

# Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought.

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## The Third Dialogue

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

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

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

**Hyl:** There isn't one single thing in the world whose real nature we can know.

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

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

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

**Hyl:** *Know?* No, it is impossible that you or any man alive should know it. All you *know* is that you have such and such an idea or appearance in your own mind. But what does that have to do with the real tree or stone? I tell you, the

colour, shape, and hardness that you perceive aren't the real natures of those things, or in the least like them. The same may be said of all other real things or corporeal substances that make up the world. None of them has in itself anything like the sensible qualities that we perceive. So we shouldn't claim to affirm or know anything about them as they are in their own nature.

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

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

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

**Hyl:** Just so.

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

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

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

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

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

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

**Phil:** You amaze me! Was ever anything more wild and extravagant than the notions you now maintain? Isn't it evident that you are led into all these extravagances by the belief in *material substance*? That's what makes you dream of those unknown natures in every thing. It is what leads you to distinguish the reality of things from their sensible appearances. It is to this that you are indebted for being

ignorant of what everyone else knows perfectly well. Nor is this all: you are ignorant not only of the true nature of every thing, but of whether any thing really exists, or whether there are any true natures at all; because you attribute to your 'material beings' an absolute or external existence and suppose that their reality consists in that. As you are eventually forced to admit that such an existence means either a direct contradiction or nothing at all, it follows that you are obliged to pull down your own hypothesis of material substance, and positively to deny the real existence of any part of the universe. And so you are plunged into the deepest and most deplorable scepticism that anyone ever suffered from. Tell me, Hylas, isn't that what has happened?

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

**Phil:** I assure you, Hylas, I don't claim to formulate any hypothesis at all. I have the common man's frame of mind; I am simple enough to believe my senses and to leave things as I find them. Here's what I think, in plain words. The real things are the very things I see and feel and perceive by my senses. I know these; and because I find that they satisfy all the needs and purposes of life, I have no reason to worry about any other unknown beings. A piece of sensible [= 'perceptible'] bread, for instance, would appease my hunger better than ten thousand times as much of that insensible, unintelligible, 'real' bread you speak of. It is also my opinion

that colours and other sensible qualities are in the objects. I can't for the life of me help thinking that snow is white, and fire hot. You indeed, who by 'snow' and 'fire' mean certain external, unperceived, unperceiving substances, are right to deny whiteness or heat to be qualities inherent in them. But I, who understand by 'snow' and 'fire' the things I see and feel, am obliged to think as other folk do. And as I am no sceptic about •the nature of things, I am not a sceptic either about •their existence. That a thing should be really perceived by my senses, and at the same time not really exist, is to me a plain contradiction; since I cannot abstract, even in thought, the •existence of a sensible thing from •its being perceived. Wood, stones, fire, water, flesh, iron, and other such things that I name and talk about are things that I know. And I wouldn't have known them if I hadn't perceived them by my senses; and

- things perceived by the senses are immediately perceived; and
- things that are immediately perceived are ideas; and
- ideas can't exist outside the mind.

So it follows that

the •existence of things I perceive by my senses consists in •being perceived.

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

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

**Phil:** I do.

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

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

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

**Phil:** They are altogether passive and inert.

**Hyl:** And isn't God an agent, a being purely active?

**Phil:** I agree.

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

**Phil:** It cannot.

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

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

him·. And though I don't perceive him by sense, still I have a *notion* of him, which is to say that I know him by reflection and reasoning. I immediately know my own mind and my own ideas; and these give me, in an indirect way, a grasp of the possibility that other spirits and ideas exist. Further, from the fact that I exist and the fact that I find that my ideas ·of sense· aren't caused by me, I reason my way to the unavoidable conclusion that a God exists and that all created things exist in his mind. So much for your first question. By this time you can probably answer your second question for yourself. ·I have shown that there are four different ways in which things can come before the mind, and none of them is a way in which matter could come before your mind·. **(i)** You don't perceive matter by mentally representing it, as you do an inactive being or idea; **(ii)** nor do you know it, as you know yourself, by an act of mentally attending to yourself. **(iii)** You don't understand it indirectly, through a resemblance between it and either your ideas or yourself; and **(iv)** you don't bring it into your mind by reasoning from what you know immediately. All of this makes the case of matter widely different from that of God, ·because your knowledge of him involves **(iii)** and **(iv)**·.

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

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

agents like ourselves. **(3)** Although I don't have an idea of spirit, if 'idea' is used strictly, I do have a notion of it. I don't perceive it as an idea, or by means of an idea, but I know it by reflection ·on myself·.

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

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

**Hyl:** I admit to being satisfied about this. But do you seriously think that the •real existence of sensible things consists in their •being actually perceived? If so, how does it

come about that all mankind distinguish between them? Ask the first man you meet, and he'll tell you that to *be perceived* is one thing and to *exist* is another.

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

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

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

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

**Phil:** The same answer that *I* would give, namely, that it does exist out of his mind. But then surely to a Christian it can't be shocking to say that the real tree existing outside his mind is truly known and comprehended by (that is, exists in) the infinite mind of God. Probably the gardener won't at first glance be aware of the direct and immediate proof there is of this—namely that the very existence of a tree or any other perceptible thing implies a mind that contains it. But the point itself is one that he can't deny. What is at issue between the materialists and me is not whether

things have a real existence outside the mind of this or that person, but whether they exist outside *all* minds, having an existence that doesn't involve being perceived by God. Some heathens and philosophers have indeed affirmed this, but anyone whose notions of God are appropriate to the holy scriptures will think differently

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

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

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

**Phil:** I agree that the word 'idea', not being commonly used for 'thing', sounds a little peculiar. I used it because it implies

a necessary relation to the mind; and it is now commonly used by philosophers to stand for the immediate objects of the understanding. But however odd the proposition may sound in words, there's nothing very strange or shocking in what it means, which in effect amounts merely to this: that •there are only perceiving things and perceived things; or that •every unthinking being is necessarily—from the very nature of its existence—perceived by some mind, if not by any finite created mind then certainly by the infinite mind of God, in whom 'we live, and move, and have our being'. Is this as strange as to say that sensible qualities aren't in the objects? Or that we can't be sure of the existence of things, or know anything of their real natures, although we see and feel them and perceive them by all our senses?

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

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

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

**Phil:** In answer to that, I remark first that a person's guilt

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

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

**Phil:** I would like both our positions to be fairly stated and submitted to the judgment of men who had plain common sense, without the prejudices of a learned education. Let me be represented as one who trusts his senses, who thinks he knows the things he sees and feels, and has no doubts about

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

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

**Phil:** He is mistaken not with regard to the ideas he actually

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

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

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

**Hyl:** After all, it seems that our dispute is about words rather than things. We agree in the thing, but differ in the name. It is obvious that we are affected with ideas from outside ourselves; and it is equally obvious that there must be powers outside the mind corresponding to those

ideas (I don't say *resembling* them). And as these powers can't exist by themselves, we have to postulate some subject of them—some *thing* that *has* the powers—which I call 'matter', and you call 'spirit'. This is all the difference.

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

**Hyl:** It isn't; but it has the power to cause the idea of extension in you.

**Phil:** In itself, therefore, it is unextended.

**Hyl:** I grant it.

**Phil:** Is it not also active?

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

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

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

**Phil:** My reason is as follows. I want to have some notion or meaning in what I say; but **I have no notion of any action other than volition**, and I can't conceive of volition as being anywhere but in a spirit; so when I speak of an active being, I am obliged to mean a spirit. Besides, it is quite obvious that a thing that can impart ideas to me must have ideas in itself; and if a thing has ideas, surely it must

be a spirit. ·I shall state the case differently·, to enable you to understand the point still more clearly, if that is possible. I assert, as you do, that since we are affected from outside ourselves we must accept that there are powers outside us in some being that is distinct from ourselves. Up to here we are in agreement; but then we differ about what kind of powerful being it is. I say it is spirit; you say that it is matter or else some third kind of thing—I don't know of what kind, and nor do you! Here is how I prove it to be spirit. •From the effects I see produced, I infer that there are actions; so there are volitions; so there must be a *will*. Again, •the things I perceive (or things they are copied from) must exist outside my mind: but because they are ideas, neither they nor things they are copied from can exist otherwise than in an understanding; there is therefore an *understanding*. •But will and understanding constitute in the strictest sense a mind or spirit. The powerful cause of my ideas is, therefore, something that it is strictly proper to call 'a spirit'.

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

**Phil:** Without doubt.

**Hyl:** To suffer pain is an imperfection.

**Phil:** It is.

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

**Phil:** We are.

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

**Phil:** I agree.

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

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

accompanied by sensations of pain or pleasure in his mind. To know everything knowable is certainly a perfection; but to endure, or suffer, or feel anything through the senses is an imperfection. The former, I repeat, fits God, but not the latter. God knows or has ideas; but his ideas aren't conveyed to him by sense as ours are. What led you to think you saw an absurdity where really there is none was your failure to attend to this obvious difference between God and his creatures.

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

**Phil:** Let me see how you demonstrate that point.

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

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

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

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

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

**Phil:** What do you mean by 'the phenomena'?

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

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

**Hyl:** I have told you so a hundred times.

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

**Hyl:** It is.

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

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

**Phil:** I don't think you will affirm that *every* widespread opinion arising from prejudice, or passion, or thoughtlessness, may be blamed on God as the author of it. We aren't entitled to lay at his door an opinion ·of ours· unless either •he has shown it to us by supernatural revelation or •it is so evident to our natural faculties, which were formed and given to us by God, that we couldn't possibly withhold our assent from it. But where is •the ·supernatural· revelation of matter, or where is •the evidence that compels us to believe in it? Indeed, what is the evidence that matter, taken for something distinct from what we perceive by our senses, *is* thought to exist by all mankind, or indeed by any except a

few philosophers who don't know what they are saying? Your question presupposes that these points are clear. When you have made them so, I shall regard myself as obliged to give you another answer. In the meantime let it suffice that I tell you that I don't suppose that God has deceived mankind at all.

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

**Phil:** I can't imagine why rejecting a notion that has no basis in sense, or in reason, or in divine authority, should be thought to unsettle men's hold on beliefs that are grounded on all or any of these. I freely grant that new opinions about •government and •religion are dangerous, and ought to be discountenanced. But is there any such reason why they should be discouraged in •philosophy? Making anything known that was unknown before introduces a new opinion; and if all such new opinions had been forbidden, what a notable progress men would have made in the arts and sciences! But it isn't my concern to plead for novelties and paradoxes.

- That the qualities we perceive are not in the objects;
- that we mustn't believe our senses;
- that we know nothing of the real nature of things, and can never be assured even that they exist;
- that real colours and sounds are nothing but certain unknown shapes and motions;
- that motions are in themselves neither swift nor slow;
- that bodies have absolute extensions, without any particular size or shape;
- that a stupid, thoughtless, and inactive thing operates on a spirit;

- that the tiniest particle of a body contains countless extended parts.

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

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

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

**Hyl:** Things! Say what you like, it's certain that all you leave us with are the empty forms of things, their mere outsides that strike the senses.

**Phil:** What you call the 'empty forms' and 'outsides' of things seem to me to be the things themselves. And they aren't

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

**Hyl:** You say that you believe your senses, and you seem to congratulate yourself on agreeing with common people about this. According to you, therefore, the true nature of a thing is discovered by the senses. If so, what is the source of the sensory disagreement that we experience? Why do different ways of perceiving—e.g. sight and touch—indicate different shapes for the same object? And if the true nature of a body can be discovered by the naked eye, why should a microscope enable us to know it better?

**Phil:** Strictly speaking, Hylas, we don't see the same object that we feel; and the object perceived through the microscope isn't the same one that was perceived by the naked eye. But if every variation were thought sufficient to constitute a new kind or new individual, language would be made useless by the sheer number of names or by confusions amongst them. Therefore, to avoid this and other inconveniences (you'll easily see what they are if you think about it), men in their thought and language treat as *one thing* a number of ideas that are observed to have some connection in nature (either occurring together or in sequence), although the ideas are certainly distinct from one another, because they are perceived through different senses, or through one sense at different times or in different circumstances. So when I see a thing and then proceed to examine it by my other senses, I'm not trying to understand better the same object that I had seen. That can't be what I am doing, because the object of one sense can't be perceived by the other senses.

And when I look through a microscope, it isn't so as to perceive more clearly what I had already perceived with my bare eyes, because the objects perceived in these two ways are quite different from one another. In each case, all I want is to know what ideas are connected together; and the more a man knows of the *connection of ideas* the more he is said to know of the *nature of things*. If our ideas are variable, and our senses are not always affected with the same appearances—what of it? It doesn't follow that they aren't to be trusted, or that they are inconsistent either with themselves or with anything else, except for your preconceived notion that each name stands for I know not what single, unchanged, unperceivable 'real nature'; a prejudice that seems to have arisen from a failure to understand the common language that people use when speaking of *several distinct ideas* as united into *one thing* by the mind. There is reason to suspect that other erroneous views of the philosophers are due to the same source: they founded their theories not so much on *notions* as on *words*, which were invented by the common people merely for convenience and efficiency in the common actions of life, without any regard to theories.

**Hyl:** I think I follow you.

**Phil:** You hold that the ideas we perceive by our senses are not real things but images or copies of them. So our knowledge is real only to the extent that our ideas are the true representations of those originals. But as these supposed originals (or real things) are in themselves unknown, we can't know how far our ideas resemble them, or indeed whether they resemble them at all. So we can't be sure that we have any real knowledge. Furthermore, while the supposed real things remain unchanged our ideas keep changing; so they can't *all* be true copies of the real things;

and if some are and others are not, we can't tell which are which. This plunges us yet deeper into uncertainty. Again, when we think about it we can't conceive how any idea, or *anything like an idea*, could have an absolute existence out of any mind; from which it follows, according to your views, that we can't conceive how there should be any *real thing* in nature because you say that real things are like ideas. The result of all this is that we are hopelessly lost in scepticism. Now let me ask you four questions. First, •doesn't all this scepticism arise from your relating ideas to certain absolutely existing unperceived substances, as their originals? Secondly, •are you informed, either by sense or reason, of the existence of those unknown originals? And if you are not, isn't it absurd to suppose that they exist? Thirdly, •when you look into it, do you find that there is anything distinctly conceived or meant by the *absolute or external existence of unperceiving substances*? Lastly, •having considered the premises that I have put to you, isn't it wisest to follow nature, trust your senses, lay aside all anxious thoughts about unknown natures or substances, and join the common people in taking the things that are perceived by the senses to be real things?

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

**Phil:** I agree that it does; and I have never denied that the objects of sense are different from those of imagination.

But what would you infer from this? You can't say that sensible objects exist unperceived because they are perceived by many people.

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

**Phil:** It is.

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

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

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

**Hyl:** But they suppose that an idea represents and copies an external thing, and they can say truly that several people

'perceive the same thing' meaning that their ideas all copy a single external thing.

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

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

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

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

**Phil:** And what more should we be concerned with? I see this cherry, I feel it, I taste it; and I am sure *nothing* cannot be seen, or felt, or tasted; so the cherry is not *nothing* and it is therefore real. Take away the sensations of softness, moisture, redness, tartness, and you take away the cherry. Since it is not a thing distinct from sensations, a cherry—I repeat—is nothing but a heap of sensible impressions, or ideas perceived by various senses. These ideas are united into one thing (or have one name given to them) by the mind, because they are observed to accompany each other. Thus when the palate is affected with a certain taste, the

sight is affected with a red colour, the sense of touch with roundness, softness, etc. And when I see and feel and taste in certain particular ways, I am sure that the cherry exists, or is real; because I don't think its reality is anything apart from those sensations. But if by the word 'cherry' you mean an unknown nature distinct from all those sensible qualities, and by its 'existence' you mean something distinct from its being perceived, then indeed I agree that neither you nor I nor anyone else can be sure that it exists.

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

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

**Hyl:** Is the mind extended or unextended?

**Phil:** Unextended, without doubt.

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

**Phil:** They are.

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

**Phil:** I believe you may have.

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

sense therefore are we to understand those expressions? Explain this to me if you can; and I shall then be able to answer all those questions you earlier put to me about my substratum.

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

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

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

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

**Phil:** Let me know this mighty difficulty.

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

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

with an absolute mind-independent existence. When you have proved these points, then (and not till then) you may bring the authority of Moses into our dispute.

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

**Phil:** If the first chapter of Genesis can be given any possible sense that makes it square with my principles as well as with any others, then that chapter has no special conflict with mine. And any such sense can be conceived by *you*, because you believe what I believe. All you can conceive apart from spirits are ideas, and *their* existence I don't deny. And you like me don't claim that they exist outside the mind.

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

**Phil:** Why, I imagine that if I had been present at the creation, I would have seen things *come into existence*—that is, *become perceptible*—in the order described by Moses. I have always believed Moses' account of the creation, and I don't find that my manner of believing it has altered in any way. When things are said to begin or end their existence, we mean this with regard not to God but to his creatures. All objects are eternally known by God, or (the same thing) have an eternal existence in his mind; but when things that were previously imperceptible to creatures are by a decree of God made perceptible to them, then are they said to 'come into existence', in the sense that they begin a relative existence with respect to created minds. So when I read Moses' account of the creation, I understand that the various parts of the world gradually became perceivable to finite spirits that were endowed with proper faculties; so that when such spirits

were present, the things were in truth perceived by them. This is the literal, obvious sense suggested to me by the words of the holy scripture; and in it there is no mention and no thought of substratum, instrument, occasion, or absolute existence. And if you look into it I am sure you will find that most plain, honest men who believe the creation never think of those things any more than I do. What metaphysical sense *you* may understand the creation story in, only you can tell.

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

**Phil:** In answer to that I say, first, created beings might begin to exist in the mind of other created intelligences besides men. To prove any contradiction between Moses' account and my notions you must first show that there was no other order of finite created spirits in existence before men. For my second reply, let us think of the creation as it was at the end of the fourth day, a collection of plants of all sorts, produced by an invisible power, in a desert where nobody was present. I say that this way of thinking about the creation is consistent with my principles, since they deprive you of nothing sensible and nothing imaginable; that it exactly suits with the common, natural, uncorrupted notions of mankind; that it brings out the dependence of all things on God, and consequently has all the good effect or influence which that important article of our faith could possibly have

in making men humble, thankful, and resigned to their creator. I say, furthermore, that in this naked conception of things, with words stripped off, you won't find any notion of what you call the 'actuality of absolute existence'. You may indeed raise a dust with those terms, and so pointlessly lengthen our dispute. But I beg you to look calmly into your own thoughts, and then tell me if they aren't useless and unintelligible jargon.

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

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

**Hyl:** I do.

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

**Hyl:** This I acknowledge.

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

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

**Phil:** Can't we understand it to have been entirely in respect of *finite* spirits? On that understanding of it, things (with regard to us) can properly be said to *begin their existence, or be created*, when God decreed they should *become perceptible to intelligent creatures* in the order and manner which he then established and which we now call 'the laws of nature'.

You may call this a relative or hypothetical existence if you please. But so long as •it supplies us with the most natural, obvious, and literal sense of Moses' history of the creation; so long as •it answers all the religious ends of that great article of faith; in a word, so long as •you can assign no other sense or meaning in place of it; why should we reject this? Is it to comply with a ridiculous sceptical desire to make everything nonsense and unintelligible? I am sure you can't say it is for the glory of God. For even if it were possible and conceivable that the physical world should have an absolute existence outside the mind of God, as well as of the minds of all created spirits, how could this display either the immensity or the omniscience of the Deity, or the necessary and immediate dependence of all things on him? Wouldn't it indeed seem rather to detract from those attributes?

**Hyl:** Well, let us look into this decree of God's that things should become perceptible. Isn't it clear, Philonous, that either •God carried out that decree from all eternity or •at some particular time he began to will what he hadn't actually willed before but only planned to will? If the former, then there could be no creation or beginning of existence for finite things. If the latter, then we must think that something new happened to God, which implies a sort of change; and all change points to imperfection.

**Phil:** Please think what you are doing! Isn't it obvious that this objection counts equally against a creation in *any* sense; indeed, that it counts against every other act of God's that we can discover by the light of nature? We can't conceive any act of God's otherwise than as performed in time, and having a beginning. God is a being of transcendent and unlimited perfections; so finite spirits can't understand his nature. It isn't to be expected, therefore, that any man, whether materialist or immaterialist, should have exactly

correct notions of the Deity, his attributes, and his ways of doing things. So if you want to infer anything against me, your difficulty mustn't be drawn from the inadequateness of our conceptions of the divine nature, which is unavoidable on any system; it must rather come from my denial of matter, of which there isn't one word said or hinted in what you have just objected.

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

**Phil:** What more do you want? Don't I acknowledge a twofold state of things, the one copied or natural, the other copied-from and eternal? The former was created in time; the latter existed from everlasting in the mind of God. Isn't this in harmony with what theologians generally say? Is anything more than this necessary in order to conceive the creation? But you suspect some special conflict, though you cannot locate it. To take away all possibility of doubt about all this, just consider this one point. Either you can't conceive the creation on any hypothesis whatsoever, in which case you have no ground for dislike or complaint against my thesis in particular; or you can conceive the creation, and in that case why not conceive it on my principles, since that would not take away anything conceivable? My principles have all along allowed you the full scope of sense, imagination, and reason. So anything that you could previously apprehend, either immediately by your senses or mediately by inferences from your senses, anything you could perceive, imagine, or understand, remains still with you ·on my principles·. If therefore the notion you have of the creation by other

principles is intelligible, you still have it on mine; if it isn't intelligible, I don't think it is a notion at all, and so the loss of it is no loss. And indeed it seems to me quite clear that the supposition of matter—something perfectly unknown and inconceivable—can't enable us to conceive *anything*. And I hope I don't need to prove to you that the inference from *The creation is inconceivable without matter* to *Matter exists* is no good if the existence of matter doesn't make the creation conceivable.

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

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

**Hyl:** And so I am.

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

**Hyl:** In the plain sense, doubtless.

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

**Hyl:** I can't help thinking so.

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

**Hyl:** I have already agreed to this.

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

**Hyl:** True.

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

**Hyl:** I can't contradict you.

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

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

**Phil:** Then as to absolute existence: was there ever known a more poverty-stricken notion than that? It is something so abstracted and unintelligible that you have frankly admitted to being unable to conceive it, much less to explain anything with its help. But even if we allow that matter exists and that the notion of absolute existence is as clear as daylight, has this ever been known to make the creation more credible? On the contrary, hasn't it provided the atheists and infidels down through the centuries with their most plausible argument *against* a creation? This thesis:

A corporeal substance which has an absolute existence outside the minds of spirits was produced out of nothing by the mere will of a spirit,

has been seen as so contrary to all reason, so impossible and absurd, that not only the most celebrated among the ancients, but even a variety of modern and Christian philosophers, have thought matter not to have been created at all, but to have existed for ever along with God. Put these points together, and *then* judge whether materialism disposes men to believe in the creation of things!

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

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

**Hyl:** I admit that that seems to be right.

**Phil:** Well, then, as a counter-balance to this weight of prejudice, let us throw into the scale the great advantages that arise from the belief in immaterialism, in regard to both religion and human learning. •The existence of a God, and the imperishable nature of the soul, those great articles of religion, aren't they proved with the clearest and most immediate evidence? When I say the existence of a God, I don't mean an obscure, general cause of things, of which we have no conception, but *God* in the strict and proper sense of the word. A being whose spirituality, omnipresence, providence, omniscience, infinite power and goodness are as conspicuous as the existence of sensible things, of

which (despite the fallacious claims and pretended doubts of sceptics) there is no more reason to doubt than of our own existence. Then with relation to human knowledge, •in natural science what intricacies, what obscurities, what contradictions, has the belief in *matter* led men into! To say nothing of the numberless disputes about its extent, continuity, homogeneity, gravity, divisibility, etc., don't they claim to explain everything in terms of bodies operating on bodies according to the laws of motion? And yet can they understand how one body might move another? Furthermore, even if there were no difficulty in

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

or in

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

yet by all their strained thoughts and extravagant suppositions have the materialists been able to understand the mechanical production of any one animal or plant body? Can they through the laws of motion account for sounds, tastes, smells, or colours, or for the regular course of events? Have they through physical principles accounted for the intricate ways in which even the most inconsiderable parts of the universe hang together? If on the other hand we set aside matter and corporeal causes, and admit only the effectiveness of an all-perfect mind, don't all the effects of nature become easy and intelligible? •If the phenomena are nothing but ideas, the choice is obvious: God is a spirit, but matter is unintelligent and unperceiving. •If the phenomena point to an unlimited power in their cause: God is active and omnipotent, but matter is an inert mass. •If the order, regularity, and usefulness of the effects of nature can never

be sufficiently admired: God is infinitely wise and provident, but matter doesn't have plans and designs. These surely are great advantages in physics. Not to mention that the belief in a *distant* God naturally disposes men to be slack in their moral actions, which they would be more cautious about if they thought God to be immediately present and acting on their minds without the interposition of matter or unthinking 'second causes'. Then •in metaphysics: what difficulties concerning

- thinghood in the abstract,
- substantial forms,
- 'hylarchic principles',
- 'plastic natures',
- substance and accident,
- principle of individuation,
- the possibility of matter's thinking,
- the origin of ideas,
- the question of how two independent substances as widely different as spirit and matter could act on each other!

What difficulties, I say, and what endless treatises concerning these and countless other similar points do we escape by supposing only spirits and ideas? Even •mathematics becomes much easier and clearer if we take away the absolute existence of extended things. The most shocking paradoxes and intricate speculations in the mathematical sciences depend on the infinite divisibility of finite extended things, and that depends on the supposition of absolutely existing extended things. But what need is there to insist on particular sciences? Isn't the opposition to all systematic knowledge whatsoever—that frenzy of the ancient and modern sceptics—built on the same foundation? Can you produce so much as *one* argument against the reality of bodies, or on behalf of that professed utter ignorance of their

natures, which doesn't presuppose that their reality consists in an external absolute existence? Once that presupposition is made, the objections from the change of colours in a pigeon's neck, or the broken appearance of an oar in the water, do have weight. But objections like those vanish if we don't maintain the existence of absolute external originals, but place the reality of things in ideas. Although these ideas are fleeting and changeable, they are changed not at random but according to the fixed order of nature. For it is *that*—the orderliness of our sequences of ideas—that the constancy and truth of things consists in. That is what secures all the concerns of life, and distinguishes what is real from the irregular visions of the imagination.

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

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

**Hyl:** I admit that right now I am entirely satisfied in all

respects. But how can I be sure that I shall go on fully assenting to your opinion, and that no new objection or difficulty will turn up?

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

**Hyl:** You have satisfied me, Philonous.

**Phil:** As armament against all future objections, do bear in mind that something bearing equally hard on two contradictory opinions cannot be a proof against either of them. So whenever any difficulty *in immaterialism* occurs to you, see if you can find a solution for it on the hypothesis of the materialists. Don't be deceived by *words*; but test your own *thoughts*. And if you don't find it easier with the help of materialism, it obviously can't be an objection against immaterialism. If you had followed this rule all along,

you would probably have spared yourself much trouble in objecting *because none of your objections conforms to the rule*. I challenge you to show *one* of your difficulties that is explained by matter; indeed, *one* that is not made even worse by supposing matter, and consequently counts against materialism rather than for it. In each particular case you should consider whether the difficulty arises from the non-existence of matter. If it doesn't, then arguing from it to the falsity of immaterialism is *arguing from a premise to a conclusion that has nothing to do with it*—no better than arguing from 'Extension is infinitely divisible' to 'God does not have foreknowledge!' And yet if you think back I believe you will find this to have been often, if not always, the case *in our conversation*. Be careful also not to argue by begging the question [that is, giving an argument that at the outset assumes the truth of the conclusion]. One is apt to say: 'The unknown substances ought to be regarded as real things, rather than the ideas in our minds; and for all we know the unthinking external substance may operate as a cause or instrument in the production of our ideas.' But doesn't this assume that there are such external substances? And isn't this begging the question? But above all things you should beware of misleading yourself by that common fallacy which is called 'mistaking the question'—that is, offering against one proposition an argument which really counts only against a quite different proposition. You often talked as if you thought I maintained the non-existence of sensible things; whereas in truth no-one can be more thoroughly assured of their existence than I am, and it is you who doubt—no; it is you who positively *deny*—that they exist. Everything that is seen, felt, heard, or in any way perceived by the senses is a real being according to the principles I embrace, but not according to *the principles that used to be yours*. Remember that the matter you *used to* defend

is an unknown something (if indeed it can even be called a 'something'), which is completely stripped of all sensible qualities, and can't be perceived through the senses or grasped by the mind. Remember, I say, that your *matter* is not any object that is hard or soft, hot or cold, blue or white, round or square, etc. For I affirm that all *these* things *do* exist; though I do indeed deny that they exist in any way except by being perceived, or that they exist out of all minds whatsoever. Think about these points; consider them attentively and keep them in view. Otherwise you won't be clear about the state of the question; and in that case your objections will always be wide of the mark, and instead of counting against my views they may possibly be directed (as more than once they have been) against yours.

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

**Phil:** With all my heart: retain the word 'matter', and apply it to the objects of sense, if you please, but don't credit them with existing apart from being perceived. I shan't quarrel with you over a word. 'Matter' and 'material substance' are terms introduced by philosophers; and as used by them they imply a sort of independence, or an existence distinct from being perceived by a mind. But common people don't use these terms, or if they do it is to signify the immediate objects of sense. So one would think that so long as the names of

all particular things are retained, and also such terms as 'sensible', 'substance', 'body', and 'stuff', the word 'matter' would never be missed in common talk. And in philosophical discourses it seems best to leave it out altogether, since the use of that general confused term—more perhaps than any other one factor—has favoured and strengthened the depraved tendency of the mind towards atheism.

**Hyl:** Well now, Philonous, since I am content to give up the notion of an unthinking substance exterior to the mind, I think you should allow me the privilege of using the word 'matter' as I please, to signify a collection of sensible qualities existing only in the mind. I freely grant that strictly speaking there is no other substance than spirit. But I have been accustomed to the term 'matter' for so long that I don't know how to get on without it. To say

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

There is no matter, if by 'matter' is meant an unthinking substance existing outside the mind; but if by 'matter' is meant some sensible thing whose existence consists in being perceived, then there is matter  
comes across quite differently, and this formulation will bring men to your notions with little difficulty. For, after all, the controversy about matter in the strict sense of 'matter' is not a dispute between you and ordinary folk. It lies altogether between you and the philosophers, whose principles are admittedly nowhere near so natural or so agreeable to the common sense of mankind and to holy scripture as yours are. All our desires are directed towards gaining happiness or avoiding misery. But what have happiness or misery, joy or grief, pleasure or pain, to do with absolute existence, or with unknown entities, abstracted from all relation to us? It is obvious that things concern us only insofar as they are

pleasing or displeasing; and they can please or displease only to the extent that they are perceived. Beyond that, we are not concerned; and in this respect you leave things as you found them. But still there is something new in this doctrine of yours. It is clear to me that I don't now think with the philosophers, nor do I entirely think with the common people. I would like to know where I stand now—to know precisely what you have added to my former notions or altered in them.

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

**Hyl:** For a long time I have distrusted my senses: I thought I saw things by a dim light, and through false glasses. Now

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

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