To *exist* is one thing, and to be *perceived* is another.

PHILONOUS [D1.57] I'm speaking only of sensible things. And about these I ask whether by their real existence you mean an existence outside the mind, distinct from their being perceived?

HYLAS [D1.58] I mean a real, absolute being, distinct from their being perceived and without any relation to it.

PHILONOUS [D1.59] So heat, if it is granted a real being, must exist outside the mind?

HYLAS [D1.60] It must.

PHILONOUS [D1.61] Tell me, Hylas: is this real existence equally compatible with every degree of heat we perceive? Or is there any reason why we should attribute it to some degrees and deny it to others? And if there is, please tell me that reason.

HYLAS [D1.62] Whatever degree of heat we perceive by sense, we can be sure the same exists in the object that causes it.

PHILONOUS [D1.63] What! The greatest as well as the least?

HYLAS [D1.64] I tell you, the reasoning is plainly the same for both. They are both perceived by sense. In fact, the greater degree of heat is perceived more intensely; so if there is any difference, we are more certain of its real existence than we can be of the reality of a lesser degree.

PHILONOUS [D1.65] But isn't the most violent and intense degree of heat a very great pain?

HYLAS [D1.66] No one can deny it.

PHILONOUS [D1.67] And is any unperceiving thing capable of pain or pleasure?

HYLAS [D1.68] Certainly not.

PHILONOUS [D1.69] Is your material substance a senseless being, or a being endowed with sense and perception?

HYLAS [D1.70] It is senseless, no doubt.

PHILONOUS [D1.71] So it can't be the subject of pain?

HYLAS [D1.72] By no means.

PHILONOUS [D1.73] And so not of the greatest heat perceived by sense either, since you admit that this is no small pain?

HYLAS [D1.74] I grant it.

PHILONOUS [D1.75] What shall we say, then, of your external object? Is it a material substance or not?

HYLAS [D1.76] It is a material substance with the sensible qualities inhering in it.

PHILONOUS [D1.77] How, then, can a great heat exist in it, since you admit that it can't exist in a material substance? I'd like you to clear up this point.

HYLAS [D1.78] Wait, Philonous, I'm afraid I was wrong to concede that intense heat is a pain. It would seem, rather, that pain is something distinct from heat, a consequence or effect of it.

PHILONOUS [D1.79] When you put your hand near the fire, do you perceive one simple, uniform sensation, or two distinct sensations?

HYLAS [D1.80] Just one simple sensation.

PHILONOUS [D1.81] Isn't the heat immediately perceived?

HYLAS [D1.82] It is.

PHILONOUS [D1.83] And the pain?

HYLAS [D1.84] True.

PHILONOUS [D1.85] Since, then, they are both immediately perceived at the same time, and the fire affects you with only one simple, uncompounded idea, it follows that this one simple idea is both the intense heat immediately perceived and the pain. Consequently, the intense heat immediately perceived is nothing distinct from a particular sort of pain.

HYLAS [D1.86] So it seems.

PHILONOUS [D1.87] Again, Hylas, try in your thoughts whether you can conceive of a violent sensation without pain or pleasure.

HYLAS [D1.88] I can't.

PHILONOUS [D1.89] Or can you form an idea of sensible pain or pleasure in general, abstracted from every particular idea of heat, cold, tastes, smells, and so on?

HYLAS [D1.90] I don't find that I can.

PHILONOUS [D1.91] Doesn't it follow, then, that sensible pain is nothing distinct from those sensations or ideas when they are at an intense degree?

HYLAS [D1.92] It's undeniable. And to tell the truth, I'm beginning to suspect that a very great heat can't exist except in a mind that perceives it.

PHILONOUS [D1.93] What! Are you then in that skeptical state of suspense between affirming and denying?

HYLAS [D1.94] I think I can be definite on the point. A very violent and painful heat can't exist outside the mind.

PHILONOUS [D1.95] So, according to you, it has no *real* being?

HYLAS [D1.96] I admit it.

PHILONOUS [D1.97] Is it certain, then, that no body in nature is really hot?

HYLAS [D1.98] I haven't denied that there is any real heat in bodies. I only say there is no such thing as an intense real heat.

PHILONOUS [D1.99] But didn't you say before that all degrees of heat were equally real; or, if there was any difference, that the greater were more certainly real than the lesser?

HYLAS [D1.100] True; but that was because I hadn't then considered the grounds for distinguishing between them, which I now see plainly. It's this: since intense heat is nothing but a particular kind of painful sensation, and pain can't exist except in a perceiving being, it follows that no intense heat can really exist in an unperceiving corporeal substance. But that's no reason why we should deny that heat of a lower degree exists in such a substance.

PHILONOUS [D1.101] But how will we be able to tell the degrees of heat that exist only in the mind from those that exist outside it?

HYLAS D1.102 That's no hard matter. You know that even the least pain can't exist unperceived; so whatever degree of heat is a pain exists only in the mind. But as for all other degrees of heat, nothing obliges us to think the same of them.

PHILONOUS D1.103 I think you granted earlier that no unperceiving being is capable of pleasure, any more than of pain.

HYLAS D1.104 I did.

PHILONOUS D1.105 And isn't warmth, a gentler degree of heat than the kind that causes discomfort, a pleasure?

HYLAS D1.106 What of it?

PHILONOUS D1.107 Then it can't exist outside the mind, in an unperceiving substance or body.

HYLAS D1.108 So it seems.

PHILONOUS D1.109 Since, then, the degrees of heat that aren't painful, as well as those that are, can exist only in a thinking substance, may we not conclude that external bodies are absolutely incapable of any degree of heat whatever?

HYLAS D1.110 On second thought, I don't think it's as evident that warmth is a pleasure as that a great degree of heat is a pain.

PHILONOUS D1.111 I don't claim that warmth is as great a pleasure as heat is a pain. But if you grant that it is even a small pleasure, that's enough to establish my conclusion.

HYLAS D1.112 I would rather call it an *indolence*. It seems to be nothing more than the absence of both pain and pleasure. And I hope you won't deny that such a quality or state may belong to an unthinking substance.[2]

PHILONOUS D1.113 If you are determined to maintain that warmth, or a gentle degree of heat, is not a pleasure, I don't know how to convince you otherwise than by appealing to your own senses. But what do you think of cold?

2 "Indolence" here in its old sense: freedom from pain, a neutral state neither painful nor pleasant.

HYLAS D1.114 The same as I think of heat. An intense degree of cold is a pain, for to feel a very great cold is to perceive a great discomfort; so it can't exist outside the mind. But a lesser degree of cold may, just as a lesser degree of heat may.

PHILONOUS D1.115 Then those bodies which, when applied to our own, give us a sensation of moderate heat must be concluded to have a moderate degree of heat or warmth in them; and those which, when applied, make us feel a similar degree of cold must be thought to have cold in them.

HYLAS D1.116 They must.

PHILONOUS D1.117 Can any doctrine be true that necessarily leads a person into an absurdity?

HYLAS D1.118 Undoubtedly not.

PHILONOUS D1.119 Isn't it absurd to think that the same thing could be both cold and warm at the same time?

HYLAS D1.120 It is.

PHILONOUS D1.121 Now suppose one of your hands is hot and the other cold, and both are put at once into the same bowl of water at an intermediate temperature. Won't the water seem cold to one hand and warm to the other?

HYLAS D1.122 It will.

PHILONOUS D1.123 Shouldn't we then, by your principles, conclude that it is really both cold and warm at the same time, which is, by your own admission, to believe an absurdity?

HYLAS D1.124 I confess it seems so.

PHILONOUS D1.125 So the principles themselves are false, since you have granted that no true principle leads to an absurdity.

HYLAS D1.126 But after all, can anything be more absurd than to say *there is no heat in the fire*?

PHILONOUS D1.127 To make the point still clearer, tell me: in two cases exactly alike, shouldn't we make the same judgment?

HYLAS D1.128 We should.

PHILONOUS D1.129 When a pin pricks your finger, doesn't it tear and divide the fibers of your flesh?

HYLAS D1.130 It does.

PHILONOUS D1.131 And when a coal burns your finger, does it do anything more?

HYLAS D1.132 It doesn't.

PHILONOUS D1.133 Since, then, you don't judge that the sensation caused by the pin, or anything like it, is in the pin, you should not, in keeping with what you have just granted, judge that the sensation caused by the fire, or anything like it, is in the fire.

HYLAS D1.134 Well, since it must be so, I'm willing to give up this point and acknowledge that heat and cold are only sensations existing in our minds. But there are still enough qualities left to secure the reality of external things.

PHILONOUS D1.135 But what will you say, Hylas, if it turns out that the case is the same for all other sensible qualities, and that they can no more be supposed to exist outside the mind than heat and cold can?

HYLAS D1.136 Then you'll really have accomplished something; but I have no hope of seeing that proved.

TASTES, SMELLS AND SOUNDS

The argument extends to tastes and smells, and Hylas's account of sound as motion in air is refuted.

PHILONOUS D1.137 Let's examine them in order. What do you think of *tastes*? Do they exist outside the mind or not?

HYLAS D1.138 Can anyone in his right mind doubt that sugar is sweet, or wormwood bitter?[3]

PHILONOUS D1.139 Tell me, Hylas: is a sweet taste a particular kind of pleasure or pleasant sensation, or isn't it?

HYLAS D1.140 It is.

3 Wormwood: a notoriously bitter herb (used to flavor absinthe).

PHILONOUS D1.141 And isn't bitterness some kind of discomfort or pain?

HYLAS D1.142 I grant it.

PHILONOUS D1.143 If, then, sugar and wormwood are unthinking corporeal substances existing outside the mind, how can sweetness and bitterness, that is, pleasure and pain, belong to them?

HYLAS D1.144 Wait, Philonous, I now see what was misleading me all this time. You asked whether heat and cold, sweetness and bitterness, weren't particular sorts of pleasure and pain, and I answered simply that they were. But I should have made this distinction: those qualities, as perceived by us, are pleasures or pains, but not as they exist in the external objects. So we must not conclude outright that there is no heat in the fire or sweetness in the sugar, but only that heat or sweetness as perceived by us is not in the fire or the sugar. What do you say to this?

PHILONOUS D1.145 I say it's beside the point. Our discussion has been entirely about sensible things, which you defined as *the things we immediately perceive by our senses*. So whatever other qualities you speak of, as distinct from these, I know nothing of them, and they have nothing to do with the point in dispute. You may, of course, claim to have discovered certain qualities that you don't perceive, and assert that those insensible qualities exist in fire and sugar. But what use this can be to your present purpose, I can't imagine. So tell me once more: do you acknowledge that heat and cold, sweetness and bitterness (meaning the qualities that are perceived by the senses), do not exist outside the mind?

HYLAS D1.146 I see it's pointless to hold out, so I give up my case as far as those qualities are concerned. Though I admit it sounds odd to say that sugar isn't sweet.

PHILONOUS D1.147 But for your further satisfaction, take this with you as well: what at other times seems sweet will seem bitter to a sick palate. And nothing is plainer than that different people perceive different tastes in the same food, since what one

person delights in, another loathes. How could this be, if the taste were something really inherent in the food?

HYLAS D1.148 I admit I don't know how.

PHILONOUS D1.149 Next, we should consider *odors*. With regard to these, I'd very much like to know whether what has been said about tastes doesn't apply to them exactly. Aren't they so many pleasing or displeasing sensations?

HYLAS D1.150 They are.

PHILONOUS D1.151 Can you conceive, then, that they could exist in an unperceiving thing?

HYLAS D1.152 I can't.

PHILONOUS D1.153 Or can you imagine that filth and dung affect the animals that choose to feed on them with the same smells that we perceive in them?

HYLAS D1.154 By no means.

PHILONOUS D1.155 May we not conclude, then, of smells, as of the other qualities already mentioned, that they can't exist in anything but a perceiving substance or mind?

HYLAS D1.156 I think so.

PHILONOUS D1.157 Now as to *sounds*, what are we to think of them? Are they accidents really inherent in external bodies, or not?

HYLAS D1.158 That they don't inhere in the bodies that make the sound is plain from this: a bell struck inside the evacuated chamber of an air pump gives off no sound. So the air must be considered the subject of sound.[4]

PHILONOUS D1.159 What reason is there for that, Hylas?

HYLAS D1.160 Because whenever any motion is set up in the air, we perceive a sound, louder or softer according to the air's

4 The air-pump experiment, made famous by Robert Boyle in the 1660s: a bell ringing in a jar from which the air has been pumped out cannot be heard.

motion; but without some motion in the air, we never hear any sound at all.

PHILONOUS [D1.161] Even granting that we never hear a sound except when some motion is produced in the air, I still don't see how you can infer from this that the sound itself is in the air.

HYLAS [D1.162] It is this very motion in the external air that produces in the mind the sensation of *sound*. For it strikes the eardrum and causes a vibration, which is communicated to the brain by the auditory nerves; the soul is then affected with the sensation called *sound*.

PHILONOUS [D1.163] What! Is sound, then, a sensation?

HYLAS [D1.164] I tell you, as perceived by us, it is a particular sensation in the mind.

PHILONOUS [D1.165] And can any sensation exist outside the mind?

HYLAS [D1.166] Certainly not.

PHILONOUS [D1.167] How, then, can sound, being a sensation, exist in the air, if by the *air* you mean a senseless substance existing outside the mind?

HYLAS [D1.168] You must distinguish, Philonous, between sound as it is perceived by us and sound as it is in itself; or (which is the same thing) between the sound we immediately perceive and the sound that exists outside us. The first is indeed a particular kind of sensation, but the second is merely a vibrating or wave-like motion in the air.

PHILONOUS [D1.169] I thought I had already disposed of that distinction with the answer I gave when you applied it to a similar case earlier. But, to say no more about that, are you sure, then, that sound is really nothing but motion?

HYLAS [D1.170] I am.

PHILONOUS [D1.171] Then whatever belongs to real sound may truly be attributed to motion?

HYLAS [D1.172] It may.

PHILONOUS D1.173 Then it makes good sense to speak of *motion* as a thing that is *loud, sweet, high or low*.

HYLAS D1.174 I see you're determined not to understand me. Isn't it obvious that those accidents or modes belong only to sensible sound, or *sound* in the common meaning of the word, but not to *sound* in the real and philosophical sense, which, as I just told you, is nothing but a certain motion of the air?

PHILONOUS D1.175 It seems, then, that there are two sorts of sound: the one ordinary, the sound that is heard; the other philosophical and real?

HYLAS D1.176 Just so.

PHILONOUS D1.177 And the latter consists in motion?

HYLAS D1.178 I told you so already.

PHILONOUS D1.179 Tell me, Hylas, to which of the senses do you think the idea of motion belongs? To hearing?

HYLAS D1.180 Certainly not; to sight and touch.

PHILONOUS D1.181 It would follow, then, that according to you real sounds may possibly be *seen* or *felt*, but never *heard*.

HYLAS D1.182 Look, Philonous, you can make a joke of my opinion if you like, but that won't change the truth of things. I admit that the inferences you lead me into sound rather odd. But ordinary language, you know, is made by ordinary people and for their use; so we shouldn't be surprised if expressions suited to exact philosophical notions seem strange and out of the way.

PHILONOUS D1.183 Has it come to that? I assure you I think I've gained no small point, since you think so little of departing from common expressions and opinions; for a main part of our inquiry is to find out whose notions stray furthest from the common road and most contradict the general sense of the world. But can you really think it no more than a philosophical paradox to say that *real sounds are never heard*, and that we get the idea of them through some other sense? Is there nothing in this contrary to nature and the truth of things?

HYLAS D1.184 To be honest, I don't like it. And after the concessions I've already made, I might as well grant that sounds, too, have no real being outside the mind.

COLORS

Hylas calls some colors only apparent, then places them in light; Philonous shows no color exists outside the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.185 And I hope you'll have no difficulty acknowledging the same of *colors*.

HYLAS D1.186 Forgive me, but the case of colors is very different. Can anything be plainer than that we see them on the objects?

PHILONOUS D1.187 The objects you speak of are, I suppose, corporeal substances existing outside the mind?

HYLAS D1.188 They are.

PHILONOUS D1.189 And they have true and real colors inhering in them?

HYLAS D1.190 Each visible object has the color we see in it.

PHILONOUS D1.191 What! Is there anything visible except what we perceive by sight?

HYLAS D1.192 There isn't.

PHILONOUS D1.193 And do we perceive anything by sense that we don't perceive immediately?

HYLAS D1.194 How many times must I repeat the same thing? I tell you, we don't.

PHILONOUS D1.195 Be patient, good Hylas, and tell me once more whether anything is immediately perceived by the senses except sensible qualities. I know you asserted there was not; but I'd like to know now whether you still hold the same opinion.

HYLAS D1.196 I do.

PHILONOUS D1.197 Tell me, is your corporeal substance either a sensible quality or made up of sensible qualities?

HYLAS D1.198 What a question! Who ever thought it was?

PHILONOUS D1.199 My reason for asking was this. In saying that *each visible object has the color we see in it*, you make visible objects corporeal substances. That implies either that corporeal substances are sensible qualities, or else that something besides sensible qualities is perceived by sight. But since that point was agreed between us earlier, and you still maintain it, it clearly follows that your *corporeal substance* is nothing distinct from *sensible qualities*.

HYLAS D1.200 You can draw as many absurd consequences as you like and try to confuse the plainest things; but you'll never argue me out of my senses. I understand my own meaning clearly.

PHILONOUS D1.201 I wish you would make me understand it too. But since you are unwilling to have your notion of corporeal substance examined, I won't press that point any further. Only be so good as to tell me whether the same colors that we see exist in external bodies, or some other colors.

HYLAS D1.202 The very same.

PHILONOUS D1.203 What! Then are the beautiful red and purple we see on those clouds over there really in them? Or do you imagine they have in themselves any other form than that of a dark mist or vapor?

HYLAS D1.204 I must admit, Philonous, that those colors aren't really in the clouds as they seem to be from this distance. They are only apparent colors.

PHILONOUS D1.205 *Apparent*, you call them? How are we to tell these apparent colors from real ones?

HYLAS D1.206 Very easily. Those are to be considered apparent which appear only at a distance and vanish when we come closer.

PHILONOUS D1.207 And those, I suppose, are to be considered real which are revealed by the closest and most exact examination.

HYLAS D1.208 Right.

PHILONOUS D1.209 Is the closest and most exact examination made with the help of a microscope, or with the naked eye?

HYLAS D1.210 With a microscope, no doubt.

PHILONOUS D1.211 But a microscope often reveals colors in an object different from those perceived by unaided sight. And if we had microscopes that magnified to any degree we chose, it is certain that no object whatever, viewed through them, would appear the same color it shows to the naked eye.

HYLAS D1.212 And what will you conclude from all this? You can't argue that there are really and naturally no colors on objects just because they can be altered or made to vanish by artificial means.

PHILONOUS D1.213 I think it can clearly be concluded from your own concessions that all the colors we see with our naked eyes are only apparent, like those on the clouds, since they vanish on the closer and more accurate inspection a microscope gives us. Then, as to the objection you raised in advance: I ask you whether the real and natural state of an object is better revealed by a very sharp and piercing sight, or by one that is less sharp?

HYLAS D1.214 By the former, without doubt.

PHILONOUS D1.215 Isn't it plain from *optics* that microscopes make sight more penetrating, and represent objects as they would appear to the eye if it were naturally endowed with the most exquisite sharpness?[5]

HYLAS D1.216 It is.

PHILONOUS D1.217 So the microscopic image is to be regarded as the one that best shows the real nature of the thing, or what it is in itself. The colors perceived through it, therefore, are more genuine and real than those perceived otherwise.

HYLAS D1.218 I admit there is something in what you say.

PHILONOUS D1.219 Besides, it is not only possible but obvious that there actually are animals whose eyes are made by nature

to perceive things that escape our sight because they are so tiny. What do you think of those inconceivably small animals seen through lenses? Must we suppose they are all completely blind? Or, if they do see, can we imagine that their sight doesn't serve the same purpose of protecting their bodies from harm that we observe in all other animals? And if it does, isn't it evident that they must see particles smaller than their own bodies, which will give them a far different view of every object from the one that strikes our senses? Even our own eyes don't always present objects to us in the same way. Everyone knows that in jaundice all things look yellow. Isn't it highly probable, then, that those animals in whose eyes we observe a structure very different from ours, and whose bodies are full of different fluids, do not see the same colors in every object that we do? From all this, shouldn't it seem to follow that all colors are equally apparent, and that none of those we perceive is really inherent in any external object?

HYLAS D1.220 It should.

PHILONOUS D1.221 The point will be beyond all doubt if you consider this. If colors were real properties or qualities inherent in external bodies, they could not change without some change being made in the bodies themselves. But isn't it evident from what has been said that when we use microscopes, or when some change happens in the fluids of the eye, or the distance varies, the colors of an object either change or disappear entirely, without any real alteration at all in the thing itself? Indeed, with all other circumstances the same, just change the position of some objects and they will present different colors to the eye. The same thing happens when we view an object in various degrees of light. And what is better known than that the same bodies look differently colored by candlelight than they do in broad daylight? Add to these the experiment with a prism, which, by separating the different rays of light, alters the color

5 Berkeley's word is *Dioptrics*, the branch of optics dealing with refraction through lenses.

of any object and will make the whitest one appear deep blue or red to the naked eye. And now tell me whether you still think that every body has its true, real color inhering in it. And if you think it does, I would very much like to know further from you what particular distance and position of the object, what special structure and formation of the eye, and what degree or kind of light are needed to determine that true color and distinguish it from the apparent ones.

HYLAS D1.222 I admit I'm entirely satisfied that they are all equally apparent, and that there is no such thing as color really inhering in external bodies, but that it is entirely in the light. What confirms me in this opinion is that colors are always more or less vivid in proportion to the light, and if there is no light, no colors are perceived. Besides, even granting that there are colors on external objects, how could we possibly perceive them? For no external body affects the mind unless it first acts on our sense organs. But the only action of bodies is motion, and motion can't be communicated except by impact. So a distant object can't act on the eye, nor, consequently, make itself or its properties perceptible to the soul. From this it plainly follows that it is some substance immediately in contact with the eye which, by acting on it, causes a perception of colors; and such a substance is light.

PHILONOUS D1.223 What! Is light, then, a substance?

HYLAS D1.224 I tell you, Philonous, external light is nothing but a thin fluid substance whose tiny particles, agitated by a rapid motion and reflected in various ways from the different surfaces of external objects to the eyes, communicate different motions to the optic nerves. These motions, carried to the brain, cause various impressions there; and these are accompanied by the sensations of red, blue, yellow, and so on.

PHILONOUS D1.225 It seems, then, that light does no more than shake the optic nerves.

HYLAS D1.226 Nothing more.

PHILONOUS D1.227 And following each particular motion of the nerves, the mind is affected with a sensation, which is some particular color.

HYLAS D1.228 Right.

PHILONOUS D1.229 And these sensations have no existence outside the mind.

HYLAS D1.230 They don't.

PHILONOUS D1.231 How, then, can you maintain that colors are in the light, since by *light* you understand a corporeal substance external to the mind?

HYLAS D1.232 Light and colors, as immediately perceived by us, I grant cannot exist outside the mind. But in themselves they are only the motions and configurations of certain imperceptible particles of matter.

PHILONOUS D1.233 Colors, then, in the ordinary sense, or taken as the immediate objects of sight, can belong only to a perceiving substance.

HYLAS D1.234 That's what I say.

PHILONOUS D1.235 Well then, since you give up the point about those sensible qualities which everyone else in the world takes to be colors, you may hold whatever you like about the invisible ones of the philosophers. It's not my business to dispute about *them*. I would only advise you to consider whether, given the inquiry we are engaged in, it is wise for you to assert that *the red and blue we see are not real colors, but that certain unknown motions and shapes which no one ever did or can see are truly colors*. Aren't these shocking notions, and aren't they open to as many ridiculous inferences as the ones you were forced to give up earlier in the case of sounds?

PRIMARY QUALITIES

Hylas falls back on extension, shape and motion; Philonous shows they vary with the perceiver just as colors do.

HYLAS D1.236 I frankly admit, Philonous, that it's useless to hold out any longer. Colors, sounds, tastes, in a word all those called *secondary qualities*, certainly have no existence outside the mind. But in acknowledging this I must not be thought to take anything away from the reality of matter or external objects, since it is no more than several philosophers maintain who are nevertheless as far as can be from denying matter. To understand this more clearly, you should know that philosophers divide sensible qualities into *primary* and *secondary*. The primary are extension, shape, solidity, gravity, motion and rest; and these, they hold, really exist in bodies.[6] The secondary are those listed above; or, briefly, *all sensible qualities besides the primary*. These, they assert, are only so many sensations or ideas existing nowhere but in the mind. But I have no doubt you are aware of all this. For my part, I have long known that such an opinion was current among philosophers, but I was never thoroughly convinced of its truth until now.

PHILONOUS D1.237 So you still think that *extension* and *shape* are inherent in external, unthinking substances?

HYLAS D1.238 I do.

PHILONOUS D1.239 But what if the same arguments that are brought against secondary qualities hold good against these as well?

HYLAS D1.240 Why, then I'd be obliged to think that they too exist only in the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.241 Is it your view that the very shape and extension you perceive by sense exist in the outward object, or material substance?

6 The distinction, owed to Galileo, Descartes, Boyle and above all Locke (*Essay* II.viii), is the main target of the rest of this Dialogue.

HYLAS D1.242 It is.

PHILONOUS D1.243 Do all other animals have just as good grounds to think the same about the shape and extension that they see and feel?

HYLAS D1.244 No doubt, if they have any thoughts at all.

PHILONOUS D1.245 Answer me, Hylas. Do you think the senses were given to all animals for their preservation and well-being in life? Or were they given to human beings alone for this purpose?

HYLAS D1.246 I have no doubt that they serve the same purpose in all other animals.

PHILONOUS D1.247 If so, must they not be enabled by their senses to perceive their own limbs, and the bodies that are capable of harming them?

HYLAS D1.248 Certainly.

PHILONOUS D1.249 Then a mite must be supposed to see its own foot, and things equal to it or even smaller, as bodies of considerable size, even though to you they appear barely visible, or at best as so many visible points?

HYLAS D1.250 I can't deny it.

PHILONOUS D1.251 And to creatures smaller than the mite they will seem larger still?

HYLAS D1.252 They will.

PHILONOUS D1.253 So that what you can hardly make out will look to some other, extremely tiny animal like a huge mountain?

HYLAS D1.254 All this I grant.

PHILONOUS D1.255 Can one and the same thing, in itself, be of different sizes at the same time?

HYLAS D1.256 That would be absurd to imagine.

PHILONOUS D1.257 But from what you have laid down it follows that the extension you perceive, and the extension the mite itself perceives, as well as all those perceived by still smaller

animals, are each of them the true extension of the mite's foot. In other words, your own principles have led you into an absurdity.

HYLAS D1.258 There does seem to be some difficulty on this point.

PHILONOUS D1.259 Again, haven't you acknowledged that no real, inherent property of an object can be changed without some change in the thing itself?

HYLAS D1.260 I have.

PHILONOUS D1.261 But as we approach an object or move away from it, its visible extension varies, being ten or a hundred times greater at one distance than at another. Doesn't it likewise follow from this that extension is not really inherent in the object?

HYLAS D1.262 I admit I'm at a loss what to think.

PHILONOUS D1.263 You will soon make up your mind, if you are willing to think as freely about this quality as you have about the rest. Didn't we accept as a good argument that neither heat nor cold was in the water, because it seemed warm to one hand and cold to the other?

HYLAS D1.264 We did.

PHILONOUS D1.265 Isn't it exactly the same reasoning to conclude that there is no extension or shape in an object, because to one eye it seems small, smooth, and round, while at the same time it appears to the other eye large, uneven, and angular?

HYLAS D1.266 Exactly the same. But does that ever actually happen?

PHILONOUS D1.267 You can try the experiment any time you like, by looking at something with one eye bare and with the other through a microscope.

HYLAS D1.268 I don't know how to defend my position; and yet I'm reluctant to give up *extension*, since I see so many strange consequences following from such a concession.

PHILONOUS D1.269 Strange, you say? After the concessions you have already made, I hope you will not balk at anything merely because it is strange. But on the other hand, wouldn't it seem very strange if the general reasoning that covers all other sensible qualities did not cover extension as well? If it is granted that no idea, nor anything like an idea, can exist in a substance that does not perceive, then surely it follows that no shape, or mode of extension, that we can perceive, or imagine, or have any idea of, can really be inherent in matter. And that is not to mention the special difficulty there must be in conceiving of a material substance, prior to and distinct from extension, as the *substratum* of extension. Whatever the sensible quality may be—shape, or sound, or color—it seems equally impossible that it should exist in something that doesn't perceive it.

HYLAS D1.270 I give up the point for now, while still reserving the right to retract my opinion if I later discover some false step on the way to it.

PHILONOUS D1.271 That is a right no one can deny you. Having dealt with shape and extension, we move on next to *motion*. Can a real motion in an external body be both very fast and very slow at the same time?

HYLAS D1.272 It can't.

PHILONOUS D1.273 Isn't the speed of a body's motion inversely proportional to the time it takes to cover a given distance? So a body that covers a mile in an hour moves three times faster than it would if it covered only a mile in three hours.

HYLAS D1.274 I agree with you.

PHILONOUS D1.275 And isn't time measured by the succession of ideas in our minds?

HYLAS D1.276 It is.

PHILONOUS D1.277 And isn't it possible that ideas should succeed one another twice as fast in your mind as in mine, or in the mind of some other kind of spirit?

HYLAS D1.278 I admit it.

PHILONOUS [D1.279] Consequently, the same body may seem to someone else to complete its motion over a given distance in half the time it seems to take for you. And the same reasoning holds for any other proportion. In other words, according to your principles (since both of the perceived motions are really in the object), it is possible for one and the same body to be really moving, in the same direction, both very fast and very slow at once. How is this consistent either with common sense, or with what you granted a moment ago?

HYLAS [D1.280] I have nothing to say to that.

PHILONOUS [D1.281] Then as for *solidity*: either you do not mean any sensible quality by that word, in which case it lies outside our inquiry; or if you do, it must be either hardness or resistance. But both of these are plainly relative to our senses. For it is evident that what seems hard to one animal may seem soft to another that has greater strength and firmness of limb. Nor is it any less plain that the resistance I feel is not in the body.

HYLAS [D1.282] I admit that the very *sensation* of resistance, which is all you immediately perceive, isn't in the body; but the *cause* of that sensation is.

PHILONOUS [D1.283] But the causes of our sensations are not things immediately perceived, and therefore they are not sensible. I thought this point had already been settled.

HYLAS [D1.284] I admit it was; but you will forgive me if I seem a little flustered. I don't know how to give up my old notions.

PHILONOUS [D1.285] To help you out, just consider this: once *extension* is acknowledged to have no existence outside the mind, the same must necessarily be granted of motion, solidity, and gravity, since they all obviously presuppose extension. So it is unnecessary to inquire into each of them separately. In denying extension, you have denied that any of them has real existence.

HYLAS [D1.286] If what you say is true, Philonous, I wonder why those philosophers who deny the secondary qualities any real

existence should still attribute it to the primary ones. If there is no difference between them, how can this be explained?

PHILONOUS D1.287 It is not my job to explain every opinion of the philosophers. But among other reasons that might be given for this, one probable reason is that pleasure and pain are attached to the secondary qualities rather than the primary. Heat and cold, tastes and smells, strike us as more vividly pleasant or unpleasant than the ideas of extension, shape, and motion do. And since it is too obviously absurd to hold that pain or pleasure can be in an unperceiving substance, people are more easily weaned from believing in the external existence of the secondary qualities than of the primary ones. You will be satisfied that there is something in this if you recall the difference you drew between an intense and a more moderate degree of heat, allowing the one a real existence while denying it to the other. But after all, there is no rational basis for that distinction. For surely a neutral sensation is just as truly *a sensation* as one that is more pleasant or painful; and consequently it should no more be supposed to exist in an unthinking subject than they are.

HYLAS D1.288 It has just occurred to me, Philonous, that I have heard somewhere of a distinction between absolute and sensible extension. Now, though it may be granted that *large* and *small*, which consist merely in the relation other extended beings have to the parts of our own bodies, do not really inhere in the substances themselves, nothing obliges us to hold the same about *absolute extension*, which is something abstracted from *large* and *small*, from this or that particular size or shape. The same goes for motion: *fast* and *slow* are entirely relative to the succession of ideas in our own minds. But it doesn't follow that, because those modifications of motion don't exist outside the mind, absolute motion abstracted from them doesn't either.

PHILONOUS D1.289 Tell me, what is it that distinguishes one motion, or one part of extension, from another? Isn't it something sensible, such as some degree of speed or slowness, some definite size or shape peculiar to each?

HYLAS D1.290 I think so.

PHILONOUS D1.291 So these qualities, stripped of all sensible properties, lack all specific and numerical differences, as the Schoolmen call them.

HYLAS D1.292 They do.

PHILONOUS D1.293 That is to say, they are extension in general and motion in general.

HYLAS D1.294 Let it be so.

PHILONOUS D1.295 But it is a universally accepted maxim that *everything that exists is particular*. How then can motion in general, or extension in general, exist in any corporeal substance?

HYLAS D1.296 I will need time to resolve your difficulty.

PHILONOUS D1.297 But I think the point can be settled quickly. No doubt you can tell whether or not you are able to form this or that idea. Now I am willing to let our dispute rest on this. If you can form in your thoughts a distinct *abstract idea* of motion or extension, stripped of all those sensible modes—fast and slow, large and small, round and square, and the like—which are admitted to exist only in the mind, then I will concede the point you are arguing for. But if you cannot, it will be unreasonable of you to go on insisting on something you have no notion of.

HYLAS D1.298 To be honest, I can't.

PHILONOUS D1.299 Can you even separate the ideas of extension and motion from the ideas of all those qualities that the people who make this distinction call *secondary*?

HYLAS D1.300 What! Isn't it easy to consider extension and motion by themselves, abstracted from all other sensible qualities? Tell me, how do mathematicians deal with them?

PHILONOUS D1.301 I grant, Hylas, that it is not difficult to form general propositions and reasonings about those qualities without mentioning any others, and in this sense to consider or deal with them abstractly. But how does it follow that, because I can pronounce the word *motion* by itself, I can form the idea of

it in my mind apart from body? Or, because theorems can be framed about extension and shapes without any mention of *large* or *small*, or any other sensible mode or quality, that it is therefore possible for the mind to form and grasp distinctly an abstract idea of extension without any particular size or shape or sensible quality? Mathematicians deal with quantity without regard to what other sensible qualities accompany it, since these are entirely irrelevant to their proofs. But when they set the words aside and contemplate the bare ideas, I believe you will find that these are not pure abstract ideas of extension.

HYLAS D1.302 But what do you say to *pure intellect*? Can abstract ideas not be formed by that faculty?

PHILONOUS D1.303 Since I cannot form abstract ideas at all, it is plain I cannot form them with the help of *pure intellect*, whatever faculty you mean by those words. Besides, without inquiring into the nature of pure intellect and its spiritual objects—*virtue*, *reason*, *God*, and the like—this much seems clear: sensible things can be perceived only by sense, or represented by the imagination. Shapes and extension, then, being originally perceived by sense, do not belong to pure intellect. But to satisfy yourself further, try whether you can form the idea of any shape abstracted from all particulars of size, or even from other sensible qualities.

HYLAS D1.304 Let me think a moment——I don't find that I can.

PHILONOUS D1.305 And do you think it possible for something to really exist in nature when the very conception of it involves a contradiction?

HYLAS D1.306 By no means.

PHILONOUS D1.307 Since, then, it is impossible even for the mind to separate the ideas of extension and motion from all other sensible qualities, doesn't it follow that where the one exists, the other necessarily exists as well?

HYLAS D1.308 It would seem so.

PHILONOUS D1.309 Consequently, the very same arguments you accepted as conclusive against the secondary qualities are, without any further pressing, conclusive against the primary ones too. Besides, if you trust your senses, isn't it plain that all sensible qualities coexist, or appear to the senses to be in the same place? Do the senses ever present a motion, or a shape, as stripped of all other visible and tangible qualities?

HYLAS D1.310 You need say no more on this head. I freely admit that, if there is no hidden error or oversight in our proceedings so far, *all* sensible qualities are equally to be denied existence outside the mind. But I fear that I have been too generous in my earlier concessions, or have overlooked some fallacy or other. In short, I did not take time to think.

PHILONOUS D1.311 As to that, Hylas, you may take as much time as you like to review the course of our inquiry. You are free to correct any slips you may have made, or to bring forward anything you have left out that supports your original opinion.

OBJECT AND SENSATION

Hylas separates the act of perceiving from its object, a tulip; Philonous shows that perceiving is passive.

HYLAS D1.312 One great oversight, I think, is this: I did not sufficiently distinguish the *object* from the *sensation*. Now, though the sensation may not exist outside the mind, it does not follow that the object cannot.

PHILONOUS D1.313 What object do you mean? The object of the senses?

HYLAS D1.314 That very one.

PHILONOUS D1.315 Then it is immediately perceived?

HYLAS D1.316 Right.

PHILONOUS D1.317 Help me understand the difference between what is immediately perceived and a sensation.

HYLAS D1.318 The sensation, I take it, is an act of the mind perceiving; and besides this there is something perceived, which I call the *object*. For example, there is red and yellow on that tulip. But the act of perceiving those colors is in me only, and not in the tulip.

PHILONOUS D1.319 What tulip are you talking about? The one you see?

HYLAS D1.320 That very one.

PHILONOUS D1.321 And what do you see besides color, shape, and extension?

HYLAS D1.322 Nothing.

PHILONOUS D1.323 What you mean, then, is that the red and yellow coexist with the extension—is that it?

HYLAS D1.324 That isn't all. I'd say they have a real existence outside the mind, in some unthinking substance.

PHILONOUS D1.325 That the colors are really in the tulip I see is obvious. Nor can it be denied that this tulip may exist independently of your mind or mine. But that any immediate object of the senses—that is, any idea, or combination of ideas—should exist in an unthinking substance, or outside *all* minds, is in itself an evident contradiction. Nor can I imagine how this follows from what you said just now, namely, that the red and yellow were on the tulip *you saw*, since you do not claim to *see* that unthinking substance.

HYLAS D1.326 You have a crafty way, Philonous, of steering our inquiry away from the subject.

PHILONOUS D1.327 I see you do not care to be pressed on that front. To return, then, to your distinction between *sensation* and *object*: if I understand you, you distinguish two things in every perception, one an action of the mind, the other not.

HYLAS D1.328 True.

PHILONOUS [D1.329] And this action can't exist in, or belong to, any unthinking thing; but whatever else is involved in a perception may?

HYLAS [D1.330] That's what I mean.

PHILONOUS [D1.331] So if there were a perception without any act of the mind, it would be possible for such a perception to exist in an unthinking substance?

HYLAS [D1.332] I grant it. But there can't be such a perception.

PHILONOUS [D1.333] When is the mind said to be active?

HYLAS [D1.334] When it produces, puts an end to, or changes something.

PHILONOUS [D1.335] Can the mind produce, stop, or change anything except by an act of the will?

HYLAS [D1.336] It can't.

PHILONOUS [D1.337] So the mind is to be considered *active* in its perceptions just insofar as *volition* is included in them?

HYLAS [D1.338] It is.

PHILONOUS [D1.339] In picking this flower I am active, because I do it by the motion of my hand, which followed from my volition; and likewise in lifting it to my nose. But is either of these smelling?

HYLAS [D1.340] No.

PHILONOUS [D1.341] I am also acting when I draw air in through my nose, because my breathing this way rather than some other way is the effect of my volition. But this cannot be called *smelling* either; for if it were, I would smell every time I breathed that way, wouldn't I?

HYLAS [D1.342] True.

PHILONOUS [D1.343] So smelling is something that follows after all this?

HYLAS [D1.344] It is.

PHILONOUS D1.345 But I do not find my will involved any further. Whatever more there is—such as my perceiving this particular smell, or any smell at all—is independent of my will, and in that respect I am entirely passive. Do you find it any different in your own case, Hylas?

HYLAS D1.346 No, exactly the same.

PHILONOUS D1.347 Then, as to seeing: isn't it in your power to open your eyes or keep them shut, to turn them this way or that?

HYLAS D1.348 No doubt.

PHILONOUS D1.349 But does it depend in the same way on *your* will that, in looking at this flower, you perceive *white* rather than some other color? Or, if you direct your open eyes toward that part of the sky over there, can you avoid seeing the sun? Or are light and darkness the effect of your volition?

HYLAS D1.350 Certainly not.

PHILONOUS D1.351 Then in these respects you are entirely passive?

HYLAS D1.352 I am.

PHILONOUS D1.353 Now tell me: does *seeing* consist in perceiving light and colors, or in opening and turning the eyes?

HYLAS D1.354 In the former, no doubt.

PHILONOUS D1.355 Since, then, you are entirely passive in the very perception of light and colors, what has become of that action you were speaking of as an ingredient in every sensation? And doesn't it follow from your own concessions that the perception of light and colors, since it includes no action, may exist in an unperceiving substance? And isn't that a plain contradiction?

HYLAS D1.356 I don't know what to think of it.

PHILONOUS D1.357 Besides, since you distinguish the *active* and the *passive* in every perception, you must do so in the perception of pain. But how is it possible for pain, however little active you make it, to exist in an unperceiving substance? In short, just

consider the point, and then honestly admit whether light and colors, tastes, sounds, and so on, are not all equally passions or sensations in the soul. You may indeed call them *external objects*, and give them in words whatever independent existence you like. But examine your own thoughts, and then tell me whether it is not as I say.

MATERIAL SUBSTRATUM

Hylas says qualities need a material support, but cannot explain what supporting them means.

HYLAS D1.358 I acknowledge, Philonous, that when I fairly observe what goes on in my mind, I can find nothing but that I am a thinking being, affected by a variety of sensations; nor is it possible to conceive how a sensation could exist in an unperceiving substance.—But then, on the other hand, when I look at sensible things from a different angle, considering them as so many modes and qualities, I find it necessary to suppose a *material substratum*, without which they cannot be conceived to exist.

PHILONOUS D1.359 *Material substratum*, you call it? Tell me, by which of your senses did you become acquainted with that being?

HYLAS D1.360 It isn't itself sensible; only its modes and qualities are perceived by the senses.

PHILONOUS D1.361 Then I suppose it was by reflection and reason that you obtained the idea of it?

HYLAS D1.362 I don't claim to have any proper, positive *idea* of it. Still, I conclude that it exists, because qualities can't be conceived to exist without a support.

PHILONOUS D1.363 It seems, then, that you have only a relative *notion* of it: you conceive it only by conceiving the relation it bears to sensible qualities?

HYLAS D1.364 Right.

PHILONOUS [D1.365] Then please tell me what that relation consists in.

HYLAS [D1.366] Isn't it adequately expressed by the term *substratum*, or *substance*?

PHILONOUS [D1.367] If so, the word *substratum* should mean that it is spread out under the sensible qualities or accidents?

HYLAS [D1.368] True.

PHILONOUS [D1.369] And consequently under extension?

HYLAS [D1.370] I admit it.

PHILONOUS [D1.371] So it is something entirely distinct from extension in its own nature?

HYLAS [D1.372] I tell you, extension is only a mode, and matter is something that supports modes. And isn't it evident that the thing supported is different from the thing supporting it?

PHILONOUS [D1.373] So something distinct from extension, and excluding it, is supposed to be the *substratum* of extension?

HYLAS [D1.374] Just so.

PHILONOUS [D1.375] Answer me, Hylas. Can a thing be spread out without extension? Or isn't the idea of extension necessarily included in *spreading*?

HYLAS [D1.376] It is.

PHILONOUS [D1.377] Then whatever you suppose to be spread under something must have in itself an extension distinct from the extension of the thing it is spread under?

HYLAS [D1.378] It must.

PHILONOUS [D1.379] Consequently, every corporeal substance, being the *substratum* of extension, must have in itself another extension, which qualifies it to be a *substratum*—and so on to infinity? And I ask whether this is not absurd in itself, and contrary to what you granted a moment ago, namely, that the *substratum* was something distinct from extension and excluding it?

HYLAS D1.380 Ah, but Philonous, you misunderstand me. I do not mean that matter is *spread* under extension in a crude, literal sense. The word *substratum* is used only to express in general the same thing as *substance*.

PHILONOUS D1.381 Well then, let us examine the relation implied in the term *substance*. Isn't it that it stands under accidents?

HYLAS D1.382 Exactly that.

PHILONOUS D1.383 But for one thing to stand under or support another, mustn't it be extended?

HYLAS D1.384 It must.

PHILONOUS D1.385 Then isn't this supposition open to the same absurdity as the previous one?

HYLAS D1.386 You are still taking things in a strict, literal sense. That isn't fair, Philonous.

PHILONOUS D1.387 I have no wish to impose any meaning on your words; you are free to explain them however you like. Only, I beg you, make me understand something by them. You tell me matter supports or stands under accidents. How? Is it the way your legs support your body?

HYLAS D1.388 No; that is the literal sense.

PHILONOUS D1.389 Then please tell me any sense, literal or not, in which you understand it.—How long must I wait for an answer, Hylas?

HYLAS D1.390 I confess I do not know what to say. I once thought I understood well enough what was meant by matter's supporting accidents. But now, the more I think about it, the less I can grasp it. In short, I find that I know nothing about it.

PHILONOUS D1.391 It seems, then, that you have no idea of matter at all, neither relative nor positive; you know neither what it is in itself, nor what relation it bears to accidents?

HYLAS D1.392 I acknowledge it.

PHILONOUS D1.393 And yet you claimed that you could not conceive how qualities or accidents could really exist without at the same time conceiving a material support for them?

HYLAS D1.394 I did.

PHILONOUS D1.395 That is to say, when you conceive the *real* existence of qualities, you also conceive something that you can't conceive?

THE UNPERCEIVED TREE

Hylas tries to conceive a tree existing unperceived, and sight's sense of distance; both fail.

HYLAS D1.396 I admit that was wrong. But I still fear there is some fallacy or other. Tell me what you think of this. It has just occurred to me that the root of our whole mistake lies in your treating each quality by itself. Now, I grant that no quality can exist alone outside the mind. Color cannot exist without extension, and shape cannot exist without some other sensible quality. But since the various qualities, united or blended together, make up whole sensible things, there is nothing to stop us from supposing that such things exist outside the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.397 Either you are joking, Hylas, or you have a very bad memory. It is true that we went through all the qualities by name, one after another; yet my arguments—or rather your concessions—were nowhere aimed at proving that the secondary qualities did not exist each alone by itself, but that they did not exist outside the mind *at all*. Indeed, in discussing shape and motion we concluded that they could not exist outside the mind because it was impossible, even in thought, to separate them from all secondary qualities so as to conceive them existing by themselves. But that was not the only argument used on that occasion. But (setting aside everything said so far, and counting it as nothing, if that is what you want) I am willing to let the whole question rest on this. If you can conceive it to be possible for any mixture or combination of qualities, or any

sensible object whatever, to exist outside the mind, then I will grant that it actually does.

HYLAS D1.398 If it comes to that, the point will soon be settled. What is easier than to conceive a tree or a house existing by itself, independent of any mind whatever and unperceived by it? I am conceiving them existing in that way right now.

PHILONOUS D1.399 Tell me, Hylas, can you see a thing that is at the same time unseen?

HYLAS D1.400 No, that would be a contradiction.

PHILONOUS D1.401 Isn't it just as great a contradiction to talk of *conceiving* a thing that is *unconceived*?

HYLAS D1.402 It is.

PHILONOUS D1.403 So the tree or house you are thinking of is conceived by you?

HYLAS D1.404 How could it be otherwise?

PHILONOUS D1.405 And what is conceived is surely in the mind?

HYLAS D1.406 Unquestionably, what is conceived is in the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.407 Then how did you come to say that you conceived a house or tree existing independently of all minds whatever, and outside them?

HYLAS D1.408 That was an oversight, I admit; but wait, let me consider what led me into it.—It is an amusing mistake, really. As I was thinking of a tree in a lonely place, where no one was present to see it, it seemed to me that this was to conceive a tree as existing unperceived or unthought of—not considering that I myself was conceiving it the whole time. But now I plainly see that all I can do is form ideas in my own mind. I can indeed conceive in my own thoughts the idea of a tree, or a house, or a mountain, but that is all. And this is far from proving that I can conceive them *existing outside the minds of all spirits*.

PHILONOUS D1.409 You acknowledge, then, that you can't possibly conceive how any corporeal, sensible thing could exist otherwise than in a mind?

HYLAS D1.410 I do.

PHILONOUS D1.411 And yet you will earnestly argue for the truth of something you can't even conceive?

HYLAS D1.412 I confess I don't know what to think; but some doubts still remain with me. Isn't it certain that I *see things at a distance*? Don't we perceive the stars and the moon, for example, to be a long way off? Isn't this, I say, obvious to the senses?

PHILONOUS D1.413 Don't you perceive those objects, or similar ones, in a dream too?

HYLAS D1.414 I do.

PHILONOUS D1.415 And don't they then have the same appearance of being distant?

HYLAS D1.416 They do.

PHILONOUS D1.417 But you don't conclude from this that the appearances in a dream are outside the mind?

HYLAS D1.418 By no means.

PHILONOUS D1.419 Then you ought not to conclude that sensible objects are outside the mind from their appearance, or from the way in which they are perceived.

HYLAS D1.420 I acknowledge it. But doesn't my sense deceive me in those cases?

PHILONOUS D1.421 Not at all. As for the idea or thing you immediately perceive, neither sense nor reason tells you that *it* actually exists outside the mind. By sense you know only that you are affected by certain particular sensations of light and colors, and so on. And these you will not say are outside the mind.

HYLAS D1.422 True; but beyond all that, don't you think that sight suggests something of *outness*, or *distance*?

PHILONOUS D1.423 As you approach a distant object, do its visible size and shape keep changing, or do they appear the same at all distances?

HYLAS D1.424 They are continually changing.

PHILONOUS [D1.425] So sight does not suggest, or in any way inform you, that the visible object you immediately perceive exists at a distance,[7] or that it will be perceived as you advance farther toward it, since there is a continuous series of visible objects following one another during the whole time of your approach.

HYLAS [D1.426] It does not. But still, when I see an object, I know what object I will perceive after I have covered a certain distance—no matter whether it is exactly the same or not. So something of distance is still suggested in this case.

PHILONOUS [D1.427] My good Hylas, just reflect on the point a little, and then tell me whether there is any more to it than this: from the ideas you actually perceive by sight, you have learned by experience to infer what other ideas you will be affected with (according to the standing order of nature) after a certain succession of time and motion.

HYLAS [D1.428] On the whole, I take it to be nothing more than that.

PHILONOUS [D1.429] Now, isn't it plain that if we suppose a man born blind were suddenly made to see, he could at first have no experience of what may be *suggested* by sight?

HYLAS [D1.430] It is.

PHILONOUS [D1.431] Then, on your account, he would not have any notion of distance attached to the things he saw, but would take them for a new set of sensations existing only in his mind?

HYLAS [D1.432] That's undeniable.

PHILONOUS [D1.433] But to make it plainer still: isn't *distance* a line pointing end-on toward the eye?

HYLAS [D1.434] It is.

7 BERKELEY'S NOTE. See the *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision*, and its *Vindication*.

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE. The *Vindication* is *The Theory of Vision Vindicated and Explained* (1733).

PHILONOUS D1.435 And can a line so positioned be perceived by sight?

HYLAS D1.436 It can't.

PHILONOUS D1.437 Doesn't it follow, then, that distance isn't properly and immediately perceived by sight?

HYLAS D1.438 It would seem so.

PHILONOUS D1.439 Again, do you think colors are at a distance?

HYLAS D1.440 It must be admitted that they are only in the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.441 But don't colors appear to the eye as coexisting in the same place with extension and shapes?

HYLAS D1.442 They do.

PHILONOUS D1.443 Then how can you conclude from sight that shapes exist outside the mind, when you admit that colors don't, since the sensible appearance is exactly the same for both?

HYLAS D1.444 I don't know what to answer.

PHILONOUS D1.445 But even granting that distance were truly and immediately perceived by the mind, it still would not follow that it existed outside the mind. For whatever is immediately perceived is an idea; and can any idea exist outside the mind?

IDEAS AS COPIES OF THINGS

Hylas proposes that ideas are copies of real things; Philonous argues an idea can resemble only an idea.

HYLAS D1.446 To suppose that would be absurd. But tell me, Philonous, can we perceive or know nothing besides our ideas?

PHILONOUS D1.447 As for rationally inferring causes from effects, that lies outside our inquiry. And as for the senses, you can best tell whether you perceive by them anything that is not immediately perceived. So I ask you: are the things immediately perceived anything other than your own sensations or ideas? You have indeed declared yourself on these points more than once

in the course of this conversation; but with this last question you seem to have departed from what you thought then.

HYLAS [D1.448] To tell the truth, Philonous, I think there are two kinds of objects: the one kind perceived immediately, which are also called *ideas*; the other, real things or external objects, perceived through the mediation of ideas, which are their images and representations. Now, I admit that ideas do not exist outside the mind; but the second kind of objects do. I am sorry I did not think of this distinction sooner; it would probably have cut your discourse short.

PHILONOUS [D1.449] Are those external objects perceived by sense, or by some other faculty?

HYLAS [D1.450] They are perceived by sense.

PHILONOUS [D1.451] What! Is there anything perceived by sense that isn't immediately perceived?

HYLAS [D1.452] Yes, Philonous, in a way there is. For example, when I look at a picture or statue of Julius Caesar, I may be said in a manner to perceive him (though not immediately) by my senses.

PHILONOUS [D1.453] It seems, then, that you take our ideas, which alone are immediately perceived, to be pictures of external things; and that these external things are also perceived by sense, insofar as they conform to or resemble our ideas?

HYLAS [D1.454] That's what I mean.

PHILONOUS [D1.455] And in the same way that Julius Caesar, invisible in himself, is nevertheless perceived by sight, real things, imperceptible in themselves, are perceived by sense.

HYLAS [D1.456] In exactly the same way.

PHILONOUS [D1.457] Tell me, Hylas, when you look at the picture of Julius Caesar, do you see with your eyes anything more than some colors and shapes, with a certain symmetry and arrangement of the whole?

HYLAS [D1.458] Nothing else.

PHILONOUS D1.459 And wouldn't a man who had never known anything about Julius Caesar see just as much?

HYLAS D1.460 He would.

PHILONOUS D1.461 So he has his sight, and the use of it, just as perfectly as you do?

HYLAS D1.462 I agree with you.

PHILONOUS D1.463 Then how is it that your thoughts are directed to the Roman emperor, and his are not? This cannot come from the sensations or ideas of sense you are perceiving at the time, since you admit you have no advantage over him in that respect. It would seem, then, to come from reason and memory, wouldn't it?

HYLAS D1.464 It would.

PHILONOUS D1.465 Consequently, it does not follow from that example that anything is perceived by sense that is not immediately perceived. I grant, though, that in one sense of the word we may be said to perceive sensible things mediately by sense: namely, when, because of a frequently perceived connection, the immediate perception of ideas by one sense *suggests* to the mind other ideas, perhaps belonging to another sense, that are usually connected with them. For instance, when I hear a coach driving along the street, what I immediately perceive is only the sound; but from my experience that such a sound is connected with a coach, I am said to hear the coach. Yet it is evident that, in truth and strictness, nothing can be *heard* but *sound*; and the coach is not then properly perceived by sense, but suggested by experience. Likewise, when we are said to see a red-hot iron bar, the solidity and heat of the iron are not objects of sight, but are suggested to the imagination by the color and shape, which are what that sense properly perceives. In short, the only things actually and strictly perceived by any sense are those that would have been perceived if that same sense had just then been given to us for the first time. As for other things, it is plain that they are only suggested to the mind by experience, based on earlier

perceptions. But to return to your comparison with Caesar's picture: it is plain that if you stick to it, you must hold that real things, or the archetypes of our ideas, are perceived not by sense but by some internal faculty of the soul, such as reason or memory. So I would very much like to know what arguments you can draw from reason for the existence of what you call *real things* or *material objects*. Or whether you remember having seen them at some earlier time as they are in themselves; or whether you have heard or read of anyone who did.

HYLAS D1.466 I see, Philonous, you are in a mood for teasing; but that will never convince me.

PHILONOUS D1.467 My only aim is to learn from you how we come to know *material beings*. Whatever we perceive, we perceive either immediately or mediately: by sense, or by reason and reflection. But since you have excluded sense, please show me what reason you have to believe they exist, or what *medium*, or middle term, you could possibly use to prove it, either to my understanding or to your own.

HYLAS D1.468 To be honest, Philonous, now that I think about it, I can't find any good reason to give you. But this much seems fairly plain: it is at least possible that such things really exist. And as long as there is nothing absurd in supposing them, I am determined to go on believing as I did until you bring good reasons against it.

PHILONOUS D1.469 What! Has it come to this—that you only *believe* material objects exist, and that your belief rests merely on the possibility of its being true? And then you want me to bring reasons against it, though anyone else would think it reasonable for the burden of proof to fall on the one who asserts. Besides, this very point you are now determined to maintain without any reason is, in effect, one you have more than once in this conversation seen good reason to give up. But let's pass over all that. If I understand you rightly, you say our ideas do not exist outside the mind, but that they are copies, images, or representations of certain originals that do?

HYLAS D1.470 You understand me correctly.

PHILONOUS D1.471 Then they are like external things?

HYLAS D1.472 They are.

PHILONOUS D1.473 Do those things have a stable, permanent nature, independent of our senses? Or are they perpetually changing whenever we produce some motion in our bodies—suspending, exerting, or altering our faculties or sense organs?

HYLAS D1.474 Real things, obviously, have a fixed and real nature, which stays the same despite any change in our senses or in the posture and motion of our bodies. Such changes may indeed affect the ideas in our minds, but it would be absurd to think they had the same effect on things existing outside the mind.

PHILONOUS D1.475 Then how is it possible that things as perpetually fleeting and variable as our ideas should be copies or images of anything fixed and constant? To put it another way: since all sensible qualities—size, shape, color, and so on, that is, our ideas—keep changing with every alteration in the distance, the medium, or the instruments of sensation, how can any determinate material object be properly represented or pictured by a number of distinct things, each so different from and unlike the others? Or if you say it resembles only one of our ideas, how shall we tell the true copy from all the false ones?

HYLAS D1.476 I confess, Philonous, I am at a loss. I don't know what to say to this.

PHILONOUS D1.477 But that's not all. Which are material objects in themselves—perceptible or imperceptible?

HYLAS D1.478 Properly and immediately, nothing can be perceived but ideas. So all material things are in themselves imperceptible, and can be perceived only through our ideas.

PHILONOUS D1.479 So ideas are perceptible, and their archetypes or originals imperceptible?

HYLAS D1.480 Right.

PHILONOUS D1.481 But how can what is perceptible be *like* what is imperceptible? Can a real thing that is in itself *invisible* be like a *color*? Or a real thing that is not *audible* be like a *sound*? In short, can anything be like a sensation or idea except another sensation or idea?

HYLAS D1.482 I have to admit I think not.

PHILONOUS D1.483 Can there be any doubt about it? Don't you know your own ideas perfectly?

HYLAS D1.484 I know them perfectly, since what I do not perceive or know can be no part of my idea.

PHILONOUS D1.485 Then consider and examine them, and tell me whether there is anything in them that can exist outside the mind, or whether you can conceive anything like them existing outside the mind.

HYLAS D1.486 On examination, I find it impossible for me to conceive or understand how anything but an idea can be like an idea. And it is perfectly evident that *no idea can exist outside the mind*.

PHILONOUS D1.487 So your principles force you to deny the *reality* of sensible things, since you made that reality consist in an absolute existence outside the mind. In other words, you are an out-and-out skeptic. So I have made my point, which was to show that your principles led to skepticism.

HYLAS D1.488 For now I am, if not entirely convinced, at least silenced.

PHILONOUS D1.489 I would like to know what more you need to be fully convinced. Haven't you been free to explain yourself in every possible way? Were any little slips of the tongue seized on and pressed against you? Weren't you allowed to retract or reinforce anything you had put forward, whichever best served your purpose? Hasn't everything you could say been heard and examined with all imaginable fairness? In a word, haven't you on every point been convinced out of your own mouth? And if you can now find any flaw in any of your earlier concessions, or

think of any remaining way out—any new distinction, pretext, or interpretation whatever—why don't you bring it forward?

HYLAS D1.490 A little patience, Philonous. Right now I am so amazed to find myself trapped—imprisoned, as it were, in the labyrinths you have led me into—that you can't expect me to find my way out on the spot. You must give me time to look around and collect myself.

PHILONOUS D1.491 Listen—isn't that the college bell?

HYLAS D1.492 It's ringing for prayers.

PHILONOUS D1.493 Then let's go in, if you like, and meet here again tomorrow morning. In the meantime you can think over this morning's conversation and see whether you can find any fallacy in it, or come up with some new way to extricate yourself.

HYLAS D1.494 Agreed.

Second Dialogue

Hylas tries to save matter as cause, instrument or occasion; Philonous argues that God, not matter, sustains the world.

HYLAS D2.1 Forgive me, Philonous, for not meeting you sooner. All morning my head was so full of our recent conversation that I had no room to think about the time of day, or indeed about anything else.

PHILONOUS D2.2 I'm glad you were so absorbed in it. I hope that if there were any mistakes in your concessions, or fallacies in the reasoning I drew from them, you will now point them out to me.

HYLAS D2.3 I assure you I have done nothing since I saw you but hunt for mistakes and fallacies, and with that in view I have examined the whole course of yesterday's conversation in minute detail. But all in vain: on review, the conclusions it led me to seem even clearer and more evident, and the more I consider them, the more irresistibly they compel my assent.

PHILONOUS D2.4 And don't you think this is a sign that they are genuine—that they come from nature and agree with right reason? Truth and beauty are alike in this: the strictest scrutiny shows both to advantage, while the false luster of error and disguise cannot bear to be reviewed or looked at too closely.

HYLAS D2.5 I grant there is a great deal in what you say. No one could be more completely satisfied of the truth of those strange consequences than I am, as long as I keep in view the reasoning that leads to them. But when that is out of my mind, there seems on the other hand to be something so satisfying, so natural and

intelligible, in the modern way of explaining things that, I confess, I don't know how to reject it.

PHILONOUS [D2.6] I don't know which way you mean.

HYLAS [D2.7] I mean the way of accounting for our sensations or ideas.

PHILONOUS [D2.8] What is that?

TRACES IN THE BRAIN

Hylas explains sensation by motions in the brain; Philonous replies that the brain is itself an idea.

HYLAS [D2.9] It is supposed that the soul resides in some part of the brain, where the nerves originate and from which they extend to every part of the body; that external objects, through the different impressions they make on the sense organs, communicate certain vibrations to the nerves; and that the nerves, being filled with spirits, carry these vibrations to the brain, the seat of the soul, which is affected with various ideas according to the various impressions or traces thus made in the brain.

PHILONOUS [D2.10] And you call this an explanation of how we are affected with ideas?

HYLAS [D2.11] Why not, Philonous? Do you have any objection to it?

PHILONOUS [D2.12] First I want to know whether I understand your hypothesis correctly. You make certain traces in the brain the causes or occasions of our ideas. Tell me, please: by the *brain*, do you mean some sensible thing?

HYLAS [D2.13] What else do you think I could mean?

PHILONOUS [D2.14] Sensible things are all immediately perceivable; things that are immediately perceivable are ideas; and ideas exist only in the mind. You agreed to this much long ago, if I'm not mistaken.

HYLAS [D2.15] I don't deny it.

PHILONOUS [D2.16] Then the brain you speak of, being a sensible thing, exists only in the mind. Now I would like to know

whether you think it reasonable to suppose that one idea, or thing existing in the mind, causes all the other ideas. And if you do, how do you account for the origin of that first idea, the brain itself?

HYLAS [D2.17] I don't explain the origin of our ideas by the brain that is perceivable by sense—that is itself only a combination of sensible ideas—but by another brain, which I imagine.

PHILONOUS [D2.18] But aren't things imagined just as truly *in the mind* as things perceived?

HYLAS [D2.19] I have to admit they are.

PHILONOUS [D2.20] So it comes to the same thing. All this while you have been accounting for ideas by certain motions or impressions of the brain—that is, by some alterations in an idea, whether sensible or imaginable makes no difference.

HYLAS [D2.21] I am beginning to doubt my hypothesis.

PHILONOUS [D2.22] Apart from spirits, all we know or conceive are our own ideas. So when you say all ideas are caused by impressions in the brain, do you conceive this brain or not? If you do, then you are talking about ideas imprinted on an idea causing that same idea, which is absurd. If you don't conceive it, you are talking unintelligibly instead of framing a reasonable hypothesis.

HYLAS [D2.23] I now see clearly that it was a mere dream. There is nothing in it.

PHILONOUS [D2.24] You needn't be much troubled by that, for after all, this way of explaining things, as you called it, could never have satisfied any reasonable person. What connection is there between a motion in the nerves and the sensations of sound or color in the mind? How could the one possibly be the effect of the other?

HYLAS [D2.25] But I never thought there was so little in it as there now seems to be.

PHILONOUS D2.26 Well then, are you finally satisfied that no sensible things have a real existence, and that you are in truth a thoroughgoing skeptic?

HYLAS D2.27 It is too plain to deny.

THE WORLD IN AN INFINITE MIND

Philonous praises the beauty of nature and argues that sensible things must exist in the mind of God.

PHILONOUS D2.28 Look! Aren't the fields covered with delightful green? Isn't there something in the woods and groves, in the rivers and clear springs, that soothes, delights, and transports the soul? At the sight of the wide, deep ocean, or some huge mountain whose top is lost in the clouds, or an old gloomy forest, aren't our minds filled with a pleasing awe? Even in rocks and deserts, isn't there an agreeable wildness? What a genuine pleasure it is to behold the natural beauties of the earth! And to keep and renew our delight in them, isn't the veil of night drawn over her face in turn, and doesn't she change her dress with the seasons? How fittingly the elements are arranged! What variety and usefulness in the humblest productions of nature! What delicacy, what beauty, what design in the bodies of animals and plants! How exquisitely all things are suited both to their particular ends and to forming complementary parts of the whole! And while they help and support one another, don't they also set each other off and show each other to advantage? Now raise your thoughts from this ball of earth to all the glorious lights that adorn the high arch of heaven. The motions and positions of the planets—aren't they admirable for their usefulness and order? Were those globes (wrongly called *wandering*) ever known to stray on their repeated journeys through the pathless void?[1] Don't they sweep out areas around the sun always proportional to the times? So fixed, so unchangeable are the laws by

1 "Planet" comes from the Greek for "wanderer"; the old astronomy called them "erratic" stars.

which the unseen Author of Nature moves the universe. How vivid and radiant the brilliance of the fixed stars! How magnificent and rich the careless abundance with which they seem to be scattered across the whole blue vault! Yet if you take up a telescope, it brings into view a new host of stars that escape the naked eye. Here they seem close together and tiny, but seen nearer they are immense globes of light at various distances, sunk far in the abyss of space. Now you must call imagination to your aid.[2] Our feeble, narrow senses cannot make out the countless worlds revolving around their central fires, and in those worlds the energy of an all-perfect Mind displayed in endless forms. But neither sense nor imagination is big enough to take in the boundless expanse with all its glittering furnishings. Though the laboring mind exert and strain every power to its utmost reach, there still remains beyond its grasp an immeasurable surplus. Yet all the vast bodies that make up this mighty frame, however distant and remote, are linked by some secret mechanism, some divine art and force, in mutual dependence and interaction with one another—even with this earth, which had almost slipped from my thoughts and been lost in the crowd of worlds. Isn't the whole system immense, beautiful, glorious beyond words and beyond thought! What treatment, then, do those philosophers deserve who would strip these noble and delightful scenes of all *reality*? How can we accept principles that lead us to think all the visible beauty of creation a false, imaginary glare? To be plain: can you expect this skepticism of yours not to be thought wildly absurd by every sensible person?

HYLAS D2.29 Other people may think what they like, but you, at least, have nothing to reproach me with. My comfort is that you are as much a skeptic as I am.

PHILONOUS D2.30 There, Hylas, I must beg to differ with you.

2 Kepler's second law: a line from the sun to a planet sweeps out equal areas in equal times.

HYLAS D2.31 What! Have you agreed to the premises all along, and now you deny the conclusion and leave me to defend by myself the paradoxes you led me into? Surely that isn't fair.

PHILONOUS D2.32 I deny that I agreed with you in the notions that led to skepticism. You did say that the *reality* of sensible things consisted in an *absolute existence outside the minds of spirits,* or distinct from their being perceived. And following that notion of reality, *you* are obliged to deny sensible things any real existence: that is, by your own definition, you declare yourself a skeptic. But I never said or thought that the reality of sensible things was to be defined that way. To me it is evident, for the reasons you accept, that sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind or spirit. From this I conclude, not that they have no real existence, but that, since they do not depend on my thought and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me, *there must be some other Mind in which they exist*. So as surely as the sensible world really exists, so surely is there an infinite, omnipresent Spirit who contains and sustains it.

HYLAS D2.33 What! That is no more than I and all Christians hold —and indeed everyone else who believes there is a God and that He knows and comprehends all things.

PHILONOUS D2.34 Yes, but here is the difference. People commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God because they believe there is a God; whereas I, on the contrary, conclude immediately and necessarily that there is a God because all sensible things must be perceived by Him.

HYLAS D2.35 But as long as we all believe the same thing, what does it matter how we arrive at that belief?

PHILONOUS D2.36 But we don't agree in the same opinion either. For philosophers, though they grant that all corporeal beings are perceived by God, still ascribe to them an absolute existence distinct from their being perceived by any mind whatever—which I do not. Besides, isn't there a difference between saying, *There is a God, therefore He perceives all things*, and saying, *Sensible things really exist; and if they really exist, they are necessarily per-*

ceived by an infinite Mind: therefore there is an infinite Mind, or God? This gives you a direct and immediate demonstration, from a most evident principle, of the *existence of God*. Theologians and philosophers had proved beyond all dispute, from the beauty and usefulness of the various parts of creation, that it was the work of God. But that an infinite Mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare *existence of the sensible world*—setting aside all help from astronomy and natural science, all contemplation of the design, order, and adjustment of things—is an advantage available only to those who have made this simple reflection: that the sensible world is what we perceive by our various senses; that nothing is perceived by the senses except ideas; and that no idea, or archetype of an idea, can exist otherwise than in a mind. Now, without any laborious research into the sciences, without any subtle reasoning or long-winded discussion, you can oppose and confound the most strenuous advocate of atheism. Those wretched refuges—an eternal series of unthinking causes and effects, or a chance collision of atoms; those wild fancies of Vanini, Hobbes, and Spinoza; in short, the whole system of atheism—isn't it entirely overthrown by this single reflection on the contradiction involved in supposing that the whole visible world, or any part of it, even the crudest and most shapeless, exists without a Mind?[3] Let any of those promoters of impiety just look into his own thoughts and try whether he can conceive how so much as a rock, a desert, a chaos, or a confused jumble of atoms—how anything at all, whether sensible or imaginable—can exist independently of a Mind. He need go no further to be convinced of his folly. Could anything be fairer than to rest a dispute on such an issue, leaving it to a man himself to see whether he can conceive, even in thought, what he holds to be true in fact, and so pass from its existence in thought to granting it a real existence?

3 Lucilio Vanini (1585–1619), Italian freethinker burned at Toulouse; Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Dutch philosopher who identified God with nature. Like Hobbes, both were widely denounced as atheists in Berkeley's day.

SEEING ALL THINGS IN GOD

Hylas compares this with Malebranche's doctrine; Philonous sets out how his own view differs.

HYLAS D2.37 It can't be denied that there is something very useful to religion in what you propose. But don't you think it looks very like a notion held by some eminent modern thinkers, that we *see all things in God*?

PHILONOUS D2.38 I would be glad to know that opinion. Please explain it to me.

HYLAS D2.39 They hold that the soul, being immaterial, cannot be united with material things so as to perceive them in themselves, but that it perceives them through its union with the substance of God, which, being spiritual, is purely intelligible—capable of being the immediate object of a spirit's thought. Besides, the divine essence contains perfections corresponding to each created being, and these are for that reason fit to display or represent them to the mind.

PHILONOUS D2.40 I don't understand how our ideas, which are entirely passive and inert, can be the essence of God, or any part of it (or like any part of it)—the essence or substance of God, who is an impassive, indivisible, purely active being. Many more difficulties and objections to this hypothesis come to mind at first glance, but I will add only this: it is open to all the absurdities of the common hypothesis, in making a created world exist otherwise than in the mind of a Spirit. And on top of all that, it has this peculiar to itself: it makes the material world serve no purpose. And if it counts as a good argument against other hypotheses in the sciences that they suppose Nature, or divine wisdom, to make something in vain, or to do by tedious roundabout methods what could have been done in a much easier and more direct way, what are we to think of a hypothesis that supposes the whole world made in vain?

HYLAS D2.41 But what do you say? Aren't you too of the opinion that we see all things in God? If I'm not mistaken, what you propose comes close to it.

PHILONOUS D2.42 Few people think, yet everyone has opinions. That is why people's opinions are superficial and confused. It is no wonder that doctrines which are in themselves as different as can be should nonetheless be confused with one another by those who don't consider them attentively. So I won't be surprised if some imagine that I have fallen into the enthusiasm of Malebranche, though in truth I am very far from it. He builds on the most abstract general ideas, which I entirely reject. He asserts an absolute external world, which I deny. He maintains that our senses deceive us and that we do not know the real natures or the true forms and shapes of extended beings—in all of which I hold exactly the opposite.[4] So on the whole there are no principles more fundamentally opposed than his and mine. I must admit that I entirely agree with what holy Scripture says, "That in God we live and move and have our being." But that we see things in His essence, in the way described above, I am far from believing.[5] Here, briefly, is what I mean. It is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas, and that no idea can exist unless it is in a mind. And it is no less plain that these ideas, or things perceived by me, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of *my* mind, since I know that I am not their author: it is not in my power to decide at will what particular ideas I shall be affected with when I open my eyes or ears. They must therefore exist in some other Mind, whose Will it is that they should be shown to me. The things immediately perceived, I say, are ideas or sensations—call them whichever you like. But how can any idea or sensation exist in, or be produced by, anything but a mind or spirit? That is inconceivable. And to assert what is inconceivable is to talk nonsense, isn't it?

4 "Enthusiasm" in the eighteenth-century sense: extravagant claims to divine inspiration or intimacy with God.
5 Acts 17:28.

HYLAS D2.43 Without doubt.

PHILONOUS D2.44 But on the other hand, it is quite conceivable that they should exist in and be produced by a Spirit, since this is no more than I experience in myself every day. I perceive countless ideas, and by an act of my will I can form a great variety of them and call them up in my imagination—though, I must admit, these creatures of the imagination are not quite so distinct, so strong, vivid, and permanent as those perceived by my senses, which are called *real things*. From all this I conclude that *there is a Mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive*. And from their variety, order, and manner, I conclude that *their Author is wise, powerful, and good beyond comprehension*. Mark this well: I do not say that I see things by perceiving what represents them in the intelligible Substance of God. That I don't understand. What I say is that the things I perceive are known by the understanding, and produced by the will, of an infinite Spirit. And isn't all this perfectly plain and evident? Is there anything more in it than what a little observation of our own minds, and of what passes in them, not only enables us to conceive but obliges us to acknowledge?

MATTER AS CAUSE, INSTRUMENT, OCCASION

Hylas offers matter as a lesser cause, then an instrument, then an occasion of God's acts; each fails.

HYLAS D2.45 I think I understand you very clearly, and I grant that the proof you give of a Deity seems no less evident than it is surprising. But granting that God is the supreme and universal Cause of all things, might there not still be a Third Nature besides spirits and ideas? May we not admit a subordinate and limited cause of our ideas? In a word, might there not be *matter* after all?

PHILONOUS D2.46 How often must I drive home the same point? You grant that the things immediately perceived by sense exist nowhere outside the mind; but nothing is perceived by sense that is not perceived immediately; therefore nothing sensible

exists outside the mind. So the matter you still insist on is, I suppose, something intelligible—something that may be discovered by reason, not by sense.

HYLAS [D2.47] You are right.

PHILONOUS [D2.48] Then please tell me what reasoning your belief in matter rests on, and what this matter is, in your present sense of it.

HYLAS [D2.49] I find myself affected with various ideas of which I know I am not the cause. Nor are they the cause of themselves or of one another, or able to exist by themselves, since they are wholly inactive, fleeting, dependent beings. So they have *some* cause distinct from me and from them, of which I claim to know no more than that it is *the cause of my ideas*. And this thing, whatever it is, I call matter.

PHILONOUS [D2.50] Tell me, Hylas: is everyone free to change the current, proper meaning attached to a common word in any language? For example, suppose a traveler told you that in a certain country people walk unharmed through fire, and when he explained himself, you found that by the word *fire* he meant what others call *water*. Or suppose he claimed there are trees that walk on two legs, meaning men by the word *trees*. Would you think this reasonable?

HYLAS [D2.51] No, I would think it quite absurd. Common usage is the standard of correctness in language. For anyone to make a point of speaking improperly is to pervert the use of speech, and it can serve no better purpose than to prolong and multiply disputes where there is no difference of opinion.

PHILONOUS [D2.52] And doesn't *matter*, in the common current sense of the word, mean an extended, solid, movable, unthinking, inactive Substance?

HYLAS [D2.53] It does.

PHILONOUS [D2.54] And hasn't it been made evident that no *such* substance can possibly exist? And even if it were granted to exist, how can what is *inactive* be a *cause*, or what is *unthinking*

be a *cause of thought*? You may, of course, if you like, attach to the word *matter* a meaning contrary to the one commonly accepted, and tell me you understand by it an unextended, thinking, active being that is the cause of our ideas. But what is that but playing with words, and falling into the very fault you just condemned with so much reason? I don't at all fault your reasoning insofar as you infer *a* cause from the *phenomena*. But I deny that *the* cause which can be deduced by reason can properly be called matter.

HYLAS D2.55 There is indeed something in what you say. But I'm afraid you don't fully grasp my meaning. I would by no means be thought to deny that God, or an infinite Spirit, is the Supreme Cause of all things. All I contend is that, subordinate to the Supreme Agent, there is a cause of a limited and inferior nature which *concurs* in producing our ideas—not by any act of will or spiritual agency, but by the kind of action that belongs to matter, namely *motion*.

PHILONOUS D2.56 I see you are relapsing at every turn into your old discredited notion of a movable, and therefore extended, substance existing outside the mind. What! Have you already forgotten that you were convinced? Or do you want me to repeat what has been said on that subject? Honestly, it isn't fair dealing on your part to go on supposing the existence of something you have so often admitted does not exist. But without dwelling further on what has been discussed at such length, I ask whether all your ideas are not perfectly passive and inert, containing nothing of action in them.

HYLAS D2.57 They are.

PHILONOUS D2.58 And are sensible qualities anything other than ideas?

HYLAS D2.59 How often have I admitted that they are not?

PHILONOUS D2.60 But isn't *motion* a sensible quality?

HYLAS D2.61 It is.

PHILONOUS D2.62 So it is no action?

HYLAS D2.63 I agree with you. And indeed it is quite plain that when I move my finger, the finger remains passive, while my will, which produced the motion, is active.

PHILONOUS D2.64 Now I want to know, first, whether—motion being granted to be no action—you can conceive of any action other than volition; second, whether saying something while conceiving nothing is not talking nonsense; and finally, whether, having considered the premises, you do not see that to suppose any efficient or active Cause of our ideas other than *Spirit* is highly absurd and unreasonable.

HYLAS D2.65 I give up the point entirely. But though matter may not be a cause, what prevents it from being an *instrument* serving the supreme Agent in producing our ideas?

PHILONOUS D2.66 An instrument, you say? Then tell me, what might be the shape, springs, wheels, and motions of that instrument?

HYLAS D2.67 I claim to determine nothing about those, since both the substance and its qualities are entirely unknown to me.

PHILONOUS D2.68 What? So you think it is made up of unknown parts, that it has unknown motions and an unknown shape?

HYLAS D2.69 I don't believe it has any shape or motion at all, since I am already convinced that no sensible qualities can exist in an unperceiving substance.

PHILONOUS D2.70 But what notion can you possibly form of an instrument without any sensible qualities, even extension itself?

HYLAS D2.71 I don't claim to have any notion of it.

PHILONOUS D2.72 Then what reason do you have to think that this unknown, inconceivable Something exists? Is it that you imagine God cannot act as well without it? Or that you find by experience the use of some such thing when you form ideas in your own mind?

HYLAS D2.73 You are always pestering me for the reasons for my belief. Tell me, what reasons do you have for not believing it?

PHILONOUS D2.74 For me it is reason enough not to believe that anything exists if I see no reason for believing it. But leaving aside reasons for believing, you won't even let me know *what it is* you want me to believe, since you say you have no notion of it whatever. After all, I beg you to consider whether it is worthy of a philosopher, or even of a person of common sense, to profess to believe you know not what, and you know not why.

HYLAS D2.75 Wait, Philonous. When I tell you matter is an *instrument*, I don't mean nothing at all. It's true I don't know what particular kind of instrument it is; but still, I have some notion of *instrument in general*, which I apply to it.

PHILONOUS D2.76 But what if it turns out that there is something, even in the most general notion of *instrument*—taken in a sense distinct from *cause*—that makes using one inconsistent with the divine attributes?

HYLAS D2.77 Show me that, and I will give up the point.

PHILONOUS D2.78 What do you mean by the general nature or notion of an *instrument*?

HYLAS D2.79 What is common to all particular instruments makes up the general notion.

PHILONOUS D2.80 Isn't it common to all instruments that they are used only to do things that cannot be done by the mere act of our wills? For instance, I never use an instrument to move my finger, because that is done by a volition. But I would use one if I wanted to move part of a rock or pull up a tree by the roots. Do you agree? Or can you show any example where an instrument is used to produce an effect that depends *immediately* on the will of the agent?

HYLAS D2.81 I admit I can't.

PHILONOUS D2.82 Then how can you suppose that an All-perfect Spirit, on whose Will all things depend absolutely and immediately, should need an instrument in His operations—or, not needing one, should use it? So it seems to me that you are obliged to admit that the use of a lifeless, inactive instrument is

incompatible with the infinite perfection of God—that is, by your own admission, to give up the point.

HYLAS [D2.83] No answer readily comes to mind.

PHILONOUS [D2.84] But I would think you should be ready to acknowledge the truth when it has been fairly proved to you. We, who are beings of finite powers, are indeed forced to use instruments. And the use of an instrument shows that the agent is bound by rules prescribed by someone else, and that he can reach his goal only in a certain way and under certain conditions. From this it seems to follow clearly that the supreme, unlimited Agent uses no tool or instrument at all. The will of an Omnipotent Spirit is no sooner exerted than carried out, without the use of any means. If means are employed by lesser agents, it is not because of any real power in them, or any necessary fitness to produce an effect, but merely in compliance with the laws of nature, or the conditions prescribed to those agents by the First Cause, who is Himself above all limitation or prescription whatever.

HYLAS [D2.85] I will no longer maintain that matter is an instrument. But I don't want to be understood as giving up its existence either, since, despite everything that has been said, it may still be an *occasion*.

PHILONOUS [D2.86] How many shapes is your matter going to take? Or how often must it be proved not to exist before you are willing to part with it? But to say no more about this (though by all the rules of debate I could fairly blame you for so often changing the meaning of the principal term), I would like to know what you mean by asserting that matter is an occasion, when you have already denied that it is a cause. And when you have shown in what sense you understand *occasion*, then please show me what reason leads you to believe there is such an occasion of our ideas.

HYLAS [D2.87] As to the first point: by *occasion* I mean an inactive, unthinking being, in whose presence God produces ideas in our minds.

PHILONOUS [D2.88] And what might be the nature of that inactive, unthinking being?

HYLAS [D2.89] I know nothing of its nature.

PHILONOUS [D2.90] Then go on to the second point, and give some reason why we should grant existence to this inactive, unthinking, unknown thing.

HYLAS [D2.91] When we see ideas produced in our minds in an orderly and constant way, it is natural to think they have some fixed and regular occasions, in whose presence they are produced.

PHILONOUS [D2.92] So you acknowledge that God alone is the cause of our ideas, and that He causes them in the presence of those occasions.

HYLAS [D2.93] That is my opinion.

PHILONOUS [D2.94] Whatever things you say are present to God, He no doubt perceives.

HYLAS [D2.95] Certainly; otherwise they could not be an occasion for Him to act.

PHILONOUS [D2.96] Leaving aside whether you can make sense of this hypothesis, or answer all the puzzling questions and difficulties it runs into, I only ask this: isn't the order and regularity we observe in the series of our ideas—the course of nature—sufficiently accounted for by the wisdom and power of God? And doesn't it detract from those attributes to suppose that He is influenced, directed, or reminded by an unthinking substance of when and how He is to act? And lastly, even if I granted everything you argue for, would it do anything for your case? For it is not easy to see how the external or absolute existence of an unthinking substance, distinct from its being perceived, can be inferred from my allowing that there are certain things perceived by the mind of God which are for Him the occasion of producing ideas in us.

HYLAS [D2.97] I am completely at a loss what to think. This notion of *occasion* now seems every bit as groundless as the rest.

MATTER AS AN UNKNOWN SOMETHING

Hylas reduces matter to something entirely unknown, which Philonous argues means nothing at all.

PHILONOUS D2.98 Don't you see at last that in all these different senses of *matter* you have only been supposing you know not what, for no reason whatever, and to no use at all?

HYLAS D2.99 I freely admit that I am less attached to my notions now that they have been so carefully examined. But still, it seems to me, I have some confused perception that there is such a thing as *matter*.

PHILONOUS D2.100 Either you perceive the being of matter immediately or mediately. If immediately, please tell me by which of the senses you perceive it. If mediately, tell me by what reasoning it is inferred from the things you perceive immediately. So much for the perception. Now for matter itself: I ask whether it is object, *substratum*, cause, instrument, or occasion. You have already argued for each of these, shifting your notions and making matter appear first in one shape, then in another. And what you have offered you have yourself disowned and rejected. If you have anything new to put forward, I would be glad to hear it.

HYLAS D2.101 I think I have already offered everything I had to say on those points. I don't know what more to urge.

PHILONOUS D2.102 And yet you are reluctant to part with your old prejudice. But to make it easier for you to give it up, I ask you to consider, besides what has been suggested so far, whether—supposing matter exists—you can possibly conceive how you would be affected by it. Or, supposing it did not exist, isn't it evident that you might still be affected with the same ideas you have now, and so have exactly the same reasons for believing in its existence that you have now?

HYLAS D2.103 I admit it is possible that we might perceive everything just as we do now even if there were no matter in the

world. Nor can I conceive, if there is matter, how it could produce any idea in our minds. And I further grant that you have fully convinced me that there cannot be such a thing as matter in any of the senses discussed so far. But still I can't help supposing that there is *matter* in some sense or other. *What that is*, I admittedly don't claim to determine.

PHILONOUS D2.104 I don't expect you to define exactly the nature of that unknown being. Only tell me whether it is a substance. If so, can you suppose a substance without accidents? Or, if you suppose it has accidents or qualities, I would like you to tell me what those qualities are—or at least what is meant by matter's supporting them.

HYLAS D2.105 We have already argued those points. I have nothing more to say about them. But to head off further questions, let me tell you that by *matter* I now understand neither substance nor accident, neither a thinking nor an extended being, neither cause, instrument, nor occasion, but something entirely unknown, distinct from all of these.

PHILONOUS D2.106 It seems, then, that your present notion of matter includes nothing but the general abstract idea of *entity*.

HYLAS D2.107 Nothing else—except that I add to this general idea the negation of all the particular things, qualities, or ideas that I perceive, imagine, or in any way apprehend.

PHILONOUS D2.108 Tell me, where do you suppose this unknown matter exists?

HYLAS D2.109 Ah, Philonous! Now you think you have trapped me. If I say it exists in a place, you will infer that it exists in the mind, since we have agreed that place or extension exists only in the mind. But I am not ashamed to admit my ignorance. I don't know where it exists; I am only sure it does not exist in any place. There's a negative answer for you. And you must expect no other kind to all the questions you ask me about matter from now on.

PHILONOUS D2.110 Since you won't tell me where it exists, please tell me in what manner you suppose it exists, or what you mean by its *existence*.

HYLAS D2.111 It neither thinks nor acts, neither perceives nor is perceived.

PHILONOUS D2.112 But what is there that is positive in your abstract notion of its existence?

HYLAS D2.113 On careful examination, I find I have no positive notion or meaning at all. I tell you again, I am not ashamed to admit my ignorance. I don't know what is meant by its *existence*, or how it exists.

PHILONOUS D2.114 Keep playing the same honest part, good Hylas, and tell me sincerely whether you can form a distinct idea of entity in general, separated from and excluding all thinking and corporeal beings—all particular things whatsoever.

HYLAS D2.115 Wait, let me think a moment——I confess, Philonous, I find I can't. At first glance I thought I had some thin, airy notion of pure entity in the abstract; but on closer attention it has vanished completely. The more I think about it, the more I am confirmed in my prudent resolution to give only negative answers, and not to claim the slightest positive knowledge or conception of matter—its *where*, its *how*, its *entity*, or anything else about it.

PHILONOUS D2.116 So when you speak of the existence of matter, you have no notion in your mind at all?

HYLAS D2.117 None at all.

PHILONOUS D2.118 Tell me whether this is how things stand. At first, from a belief in material substance, you held that the immediate objects existed outside the mind; then that they were archetypes; then causes; next instruments; then occasions; and lastly *something in general*—which, once interpreted, turns out to be *nothing*. So matter comes to nothing. What do you think, Hylas—isn't this a fair summary of your whole proceeding?

HYLAS D2.119 Be that as it may, I still insist that *our* not being able to conceive a thing is no argument against its existence.

PHILONOUS D2.120 I freely grant that from a cause, an effect, an operation, a sign, or some other circumstance, we may reasonably infer the existence of a thing not immediately perceived; and that it would be absurd for anyone to argue against that thing's existence because he has no direct and positive notion of it. But where there is nothing of the kind—where neither reason nor revelation leads us to believe that a thing exists; where we don't have even a relative notion of it; where abstraction is made from perceiving and being perceived, from spirit and idea; and lastly, where not even the most inadequate or faint idea is claimed—there, I will not indeed conclude against the reality of any notion or the existence of anything. But my inference will be that you mean nothing at all: that you are using words to no purpose whatever, without any intention or meaning. And I leave it to you to consider how mere jargon ought to be treated.

HYLAS D2.121 To be frank with you, Philonous, your arguments seem unanswerable in themselves; but they don't have enough effect on me to produce that complete conviction, that wholehearted agreement, which comes with a demonstration. I find myself still slipping back into a dim suspicion of I know not what—*matter*.

PHILONOUS D2.122 But don't you realize, Hylas, that two things must come together to remove every doubt and produce full assent in the mind? However clear the light a visible object is set in, if there is any defect in the eye, or if the eye is not turned toward it, it will not be seen distinctly. And however well grounded and fairly presented a demonstration may be, if there is a stain of prejudice or a wrong bias in the understanding as well, can the understanding be expected to see the truth clearly all at once and hold to it firmly? No; it takes time and effort. The attention must be roused and held by repeating the same thing often—sometimes in the same light, sometimes in different ones. I have said it already, and I find I must keep repeating it and

pressing it home: it is an inexplicable liberty you take in claiming to defend you know not what, for you know not what reason, to you know not what purpose. Can this be matched in any art or science, any sect or profession? Or is there anything *so* barefacedly groundless and unreasonable to be found even in the lowest everyday conversation? But perhaps you will still say that matter may exist, even though at the same time you know neither *what is meant* by *matter* nor by its *existence*. This is surprising indeed—all the more because it is entirely voluntary, since you are not led to it by a single reason. For I challenge you to show me anything in nature that needs matter to explain or account for it.

HYLAS [D2.123] The *reality* of things cannot be maintained without supposing that matter exists. And don't you think that is a good reason for me to be earnest in defending it?

PHILONOUS [D2.124] The reality of things! What things? Sensible or intelligible?

HYLAS [D2.125] Sensible things.

PHILONOUS [D2.126] My glove, for example?

HYLAS [D2.127] That, or any other thing perceived by the senses.

PHILONOUS [D2.128] But let's fix on one particular thing. Isn't it sufficient evidence to me that this *glove* exists that I see it, and feel it, and wear it? Or, if that won't do, how could I possibly be assured of the reality of this thing, which I actually see in this place, by supposing that some unknown thing, which I never did or can see, exists in an unknown way, in an unknown place, or in no place at all? How can the supposed reality of what is intangible be a proof that anything tangible really exists? Or the reality of what is invisible a proof that any visible thing exists—or, in general, the reality of anything imperceptible a proof that something perceptible exists? Just explain this, and I will think nothing is too hard for you.

HYLAS D2.129 All things considered, I am willing to admit that the existence of matter is highly improbable; but I don't see that it is directly and absolutely impossible.

PHILONOUS D2.130 But granting that matter is possible, on that ground alone it can have no more claim to existence than a golden mountain or a centaur.

HYLAS D2.131 I admit that. But still, you don't deny it is possible; and what is possible may, for all you know, actually exist.

PHILONOUS D2.132 I do deny that it is possible, and I have, unless I am mistaken, clearly proved from your own concessions that it is not. In the common sense of the word *matter*, is anything more implied than an extended, solid, shaped, movable substance existing outside the mind? And haven't you acknowledged over and over that you have seen clear reason for denying that such a substance is possible?

HYLAS D2.133 True, but that is only one sense of the term *matter*.

PHILONOUS D2.134 But isn't it the only proper, genuine, accepted sense? And if matter in that sense is proved impossible, may it not with good reason be thought absolutely impossible? Otherwise how could anything be proved impossible? Or indeed, how could there be any proof at all, one way or the other, for a man who takes the liberty of unsettling and changing the common meaning of words?

HYLAS D2.135 I thought philosophers might be allowed to speak more precisely than ordinary people, and were not always confined to the common meaning of a term.

PHILONOUS D2.136 But the sense just mentioned is the common accepted sense among philosophers themselves. But leaving that aside, haven't you been allowed to take matter in whatever sense you pleased? And haven't you used this privilege to the utmost—sometimes changing the definition entirely, at other times leaving out or putting into it whatever best served your purpose at the moment, contrary to all the known rules of reason and logic? And hasn't this shifting, unfair method of

yours drawn out our dispute to an unnecessary length, with matter examined in detail and, by your own admission, refuted in each of those senses? And can anything more be required to prove that a thing is absolutely impossible than to prove it impossible in every particular sense in which you or anyone else understands it?

HYLAS D2.137 But I am not fully satisfied that you have proved matter impossible in the last, most obscure, abstract, and indefinite sense.

PHILONOUS D2.138 When is a thing shown to be impossible?

HYLAS D2.139 When a contradiction is demonstrated between the ideas contained in its definition.

PHILONOUS D2.140 But where there are no ideas, no contradiction between ideas can be demonstrated?

HYLAS D2.141 I agree with you.

PHILONOUS D2.142 Now, in what you call the obscure, indefinite sense of the word *matter*, it is plain by your own admission that no idea at all was included—no sense except an unknown sense, which is the same as none. So you are not to expect me to prove a contradiction between ideas where there are no ideas, or to prove matter impossible when it is taken in an *unknown* sense, that is, in no sense at all. My business was only to show that you meant *nothing*, and you were brought to admit it. So in all your various senses, you have been shown either to mean nothing at all or, if anything, an absurdity. And if this is not enough to prove a thing impossible, I'd like you to tell me what is.

HYLAS D2.143 I admit you have proved that matter is impossible, and I don't see what more can be said in its defense. But at the same time that I give this up, I begin to suspect all my other notions. For surely none could seem more evident than this one once did; and yet it now seems as false and absurd as it seemed true before. But I think we have discussed the point enough for now. I would like to spend the rest of the day going over in my mind the various topics of this morning's conversation, and

tomorrow I will be glad to meet you here again at about the same time.

PHILONOUS D2.144 I will be sure to be here.

Third Dialogue

Hylas turns sceptic; Philonous answers the objections and argues his view restores common sense.

PHILONOUS D3.1 Tell me, Hylas, what came of yesterday's reflection? Has it confirmed you in the view you held when we parted? Or have you since seen reason to change your opinion?

HYLAS D3.2 Honestly, my opinion is that all our opinions are equally empty and uncertain. What we approve today we condemn tomorrow. We make a great fuss about knowledge and spend our lives pursuing it, when, alas, we know nothing all the while. Nor do I think it possible for us ever to know anything in this life. Our faculties are too narrow and too few. Nature certainly never meant us for speculation.

PHILONOUS D3.3 What! You say we can know nothing, Hylas?

HYLAS D3.4 There is not one single thing in the world whose real nature, or what it is in itself, we can know.

PHILONOUS D3.5 Will you tell me that I don't really know what fire or water is?

HYLAS D3.6 You may indeed know that fire appears hot and water fluid; but that is no more than knowing what sensations are produced in your own mind when fire and water are applied to your sense organs. Their internal constitution, their true and real nature—about *that* you are completely in the dark.

PHILONOUS D3.7 Don't I know that this is a real stone I am standing on, and that what I see before my eyes is a real tree?

HYLAS D3.8 *Know?* No—it is impossible for you or anyone alive to know it. All you know is that you have a certain idea or appearance in your own mind. But what does that have to do with the real tree or stone? I tell you, the color, shape, and hardness you perceive are not the real natures of those things, nor in the least like them. The same can be said of all the other real things, or corporeal substances, that make up the world. None of them has anything in itself like the sensible qualities we perceive. So we should not claim to affirm or know anything about them as they are in their own nature.

PHILONOUS D3.9 But surely, Hylas, I can tell gold from iron, for example. And how could that be, if I didn't know what either one truly was?

HYLAS D3.10 Believe me, Philonous, you can only distinguish between your own ideas. That yellowness, that weight, and the other sensible qualities—do you think they are really in the gold? They are only relative to the senses and have no absolute existence in nature. And in claiming to distinguish the kinds of real things by the appearances in your mind, you may be acting about as wisely as someone who concluded that two men were of different species because their clothes were not the same color.

PHILONOUS D3.11 It seems, then, that we are fobbed off entirely with the appearances of things—and false ones at that. The very food I eat and the cloth I wear have nothing in them like what I see and feel.

HYLAS D3.12 Just so.

PHILONOUS D3.13 But isn't it strange that the whole world should be deceived like this, and be so foolish as to believe their senses? And yet somehow people eat, drink, sleep, and carry out all the business of life as comfortably and conveniently as if they really knew the things they deal with.

HYLAS D3.14 They do. But you know that everyday practice does not require precise speculative knowledge. So ordinary people

keep their mistakes and still manage to bustle through the affairs of life. But philosophers know better.

PHILONOUS D3.15 You mean they *know* that they *know nothing*.

HYLAS D3.16 That is the very summit and perfection of human knowledge.

PHILONOUS D3.17 But have you been in earnest all this while, Hylas? Are you seriously persuaded that you know nothing real in the world? Suppose you were going to write: wouldn't you ask for pen, ink, and paper like anyone else? And don't you know what it is you are asking for?

HYLAS D3.18 How often must I tell you that I don't know the real nature of any single thing in the universe? I may of course use pen, ink, and paper when the occasion arises. But what any one of them is in its own true nature, I declare positively that I don't know. And the same holds for every other corporeal thing. What is more, we are ignorant not only of the true and real nature of things but even of their existence. It cannot be denied that we perceive certain appearances or ideas; but it cannot be concluded from that that bodies really exist. In fact, now that I think about it, I must—in keeping with my earlier concessions—go further and declare that it is impossible for any *real* corporeal thing to exist in nature.

PHILONOUS D3.19 You amaze me. Was anything ever more wild and extravagant than the notions you now hold? And isn't it evident that you are led into all these extravagances by your belief in *material substance*? This is what makes you dream of those unknown natures in everything. This is what leads you to distinguish between the reality of things and their sensible appearances. It is to this that you owe your ignorance of what everybody else knows perfectly well. Nor is that all. You are not only ignorant of the true nature of everything; you don't even know whether anything really exists, or whether there are any true natures at all. For you attribute to your material beings an absolute or external existence, and you suppose their reality consists in that. And since you are forced in the end to admit

that such an existence means either an outright contradiction or nothing at all, it follows that you must tear down your own hypothesis of material substance and positively deny the real existence of any part of the universe. And so you are plunged into the deepest and most deplorable skepticism anyone was ever in. Tell me, Hylas, isn't it just as I say?

HYLAS [D3.20] I agree with you. *Material substance* was no more than a hypothesis, and a false and groundless one at that. I will waste no more breath defending it. But whatever hypothesis you put forward, whatever scheme of things you introduce in its place, I have no doubt it will turn out every bit as false—just let me question you about it. That is, allow me to pay you back in your own coin, and I guarantee it will lead you through as many perplexities and contradictions, to the very same state of skepticism I am in now.

COMMON SENSE RESTORED

Philonous says real things are the things we perceive, existing in God's mind when we do not perceive them.

PHILONOUS [D3.21] I assure you, Hylas, I don't claim to frame any hypothesis at all. I am of a common cast of mind, simple enough to believe my senses and leave things as I find them. To put it plainly, it is my view that the real things are the very things I see and feel and perceive by my senses. These I know; and since I find they answer all the needs and purposes of life, I have no reason to worry about any other, unknown beings. A piece of sensible bread, for instance, would satisfy my hunger better than ten thousand times as much of that insensible, unintelligible, real bread you speak of. It is likewise my view that colors and other sensible qualities are in the objects. I cannot for the life of me help thinking that snow is white and fire hot. You, of course, who by *snow* and *fire* mean certain external, unperceived, unperceiving substances, are right to deny that whiteness or heat are properties inherent in *them*. But I, who understand by those words the things I see and feel, must think like

other people. And just as I am no skeptic about the nature of things, neither am I about their existence. That a thing should really be perceived by my senses and at the same time not really exist is to me a plain contradiction, since I cannot separate or abstract, even in thought, the existence of a sensible thing from its being perceived. Wood, stones, fire, water, flesh, iron, and things like them, which I name and talk about, are things I know. And I would not have known them if I had not perceived them by my senses. Things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived; things immediately perceived are ideas; and ideas cannot exist outside the mind. Their existence therefore consists in being perceived. So when they are actually perceived, there can be no doubt of their existence. Away, then, with all that skepticism, all those ridiculous philosophical doubts! What a joke it is for a philosopher to question the existence of sensible things until it has been proved to him from the truthfulness of God, or to claim that our knowledge on this point falls short of intuition or demonstration! I might as well doubt my own existence as the existence of the things I actually see and feel.[1]

HYLAS D3.22 Not so fast, Philonous. You say you cannot conceive how sensible things could exist outside the mind, don't you?

PHILONOUS D3.23 I do.

HYLAS D3.24 Supposing you were annihilated, can't you conceive it possible that things perceivable by sense might still exist?

PHILONOUS D3.25 I can—but then it must be in another mind. When I deny that sensible things exist outside the mind, I don't mean my mind in particular, but all minds. Now, it is plain that they have an existence outside my mind, since I find by experience that they are independent of it. There is therefore some other Mind in which they exist during the intervals between my perceiving them, just as they did before I was born and would after my supposed annihilation. And since the same is true of all

1 Aimed at Descartes, who secured the existence of bodies by arguing that God is no deceiver (*Meditations* VI).

other finite created spirits, it necessarily follows that there is an *omnipresent, eternal Mind*, which knows and comprehends all things and presents them to our view in such a way, and according to such rules, as He Himself has ordained—rules that we call the *laws of nature*.

HOW WE KNOW SPIRITS

Hylas asks how we know God or ourselves without ideas; Philonous answers that we have a notion of spirit.

HYLAS D3.26 Answer me this, Philonous. Are all our ideas completely inert beings? Or do they have any agency in them?

PHILONOUS D3.27 They are entirely passive and inert.

HYLAS D3.28 And isn't God an agent, a purely active being?

PHILONOUS D3.29 I grant that.

HYLAS D3.30 So no idea can resemble or represent the nature of God?

PHILONOUS D3.31 It cannot.

HYLAS D3.32 Then since you have no *idea* of the mind of God, how can you conceive it possible that things exist in His mind? Or, if you can conceive the mind of God without having an idea of it, why shouldn't I be allowed to conceive the existence of matter even though I have no idea of it?

PHILONOUS D3.33 As to your first question: I admit that, properly speaking, I have no *idea* either of God or of any other spirit. For spirits, being active, cannot be represented by things that are perfectly inert, as our ideas are. Nevertheless I know that I, who am a spirit or thinking substance, exist—as certainly as I know that my ideas exist. Further, I know what I mean by the terms *I* and *myself*; and I know this immediately or intuitively, though I don't perceive it the way I perceive a triangle, a color, or a sound. The mind, spirit, or soul is that indivisible, unextended thing which thinks, acts, and perceives. I say *indivisible* because it is unextended; and *unextended* because extended, shaped, movable things are ideas, and what perceives ideas—what

thinks and wills—is plainly not itself an idea, nor like one. Ideas are inactive things, and perceived; spirits are a kind of being altogether different from them. So I don't say that my soul is an idea or like an idea. Still, taking the word *idea* in a broad sense, my soul may be said to furnish me with an idea—that is, an image or likeness—of God, though admittedly an extremely inadequate one. For all the notion I have of God is obtained by reflecting on my own soul, heightening its powers, and removing its imperfections. So although I have no inactive idea of the Deity, I do have in *myself* a kind of active, thinking image of Him. And though I don't perceive Him by sense, I have a notion of Him—I know Him by reflection and reasoning. My own mind and my own ideas I know immediately; and with their help I apprehend, mediately, the possibility that other spirits and ideas exist. Further, from my own being, and from the dependence I find in myself and my ideas, I necessarily infer, by an act of reason, the existence of a God and of all created things in the mind of God. So much for your first question. As for the second, I suppose by now you can answer it yourself. For you neither perceive matter as an object, the way you perceive an inactive being or idea; nor know it, as you know yourself, by an act of reflection; nor apprehend it mediately by its likeness to the one or the other; nor yet gather it by reasoning from what you know immediately. All of which makes the case of *matter* very different from that of the *Deity*.

HYLAS [D3.34] You say your own soul supplies you with a kind of idea or image of God. But at the same time you admit that, properly speaking, you have no *idea* of your own soul. You even assert that spirits are a kind of being altogether different from ideas—and so that no idea can be like a spirit. We therefore have no idea of any spirit. Nevertheless you admit that there is spiritual substance, although you have no idea of it, while you deny that there can be any such thing as material substance, because you have no notion or idea of it. Is this fair dealing? To be consistent, you must either admit matter or reject spirit. What do you say to that?

PHILONOUS [D3.35] I say, first, that I don't deny the existence of material substance merely because I have no notion of it, but because the notion of it is inconsistent—in other words, because it is contradictory that there should be a notion of it. Many things, for all I know, may exist of which neither I nor anyone else has or can have any idea or notion whatever. But then those things must be possible; that is, nothing inconsistent must be included in their definition. I say, second, that although we believe things exist which we do not perceive, we may not believe that any particular thing exists without some reason for believing it. But I have no reason for believing in the existence of matter. I have no immediate intuition of it; nor can I infer, directly from my sensations, ideas, notions, actions, or passions, an unthinking, unperceiving, inactive substance—either by probable deduction or by necessary consequence. Whereas the being of my self—that is, my own soul, mind, or thinking principle—I know evidently by reflection. You will forgive me if I repeat the same things in answer to the same objections. In the very notion or definition of *material substance* there is included a manifest contradiction and inconsistency. But this cannot be said of the notion of spirit. That ideas should exist in what does not perceive, or be produced by what does not act, is contradictory. But it is no contradiction to say that a perceiving thing is the subject of ideas, or that an active thing is their cause. It is granted that we have neither immediate evidence nor demonstrative knowledge of the existence of other finite spirits. But it does not follow that such spirits are on the same footing as material substances—if supposing the one is inconsistent and supposing the other is not; if the one can be inferred by no argument, while there is a probability for the other; if we see signs and effects indicating distinct finite agents like ourselves, and see no sign or symptom whatever that leads to a rational belief in matter. I say, lastly, that I have a notion of spirit, though strictly speaking I do not have an idea of it. I don't perceive it as an idea, or by means of an idea, but know it by reflection.

HYLAS D3.36 Despite all you have said, it seems to me that by your own way of thinking, and as a consequence of your own principles, it should follow that *you* are only a system of floating ideas, with no substance to support them. Words are not to be used without meaning. And since there is no more meaning in *spiritual substance* than in *material substance*, the one should be thrown out as well as the other.

PHILONOUS D3.37 How often must I repeat that I know, or am conscious of, my own being; and that I *myself* am not my ideas, but something else—a thinking, active principle that perceives, knows, wills, and operates on ideas? I know that I, one and the same self, perceive both colors and sounds; that a color cannot perceive a sound, nor a sound a color; and that I am therefore one individual principle, distinct from color and sound, and for the same reason from all other sensible things and inert ideas. But I am not in the same way conscious of either the existence or the essence of matter. On the contrary, I know that nothing inconsistent can exist, and that the existence of matter implies an inconsistency. Further, I know what I mean when I affirm that there is a spiritual substance or support of ideas—that is, that a spirit knows and perceives ideas. But I don't know what is meant when it is said that an unperceiving substance has ideas, or the archetypes of ideas, inherent in it and supports them. So, taking everything together, there is no parity between the case of spirit and that of matter.

REAL THINGS AND DREAMS

Philonous appeals to a gardener, distinguishes real things from fancies, and answers the charge about sin.

HYLAS D3.38 I admit I am satisfied on this point. But do you seriously think that the real existence of sensible things consists in their being actually perceived? If so, how is it that all mankind distinguishes between the two? Ask the first person you meet, and he will tell you that *to be perceived* is one thing and *to exist* is another.

PHILONOUS [D3.39] I am content, Hylas, to appeal to the common sense of the world for the truth of my view. Ask the gardener why he thinks that cherry tree over there exists in the garden, and he will tell you: because he sees and feels it—in a word, because he perceives it by his senses. Ask him why he thinks there is no orange tree there, and he will tell you: because he does not perceive one. What he perceives by sense he calls a real being, and says it *is* or *exists*; but what is not perceivable, he says, has no being.

HYLAS [D3.40] Yes, Philonous, I grant that the existence of a sensible thing consists in being perceivable, but not in being actually perceived.

PHILONOUS [D3.41] And what is perceivable but an idea? And can an idea exist without being actually perceived? We agreed on these points long ago.

HYLAS [D3.42] But however true your view may be, surely you won't deny that it is shocking and contrary to people's common sense. Ask that fellow there whether that tree has an existence outside his mind: what answer do you think he would give?

PHILONOUS [D3.43] The same one I would give myself: namely, that it does exist outside his mind. But then, to a Christian it surely cannot be shocking to say that the real tree, existing outside his mind, is truly known and comprehended by (that is, *exists in*) the infinite mind of God. He may not at first glance be aware of the direct and immediate proof there is of this—namely, that the very being of a tree, or of any other sensible thing, implies a mind in which it exists. But the point itself he cannot deny. The question between the materialists and me is not whether things have a *real* existence outside the mind of this or that person, but whether they have an *absolute* existence, distinct from being perceived by God and outside *all* minds. Some pagans and philosophers have indeed affirmed this; but anyone whose notions of the Deity fit the Holy Scriptures will be of another opinion.

HYLAS D3.44 But on your view, what difference is there between real things and fantasies formed by the imagination, or the visions of a dream—since they are all equally in the mind?

PHILONOUS D3.45 The ideas formed by the imagination are faint and indistinct, and they also depend entirely on the will. But the ideas perceived by sense—that is, real things—are more vivid and clear, and since they are imprinted on the mind by a spirit distinct from us, they do not depend on our will in the same way. So there is no danger of confusing these with the former, and just as little of confusing them with the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused. And even if dreams happened to be ever so lively and natural, they could easily be told apart from realities, because they are not connected with, and of a piece with, what comes before and after them in our lives. In short, whatever method you use to distinguish *things* from *chimeras* on your scheme, the same method will obviously work on mine too. For it must be, I presume, by some perceived difference, and I am not trying to deprive you of a single thing you perceive.

HYLAS D3.46 But still, Philonous, you hold that there is nothing in the world but spirits and ideas. And you must admit that this sounds very odd.

PHILONOUS D3.47 I grant that the word *idea*, since it is not commonly used for *thing*, sounds somewhat out of the way. My reason for using it was that the term is understood to imply a necessary relation to the mind, and philosophers now commonly use it to denote the immediate objects of the understanding. But however oddly the proposition may sound in words, there is nothing very strange or shocking in its meaning. In effect it comes to no more than this: that there are only things perceiving and things perceived; or that every unthinking being is necessarily, by the very nature of its existence, perceived by some mind—if not by a finite created mind, then certainly by the infinite mind of God, in whom "we live, and move, and have our being." Is this as strange as saying that the sensible qualities

are not in the objects? Or that we cannot be sure things exist, or know anything of their real natures—even though we both see and feel them, and perceive them by all our senses?

HYLAS [D3.48] And as a consequence of this, mustn't we think there are no such things as physical or corporeal causes, but that a Spirit is the immediate cause of all the phenomena in nature? Could anything be more extravagant than that?

PHILONOUS [D3.49] Yes: it is infinitely more extravagant to say that a thing which is inert acts on the mind, and that a thing which does not perceive is the cause of our perceptions. Besides, what seems so extravagant to you—for what reason I don't know—is no more than the Holy Scriptures assert in a hundred places. There God is represented as the sole and immediate Author of all those effects that some pagans and philosophers usually attribute to nature, matter, fate, or some such unthinking principle. This is so constantly the language of Scripture that it would be pointless to confirm it with citations.

HYLAS [D3.50] You don't realize, Philonous, that by making God the immediate Author of all the motions in nature, you make Him the Author of murder, sacrilege, adultery, and similar heinous sins.

PHILONOUS [D3.51] In answer to that, I observe, first, that a person is equally guilty whether he commits an action with an instrument or without one. So if you suppose that God acts through an instrument or occasion called *matter*, you make Him the author of sin just as truly as I do, who think Him the immediate agent in all the operations commonly attributed to Nature. I further observe that sin, or moral wrongdoing, does not consist in the outward physical action or motion, but in the will's inner departure from the laws of reason and religion. This is plain from the fact that killing an enemy in battle, or lawfully putting a criminal to death, is not thought sinful, even though the outward act is exactly the same as in a murder. Since, then, sin does not consist in the physical action, making God the immediate cause of all such actions is not making Him the Author of sin. Lastly, I

have nowhere said that God is the only agent who produces all the motions in bodies. It is true that I have denied there are any agents besides spirits. But this is entirely consistent with granting that thinking, rational beings use limited powers in producing motions—powers ultimately derived from God, indeed, but immediately under the direction of their own wills. And that is enough to make them bear all the guilt of their actions.

HYLAS D3.52 But denying matter, Philonous, or corporeal substance—there's the point. You can never persuade me that this does not go against the universal sense of mankind. If our dispute were settled by majority vote, I'm confident you would give up without waiting for the ballots to be counted.

PHILONOUS D3.53 I wish both our opinions were fairly stated and put to the judgment of people with plain common sense, free of the prejudices of a learned education. Let me be presented as someone who trusts his senses, who thinks he knows the things he sees and feels, and has no doubts about their existence; and let you be fairly shown with all your doubts, your paradoxes, and your skepticism about you—and I will gladly accept the verdict of any impartial person. It is evident to me that there is no substance in which ideas can exist other than spirit. Everyone agrees that the objects immediately perceived are ideas. And no one can deny that sensible qualities are objects immediately perceived. It is therefore evident that there can be no *substratum* of those qualities except spirit, *in* which they exist—not as a mode or property, but as a thing perceived exists in what perceives it. I deny, then, that there is any unthinking *substratum* of the objects of sense, and *in that sense* I deny that there is any material substance. But if by *material substance* is meant only *sensible body*—what is seen and felt (and the unphilosophical part of the world, I dare say, means no more than that)—then I am more certain of matter's existence than you or any other philosopher claim to be. If anything makes most people averse to the views I hold, it is the mistaken belief that I deny the reality of sensible things. But since it is you who are guilty of that, and not I, it follows that their aversion is really to your views and not

mine. I therefore assert that I am as certain as I am of my own existence that there are bodies or corporeal substances (meaning the things I perceive by my senses). And granting this, the bulk of mankind will give no thought to, nor consider themselves at all concerned with, the fate of those unknown natures and philosophical quiddities some people are so fond of.

FURTHER OBJECTIONS

Philonous answers the crooked oar, a nameless "third nature" as cause, and whether God would feel pain.

HYLAS D3.54 What do you say to this? Since, according to you, people judge the reality of things by their senses, how can anyone be mistaken in thinking the moon a flat, shining surface about a foot across; or a square tower seen from a distance round; or an oar with one end in the water crooked?

PHILONOUS D3.55 He is not mistaken about the ideas he actually perceives, but in the inferences he draws from his present perceptions. Thus, in the case of the oar, what he immediately perceives by sight is certainly crooked, and to that extent he is right. But if he concludes from this that when he takes the oar out of the water he will perceive the same crookedness, or that it would feel to his touch the way crooked things usually do, then he is mistaken. Likewise, if he concludes from what he perceives at one spot that, if he moved toward the moon or the tower, he would still be affected with similar ideas, he is mistaken. But his mistake does not lie in what he perceives immediately and at present (it would be an obvious contradiction to suppose he could err about that). It lies in the wrong judgment he makes about the ideas he takes to be connected with those he immediately perceives—or about the ideas that, on the basis of what he perceives now, he imagines would be perceived in other circumstances. The case is the same with the Copernican system. Here we do not perceive any motion of the earth; but it would be a mistake to conclude from this that if we were placed

as far from it as we now are from the other planets, we would not then perceive its motion.[2]

HYLAS D3.56 I understand you, and must admit that what you say is plausible enough. But let me remind you of one thing. Tell me, Philonous: weren't you once as positive that matter existed as you are now that it does not?

PHILONOUS D3.57 I was. But here is the difference. Before, my certainty rested, without examination, on prejudice; now, after inquiry, it rests on evidence.

HYLAS D3.58 After all, it seems our dispute is about words rather than things. We agree on the thing but differ on the name. It is evident that we are affected with ideas *from outside*; and it is no less evident that there must be (I won't say archetypes, but) Powers outside the mind corresponding to those ideas. And since these Powers cannot exist on their own, we must admit some subject of them—which I call *matter*, and you call *Spirit*. That is the whole difference.

PHILONOUS D3.59 Tell me, Hylas: is that powerful Being, or subject of powers, extended?

HYLAS D3.60 It has no extension, but it has the power to produce in you the idea of extension.

PHILONOUS D3.61 So it is itself unextended?

HYLAS D3.62 I grant it.

PHILONOUS D3.63 Isn't it also active?

HYLAS D3.64 No doubt. Otherwise how could we attribute powers to it?

PHILONOUS D3.65 Now let me ask you two questions. *First*, does it fit the usage of philosophers, or of anyone else, to give the name *matter* to an unextended active being? And *second*, isn't it ridiculously absurd to misapply names contrary to the common use of language?

2 The Copernican system: the sun-centered astronomy of Nicolaus Copernicus (1543), in which the earth moves though we do not perceive its motion.

HYLAS D3.66 Well then, since you insist, let's not call it matter, but some *Third Nature* distinct from both matter and spirit. For what reason do you have to call it Spirit? Doesn't the notion of spirit imply that it thinks, as well as being active and unextended?

PHILONOUS D3.67 My reason is this: I want to have some notion of meaning in what I say. But I have no notion of any action other than volition, nor can I conceive of volition being anywhere but in a spirit. So when I speak of an active being, I am obliged to mean a Spirit. Besides, what could be plainer than that a thing which has no ideas in itself cannot impart them to me; and if it has ideas, surely it must be a Spirit. To make you grasp the point even more clearly, if possible: I assert, as you do, that since we are affected from outside, we must grant that there are Powers outside us, in a Being distinct from ourselves. So far we agree. But we differ about what kind of powerful Being this is. I say it is Spirit; you say matter, or some Third Nature of I know not what kind (and, I might add, you know not what). This is how I prove it to be Spirit. From the effects I see produced, I conclude that there are actions; and because there are actions, there are volitions; and because there are volitions, there must be a *will*. Again, the things I perceive must exist—they or their archetypes—outside *my* mind. But since they are ideas, neither they nor their archetypes can exist anywhere except in an understanding; so there is an *understanding*. But will and understanding together make up, in the strictest sense, a mind or spirit. Therefore the powerful cause of my ideas is, in strict propriety of speech, a *Spirit*.

HYLAS D3.68 And now I suppose you think you have made the point very clear, little suspecting that what you put forward leads straight to a contradiction. Isn't it absurd to imagine any imperfection in God?

PHILONOUS D3.69 Without a doubt.

HYLAS D3.70 Is suffering pain an imperfection?

PHILONOUS D3.71 It is.

HYLAS D3.72 Aren't we sometimes affected with pain and discomfort by some other Being?

PHILONOUS D3.73 We are.

HYLAS D3.74 And haven't you said that this Being is a Spirit? And isn't that Spirit God?

PHILONOUS D3.75 I grant it.

HYLAS D3.76 But you have asserted that whatever ideas we perceive from outside are in the mind that affects us. The ideas of pain and discomfort, then, are in God; in other words, God suffers pain. That is to say, there is an imperfection in the divine nature—which you admitted was absurd. So you are caught in a plain contradiction.

PHILONOUS D3.77 I have no doubt that God knows or understands all things, and that He knows, among other things, what pain is—every sort of painful sensation—and what it is for His creatures to suffer pain. But that God, though He knows and sometimes causes painful sensations in us, can Himself suffer pain, I flatly deny. We, who are limited and dependent spirits, are subject to impressions of sense, the effects of an external Agent; and since these are produced against our will, they are sometimes painful and distressing. But God, whom no external being can affect, who perceives nothing by sense as we do, whose will is absolute and independent, causing all things and liable to be thwarted or resisted by nothing—it is evident that such a Being can suffer nothing, nor be affected with any painful sensation, or indeed any sensation at all. We are chained to a body; that is, our perceptions are connected with corporeal motions. By the law of our nature, we are affected by every change in the nervous parts of our sensible body—and that sensible body, rightly considered, is nothing but a combination of qualities or ideas that have no existence apart from being perceived by a mind. So this connection of sensations with corporeal motions means no more than a correspondence, in the order of nature, between two sets of ideas, or things immediately perceivable. But God is a Pure Spirit, free of all such sympathy or

natural ties. No corporeal motions are accompanied by sensations of pain or pleasure in His mind. To know everything knowable is certainly a perfection; but to endure, or suffer, or feel anything by sense is an imperfection. The first, I say, belongs to God, but not the second. God knows, or has ideas; but His ideas are not conveyed to Him by sense, as ours are. Because you fail to make a distinction where there is so obvious a difference, you imagine you see an absurdity where there is none.

SCIENCE AND NOVELTY

Hylas appeals to gravity, natural philosophy and the danger of new notions; Philonous says matter explains nothing.

HYLAS [D3.78] But all this while you haven't considered that the quantity of matter has been demonstrated to be proportional to the gravity of bodies. And what can stand against a demonstration?

PHILONOUS [D3.79] Let me see how you demonstrate that point.

HYLAS [D3.80] I lay it down as a principle that the moments, or quantities of motion, in bodies are jointly proportional to their velocities and to the quantities of matter they contain. Hence, where the velocities are equal, it follows that the moments are directly proportional to the quantity of matter in each. But experience shows that all bodies (apart from small inequalities caused by air resistance) fall with equal velocity. Therefore the motion of falling bodies—and consequently their gravity, which is the cause or principle of that motion—is proportional to the quantity of matter. Which was to be demonstrated.

PHILONOUS [D3.81] You lay it down as a self-evident principle that the quantity of motion in any body is proportional to its velocity and its *matter* taken together; and this is then used to prove a proposition from which the existence of *matter* is inferred. Tell me, isn't that arguing in a circle?

HYLAS D3.82 In the premise I mean only that the motion is proportional to the velocity together with the extension and solidity.

PHILONOUS D3.83 But even granting that this is true, it still won't follow that gravity is proportional to *matter* in your philosophical sense of the word—unless you take it for granted that the unknown *substratum*, or whatever else you call it, is proportional to those sensible qualities; and to suppose that is plainly begging the question. I readily grant that there is size and solidity, or resistance, perceived by sense; and I won't dispute that gravity may be proportional to those qualities. But that either these qualities as we perceive them, or the powers producing them, exist in a *material substratum*—this is what I deny, and what you do affirm but, for all your demonstration, have not yet proved.

HYLAS D3.84 I won't press that point any further. But do you really think you will persuade me that the natural philosophers have been dreaming all this time? What becomes of all their hypotheses and explanations of the phenomena, which presuppose the existence of matter?

PHILONOUS D3.85 What do you mean, Hylas, by the *phenomena*?

HYLAS D3.86 I mean the appearances I perceive by my senses.

PHILONOUS D3.87 And the appearances perceived by sense—aren't they ideas?

HYLAS D3.88 I have told you so a hundred times.

PHILONOUS D3.89 Then to explain the phenomena is to show how we come to be affected with ideas in the manner and order in which they are imprinted on our senses. Isn't it?

HYLAS D3.90 It is.

PHILONOUS D3.91 Now, if you can prove that any philosopher has explained the production of even one idea in our minds with the help of *matter*, I will give in for good and regard everything said against it as nothing. But if you cannot, it is useless to appeal to the explanation of phenomena. That a Being endowed with

knowledge and will should produce or present ideas is easily understood. But that a Being utterly lacking these faculties should be able to produce ideas, or affect an intelligence in any way, I can never understand. Even if we had some positive conception of matter—even if we knew its qualities and could comprehend its existence—it would still, I say, be so far from explaining things that it would itself be the most inexplicable thing in the world. And yet, for all that, it does not follow that philosophers have been doing nothing. By observing and reasoning about the connection of ideas, they discover the laws and methods of nature, which is a branch of knowledge both useful and enjoyable.

HYLAS D3.92 After all, can we suppose that God would deceive all mankind? Do you imagine He would have led the whole world to believe in the existence of matter if there were no such thing?

PHILONOUS D3.93 I don't think you will claim that every widespread opinion arising from prejudice, passion, or thoughtlessness can be attributed to God as its Author. Whatever opinion we credit to Him must be either one He has disclosed to us by supernatural revelation, or one so evident to our natural faculties—which God framed and gave us—that we cannot possibly withhold our assent from it. But where is the revelation? Or where is the evidence that compels belief in matter? Indeed, how does it appear that matter, *taken as something distinct from what we perceive by our senses*, is thought to exist by all mankind—or by anyone at all except a few philosophers who don't know what they are after? Your question assumes that these points are clear; when you have cleared them up, I will consider myself obliged to give you another answer. Meanwhile, let it be enough to tell you that I do not suppose God has deceived mankind at all.

HYLAS D3.94 But the novelty, Philonous, the novelty! That's where the danger lies. New notions should always be discouraged; they unsettle people's minds, and nobody knows where they will end.

PHILONOUS D3.95 Why rejecting a notion that has no foundation in sense, reason, or divine authority should be thought to unsettle belief in opinions grounded on all or any of these, I cannot imagine. I freely admit that innovations in government and religion are dangerous and ought to be discouraged. But is there the same reason to discourage them in philosophy? Making known anything that was unknown before is an innovation in knowledge; and if all such innovations had been forbidden, mankind would have made remarkable progress in the arts and sciences! But it is no business of mine to plead for novelties and paradoxes. That the qualities we perceive are not in the objects; that we must not believe our senses; that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be sure even of their existence; that real colors and sounds are nothing but certain unknown shapes and motions; that motions are in themselves neither fast nor slow; that there are absolute extensions in bodies, without any particular size or shape; that a thing that is dull, unthinking, and inactive acts on a spirit; that the smallest particle of a body contains countless extended parts—these are the novelties, these are the strange notions that shock the genuine, uncorrupted judgment of all mankind, and that, once admitted, entangle the mind in endless doubts and difficulties. And it is against these and similar innovations that I am trying to defend common sense. It is true that in doing so I may have to use some *ambages*—roundabout expressions—and unusual ways of speaking. But once my views are thoroughly understood, what is most unusual in them will turn out, in effect, to amount to no more than this: that it is absolutely impossible, and a plain contradiction, to suppose that any unthinking Being could exist without being perceived by a Mind. And if this view is unusual, it is a shame that it should be so at this stage of history, and in a Christian country.[3]

HYLAS D3.96 As for the difficulties other opinions may face, those are beside the point. Your job is to defend your own opinion.

3 *Ambages* (Latin): circumlocutions, roundabout ways of speaking.

Could anything be plainer than that you want to change all things into ideas? You, I say, who are not ashamed to accuse me of *skepticism*. This is so plain there is no denying it.

PHILONOUS D3.97 You misunderstand me. I am not for changing things into ideas, but rather ideas into things. For I take those immediate objects of perception, which according to you are only appearances of things, to be the real things themselves.

HYLAS D3.98 Things! Claim what you like; but it is certain that you leave us nothing but the empty forms of things—only the outside, which strikes the senses.

PHILONOUS D3.99 What you call the empty forms and outside of things seem to me to be the very things themselves. Nor are they empty or incomplete, except on your supposition that matter is an essential part of all corporeal things. So we both agree on this: that we perceive only sensible forms. But here we differ: you take them to be empty appearances, I take them to be real beings. In short, you do not trust your senses, and I do.

THE SAME THING

Philonous explains how ideas from several senses make one thing, and in what sense people see the same thing.

HYLAS D3.100 You say you believe your senses, and you seem pleased with yourself for agreeing with ordinary people in this. According to you, then, the true nature of a thing is discovered by the senses. If so, where does all the disagreement come from? Why isn't the same shape, and the other sensible qualities, perceived in every way we perceive? And why should we use a microscope to discover the true nature of a body better, if it could be discovered by the naked eye?

PHILONOUS D3.101 Strictly speaking, Hylas, we do not see the same object that we feel; nor is the same object perceived through the microscope as by the naked eye. But if every variation were thought enough to make a new kind or a new individual, the endless number and confusion of names would

make language unworkable. So, to avoid this, as well as other drawbacks that are obvious on a little reflection, people combine several ideas—apprehended by different senses, or by the same sense at different times or in different circumstances, but observed to have some connection in nature, whether of coexistence or succession—and they refer them all to one name and consider them as one thing. It follows that when I examine with my other senses a thing I have seen, it is not in order to understand better the same object I perceived by sight, since the object of one sense is not perceived by the other senses. And when I look through a microscope, it is not to perceive more clearly what I already perceived with my bare eyes, since the object perceived through the lens is quite different from the former one. In both cases my aim is only to learn which ideas are connected together; and the more someone knows about the connection of ideas, the more he is said to know about the nature of things. So what if our ideas vary? What if our senses are not affected with the same appearances in all circumstances? It does not follow that they cannot be trusted, or that they are inconsistent either with themselves or with anything else—except with your preconceived notion of some single, unchanging, unperceivable, real Nature (I know not what) marked by each name. This prejudice seems to have arisen from misunderstanding the ordinary language of people, who speak of several distinct ideas as united by the mind into one thing. And indeed there is reason to suspect that several of the philosophers' mistaken notions have the same origin: they began to build their systems not so much on notions as on words—words coined by ordinary people merely for convenience and speed in the everyday business of life, without any concern for speculation.

HYLAS [D3.102] I think I grasp your meaning.

PHILONOUS [D3.103] Your view is that the ideas we perceive by our senses are not real things, but images or copies of them. Our knowledge, then, is real only to the extent that our ideas are true *representations* of those *originals*. But since these supposed ori-

ginals are unknown in themselves, it is impossible to know how far our ideas resemble them, or whether they resemble them at all. So we cannot be sure we have any real knowledge. Further, since our ideas are constantly changing, without any change in the supposed real things, it necessarily follows that they cannot all be true copies of them; or, if some are and others are not, it is impossible to tell which are which. And this plunges us still deeper into uncertainty. Again, when we think it over, we cannot conceive how any idea, or anything like an idea, could have an absolute existence outside a mind—nor, consequently, on your view, how there could be any real thing in nature. The result of all this is that we are thrown into the most hopeless and desperate skepticism. Now let me ask you: First, isn't your referring ideas to certain absolutely existing, unperceived substances as their originals the source of all this skepticism? Second, are you informed, by either sense or reason, of the existence of those unknown originals? And if you are not, isn't it absurd to suppose them? Third, when you look into it, do you find that anything is distinctly conceived or meant by the *absolute or external existence of unperceiving substances*? Lastly, all things considered, isn't the wisest course to follow nature, trust your senses, and, setting aside all anxious thought about unknown natures or substances, accept with ordinary people that the things perceived by the senses are real things?

HYLAS [D3.104] For the moment I have no wish to do the answering. I would much rather see how you can get past what follows. Tell me: aren't the objects perceived by one person's *senses* also perceivable by others who are present? If there were a hundred more people here, they would all see the garden, the trees, and the flowers as I see them. But they are not affected in the same way by the ideas I form in my *imagination*. Doesn't this make a difference between the first sort of objects and the second?

PHILONOUS [D3.105] I grant that it does. Nor have I ever denied a difference between the objects of sense and those of imagination. But what would you infer from that? You cannot say that

sensible objects exist unperceived because they are perceived by many.

HYLAS D3.106 I admit I can make nothing of that objection; but it has led me to another. Isn't it your view that by our senses we perceive only the ideas existing in our minds?

PHILONOUS D3.107 It is.

HYLAS D3.108 But the *same* idea that is in my mind cannot be in yours, or in any other mind. So doesn't it follow from your principles that no two people can see the same thing? And isn't that highly absurd?

PHILONOUS D3.109 If the term *same* is taken in its ordinary sense, it is certain (and not at all contrary to the principles I hold) that different persons may perceive the same thing, or that the same thing or idea may exist in different minds. Words are assigned arbitrarily; and since people are accustomed to apply the word *same* where no distinction or variety is perceived, and I do not claim to alter their perceptions, it follows that just as people have said before, *several saw the same thing*, so on similar occasions they may go on using the same phrase, without any departure either from correct language or from the truth of things. But if the term *same* is used in the sense of philosophers, who claim to have an abstract notion of identity, then, depending on their various definitions of this notion (for they have not yet agreed on what that philosophical identity consists in), it may or may not be possible for different persons to perceive the same thing. But whether philosophers see fit to *call* a thing the *same* or not is, I think, of little importance. Suppose several people together, all endowed with the same faculties and so affected in the same way by their senses, who had never yet known the use of language. They would undoubtedly agree in their perceptions. Yet perhaps, when they came to use speech, some, attending to the uniformity of what was perceived, might call it the *same* thing, while others, attending especially to the diversity of the persons who perceived it, might choose to call it *different* things. But who does not see that the whole dispute is about a

word—namely, whether what is perceived by different persons may still have the term *same* applied to it? Or suppose a house whose walls, or outer shell, remain unaltered, while the rooms are all torn down and new ones built in their place; and suppose you called this the *same* house and I said it was not the *same* house. Wouldn't we, for all that, agree perfectly in our thoughts about the house, considered in itself? And wouldn't the whole difference consist in a sound? If you said we differed in our notions, because you added to your idea of the house the simple abstract idea of identity, whereas I did not, I would tell you that I don't know what you mean by the *abstract idea of identity*, and I would ask you to look into your own thoughts and make sure you understood yourself.—Why so silent, Hylas? Aren't you satisfied yet that people may dispute about identity and diversity without any real difference in their thoughts and opinions apart from names? Take this further reflection with you: whether matter is granted to exist or not, the situation is exactly the same with respect to the point at issue. For the materialists themselves acknowledge that what we immediately perceive by our senses is our own ideas. Your difficulty—that no two people see the same thing—therefore tells equally against the materialists and against me.

HYLAS D3.110 But they suppose an external archetype, and by referring their several ideas to it they can truly be said to perceive the same thing.

PHILONOUS D3.111 And (not to mention that you have discarded those archetypes) you may just as well suppose an external archetype on my principles—*external, I mean, to your own mind*—though indeed it must be supposed to exist in that Mind which comprehends all things. But then this serves all the purposes of *identity* just as well as if it existed outside a mind. And I am sure you yourself will not say it is less intelligible.

HYLAS D3.112 You have indeed clearly satisfied me—either that there is no real difficulty in this point, or, if there is, that it tells equally against both opinions.

PHILONOUS [D3.113] But what tells equally against two contradictory opinions can be a proof against neither.

HYLAS [D3.114] I admit it.

But after all, Philonous, when I consider the substance of what you put forward against *skepticism*, it amounts to no more than this: we are sure that we really see, hear, and feel—in a word, that we are affected with sensible impressions.

PHILONOUS [D3.116] And how are *we* concerned any further? I see this cherry, I feel it, I taste it; and I am sure that *nothing* cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted. It is therefore *real*. Take away the sensations of softness, moisture, redness, and tartness, and you take away the cherry, since it is not a being distinct from sensations. A cherry, I say, is nothing but a cluster of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by various senses—ideas united by the mind into one thing (or given one name) because they are observed to accompany each other. Thus, when the palate is affected with a certain particular taste, the sight is affected with a red color, the touch with roundness, softness, and so on. So when I see, feel, and taste in various specific ways, I am sure the cherry exists, or is real, since in my view its reality is nothing abstracted from those sensations. But if by the word *cherry* you mean an unknown nature, distinct from all those sensible qualities, and by its *existence* something distinct from its being perceived, then I admit that neither you nor I nor anyone else can be sure it exists.

HYLAS [D3.117] But what would you say, Philonous, if I brought the very same reasons against the existence of sensible things *in a mind* that you have offered against their existing *in a material substratum*?

PHILONOUS [D3.118] When I see your reasons, you shall hear what I have to say to them.

HYLAS [D3.119] Is the mind extended or unextended?

PHILONOUS [D3.120] Unextended, no doubt.

HYLAS D3.121 Do you say that the things you perceive are in your mind?

PHILONOUS D3.122 They are.

HYLAS D3.123 And haven't I heard you speak of sensible impressions?

PHILONOUS D3.124 I believe you may have.

HYLAS D3.125 Now explain to me, Philonous, how there can possibly be room for all those trees and houses to exist in your mind. Can extended things be contained in what is unextended? Or are we to imagine impressions made on a thing entirely lacking solidity? You cannot say that objects are in your mind as books are in your study, or that things are imprinted on it as the shape of a seal is on wax. In what sense, then, are we to understand those expressions? Explain this to me if you can, and then I will be able to answer all the questions you put to me earlier about my *substratum*.

PHILONOUS D3.126 Look, Hylas: when I speak of objects as existing in the mind, or as imprinted on the senses, I don't want to be understood in the crude literal sense, as when bodies are said to exist in a place, or a seal to make an impression on wax. I mean only that the mind comprehends or perceives them, and that it is affected from outside, by some being distinct from itself. That is my explanation of your difficulty. How it can help make your doctrine of an unperceiving material *substratum* intelligible, I'd very much like to know.

HYLAS D3.127 Well, if that is all, I admit I don't see what use can be made of it. But aren't you guilty of some misuse of language here?

PHILONOUS D3.128 None at all. It is simply what common usage—which, as you know, is the rule of language—has authorized. Nothing is more usual than for philosophers to speak of the immediate objects of the understanding as things existing in the mind. Nor is there anything in this that doesn't fit the general pattern of language: most mental operations are signified by

words borrowed from sensible things, as is plain in the terms *comprehend*, *reflect*, *discourse*, and so on, which, when applied to the mind, must not be taken in their crude, original sense.

HYLAS D3.129 I grant you have satisfied me on this point. But one great difficulty still remains, and I don't know how you will get past it. It is so important, in fact, that even if you could solve all the others, you must never expect to convert me to your principles unless you can find a solution to this one.

PHILONOUS D3.130 Tell me this mighty difficulty.

THE CREATION

Hylas objects that Genesis describes a creation of real things; Philonous shows his principles fit the account.

HYLAS D3.131 The Scripture account of the creation seems to me utterly irreconcilable with your views. Moses tells us of a creation. A creation of what? Of ideas? Certainly not—of things, of real things, solid corporeal substances. Bring your principles into agreement with this, and perhaps I will agree with you.[4]

PHILONOUS D3.132 Moses mentions the sun, moon, and stars, earth and sea, plants and animals. I don't question that all of these really exist and were created by God in the beginning. If by *ideas* you mean fictions and fancies of the mind, then these are not ideas. If by *ideas* you mean immediate objects of the understanding—sensible things, which cannot exist unperceived, or outside a mind—then these things are ideas. But whether or not you call them *ideas* matters little. The difference is only about a name. Whether the name is kept or dropped, the sense, the truth, and the reality of things remain the same. In ordinary talk the objects of our senses are called not *ideas* but *things*. Go on calling them that—as long as you don't attribute to them any absolute external existence—and I will never quarrel with you over a word. So I grant that the creation was a creation

4 Moses: traditionally regarded as the author of Genesis, whose first chapter narrates the creation.

of things, of *real* things. Nor is this in the least inconsistent with my principles, as is evident from what I have just said. And it would have been evident to you without my saying it, if you hadn't forgotten what has been said so often before. But as for solid corporeal substances, I ask you to show where Moses makes any mention of them. And even if he, or any other inspired writer, did mention them, it would still be up to you to show that those words were taken not in the ordinary sense, for things that fall under our senses, but in the philosophical sense, for matter, or *an unknown quiddity with an absolute existence*. When you have proved these points, then (and not before) you may bring the authority of Moses into our dispute.

HYLAS D3.133 It is pointless to argue about something so clear. I am content to leave it to your own conscience. Aren't you convinced there is some particular conflict between the Mosaic account of the creation and your views?

PHILONOUS D3.134 If every possible sense that can be given to the first chapter of Genesis can be conceived as consistently with my principles as with any others, then it has no particular conflict with them. But there is no sense you can conceive that I cannot conceive just as well, believing what I believe. For apart from spirits, everything you conceive is ideas, and I don't deny that these exist. Nor do you claim that they exist outside the mind.

HYLAS D3.135 Please show me any sense in which you can understand it.

PHILONOUS D3.136 Why, I imagine that if I had been present at the creation, I would have seen things brought into being—that is, become perceptible—in the order the sacred historian lays down. I always believed the Mosaic account of the creation before, and I find no change now in the way I believe it. When things are said to begin or end their existence, we mean this not with regard to God but with regard to His creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or, what is the same thing, have an eternal existence in His mind. But when things that were previ-

ously imperceptible to creatures become, by a decree of God, perceptible to them, then they are said to begin a relative existence, with respect to created minds. So when I read the Mosaic account of the creation, I understand that the various parts of the world gradually became perceivable to finite spirits endowed with the proper faculties, so that whoever such spirits were present did in fact perceive them. This is the literal, obvious sense the words of Holy Scripture suggest to me, and it includes no mention or thought of *substratum*, instrument, occasion, or absolute existence. And I don't doubt that, if you look into it, you will find that most plain, honest people who believe in the creation never think of those things any more than I do. In what metaphysical sense you may understand it, only you can say.

HYLAS [D3.137] But, Philonous, you don't seem to realize that you allow created things, in the beginning, only a relative and therefore hypothetical being—that is, on the supposition that there were *men* to perceive them. Without such perceivers they have no actuality of absolute existence in which the act of creation could terminate. So, on your view, isn't it plainly impossible for the creation of any inanimate creatures to have come before that of man? And isn't this directly contrary to the Mosaic account?

PHILONOUS [D3.138] In answer, I say first that created beings might have begun to exist in the minds of other created intelligences besides men. So you won't be able to prove any contradiction between Moses and my views unless you first show that there was no other order of finite created spirits in existence before man. I say further: suppose we conceive the creation as we would conceive something happening now—a crop of plants of every kind produced by an invisible Power in a desert where nobody was present. This way of explaining or conceiving it is consistent with my principles, since they take nothing from you, either sensible or imaginable. It fits exactly with the ordinary, natural, and uncorrupted notions of mankind. It shows the dependence of all things on God. And so it has every good effect

or influence that this important article of our faith could possibly have in making people humble, thankful, and resigned to their Creator. I say, moreover, that in this bare conception of things, stripped of words, you will not find any notion of what you call the *actuality of absolute existence*. You can, of course, raise a cloud of dust with those terms and so drag out our dispute to no purpose. But I urge you to look calmly into your own thoughts and then tell me whether they are not useless and unintelligible jargon.

HYLAS D3.139 I admit I attach no very clear notion to them. But what do you say to this? Don't you make the existence of sensible things consist in their being in a mind? And weren't all things eternally in the mind of God? Then, on your view, didn't they exist from all eternity? And how could what was eternal be created in time? Could anything be clearer or more tightly argued than that?

PHILONOUS D3.140 And aren't you also of the opinion that God knew all things from eternity?

HYLAS D3.141 I am.

PHILONOUS D3.142 So they always had a being in the divine intellect.

HYLAS D3.143 I grant that.

PHILONOUS D3.144 Then by your own admission nothing is new, or begins to be, in respect of the mind of God. So we agree on that point.

HYLAS D3.145 Then what are we to make of the creation?

PHILONOUS D3.146 May we not understand it as having been entirely in respect of finite spirits? Things, with regard to us, may properly be said to begin their existence, or be created, when God decreed that they should become perceptible to intelligent creatures, in the order and manner He then established and we now call the laws of nature. You may call this a *relative* or *hypothetical existence*, if you like. But as long as it gives us the most natural, obvious, and literal sense of the Mosaic history of

the creation; as long as it serves all the religious purposes of that great article of faith; in a word, as long as you can offer no other sense or meaning in its place—why should we reject it? To indulge a ridiculous skeptical habit of making everything nonsense and unintelligible? I am sure you cannot say it is for the glory of God. For even granting it to be possible and conceivable that the corporeal world should have an absolute existence outside the mind of God, as well as outside the minds of all created spirits, how could this display either the immensity or the omniscience of the Deity, or the necessary and immediate dependence of all things on Him? Wouldn't it rather seem to detract from those attributes?

HYLAS D3.147 Well, but what about this decree of God's to make things perceptible, Philonous? Isn't it plain that God either carried out that decree from all eternity, or else at some particular time began to will what He had not actually willed before, but only intended to will? If the former, there could be no creation, no beginning of existence, in finite things. If the latter, we must admit that something new happens to the Deity, which implies a kind of change—and all change implies imperfection.

PHILONOUS D3.148 Please consider what you are doing. Isn't it obvious that this objection tells equally against a creation in any sense—indeed, against every other act of the Deity that can be discovered by the light of nature? For *we* cannot conceive any of them except as performed in time and having a beginning. God is a Being of transcendent and unlimited perfections, and so His nature is incomprehensible to finite spirits. It is not to be expected, then, that anyone, whether materialist or immaterialist, should have exactly correct notions of the Deity, His attributes, and His ways of acting. So if you want to infer anything against me, your difficulty must not be drawn from the inadequacy of our conceptions of the divine nature, which is unavoidable on any system, but from the denial of matter—and there is not one word about that, directly or indirectly, in the objection you have just made.

HYLAS D3.149 I must admit that the only difficulties you are obliged to clear up are those that arise from the non-existence of matter and are peculiar to that view. So far you are right. But I simply cannot bring myself to think that there is no such particular conflict between the creation and your opinion—though I don't clearly know where to locate it.

PHILONOUS D3.150 What more do you want? Don't I acknowledge a twofold state of things—the one ectypal or natural, the other archetypal and eternal? The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God. Isn't this in keeping with the common views of theologians? Or is anything more than this needed in order to conceive the creation? But you suspect some particular conflict, though you don't know where it lies. To remove all possible doubt on the matter, just consider this one point.[5] Either you cannot conceive the creation on any hypothesis whatever—in which case there is no ground for objecting to any particular opinion on that account—or you can conceive it. And if you can, why not on my principles, since they take away nothing conceivable? You have been allowed the full range of sense, imagination, and reason all along. So whatever you could apprehend before, whether immediately or mediately by your senses, or by reasoning from your senses—whatever you could perceive, imagine, or understand—you still have. So if the notion you have of the creation on other principles is intelligible, you still have it on mine. If it is not intelligible, I take it to be no notion at all, and so nothing is lost. Indeed, it seems very plain to me that the supposition of matter—a thing perfectly unknown and inconceivable—cannot help us conceive anything. And I hope I need not prove to you that if the existence of matter does not make the creation conceivable, then the creation's being inconceivable without it can be no objection against its non-existence.

HYLAS D3.151 I admit, Philonous, you have almost satisfied me on this point about the creation.

5 Ectypal: being a copy of an archetype, the original pattern.

PHILONOUS D3.152 I would like to know why you are not entirely satisfied. You tell me there is a conflict between the Mosaic history and immaterialism, but you don't know where it lies. Is that reasonable, Hylas? Can you expect me to solve a difficulty without knowing what it is? But leaving all that aside—wouldn't anyone think you were certain that there is no conflict between the accepted views of the materialists and the inspired writings?

HYLAS D3.153 And so I am.

PHILONOUS D3.154 Should the historical part of Scripture be understood in a plain, obvious sense, or in a sense that is metaphysical and far-fetched?

HYLAS D3.155 In the plain sense, no doubt.

PHILONOUS D3.156 When Moses speaks of plants, earth, water, and so on as having been created by God, don't you think the sensible things those words commonly signify are what come to the mind of every unphilosophical reader?

HYLAS D3.157 I can't help thinking so.

PHILONOUS D3.158 And doesn't the materialist's doctrine deny a real existence to all ideas, or things perceived by sense?

HYLAS D3.159 I have already granted that.

PHILONOUS D3.160 So according to them, the creation was not the creation of sensible things, which have only a relative being, but of certain unknown natures that have an absolute being, in which the act of creation could terminate?

HYLAS D3.161 True.

PHILONOUS D3.162 Isn't it evident, then, that the defenders of matter destroy the plain, obvious sense of Moses, with which their views are utterly inconsistent, and in its place force on us I don't know what—something equally unintelligible to them and to me?

HYLAS D3.163 I can't contradict you.

PHILONOUS D3.164 Moses tells us of a creation. A creation of what? Of unknown quiddities, of occasions, or of *substratum*?

Certainly not—of things obvious to the senses. You must first reconcile this with your views if you expect me to be reconciled to them.

HYLAS D3.165 I see you can attack me with my own weapons.

PHILONOUS D3.166 Then as for *absolute existence*—was there ever a more empty notion than that? It is so abstract and unintelligible that you have frankly admitted you could not conceive it, much less explain anything by it. But even granting that matter exists, and that the notion of absolute existence is as clear as daylight, has this ever been known to make the creation more believable? On the contrary, hasn't it supplied the atheists and unbelievers of every age with their most plausible arguments against a creation? That a corporeal substance with an absolute existence outside the minds of spirits should be produced out of nothing by the mere will of a Spirit has been regarded as so contrary to all reason, so impossible and absurd, that not only the most celebrated of the ancients, but even several modern and Christian philosophers, have held that matter is co-eternal with the Deity. Put these things together, and then judge for yourself whether materialism disposes people to believe in the creation of things.

HYLAS D3.167 I admit, Philonous, I think it doesn't. This objection from the *creation* is the last one I can think of, and I have to admit it has been answered as fully as the rest. Nothing now remains to overcome except a kind of inexplicable reluctance I find in myself toward your views.

PHILONOUS D3.168 When someone is drawn to one side of a question without knowing why, can this, do you think, be anything but the effect of prejudice, which always accompanies old and deep-rooted opinions? And indeed, in this respect, I can't deny that among people with a learned education the belief in matter has a great advantage over the opposite opinion.

HYLAS D3.169 I admit it seems to be as you say.

THE ADVANTAGES OF IMMATERIALISM

Philonous lists what religion and the sciences gain by denying matter, and Hylas is satisfied.

PHILONOUS D3.170 To counterbalance this weight of prejudice, then, let us throw into the scale the great advantages that come from believing in immaterialism, both for religion and for human learning. The existence of God and the incorruptibility of the soul, those great articles of religion—aren't they proved by the clearest and most immediate evidence? When I say the existence of God, I don't mean some obscure general Cause of things of which we have no conception, but God in the strict and proper sense of the word. I mean a Being whose spirituality, omnipresence, providence, omniscience, and infinite power and goodness are as conspicuous as the existence of sensible things—which (despite the deceptive claims and affected doubts of the skeptics) we have no more reason to doubt than our own existence. Then, as regards the human sciences. In natural philosophy, what complications, what obscurities, what contradictions the belief in matter has led people into! To say nothing of the countless disputes about its extension, continuity, homogeneity, gravity, divisibility, and so on—don't they claim to explain everything by bodies acting on bodies according to the laws of motion? And yet can they understand how one body should move another?[6] Indeed, even granting there were no difficulty in reconciling the notion of an inert being with a cause, or in conceiving how an accident might pass from one body to another, have they, with all their strained thinking and extravagant hypotheses, managed to achieve the *mechanical* production of even one animal or plant body? Can they account by the laws of motion for sounds, tastes, smells, or colors, or for the regular course of things? Have they accounted by physical principles for the fitness and design of even the most insignificant parts of the universe? But set aside matter and corporeal causes, admit only

6 Natural philosophy: what we now call physics and the natural sciences.

the causal power of an All-perfect Mind, and aren't all the effects of nature easy and intelligible? If the *phenomena* are nothing but *ideas*: God is a *spirit*, but matter an unintelligent, unperceiving being. If they demonstrate an unlimited power in their cause: God is active and omnipotent, but matter an inert mass. If their order, regularity, and usefulness can never be admired enough: God is infinitely wise and provident, but matter lacks all contrivance and design. These are surely great advantages in *physics*. Not to mention that thinking of the Deity as distant naturally inclines people to be careless in their moral conduct—about which they would be more careful if they thought Him immediately present and acting on their minds, without the intervention of matter or unthinking secondary causes. Then in *metaphysics*: what difficulties about being in the abstract, substantial forms, hylarchic principles, plastic natures, substance and accident, the principle of individuation, the possibility of matter's thinking, the origin of ideas, and the way two independent substances as different as *spirit* and *matter* could act on each other—[7] what difficulties, I say, and what endless investigations about these and countless other such points do we escape by supposing only spirits and ideas? Even *mathematics* itself becomes much clearer and easier if we remove the absolute existence of extended things, since the most shocking paradoxes and intricate speculations in those sciences depend on the infinite divisibility of finite extension, which depends on that supposition. But why dwell on particular sciences? Isn't that opposition to all knowledge whatever—that frenzy of the ancient and modern skeptics—built on the same foundation? Or can you produce even one argument against the reality of corporeal things, or in support of that professed total ignorance of their natures, that does not assume their reality consists in an external, absolute existence? On that assumption, admittedly, the objections from the changing colors of a pigeon's neck, or from the oar that looks broken in the water, must be allowed some weight. But these

7 Hylarchic principles, plastic natures: formative powers in matter posited by Henry More and Ralph Cudworth, the Cambridge Platonists.

and similar objections vanish if we do not maintain the existence of absolute external originals, but place the reality of things in ideas—fleeting and changeable, it is true, yet not changed at random, but according to the fixed order of nature. For it is in this that the constancy and truth of things consists, which secures all the concerns of life and distinguishes what is *real* from the *irregular visions* of the imagination.

HYLAS D3.171 I agree with everything you have just said, and I must admit that nothing inclines me to embrace your opinion more than the advantages I see come with it. I am lazy by nature, and this would be a mighty shortcut in knowledge. What doubts, what hypotheses, what labyrinths of idle diversion, what fields of dispute, what an ocean of false learning could be avoided by that single notion of *immaterialism*!

PHILONOUS D3.172 After all, is there anything more left to be done? You may remember you promised to embrace whichever opinion, on examination, should appear most agreeable to common sense and furthest from skepticism. By your own admission, this is the one that denies matter, or the *absolute* existence of corporeal things. And that is not all: the same view has been proved in several ways, looked at in different lights, followed out in its consequences, and cleared of all objections. Could there be greater evidence of its truth? Or is it possible for it to have all the marks of a true opinion and yet be false?

HYLAS D3.173 I admit I am entirely satisfied for the present in every respect. But what assurance can I have that I will keep giving your opinion the same full assent, and that no unforeseen objection or difficulty will come up later?

PHILONOUS D3.174 Tell me, Hylas: in other cases, when a point has once been clearly proved, do you withhold your assent because of objections or difficulties it may be open to? Are the difficulties that go with the doctrine of incommensurable quantities, of the angle of contact, of the asymptotes of curves, and the like, enough to make you hold out against mathematical demonstration? Or will you disbelieve in God's Providence

because there may be some particular things that *you* don't know how to reconcile with it? If there are difficulties attending *immaterialism*, there are at the same time direct and evident proofs of it. But for the existence of matter there is not one proof, and far more numerous and insurmountable objections stand against it.[8] But where are these mighty difficulties you insist on? Alas, you don't know where or what they are—something that may possibly come up later. If that is enough excuse for withholding your full assent, you should never give it to any proposition, however free from exceptions, however clearly and solidly demonstrated.

HYLAS D3.175 You have satisfied me, Philonous.

PHILONOUS D3.176 But to arm you against all future objections, just consider this: whatever weighs equally against two contradictory opinions can be a proof against neither. So whenever a difficulty comes up, see whether you can find a solution to it on the hypothesis of the *materialists*. Don't be misled by words; examine your own thoughts. And if you cannot conceive it more easily with the help of *materialism*, it plainly can be no objection against *immaterialism*. If you had followed this rule all along, you would probably have spared yourself a great deal of trouble in raising objections. For of all your difficulties, I challenge you to show one that is explained by matter—indeed, one that is not more unintelligible with that supposition than without it, and that therefore tells *against* it rather than *for* it. You should consider in each case whether the difficulty arises from the *nonexistence of matter*. If it doesn't, you might as well argue from the infinite divisibility of extension against God's foreknowledge as argue from such a difficulty against *immaterialism*. And yet, thinking back, I believe you will find this has often, if not always, been the case. You should likewise take care not to argue by *petitio principii*. People are apt to say: "The unknown substances ought to be regarded as real things, rather than the ideas

8 Angle of contact: the "angle" between a curve and its tangent, a long-disputed puzzle in geometry.

in our minds. And who can say that the unthinking external substance doesn't play a part, as a cause or instrument, in producing our ideas?" But isn't this proceeding on the supposition that there are such external substances? And isn't supposing this begging the question? Above all, though, you should beware of deceiving yourself with the common fallacy called *ignoratio elenchi*. You often talked as if you thought I maintained the nonexistence of sensible things.[9] In truth, no one can be more thoroughly certain of their existence than I am. It is you who doubt it—or rather, I should say, who flatly deny it. Everything that is seen, felt, heard, or in any way perceived by the senses is, on the principles I hold, a real being—but not on yours. Remember, the matter you argue for is an Unknown Something (if it can even be called *something*), stripped of all sensible qualities, which can neither be perceived by sense nor apprehended by the mind. Remember, I say, that it is not any object that is hard or soft, hot or cold, blue or white, round or square, and so on. For all these things I affirm do exist. I do deny, it is true, that they have an existence distinct from being perceived, or that they exist outside all minds whatever. Think about these points; consider them carefully and keep them constantly in view. Otherwise you will not grasp what the question really is, and without that your objections will always miss the mark—and instead of being aimed at my views, may well be aimed (as more than once they have been) at your own.

KEEPING THE WORD MATTER

Hylas asks to keep the word; Philonous agrees and closes with the image of a fountain.

HYLAS D3.177 I have to admit, Philonous, that nothing seems to have kept me from agreeing with you more than this very *mistaking of the question*. When you deny matter, at first glance I am tempted to think you are denying the things we see and feel; but

9 Petitio principii: begging the question. Ignoratio elenchi: missing the point—refuting something other than what is actually in dispute.

on reflection I find there is no basis for that. So what do you think of keeping the name *matter* and applying it to *sensible things*? This could be done without any change in your views, and believe me, it would help reconcile them to some people who may be more shocked by an innovation in words than in opinion.

PHILONOUS D3.178 With all my heart. Keep the word *matter* and apply it to the objects of sense, if you like, as long as you don't attribute to them any existence distinct from their being perceived. I will never quarrel with you over an expression. *Matter*, or *material substance*, are terms introduced by philosophers, and as they use them they imply a kind of independence, an existence distinct from being perceived by a mind. But ordinary people never use them—or if they ever do, it is to mean the immediate objects of sense. So one would think that as long as the names of all particular things are kept, along with the terms *sensible*, *substance*, *body*, *stuff*, and the like, the word *matter* would never be missed in ordinary talk. And in philosophical discussions it seems best to leave it out altogether, since perhaps nothing has done more to encourage and strengthen the mind's corrupt inclination toward atheism than the use of that general, confused term.

HYLAS D3.179 Well, but Philonous, since I am willing to give up the notion of an unthinking substance outside the mind, I think you ought not to deny me the privilege of using the word *matter* as I please, and attaching it to a collection of sensible qualities existing only in the mind. I freely admit there is no other substance, in the strict sense, than *Spirit*. But I have been used to the term *matter* for so long that I don't know how to part with it. To say there is no *matter* in the world still shocks me. Whereas to say, "There is no *matter*, if by that term is meant an unthinking substance existing outside the mind; but if by *matter* is meant some sensible thing whose existence consists in being perceived, then there is *matter*"—this distinction puts it in quite a different light, and people will come round to your views with little difficulty when they are put that way. For after all, the con-

troversy about *matter* in the strict sense lies entirely between you and the philosophers, whose principles, I grant, are not nearly as natural, or as agreeable to the common sense of mankind and to Holy Scripture, as yours. There is nothing we either desire or avoid except insofar as it makes, or is thought to make, some part of our happiness or misery. But what have happiness or misery, joy or grief, pleasure or pain, to do with Absolute Existence, or with unknown entities *abstracted from all relation to us*? It is evident that things concern us only insofar as they are pleasing or displeasing, and they can please or displease only to the extent that they are perceived. Beyond that, then, we are not concerned; and up to that point you leave things as you found them. Yet there is still something new in this doctrine. I plainly don't think with the philosophers now—nor entirely with ordinary people either. I would like to know how things stand in that respect—exactly what you have added to, or changed in, my former views.

PHILONOUS D3.180 I don't claim to be a promoter of new notions. My efforts aim only at uniting, and putting in a clearer light, the truth that was previously divided between ordinary people and the philosophers. The former hold that *the things they immediately perceive are the real things*; the latter, that *the things immediately perceived are ideas, which exist only in the mind*. Put these two notions together, and they make up, in effect, the substance of what I propose.

HYLAS D3.181 For a long time I have distrusted my senses. I seemed to see things by a dim light and through distorting lenses. Now the lenses are removed, and a new light breaks in on my understanding. I am clearly convinced that I see things in their native forms, and I am no longer troubled about their *unknown natures* or *absolute existence*. This is the state I find myself in now—though I don't yet fully understand the route that brought me here. You started out from the same principles that the Academics, the Cartesians, and similar schools usually do, and for a long time it looked as if you were advancing their

philosophical skepticism. But in the end your conclusions are directly opposite to theirs.[10]

PHILONOUS [D3.182] You see, Hylas, the water of that fountain over there—how it is forced upward in a round column to a certain height, where it breaks and falls back into the basin it rose from, its rise as well as its fall proceeding from the same uniform law or principle of gravitation. In just the same way, the same principles that at first sight lead to skepticism, followed to a certain point, bring people back to common sense.

10 Academics: the skeptical later phase of Plato's Academy (Arcesilaus, Carneades). Cartesians: followers of Descartes.