

New Essays on Human Understanding

Book II: Ideas

G. W. Leibniz

Copyright ©2010–2015 All rights reserved. Jonathan Bennett

[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. Every four-point ellipsis indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth.—Longer omissions are [explained] as they occur. Very small bold unbracketed numerals indicate the corresponding section number in Locke's *Essay*; most of these are provided by Leibniz. This version does not follow Leibniz's practice of always avoiding Locke's name in favour of 'this author', 'our gifted author', etc.

First launched: February 2005

Last amended: April 2008

Contents

Chapter i: Ideas in general, and the question 'Does the soul of man always think?'	35
Chapter ii: Simple ideas	41
Chapter iii: Ideas of one sense	41
Chapter iv: Solidity	42
Chapter v: Simple ideas of more than one sense	45
Chapter vi: Simple ideas of reflection	46

Chapter vii: Ideas of both sensation and reflection	46
Chapter viii: More considerations about simple ideas	46
Chapter ix: Perception	49
Chapter x: Retention	53
Chapter xi: Discerning, or the ability to distinguish ideas	53
Chapter xii: Complex ideas	55
Chapter xiii: Simple modes, starting with the simple modes of space	56
Chapter xiv: Duration and its simple modes	59
Chapter xv: Duration and expansion considered together	61
Chapter xvi: Number	62
Chapter xvii: Infinity	63
Chapter xviii: Other simple modes	65
Chapter xix: The modes of thinking	65
Chapter xx: Modes of pleasure and pain	68
Chapter xxi: Power and freedom	72
Chapter xxii: Mixed modes	98
Chapter xxiii: Our complex ideas of substances	100
Chapter xxiv: Collective ideas of substances	105
Chapter xxv: Relation	105

Chapter xxvi: Cause and effect, and other relations	106
Chapter xxvii: What identity or diversity is	107
Chapter xxviii: Certain other relations, especially moral relations	118
Chapter xxix: Clear and obscure, distinct and confused ideas	122
Chapter xxx: Real and chimerical ideas	128
Chapter xxxi: Complete and incomplete ideas.	129
Chapter xxxii: True and false ideas	131
Chapter xxxiii: The association of ideas	132

Chapter xxii: Mixed modes

Philaethes: 1 Let us turn to mixed modes. I distinguish them from the more simple modes, which consist only of simple ideas of the same kind. These mixed modes are combinations of simple ideas that are regarded *not* as

characteristic marks of any real beings that have a steady existence,

but rather as

scattered and independent ideas that are put together by the mind.

That is what distinguishes them from the complex ideas of substances.

Theophilus: To understand this properly, we ought to run over your earlier divisions. You divide ideas into simple and complex, and you divide the complex ones into ideas of substances, modes, and relations. Modes are either simple (composed of simple ideas of the same kind) or mixed. So according to you there are

simple ideas,
ideas of simple modes and of mixed ones,
ideas of substances, and
ideas of relations.

We could also divide the items that ideas are *of* into **abstract** and **concrete**, further dividing them as follows:

abstract divide into non-relational and relational,
non-relational divide into attributes and modifications,
attributes and modifications *each* divide into simple and composite; and
concrete divide into •true simple substances and
•substantial things that are composed of or result from true simple substances.

Phil: 2 In respect of its •simple ideas the mind is wholly passive; it receives them just as sensation or reflection offers them. But it is often active with regard to •mixed modes, for it can combine simple ideas to make complex ideas without considering whether they exist together in that combination in nature. That is why these ideas are called ‘notions’.

Theo: But •simplicity doesn’t always involve passivity, because •reflection, which makes one think of simple ideas, is often voluntary •and therefore active•. And •complexity doesn’t always involve activity, because •combinations that nature hasn’t made may occur in our minds as though of their own accord in dreams and reveries—simply through memory and with no more activity on the mind’s part than in the case of simple ideas. As for the word ‘notion’: many people apply it to all sorts of ideas or conceptions, basic as well as derivative.

Phil: 4 What shows that several ideas have been united into a single one is the name.

Theo: That assumes that they *can* be combined; but often they can’t.

Phil: The crime of *killing an old man* isn’t taken for a complex idea because it doesn’t have a name as *parricide* [= ‘killing one’s parent’] does.

Theo: The reason why there is no name for the murder of an old man is that such a name wouldn’t be much use because the law hasn’t assigned a special penalty for that crime. However, •ideas don’t depend on •names. If a moralizing writer *did* invent a name for that crime and devoted a chapter to ‘Gerontophony’, showing what we owe to the old and how

monstrous it is to treat them ungenerously, he wouldn't be giving us a new *idea*. . . .

Phil: 9 We get ideas of mixed modes by •observation, as when one sees two men *wrestling*; we get them also by •invention (or voluntary putting together of simple ideas)—thus the man who invented *printing* had an idea of that art before it existed. Finally, we get them from •explanations we are given of terms that have been set aside for kinds of events that no-one has yet encountered.

Theo: We can also get them in dreams and reveries without the combination being a voluntary one—for instance seeing golden palaces in a dream without having thought of them before.

Phil: 10 The simple ideas that have been most modified—i.e. that have the largest numbers of varieties or special cases—are those of •thinking, of •motion and of •power, from which actions are conceived to flow. For action is the great business of mankind; all actions are thoughts or movements. A man's power or ability to do something, when it has been acquired by frequently doing the same thing, is what we call 'habit'; when it is ready on every occasion to break into action, we call it 'disposition'. . . . **11** Power being the source of all action, the substances that *have* these powers are, when they exercise this power to produce an event, called 'causes'; and the qualities that are introduced into any thing by the exerting of that power are called 'effects'. [Actually, Locke wrote 'the simple ideas that are introduced' etc.; Leibniz followed 'simple ideas' with '(that is, the objects of simple ideas)'; by which of course he meant 'qualities'. More of that in the next sentence.] The efficacy through which the new idea (quality) is produced is called 'action' in

the thing that exerts the power, and 'passion' in the thing in which some simple idea (quality) is changed or produced.

Theo: ·I want to make three points about this·.

(1) If power is taken to be the source of action, it means more than the aptitude or ability in terms of which 'power' was explained in the preceding chapter. For, as I have more than once remarked [page 65, 67], it also includes *endeavour*. It is in order to express this sense that I use the term 'entelechy' to stand for power. . . .

(2) You have been using the term 'cause' in the sense of *efficient* cause; but it is also used to mean *final* cause or motive or purpose—not to mention *matter* and *form*, which the Scholastics also call 'causes'!

(3) I'm not convinced that we should say that •a single item is called 'action' in the agent and 'passion' in the thing that is acted on, which would mean that it exists in two subjects at once, like a relation. I think it would be better to say that there are •two items, one in the agent and the other in the thing that is acted on.

Phil: Many words that seem to express some action signify nothing but the cause and the effect. For example, 'creation' and 'annihilation' don't contain any idea of the action or the *how* of it, but barely of •the cause and of •the thing that is produced.

Theo: I admit that in thinking of the creation one doesn't—and indeed can't—conceive of any process in detail. But one thinks of something in addition to •God and •the world, for one thinks that God is the cause and the world the effect, i.e. that God has produced the world. So obviously one does also think of action.

Chapter xxiii: Our complex ideas of substances

Philalethes: 1 The mind notices that a certain number of simple ideas go constantly together; presumes that they belong to one thing, and gives a single name to the whole collection when they occur in this way united in one subject; and from then onward we are apt to talk carelessly as though this were one simple idea, when really it is a complex of many ideas together.

Theophilus: I don't find in the ordinary ways of talking anything that deserves to be accused of 'carelessness'. We do take it that there is one thing, and one idea, but not that there is one *simple* idea.

Phil: Because we can't imagine how these simple ideas can exist by themselves, we get into the habit of supposing some substratum—some *thing* that supports them—in which they exist and from which they result, and we call this supposed thing 'substance'.

Theo: I believe that this way of thinking is correct. And we don't need to 'get into the habit' of it or 'suppose' it, because right from the outset we conceive *several properties in a single thing*, and that's all there is to these metaphorical words 'support' and 'substratum'. So I don't see why it is made out to involve a problem. On the contrary, what comes into our mind is

the concrete thing conceived as wise, warm, shining,
rather than
abstractions or qualities such as wisdom, warmth,
light etc.,
which are much harder to grasp. (I say 'qualities', for what the substantial object contains are qualities, not ideas.) It can even be doubted whether these qualities are genuine

entities at all, and indeed many of them are only relations. We know, too, that abstractions are what cause the most problems when one tries to get to the bottom of them. . . . Treating qualities or other abstract items as though they were the least problematic, and concrete ones as very troublesome, is. . . . putting the cart before the horse.

Phil: 2 A person's only notion of *pure substance in general* is the notion of I know not what subject of which he knows nothing at all but which he supposes to be the support of qualities! We talk like a child who is asked 'What's *that?*' and complacently answers 'It's *something*'—which really means that he doesn't know what it is.

Theo: If you distinguish two things in a substance—•the attributes or predicates and •their common subject—it's no wonder that you can't conceive anything special in this subject. That is inevitable, because you have already set aside all the attributes through which details could be conceived. Thus, to require of this *pure subject in general* anything beyond what is needed for the conception of *the same thing*—e.g. it is the same thing that understands and wills, the same thing that imagines and reasons—is to demand the impossible; and it also contravenes the assumption that was made in performing the abstraction and separating the subject from *all* its qualities. The same alleged difficulty could be brought against the notion of *being*, and against all that is plainest and most primary. If we ask a philosopher 'What thought do you have when you conceive *pure being in general?*' he will have as little to say as if he had been asked what *pure substance in general* is—in each case because the question excludes all detail •that might give content to an

answer. So I don't think it's fair to mock philosophers as Locke does at xiii.19 when he compares them to an Indian philosopher who was asked

'What supports the world?'

'A great elephant supports it.'

'What supports the elephant?'

'A great tortoise supports it.'

'What supports the tortoise?'

'*Something*—I don't know what.'

Yet this conception of substance, for all its apparent thinness, is less empty and sterile than it is thought to be. Several consequences arise from it; these are of the greatest importance to philosophy, to which they can give an entirely new face.

Phil: 4 We have no clear idea of *substance in general*. 5 And we have as clear an idea of •spirit as of •body, because the idea of a bodily substance in matter is as remote from our conceptions as that of spiritual substance. . . .

Theo: My own view is that this opinion about what we don't know springs from a demand for a way of knowing that the object doesn't admit of. The true sign that we have a clear and distinct notion of x is our being able to give *a priori* proofs of many truths about x. I showed this in a paper about truths and ideas that was published about 20 years ago in 1684.

Phil: 11 If our senses were acute enough, sensible qualities like the yellow colour of gold would disappear, and instead of •yellow we would see •an admirable texture of parts. We have thoroughly learned this from microscopes. 12 Our present knowledge is suitable for the condition we are now in. Perfect knowledge of the things around us may be beyond the reach of *any* finite being. We are equipped with faculties that suffice to lead us to a knowledge of •God and of •our duty. If our senses were altered by being much sharper and

more sensitive, this change would be inconsistent with our being [= 'would alter our fundamental make-up'].

Theo: That is all true, and I said something about it earlier; but I want to add three remarks to the three things you have just said. (1) The colour yellow is a reality, like the rainbow. (2) We are apparently destined to achieve a much higher state of knowledge than we are now in, and our level of knowledge may even go on rising for ever. That •there will always be more to be learned seems to follow from the fact that material nature doesn't contain elementary particles and so there is no rock-bottom level for physics. If there were atoms, as Locke appeared elsewhere to believe that there are [i.15? ii.2?], it couldn't be the case that no finite being could have perfect knowledge of bodies. (3) If our eyes became better equipped or more penetrating, so that some colours or other qualities disappeared from our view, others would appear to arise out of them, and we would need a further increase in acuity to make *them* disappear too; and since matter is actually divided to infinity, this process could go on to infinity also.

Phil: 13 I suspect that one great advantage that some spirits have over us is that they can voluntarily shape their sense-organs in ways that are suitable for their projects.

Theo: We do that too, when we shape microscopes, but other creatures can take it further than we can. If we could transform our eyes themselves—as we actually do, in a way, when we want to see close up or far away—we would need to shape them by means of something belonging to us even more intimately than they do; for all this would have to occur mechanically, because the mind can't act immediately on bodies. Furthermore, I'm of the opinion that higher-Spirits perceive things in a manner comparable with ours. . . . Nothing is so wonderful that it couldn't be produced by

nature's mechanism. And I think that the wise Fathers of the Church were right to attribute bodies to angels.

Phil: 15 The ideas of •thinking and •moving the body, which we find in the idea of *spirit*, can be conceived just as clearly and distinctly as can the ideas of •extension, •solidity and •being moved, which we find in the idea of *matter*.

Theo: I agree about the idea of •thinking as an ingredient in the idea of spirit, but I don't hold that view about the idea of •moving the body. For according to my system of pre-established harmony, bodies are so made that once they have been set into motion they continue of their own accord, as the actions of the mind require. This hypothesis doesn't imply that the mind affects or acts on the body, and so it makes sense, whereas the other doesn't.

Phil: Every act of sensation gives us an equal view of material reality and of spiritual [= 'mental'] reality. For while I know by seeing or hearing that there is some material thing outside me, I even more certainly know that there is some spiritual being within me that sees and hears.

Theo: Well said, and very true! The existence of spirit is indeed more certain than that of sensible objects.

Phil: 19 Spirits operate at various times and various places, and like bodies they can operate only *where they are*; so I have to hold that all finite spirits can change where they are.

Theo: I think that that is right, since space is only an order of coexisting things.

Phil: 20 One has only to think about the separation of the soul from the body by death to become convinced that the soul can move.

Theo: The soul could stop operating in this visible body; and if it could stop thinking altogether, as Locke earlier main-

tained, it could be separated from •this body without being united with •another one; and so its separation wouldn't involve motion after all. My own view is that the soul always thinks and feels, is always united with some body, and indeed never suddenly and totally leaves the body with which it is united.

Phil: 21 If anyone says that spirits are not *in loco sed in aliquo ubi* [scholastic Latin, meaning 'not in a place but somewhere'], I don't suppose that much weight will now be given to that way of talking. But if anyone thinks it *can* be given a reasonable sense, I ask him to put it into intelligible ordinary language and then validly infer from it a reason why spirits can't move.

Theo: The scholastics have three sorts of •ubiquity, or •ways of being somewhere. They attribute **(1) circumscriptive** ubiquity to bodies in space that are in it point for point, so that measuring them depends on being able to specify points in the located thing corresponding to points in space. **(2) Definitive** ubiquity. In this case, one can define—i.e. determine—that the located thing lies *somewhere* within a given space without being able to specify exact points or places that it occupies exclusively. That is how some people have thought that the soul is in the body, because they haven't thought it possible to pinpoint exactly where in the body the soul resides. Many competent people still take that view. (It's true that Descartes tried to impose narrower limits on the soul by locating it specially in the pineal gland; but since he didn't venture to pin-point it within the gland, he achieved nothing, and it would have made no difference if he had given the soul the run of its whole bodily prison.) What should be said about angels is, I believe, about the same as what is said about souls. . . . **(3) Repletive** ubiquity is what God is said to have, because he fills to repletion the entire universe in a more perfect way than minds fill

bodies, for he operates immediately on all created things, continually producing them, whereas finite minds cannot immediately influence or operate on them. I'm not convinced that this scholastic doctrine deserves the mockery that you seem to be trying to bring down on it. However, one can always ·uncontroversially· attribute a sort of motion to the soul, if only •by reference to the body with which it is united or •by reference to the sort of perceptions it has.

Phil: 23 If anyone says that he doesn't know •how he thinks, I answer that he also doesn't know •how the solid parts of body hold together to make an extended whole.

Theo: It is indeed rather hard to explain cohesion [= 'holding together']. But this cohesion of parts appears not to be necessary to make an extended whole, since perfectly rarefied and fluid matter can be said to make up an extended thing, without its parts holding together in any way. In fact, though, . . . I think that no mass is *absolutely* rarefied ·and perfectly fluid·, and that there is some degree of bonding everywhere. This is produced ·not by hooks or bonds or metaphysical glue, but· by motions all running the same way; ·that creates a kind of bonding, because· any division would have to set up cross-currents that couldn't happen without some turbulence and resistance. . . .

Phil: As for cohesion, some people explain it by saying that the surfaces at which two bodies touch are pressed together by something (e.g. air) surrounding them. **24** It is quite true that the pressure of a surrounding fluid may block the separation of two polished surfaces in a line •perpendicular to them; but it couldn't block them from ·being *slid* apart·, separating by a motion along a line •parallel to those surfaces. So if the *only* cause of cohesion was pressure from the surroundings, all parts of bodies would have to be easily separable by that sort of lateral sliding motion in any plane

you like intersecting any mass of matter.

Theo: Yes, no doubt that would be right if all the contiguous flat parts lay in the same plane or in parallel planes. But that isn't and can't be the case. Obviously, then, in trying to make some parts slide one will be acting in some quite different way on infinitely many others whose planes are at an angle with the plane of the former; ·so it isn't to be expected that the slide will 'easily' be made·. It must be understood that there is difficulty in separating two congruent surfaces, not only when the line of motion is perpendicular but also when it is at an oblique angle to them. . . . I agree, however, that a story about the pressure of the surroundings on flat contiguous surfaces couldn't explain *all* cohesion, because that explanation tacitly assumes that there is already cohesion *within* these contiguous faces.

Phil: 27 It has been my view that the extension of body is nothing but the cohesion of solid parts.

Theo: That seems to conflict with your own earlier explanations. It seems to me that if a body has (as I believe all bodies always do have) internal movements going on in it, i.e. if its parts are engaged in pulling away from one another, it is still extended for all that. So the notion of extension appears to me to be totally different from that of cohesion.

Phil: 28 Another idea we have of •body is the power to •communicate motion by pushing; and another we have of our •souls is the power to •arouse motion by thought. Our daily experience clearly provides us with these ideas; but if we want to dig into *how* this is done—i.e. into *how* bodies are moved by other bodies or by souls—·we are equally in the dark about both·. For in the communicating of motion where one body loses as much motion as the other gains (which is the usual case), the only conception we can have

of what happens is that motion *passes out of one body into another!* This, I think, is just as obscure and inconceivable as how our minds move or stop our bodies by thought. The *increase* of motion by pushing, which is observed or believed sometimes to happen, is even harder to understand.

Theo: ·I have two comments to offer on this·. **(1)** I'm not surprised that you run into insoluble problems when you seem to be thinking in terms of something as inconceivable as *an accident's passing from one thing to another*; but I see no reason why we have to suppose such a thing. [In this context an 'accident' is an *instance* of a quality. When ball x hits stationary ball y and starts it moving, what happens according to the 'passage of accidents' theory is that some of x's motion leaves x and goes over into y, thus becoming y's motion. It's not merely that x slows down and y starts moving; the claim is that some of *the very same motion* that x initially had has gone across to y.]. . . . I have already said something about this (xxi.4 [page 73]). Your conception of what happens in a collision seems to regard motion as being something substantial, ·a kind of *stuff*, like salt dissolved in water·. . . . **(2)** Back in xxi.4 I also made the point that it isn't true that a body ·always· loses as much motion as it gives to another body—indeed that isn't even the 'usual case'. I have demonstrated elsewhere that the total quantity of motion in two colliding bodies is preserved only when the bodies are moving in the same direction before the collision, and still moving in the same direction after it. . . . As for the 'power of arousing motion by thought': I don't think that we have any idea of this or any experience of it either! The Cartesians themselves admit that the soul can't give any new force to matter, but they claim that it can change the direction of the force that the matter has already. I on the other hand maintain that souls can make no change in the force *or* in the direction of bodies, that one of these would

be as inconceivable and irrational as the other, and that to explain the union of soul and body we must avail ourselves of the pre-established harmony. . . .

Phil: 31 I would like to see anyone point to anything in our notion of ·spirit that is more tangled and difficult, or nearer to a contradiction, than one ingredient in the notion of ·body—namely divisibility in infinitum.

Theo: What you say yet again here in order to show that we understand the nature of spirit as well as or better than that of body, is true indeed. ·As for infinite divisibility·: When Fromondus devoted a whole book to the composition of the continuum, he was right to call it 'The Labyrinth'. But that [what?] comes from a false idea that people have of the nature of body as well as of space.

Phil: 33 Even the idea of God comes to us as our other ideas do: our complex idea of God is made up of the simple ideas that we receive from reflection and which we enlarge by our idea of the infinite.

Theo: As to that, I would direct you to what I have said in several places in order to show that all these ideas, and especially that of God [page 31], are within us from the outset; that all we do is to come to pay heed to them; and that the idea of the infinite isn't formed by extending finite ideas [page 58]. **Phil: 37** Most of the simple ideas that make up our complex ideas of substances are really only ·ideas of· ·powers, however inclined we are to think of them as ·ideas of· ·positive [here = 'non-relational'] qualities.

Theo: ·I don't agree with the implication that powers are not really qualities·. I think that what we do or should mean by 'real qualities' is just precisely *powers*—ones that ·aren't essential to substances and that ·include not merely an aptitude but also a certain endeavour.

Chapter xxiv: Collective ideas of substances

Philalethes: 1 After simple substances, let us look at collective ones. Isn't the idea of such a collection of men as make an army as much *one* idea as the idea of a man?

Theophilus: It is right to say that this aggregate (this being through aggregation, to say it in Scholastic!) makes up a single idea, although strictly speaking such a collection of

substances doesn't really constitute a true substance. It is an upshot of many things' being inter-related in a certain way, and it gets its final touch of unity by the soul's thought and perception—i.e. by being thought about and experienced as a single thing. Still, it can be said to be 'substantial' in the sense that it contains substances.

Chapter xxv: Relation

Philalethes: 1 We still have to consider ideas of relations, which are the most lacking in reality. When the mind compares one thing with another it is *relating* them, and the relative terms or labels that are made from this serve as marks to lead the thoughts beyond the subject to something distinct from it— as when, for example, using the relative label 'husband' in calling James 'a husband' directs the mind to a thought not only of James but of his wife; and these two things are called subjects of the relation or *relata*. [See the note on 'compare' on page 49.]

Theophilus: Relations and orderings are to some extent beings of reason, but have their foundations in things; for one can say that their reality, like that of eternal truths and of possibilities, comes from the supreme reason of God.

Phil: 5 A thing can change in respect of one of its relational properties without changing in itself. Today I think of Titius as a father, but he may stop being a father tomorrow because

of the death of his son, without any alteration in himself.

Theo: That's the right thing to say if we are guided by the things of which we are aware; but in metaphysical strictness nothing has relational properties that don't reflect its intrinsic states, so that Titius *can't* stop being a father without changing in some intrinsic respect, though it may be one that neither we nor Titius can be aware of. . . .

Phil: 6 I believe that the only relations are relations between *two* things.

Theo: But there are instances of relations amongst several things at once; think about a •genealogical tree displaying the position and the connections of each member of the extended family. Even a figure such as a •polygon involves the relation among all its sides.

Phil: 8 It is worth noticing that our ideas of relations are often clearer than our ideas of the things that are related.

Thus the idea of *father* is clearer than that of *man*.

Theo: That's because this relation is so general that it can also apply to other substances. ·If 'father' applied only to *men*, 'father' would mean something of the form '*man* who. . . ' and would therefore involve whatever obscurity there is in the idea of *man*. ·And another point relating to your phrase '*often* clearer': you don't say what it takes for the idea of a relation *not* to be clearer than the ideas of the things that are related. Let me fill that gap·. There can be something clear and something obscure in a subject, and a relation can be grounded in what is clear. But if the very form of the relation involved knowledge of what is obscure in the subject, the relation would share in this obscurity. [See the last paragraph of xxii, on page 99.]

Phil: 10 If a term that applies to a thing x necessarily leads the mind ·also· to ideas other than ones that are supposed really to exist in x, it is a *relative* term; all other terms are absolute.

Theo: It is a good thing you put in 'necessarily', and you could also have added 'explicitly' or 'straight away', ·because without those restrictions there wouldn't be any non-relative terms on your account·. Consider for example the non-relative term 'black'. We can think of *black* without thinking of its cause, but that involves staying within the limits of the knowledge that comes to one straight away, which is either confused (when one has no analysis of the idea) or distinct but incomplete (when one has only a limited analysis). But no term is so absolute or so self-sufficient that it doesn't involve relations. A complete analysis of *any* term applying to a thing x would lead to things other than x—would lead indeed to *all* other things! But we can say that some terms are relative and others are not by classifying as 'relative' only the ones that *explicitly* indicate the relationship that they contain. I'm here contrasting 'absolute' with relative: when I earlier contrasted it with 'limited' [page 59], that was in a different sense.

Chapter xxvi: Cause and effect, and other relations

Philalethes: 1 •Cause is that which produces any simple or complex idea, and •effect is that which is produced.

Theophilus: ·Three comments·: **(1)** I notice that you frequently use the word 'idea' to stand for the *quality* that the idea represents. **(2)** You only define *efficient* cause, as I pointed out earlier [page 91], ·leaving out *final* causes·. **(3)** You would have to agree that when you say
efficient •cause is what •produces, and

•effect is what •is produced,
you are merely dealing in synonyms. I have heard you say somewhat more distinctly that

cause is what •makes another thing begin to exist · [page 65], although the word 'makes' in this also leaves the main difficulty intact. But this will become clearer later.

Phil: 4 To mention some other relations, let me point out

that some temporal words that are ordinarily thought to stand for *positive* ideas are really *relative*—examples are the words ‘young’ and ‘old’, which when applied to a thing *x* relate *x*’s age to the ordinary duration of things of the same kind as *x*. Thus a man is called ‘young’ at twenty years, and ‘very young’ at seven years old, whereas we call a horse ‘old’ at twenty, and a dog at seven years. But we don’t apply ‘old’ or ‘young’ to the sun and stars, or to a ruby or a diamond, because we don’t know how long such things usually last. 5

It is the same thing with location and size, for instance when we say that a thing is ‘high’ or ‘low’, ‘large’ or ‘small’.

Theo: These remarks are excellent. But we do sometimes depart a little from this approach, as when we say that a thing is ‘old’ in comparison not with things of its own kind but with things of other kinds. For instance we say that the world or the sun is ‘very old’. When someone asked Galileo if he thought that the sun was eternal, he answered: ‘Not eternal, but very old.’

Chapter xxvii: What identity or diversity is

Philaethes: 1 A relative idea of the greatest importance is that of *identity* or of *diversity*. We never find two things of the same kind existing in the same place at the same time, and we can’t conceive how this could even be possible. That’s why when we ask whether a thing is the same or not, our question refers always to something that existed at such-and-such a time in such-and-such a place. From this it follows that one thing can’t have two beginnings of existence, and that two things can’t both begin at the same time and place.

Theophilus: In addition to the difference of time or of place there must always be an internal basis for their being two different things. There can of course be many things of the same kind, but no two of them are ever *exactly* alike. Thus, although time and place . . . do distinguish for us things that we couldn’t easily tell apart by reference to themselves alone, things nevertheless are distinguishable in themselves. So time and place don’t constitute the core of identity and

diversity, despite the fact that difference of time or place brings with it differences in the states that are impressed on a thing, and thus goes hand in hand with differences in things. To which I would add that we can’t basically distinguish things by differences in times and places, because we have to distinguish times and places by means of things. This is because times and places are in themselves perfectly alike. . . . and so can be distinguished only through what things they have in them. The method that you seem to be offering here as the only one for distinguishing among things of the same kind is based on the assumption that interpenetration—i.e. one thing’s interpenetrating another so thoroughly that they both fully occupy the same place at the same time—is contrary to nature. That’s a reasonable assumption; but experience itself shows that we aren’t bound to it when it comes to distinguishing things. For instance, we find that two shadows or two rays of light interpenetrate,

and we could devise an imaginary world where bodies did the same. And interpenetration doesn't imply that we can't tell the interpenetrating things apart. We can distinguish one ray of light from another just by the direction of their paths, even when they intersect and thus interpenetrate at the intersection.

Phil:

what the original says: 3 What is called the *principle of individuation* in the Schools, where it is so much inquired after, is existence itself, which determines a being to a particular time and place incommunicable to two beings of the same kind.

a suggested interpretation of that: The Aristotelian philosophy departments devote a lot of research to what they call 'the principle of individuation', i.e. to the question of what basically marks a thing off from other things. The answer to the question is: what makes a thing *that* thing and not something else is the course of its existence, which traces it back to a particular time and place at which *it* began and at which, therefore, no *other* thing can have begun.

Theo: The 'principle of individuation' for individuals comes down to the principle of distinctness of which I have just been speaking. If two individuals were perfectly alike—entirely indistinguishable in themselves—there wouldn't be any principle of individuation, i.e. any basis for telling them apart. I would even go so far as to say that in such a case there wouldn't be any individual distinctness, any separate individuals, which is to say that the supposed *two* exactly alike individuals would really only be *one*. That is why the notion of *atoms* is chimerical and arises only from men's incomplete conceptions. For if there were

atoms, i.e. perfectly hard bodies that are incapable of internal change and can differ from one another only

in size and in shape,

they *could* have the same size and shape, and then obviously they would be indistinguishable in themselves and could be told apart only by means of external relations that had no internal foundation; and that is contrary to the greatest principles of reason. In fact, however, every body is changeable and indeed is actually changing all the time, so that it differs in itself from every other. . . . From these considerations, which have until now been overlooked, you can see how far people have strayed in philosophy from the most natural notions, and how far they have distanced themselves from the great principles of true metaphysics.

Phil: 4 What makes it the case that something is •one plant is its having parts that are organized in such a way as to make them contribute to •one common life that they all share and that lasts as long as the plant exists even though it changes its parts.

Theo: Mere organization or structure, without an enduring life-force that I call a 'monad', wouldn't suffice to make something remain the same individual. For the structure can continue specifically without continuing individually, i.e. the pattern can continue but come to be a pattern of different stuff. When an iron horse-shoe changes to copper in a certain mineral water from Hungary, the same •kind of shape remains but not the same •individual: the iron dissolves, and the copper with which the water is impregnated is precipitated and imperceptibly replaces it. . . . So we must acknowledge that organic bodies as well as inorganic ones remain 'the same' only in appearance, and not strictly speaking. It is rather like a river whose water is continually changing, or like Theseus's ship that the Athenians were constantly repairing. But as for

substances that possess in themselves a genuine, real,

substantial unity,
 substances that are capable of actions that can properly
 be called 'vital',
 substantial beings. . . . that are animated by a certain
 indivisible spirit,
 one can rightly say that *they* remain perfectly the same
 individual in virtue of this soul or spirit that constitutes the
I in substances that think.

Phil: 5 The case isn't so much different in brutes from how
 it is in plants.

Theo: If plants and brutes have no souls, then their identity
 is only apparent, but if they do have souls their identity is
 strictly genuine, although their organic bodies don't retain
 such an identity.

Phil: 6 This also shows what the identity of *the same*
man consists in, namely his having *the same life*, which
 is continued by constantly fleeting particles of matter that
 take turns in being vitally united to the same organized body.

Theo: That can be understood in my way. In fact, an organic
 body doesn't remain •the same for more than a moment; it
 only remains •equivalent. And if no reference is made to the
 soul, there won't be the 'same life' or a 'vital unity'. So the
 identity in that case would be merely apparent.

Phil: If you equate the identity of a man with anything but
 one suitably organized body taken at any one instant
 and carried on from there under one organization of
 life in many particles of matter that take turns in
 being united to it,
 you'll find it hard to make an embryo the same man as an
 adult, or a madman the same man as one who is sane, except
 on a basis that would make it possible for Seth, Ishmael,
 Socrates, Pilate and St Augustine *all* to be 'the same man'!

The trouble is even worse for the philosophers who allow
 of transmigration of souls, and hold that men may be
 punished for their crimes by having their souls slipped into
 the bodies of beasts. But I don't think that anybody, however
 sure he was that the soul of Heliogabalus was in a hog, would
 say 'That hog is a man' or 'That hog is Heliogabalus'.

Theo: We have here two questions, **(1)** a substantive question
 about •the thing and **(2)** a verbal question about •the name.
(1) As regards the thing, a single individual substance can
 retain its identity only by keeping the same soul, for the
 body is in continual flux and the soul doesn't reside in
 certain atoms that are reserved for it. . . . However, there
 is no transmigration in which the soul *entirely* abandons
 one body and passes into another. Even in death it always
 retains an organic body, a part of its former one, although
 what it retains is always subject to wasting away insensibly
 and to restoring itself, and even at a given time to undergoing
 a great change. Thus, instead of transmigration of the soul
 there is reshaping, infolding, unfolding and flowing in the
 soul's body. . . . If 'transmigration' is understood less strictly,
 so that the doctrine about it says only that souls remain
 in the same *rarefied* bodies and only change their *coarse*
 bodies, that would be possible •on my principles•, even to
 the extent of a soul's passing into a body of another species
 in the manner of the Brahmins or the Pythagoreans. But
 something's being •possible doesn't make it •conform with
 the order of things. **(2)** If such a transformation did occur,
 however, in such a way that Cain, Ham and Ishmael had the
 same soul, the question of whether they ought to be called
 'the same man' is merely a question of a name. I have noticed
 that Locke recognizes this and sets it forth very clearly (in
 the final paragraph of this chapter). There would be *identity*
of substance •in this supposed case•, but if there were no

connection by way of memory between the different personas that were made by the same soul, there wouldn't be enough *moral identity* to say that this was a single person. And if God wanted a human soul to pass into the body of a hog and to forget the man and perform no rational acts, it wouldn't constitute a man. But if while in the body of the beast it had the thoughts of a man, and even of the man whom it had animated before the change, perhaps no-one would object to saying that it was the same man. . . .

Phil: 8 I think I may be confident that anyone who saw a creature with a human shape and anatomy would call it 'a man', even if throughout its life it gave no more appearance of reason than a cat or a parrot does; and that anyone who heard a parrot talk and reason and philosophize wouldn't describe it or think of it as anything but a parrot. We would all say that the first of these animals was a dull irrational man, and the second a very intelligent rational parrot.

Theo: I agree more with the second point ·about the rational parrot· than with the first ·about the dull man·, though something needs to be said about the second one also. •First: if an animal of human shape but lacking the appearance of reason were found as an infant in the forest, few theologians would be bold enough to decide straight away and without qualification to baptize it. A Roman Catholic priest might say conditionally 'If you are a man I baptize you'. For it wouldn't be known whether it belonged to the human race and whether there was a rational soul in it; it might be an orang-outang—a monkey closely resembling a man in external features. . . . I admit that a man *could* become as stupid as an orang-outang; but the inner being of the rational soul would remain, despite the suspending of the exercise of reason, as I have already explained. So *that*—the presence of a rational soul—is the essential point, and it can't be

settled by appearances. As to the •second case, ·about the rational parrot·: there is no obstacle to there being rational animals of some other species than ours. . . . Indeed it does seem that the definition of 'man' as 'rational animal' needs to be amplified by something about the shape and anatomy of the body; otherwise, according to my views, Spirits would also be men.

Phil: 9 [The *starred words in what follows both replace Locke's word 'consciousness'. The fault lies with his French translator, on whose work Leibniz mainly relied.] The word 'person' stands for

a thinking intelligent being that has reason and reflection and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places, doing this purely through the *sense it has of its own actions.

And this *knowledge always accompanies our present sensations and perceptions—when they are distinct enough—and by this everyone is to himself what he calls *self*, without considering whether the same self is continued in the same substance or in different ones. For since thinking is always accompanied by

consciousness, and that is what makes everyone to be what he calls 'self', and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things,

personal identity consists purely in consciousness. *That* is what makes a rational being always the same; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, that's how far the person's identity reaches; it is the same self now as it was then.

Theo: [In this speech and a few others, Theophilus uses 'physical' in a sense that does *not* imply confinement to what is material or corporeal or 'physical' in our sense. Rather it belongs to an ancient trio—

- logic, what •must be the case,
- physics, what •is the case,
- ethics—what •ought to be the case.]

I also hold this opinion that consciousness or the sense of *I* proves moral or personal identity. And that is how I distinguish the •unendingness of a beast's soul from the •immortality of the soul of a man: both of them preserve real, physical identity; but it is consonant with the rules of God's providence that in man's case the soul should also retain a moral identity that is apparent to us ourselves, so as to constitute the same *person*, which is therefore sensitive to punishments and rewards. You seem to hold that this apparent identity could be preserved in the absence of any real identity. Perhaps that could happen through God's absolute power; but I should have thought that according to the order of things an identity that is apparent to the person concerned—one who senses himself to be the same—presupposes a real identity obtaining through each immediate temporal transition accompanied by reflection, or by the sense of *I*; because an intimate and immediate perception can't be mistaken in the natural course of things. If •a man could be a mere machine and still possess consciousness, I would have to agree with you; but I hold that •that state of affairs isn't possible—at least not naturally. I wouldn't want to deny. . . . that I am the *I* who was in the cradle, merely on the grounds that I can no longer remember anything that I did at that time. To discover one's own moral identity unaided, it is sufficient that between one state and a neighbouring (or just a nearby) one there be a mediating bond of consciousness, even if this has a jump or forgotten interval mixed into it. Thus, if an illness had interrupted the continuity of my bond of consciousness, so that I didn't know how I had arrived at my present state even though I could remember things further back, the testimony of others could fill in the gap in my recollection. I could even be punished on this testimony if I had done some deliberate wrong during an interval which this illness had made me forget a short

time later. And if I forgot my *whole* past, and needed to have myself taught all over again, even my name and how to read and write, I could still learn from others about my life during my preceding state; and I would have retained my *rights* without having to be divided into two persons and made to inherit from myself! All this is enough to maintain the moral identity that makes the same person. It is true that if the others conspired to deceive me (just as I might deceive myself by some vision or dream or illness, thinking that what I had dreamed had really happened to me), then the appearance would be false; but sometimes the reports of other people can give us enough certainty for all practical purposes. And in relation to God, whose social bond with us is the chief point of morality, error cannot occur. As regards self, it will be as well to distinguish it from the appearance of self and from consciousness. The self makes real •physical identity, and the appearance of self, when accompanied by truth, adds to it •personal identity. So, not wishing to say that personal identity extends no further than memory, I want even less to say that the self, or physical identity, depends on it. The existence of real personal identity is proved with as much certainty as any matter of fact can be, by present and immediate reflection; it is proved conclusively enough for ordinary purposes by memories across intervals and by the concurring testimony of other people. Even if God were to change the real identity in some extraordinary manner, the personal identity would remain, provided that the man preserved the appearances of identity—the inner ones (i.e. the ones belonging to consciousness) as well as outer ones such as those consisting in what appears to other people. Thus, consciousness isn't the only means of establishing personal identity, and its deficiencies can be made up by other people's accounts or even by other indications. But difficulties arise when there is a conflict

between these various appearances. Consciousness may stay silent, as in loss of memory; but if it spoke out plainly in opposition to the other appearances, we would be at a loss to decide and would sometimes be suspended between two possibilities: that the memory is mistaken or that outer appearances are deceptive.

Phil: 11 It will be said that the limbs of each man's body are parts of himself and that therefore, since his body is in constant flux, the man cannot remain the same.

Theo: I would rather say that the *I* and the *he* don't *have* parts, since we say quite correctly that *he* continues to exist as really the same substance, the same physical *I*, but we can't be speaking quite correctly if we say that the same •whole continues to exist when a •part of it is lost. And what has bodily parts cannot avoid losing some of them at every moment.

Phil: 13 If consciousness of a past action somehow included *that past action* itself, *then* of course the consciousness of one's past actions couldn't be transferred from one thinking substance to another; and our having a sense of ourselves as the same would render it certain that the same substance remained. But in fact, of course, our consciousness of a past action involves only a present *representation* of the past action; and no-one has shown why it isn't possible for something that never really happened to be represented to the mind as having happened.

Theo: We can be deceived by a memory across an interval—one often experiences this, and we can conceive of a natural cause of such an error. But a present or immediate memory, the memory of what was taking place immediately before—or in other words, the consciousness or reflection that accompanies inner activity—can't naturally deceive us.

If it could, we wouldn't even be certain that we *are* thinking about such and such a thing; for this too is silently said only about past actions, not about the very action of saying it. [When Theophilus says 'this too', he seems to mean "I think" as well as "I remember". That amounts to saying that so-called 'reflection' on our present inner activities is really *extremely short-term memory* of activities that have just occurred.] But if immediate inner experience isn't certain, we can't be sure of any truth of fact. I have already said that there can be an intelligible reason for the element of error in perceptions that are mediate and outer, but with regard to immediate inner ones such a reason couldn't be found except by resorting to God's omnipotence.

Phil: 14 Now for the question:

Could there be two distinct persons involving a single immaterial substance?

This seems to me to be built on the following question:

Can a single immaterial thing be stripped of all sense of its past existence, and lose it beyond the power of ever retrieving again, thus opening up a new page in the account-book (as it were) and having a consciousness that can't reach further back than this?

All those who believe in pre-existence of souls would evidently answer Yes. I once met a learned, intelligent, highly placed and well-respected man who was convinced that his soul had once been the soul of Socrates. For all we know to the contrary, souls can inhabit any portion of matter as well as any other, so that the supposition of a single soul's passing from one body to another has no apparent absurdity in it. But this man, now having no sense of anything that Nestor or Socrates ever did or thought, can he think of himself as the same *person* as either of them? Can he be concerned in the actions of either? Can he attribute those actions to himself, or think of them as *his* any more than the actions

of any other man who existed in the past? He is no more the same person as one of them than he would be if the soul that is now in him had been created when it began to operate in his present body. He would no more be made the same person as Nestor by this—i.e. by

his having the soul that used to be Nestor's

— than by

his having in his body some of the particles of matter that were once a part of Nestor.

For •sameness of person is not created by •sameness of immaterial substance without the same consciousness, any more than it is created by •sameness of particles of matter without a common consciousness.

Theo: An immaterial being or spirit *can't* be stripped of all perception of its past existence. It retains •impressions of everything that has previously happened to it, and it even has •presentiments of everything that will happen to it; but these states of mind are mostly too tiny to be distinguishable and for one to be aware of them, although they may perhaps grow some day. It is this continuity and interconnection of perceptions that make someone •really the same individual; but our awarenesses—i.e. when we are aware of past states of mind—prove a •moral identity as well, and make the real identity appear. The pre-existence of souls doesn't appear to us through our perceptions, but if it really did occur it could some day make itself known. So it is unreasonable to think that memory might be lost beyond any *possibility* of recovery, since insensible perceptions, whose usefulness I have shown in so many other important connections, serve a purpose here too—*preserving the seeds of memory*. . . . I have explained earlier [page 101] a way in which the migration of souls is possible (though it doesn't appear likely), namely that souls might, while retaining •rarefied bodies, whip across

into other •coarse bodies. If migration really did occur—at least, if it occurred like that—then the same individual would exist throughout, in Nestor, in Socrates and in some modern man; and it could even let its identity be known to someone who penetrated deeply enough into its nature, by means of the impressions or records of all that Nestor or Socrates had done, which remained in it and could be read there by a sufficiently acute mind. Yet if the modern man had no way, inner or outer, of knowing •what he has been, it would from a moral point of view be as though he had never been •it. But it appears that nothing in the world lacks significance—indeed, *moral* significance—because God reigns over the world and his government is perfect. According to my hypotheses, it is not true—as it seems to you to be—that a soul can inhabit any portion of matter as well as any other. On the contrary, a soul inherently expresses those portions of matter with which it is and must be united in an orderly way. So if it passed into a new coarse or sensible body, it would still retain the expression of everything of which it had had any perception in the old body; and indeed the new *body* would have to feel the effects of it, so that there will always be real marks of the continuance of the individual. But whatever our past state may have been, we can't always be aware of the effect that it leaves behind. Locke remarks in 27 that his suppositions or fictions about the migration of souls—considered as being possible—rest partly on the fact that the mind is commonly regarded not merely as independent of matter but also as being able to combine with any kind of matter as well as with any other. I hope that what I have said about this in one place and another will clear up this uncertainty and provide a better grasp of what can naturally happen. It shows in what way the actions of an ancient would belong to a modern who possessed the same soul, even though he was unaware of them. But if it did come to be known, that would imply

personal identity in addition. What makes the same human individual isn't •a portion of matter that passes from one body to another, nor is it •what we call *I*; rather, it is •the soul.

Phil: 16 However, as between

•an action that was performed a thousand years ago and now made mine by this self-consciousness that I now have of it as something that I have done,

and

•an action that I performed a moment ago,

I am as much concerned for the former as for the latter, and as justly accountable for it too.

Theo: This belief that we have done something can deceive us if the action was long ago. People have mistaken their dreams for reality, and have come to believe their own stories by constantly repeating them. Such a false belief can get one into tangled difficulties, but it can't make one liable to punishment if there are no other beliefs confirming it. On the other hand, one can be accountable for what one has done, even if one has forgotten it, provided that there is independent confirmation of the action.

Phil: 17 Everyone finds daily that while his little finger falls under that consciousness, it is as much a part of him as anything is.

Theo: I said in **11** why I wouldn't wish to maintain that my finger is part of me; but it is true that it *belongs* to me and is a part of *my body*.

Phil: Those who hold a different view will say: when this little finger is separated from the rest of the body, if this consciousness left the rest of the body and went along with the little finger, it is obvious that the little finger would then

be the person, the same person; and *self* would then have nothing to do with the rest of the body.

Theo: Nature doesn't permit these fictions, which are ruled out by the system of harmony, i.e. of the perfect correspondence between soul and body.

Phil: 18 It seems, though, that if the same body still lived and had a consciousness all of its own of which the little finger knew nothing—and if nevertheless the soul was in the finger—the finger couldn't acknowledge any of the actions of the rest of the body, and one couldn't attribute them to it.

Theo: Nor would the soul that was in the finger *belong* to this body. I admit that if God transferred a consciousness from soul *x* to soul *y*, we would have to treat *y* according to moral notions as though it were *x*. But this would disrupt the order of things for no reason, divorcing •what can come before our awareness from •the truth—the truth that is encapsulated, •out of our awareness•, in insensible perceptions. That wouldn't be reasonable, because perceptions that are now insensible may grow some day: nothing is useless, and eternity provides great scope for change.

Phil: 20 Human •laws don't punish the madman for the sane man's actions, or the sane man for what the madman did; so •they make them two persons. We go along with this when we say that someone 'is besides himself'.

Theo: The laws threaten punishments and promise rewards in order to discourage evil actions and encourage good ones. But a madman may be in a condition where threats and promises barely influence him because his reason is no longer in command; and so the severity of the penalty should be relaxed in proportion to his incapacity. On the other hand, we want the criminal to have a sense of the effects of the evil he has done, in order to increase people's fear of committing

crimes; but since the madman isn't sufficiently sensitive, we are content to postpone for some time carrying out the sentence by which we punish him for what he did while in his right mind. Thus what laws and judges do in these cases isn't the result of their supposing that two persons are involved.

Phil: 22 Indeed, Locke raises this objection against his own view: if a man who is drunk and who then becomes sober isn't the same person, he oughtn't to be punished for what he did while drunk, since he no longer has any sense of it. He replies that this man is just as much the same person as a man who walks and does other things in his sleep is the same person, and is accountable for anything he does in his sleep.

Theo: There is a great deal of difference between the actions of a drunk man and of a true and acknowledged sleepwalker. We punish drunkards because they could stay sober and may even retain some memory of the punishment while they are drunk. But a sleepwalker is less able to abstain from his nocturnal walk and from what he does during it. Still, if it were true that a good beating on the spot would make him stay in bed, we would have the right to beat him—and we would do so, too, though this would be a remedy rather than a punishment. . . .

Phil: Human laws punish both ·the drunkard and the sleep-walker· with a justice suitable to the kind of knowledge men can have in such matters. In these sorts of cases, we can't distinguish certainly what is real and what counterfeit; so ignorance in drunkenness or sleep isn't admitted as a plea. The fact ·of what he did· is proved •against him, and his not being conscious of it can't be proved •for him.

Theo: The real question isn't so much •that as •what to do when it has been well established—as it can be—that the

drunkard or the sleepwalker really was 'beside himself'. In that case the sleepwalker can only be regarded as the victim of a mania; but since drunkenness is voluntary and sickness is not, we punish the one and not the other.

Phil: But in the great and fearful day of judgment on which the secrets of all hearts will be laid open, we are entitled to think •that no-one will be held accountable for actions that he knows nothing of, and •that everyone will be told his fate with his conscience accusing or excusing him.

Theo: I doubt that man's memory will have to be raised up on the day of judgment so that he can remember everything that he had forgotten; I think the knowledge of others, and especially of ·God·, the just judge who is never deceived, will be enough. One could invent the fiction—not much in accord with the truth but at least *possible*—that a man on the day of judgment believed himself to have been wicked, and that this also appeared true to all the other created spirits who were in a position to offer a judgment on the matter, even though it wasn't the truth. Dare we say that the supreme and just judge, the only one who knew the truth of the matter, could damn this person and judge contrary to his knowledge? ·Surely not!· Yet this seems to follow from the notion of 'moral person' that you offer. It may be said ·in defence of your view· that if God judges contrary to appearances he won't be sufficiently glorified and will bring distress to others; but it can be replied that God is himself his own unique and supreme law, and that in this case the others should conclude that they were mistaken.

Phil: 23 Consider the following two possibilities:

- (1) Two distinct consciousnesses with no communication between them act alternately in the same body, the one always by day, the other always by night;

(2) A single consciousness acts in two distinct bodies, turn about.

In case (1), wouldn't the day-man and the night-man (so to speak) be *two persons*, as distinct from one another as Socrates was from Plato? And in case (2), wouldn't this be *one person* in two distinct bodies? It isn't relevant that (1) this single consciousness that affects two different bodies is introduced into them by a single immaterial substance, and that (2) these two consciousnesses that affect the same body at different times are introduced into it by two distinct immaterial substances; because the personal identity would in each case be determined by the consciousness, whether or not that consciousness was joined to some individual immaterial substance. Furthermore, an immaterial thinking thing may sometimes lose sight of its past consciousness, and then recall it again. Make these intervals of memory and forgetfulness take their turns regularly by day and night, and you have *two persons* with *one* immaterial spirit. Thus, selfhood isn't determined by identity or non-identity of •substance, which one can't be sure of, but only by identity of •consciousness.

Theo: I acknowledge that if all the appearances of one mind were transferred to another, or if God brought about an exchange between two minds by giving to one the visible body of the other and its appearances and states of consciousness, then personal identity wouldn't be tied to the identity of substance but rather would go with the constant appearances, which are what human morality must give heed to. But these appearances would not consist merely in states of consciousness: God would have to exchange not only the states of awareness or consciousness of the individuals concerned, but also the appearances that were presented to others; otherwise what the others had to say

would conflict with the consciousnesses of the individuals themselves, which would disturb the moral order. Still, you have to grant me that the ·supposed· divorce between

the insensible and sensible realms,

i.e. between

the insensible perceptions that remained in the same substances and the states of awareness that were exchanged,

would be a *miracle*—like supposing God to create a vacuum! For I have already explained why this is not in conformity with the natural order. Here is something we could much more fittingly suppose:

In another region of the universe. . . there is a sphere that is •in no way perceptibly different from this sphere of earth on which we live, and is •inhabited by men each of whom differs in no perceptible way from his counterpart among us. Thus at one time there will be more than a hundred million *pairs* of similar persons, i.e. pairs of persons where the members of each pair have the same appearances and states of consciousness.

God could transfer the minds, by themselves or with their bodies, from one sphere to the other without their being aware of it; but whether they are transferred or left where they are, what would Locke say about their 'persons' or 'selves'? Given that the states of consciousness and the inner and outer appearances of the men on these two spheres can't yield a distinction between them, are they two persons or are they one and the same? It's true that they could be told apart by God, and by minds that were capable of grasping the spatial distance between the spheres. . . and even the inner constitutions of the men on the two spheres—constitutions of which the men themselves are not sensible. But since according to your theories consciousness alone distinguishes

persons, with no need for us to be concerned about the real identity or diversity of substance or even about what would appear to other people, what is to prevent us from saying that these •two persons who are at the same time in these two similar but enormously distant spheres are •one and the same person? Yet that would obviously be absurd. I will add that if we are speaking ·not of bare logical possibility, but· of what can *naturally* occur, the two similar spheres and the two similar souls on them could remain similar only for a time. Since they would be numerically different—·i.e. since they would be *two*·—there would have to be a difference at least in their insensible constitutions, and the latter must unfold in the fullness of time ·into something sensible·.

Phil: 26 Suppose a man is ‘punished’ now for what he did in another life, of which he can’t be made in the least conscious, what difference is there between such treatment and the treatment he would get in simply being *created miserable*?

Theo: Platonists, Origenists, certain Hebrews and other defenders of the pre-existence of souls have believed that the souls of this world were put into imperfect bodies to make them suffer for crimes committed in a former world. But the fact is that if one doesn’t know the truth of the matter, and will never find it out either by recalling it through memory or from traces or from what other people know, it can’t be called ‘punishment’ according to the ordinary way of thinking. If we are to speak quite generally of punishment, however, there are grounds for questioning whether it is absolutely necessary that those who suffer should themselves eventually learn why, and whether it would not quite often be sufficient that those punishments should afford, to other and better informed Spirits, matter for glorifying divine justice. Still, it is more likely, at least in general, that the sufferers will learn why they suffer.

Phil: 28–9 Perhaps, all things considered, you can agree with

Locke when he concludes his chapter on identity by saying that the question of whether *the same man* remains is a verbal one, depending on whether we understand ‘a man’ as standing for

•a rational spirit or •a body of the form we call ‘human’
or •a spirit united with such a body.

On the •first account, the spirit that is separated (from the coarse body at least) will still be a man; on the •second, an orang-outang that was exactly like us apart from reason would be a man, and if a man lost his rational soul and acquired the soul of a beast he would remain the same man. On the •third account both must remain, still united to one another—the same spirit and the same body too, in part, or at least its equivalent as regards sensible bodily form. Thus one could remain the same being physically (the same substance), and morally (the same person), without remaining a man, ·let alone remaining the same man·. That’s where we come out if we follow the third account in regarding this shape as essential to the identity of the man.

Theo: I admit that there is a verbal question here. And the third account is like the same animal being at one time a caterpillar or silk-worm and at another a butterfly. . . . But we have met to discuss more important matters than the meanings of words. I have shown you the basis of true physical identity, and have shown that it doesn’t clash with moral identity or with memory either. [See the explanation of ‘physical’ in the middle of page 102.] And I have also shown that although moral identity and memory can’t always indicate a person’s physical identity, to the person in question or to his acquaintances, they never run counter to physical identity and are never totally divorced from it. Finally, I have shown that there are always created spirits who do or can know the truth of the matter, and that there is reason to think that things that make no difference from the point of view of the persons themselves *will* make such a difference eventually.

Chapter xxviii: Certain other relations, especially moral relations

Philaethes: 1 Besides the relations based on time, place and causality that we have just been discussing, there are countless others of which I shall mention a few. Any simple idea that is capable of •parts or •degrees provides an opportunity for comparing the things that have it, e.g. ‘whiter’, ‘less white’ or ‘equally white’. A relation of this kind may be called *proportional*.

Theophilus: But there is a way in which one thing can be greater than another although they aren’t proportional. They then differ by what I call an ‘imperfect magnitude’. An example is provided by the statement that

The angle that a radius makes with the arc of its circle is less than a right angle;

for •the radius-to-arc angle can’t stand in any proportion to •the right angle, and neither of those can stand in any proportion to •the angle between them.

Phil: 2 Another opportunity for comparing things is provided by *the circumstances of their origin*, on which are based the relations father and child, brothers, cousins, compatriots. It would hardly occur to any speaker of our language to say ‘This bull is the grandfather of that calf’ or ‘These two pigeons are first cousins’. That is because languages are adapted for common use. But in some countries where they care more about their horses’ pedigrees than about their own they have not only names for particular horses but also labels for their various blood-relationships.

Theo: [He reports various facts about how ‘the ideas and names pertaining to family’ have been handled in various countries. Then:] It remains to say that •blood-relationship is what you have when the two people whose relationship is

in question have a common origin; and one could say that •alliance or •affinity is what holds between two people if

they can be blood-related to some one person without thereby being blood-related to one another

—which can happen through the intervention of marriages, ·as with the ‘affinity’ between someone and his sister-in-law·. But by that definition there is ‘affinity’ between husband and wife, and we don’t ordinarily use ‘affinity’ in that way (their marriage causes affinities between others). So perhaps it would be better to say that •affinity is what holds between two people if

they *would* be blood-related *if* some husband and wife were taken to be a single person.

Phil: 3 Sometimes a relationship is founded on a moral right: the relation of a general to the army he commands, for instance, or that of citizen ·to the state to which he belongs·. Because these relations depend on agreements that men have made among themselves, I call them ‘instituted’ or ‘voluntary’ relations, to distinguish them from natural relations. Sometimes there is a name for each of the two related things, as with patron and client, general and soldier; but that isn’t always the case—for instance there is no name for those who have the relevant relationship to a chancellor.

Theo: We sometimes decorate and enrich natural relations by associating them with •moral ones. For example, offspring have the right to •claim their legitimate inherited share of their parents’ estates; young people are subjected to certain •restraints, and the old are granted certain •immunities. But it can also happen that something is taken to be a natural relation though it really isn’t one, as when the law defines

‘father of a child’ as ‘man who was wedded to the child’s mother at a time that makes it possible to regard the child as his’. This replacement of a *natural* relation (·biological fatherhood·) by an *instituted* one (·marriage to the mother at the time of conception· sometimes merely expresses a presumption, i.e. a judgment that treats something as true as long as it isn’t proved to be false. . . .

Phil: 4 *Moral* relation is the conformity or disagreement that men’s voluntary actions have to a rule that lets them be judged morally good or morally bad. **5** Moral good (evil) is the conformity (disagreement) of our voluntary actions to some law through which natural good (evil) is drawn on us by the will and power of the lawmaker or of someone seeking to uphold the law, this being what we call ‘reward’ (‘punishment’).

Theo: Writers as able as Locke are entitled to adapt terms as they see fit. But all the same, according to that account a single action could be morally good and morally bad at the same time under different legislators, ·fitting one set of laws and not another·. Similarly, in an earlier passage Locke took *virtue* to be whatever is praised [page 28], so that a single action would be virtuous or not depending on what men thought about it. Since that isn’t the ordinary sense of ‘morally good’ or of ‘virtuous’ as applied to actions, I for one would prefer to measure moral worth and virtue by the unchanging rule of reason that God has undertaken to uphold. We can then depend on him to bring it about that every •moral good becomes a •natural good. . . . But according to Locke’s notion of ·what he calls· •moral good (evil), it is really an •instituted good (evil)—something imposed on us by whoever has the reins of power in his hand and tries through rewards (punishments) to make us seek (avoid) it. The odd thing is that whatever is •instituted by God’s general

commands ·is not only •morally good but· also conforms to •nature, i.e. to reason, ·so that when God’s will is the touchstone the three categories coincide·.

Phil: 7 There are three sorts of laws. **(1)** The divine law, which is the standard for sins or duties. **(2)** The civil law, the standard for whether actions are criminal or innocent. **(3)** The law of opinion or reputation, the standard for virtues or vices.

Theo: In the ordinary senses of the words, virtues differ from duties and vices from sins only as general dispositions differ from actions. ·Thus, for example, honesty is a virtue and a particular honest act is a duty; undue reliance on alcohol is a vice and a particular drunken spree is a sin·. And virtue and vice aren’t ordinarily taken to be matters that depend on *opinion*. A grave sin is called a ‘crime’; and ‘innocent’ is contrasted not with ‘criminal’ but with ‘guilty’. There are two sorts of divine law: natural and positive. [Natural laws are just laws of nature, called ‘divine’ because God set them up. A ‘positive’ law is one that someone laid down as a law; so divine positive laws would be ones that God explicitly and separately laid down, as distinct from ones that are inherent in the *natural* realm that he created.] Civil law is positive. The ‘law of reputation’ can’t properly be called *law* unless it is included in the natural law. We talk like that when we speak of ‘the law of health’ in contexts where one’s actions can naturally bring one good health, ‘the law of business’ where one’s actions can naturally bring monetary gain. So we *could* speak of ‘the law of reputation’ in contexts where one’s actions can bring general approval.

Phil: 10 ‘Virtue’ (‘vice’) are labels that everyone claims stand for actions that are *in their own nature* right (wrong); and to the extent that they really are applied in that way •virtue agrees perfectly with •the natural divine law. But whatever people claim, when we look at each particular instance in

which these labels are applied it is *obvious* that they are applied only to actions that are approved of (disapproved of) in the country or society concerned. Otherwise, men would condemn themselves. Thus the measure of what is called ‘virtue’ or ‘vice’ is this approval or dislike, esteem or blame, which the whole community agrees on without openly discussing it. When men unite to form states or political communities, they hand over to the public the use of all their force, so that they can’t employ it against any fellow-citizen beyond what the law permits, but they keep for themselves the power of thinking well or badly, approving or disapproving.

Theo: If Locke were to declare that he has chosen to give this as an arbitrary nominal definition of the words ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’, one could only say that he is entitled to do that in his theory if it helps him to express himself, e.g. for lack of other terms; but one would have to add that this meaning doesn’t square with ordinary usage and isn’t very uplifting, and that if anyone tried to get it accepted in daily life and daily speech it would sound bad to many people—as Locke himself seems to acknowledge in his Preface. But what we are offered here is something more: although you admit that men •purport to be speaking of what is virtuous or vicious according to unchanging laws, you allege that they •really mean to speak only of something that is a matter of opinion. But it seems to me that your reasons for that would be equally reasons for holding that •truth and •reason and •everything we think of as most real are also matters of opinion, on the grounds that people make erroneous judgments about them! Wouldn’t it be altogether better to say •that people do understand virtue—like truth—as something conforming to nature, but •that they often go wrong in particular judgments about what is virtuous? And they aren’t wrong as they are thought to

be, for what they praise usually deserves it in some respects. The drinker’s virtue, i.e. the ability to hold one’s wine, can be an advantage. . . . The Spartans praised the cunning of thieves; and there is nothing blameworthy in that skill but only in the misuse of it. Some of those •violent criminals• who are painfully executed in peace-time could make excellent irregular soldiers in time of war. . . . Also, the idea that ‘men might condemn themselves’ shouldn’t be thought of as very strange: they do it very often, e.g. when they do things that they condemn others for doing. There are often public scandals concerning contradictions between words and actions, in cases where no-one can help seeing that a magistrate or preacher is doing what he forbids to be done.

Phil: 11 What counts as virtue is everywhere what is thought praiseworthy. Virtue and praise are called often by the same name. . . . Cicero says ‘Nature knows nothing more excellent than honesty, praise, dignity, honour’, and a little further on he adds: ‘By these various terms I wish to indicate one and the same thing.’

Theo: It is true that in the ancient world virtue was called ‘honesty’ . . . and it is also true that honesty is called ‘honour’ or ‘praise’. What that means, though, isn’t that virtue is whatever *is* praised but that it is whatever *is worthy of* praise, and that depends on the truth and not on opinion.

Phil: 12 Many people give no serious thought to the •law of God, or else they hope that they will some day be reconciled with its author; and they soothe themselves with hopes of impunity with respect to the •law of the state. But no man who offends against the opinion of the people he associates with and wants to be respected by thinks that he can escape the punishment of their censure and dislike. Nobody that has any sense of his own nature can live in society constantly despised. Such is the force of the •law of reputation.

Theo: I have already said that that isn't so much a •legal punishment as a •natural one that is brought on by the action itself. In fact, though, many people hardly care about it, because if they are despised by those who condemn something they have done, they usually find accomplices or at least allies who don't despise them—just so long as they do in some other way deserve a measure of respect, however small. Even the most infamous actions are forgotten; and often the culprit has only to be sufficiently bold and shameless. . . .for the slate to be wiped clean. If excommunication •by the church• gave rise to enduring and universal contempt, it would be as compelling as the 'law' of which Locke speaks; and it really *did* have that force among the first Christians—they had no legal powers to punish the guilty, and used excommunication instead. In somewhat the same way, craftsmen uphold certain customs amongst themselves—not looking to the law of the state for help—through the contempt they exhibit towards those who don't conform. That is also why duels still happen although they are illegal. One could wish that the populace were in agreement with each other and with reason in the distribution of praise and blame; and in particular that people of rank would refrain from sheltering villains by treating bad actions as a joke in which—most of the time, it seems—it isn't the malefactor but the victim who is punished by contempt

and made to look ridiculous. And just as commonly men will be found to despise not so much •vice as •weakness and •misfortune. Thus the 'law of reputation' needs to be thoroughly reformed and also to be better obeyed.

Phil: 19 Before leaving the topic of relations I would remark that our notion of a relation is usually as clear as—or even clearer than—our notion of its basis. If I believed that Sempronia become the mother of Titus by taking him from under a cabbage (as they use to tell children) and that later she had Caius in the same manner, I would have as clear a notion of the relation ' . . . brother of . . . ' between them as if I had all the skill of a midwife!

Theo: Yet one time when a child was told that his new-born brother had been drawn from a well (which is how the Germans satisfy children who are curious about this matter), the child replied that he was surprised they didn't throw the baby back into the same well when it troubled its mother by crying so much. My point is that the drawn-from-a-well account didn't explain to him the love the mother showed towards the baby. It can be said, then, that if someone doesn't know the basis of a relation his thoughts about it are partly of the kind I call 'blind', and are also insufficient, even though they may suffice in some respects and in some situations.

Chapter xxix: Clear and obscure, distinct and confused ideas

Philaethes: 2 Let us now turn to certain differences among ideas. A simple idea is **clear** when it is like the idea one would get from perceiving, under ideal circumstances, the object that it is an idea *of*. While the memory keeps it like that it is a clear idea. When it comes to lack any of that original exactness, or to lose any of its first freshness and to become (as it were) faded or tarnished by time, to that extent it is **obscure**. Complex ideas are clear when •the simple ideas that make them up are clear and •the number and order of those simple ideas is determinate.

Theophilus: In a short discussion of ideas—true and false, clear and obscure, distinct and confused—that appeared in thirty years ago I gave a definition of ‘clear idea’ which applied both to simple and to composite ideas; and it provides an explanation for what is said about them here. I say that an idea is clear when it enables one to recognize the thing and distinguish it from other things. For example, when I have a really clear idea of a colour I shan’t accept some other colour in place of it; and if I have a clear idea of a plant, I shall pick it out from others that are close to it—and if I can’t do that my idea is obscure. I believe that we have hardly any perfectly clear ideas of sensible things: some colours are alike in such a way that one can’t tell them apart in memory but will sometimes tell them apart when they are laid side by side. Again, when we think we have thoroughly described a plant, someone may bring from the Indies a plant that exactly fits everything we have put into our description and which nevertheless we can see belongs to a different species. So we can never be sure of having an account of a lowest species [= ‘a species that isn’t divisible into sub-species’].

Phil: 4 So, •to repeat what I have just said and to go on from there•,

- a **clear** idea is one of which the mind has as full and evident a perception as it would get from an outward object operating properly on a functioning sense-organ;
- a **distinct** idea is one in which the mind perceives a difference from all other ideas, and
- a **confused** idea is one that isn’t sufficiently distinguishable from some other idea from which it ought to be different.

Theo: On this account of what a distinct idea is, I don’t see how to distinguish it from a clear one. So in this matter I always follow Descartes’s usage, according to which an idea can be at once **clear and confused**, as are the ideas of sensible qualities that are associated with particular organs, e.g. the ideas of colour and of warmth. [Descartes did make the astonishing statement that something can be at once ‘clear and confused’, and also that pain is essentially ‘clear’—*according to the standard English translations of his works*. In fact, the translations are all wrong. Descartes used the French *clair* and the Latin *clarus* in their quite normal senses of ‘bright’, ‘vivid’ and the like. For a fuller account of this matter, see the long note at 1:47 in Descartes’s *Principles of Philosophy* in the version at www.earlymoderntexts.com. Leibniz seems mainly to have understood *clair* in Descartes’s manner; but, given that we are also dealing with Locke’s use of ‘clear’, it isn’t possible for this version to sort the whole matter out.] They are •clear because we recognize them and easily tell them apart, but they aren’t •distinct because we can’t distinguish their contents. It’s because they are not distinct that we can’t define these ideas, and can make them known only through examples and apart

from that can only say that they are a *je ne sais quoi*—an I-don't-know-what. (When their inner structure has been deciphered we'll be able to do better than that, and actually define them.) Thus, although according to us—that is, Descartes and me—•distinct ideas *do* distinguish one object from another, so also do ideas that are clear though in themselves •confused; so we don't apply the label 'distinct' to all the

(1) ideas that are distinguishing, i.e. that distinguish objects,

but only to the

(2) ideas that are distinguished, i.e. that are in themselves distinct and that •distinguish in the object the marks by which it is recognized, thus yielding an •analysis or •definition.

Ideas that aren't 'distinct' in this sense we call 'confused'. •For instance the idea of *redness*: we can (1) sort out red things from non-red things, but we can't (2) •say what the marks or criteria are through which we recognize something as red, or conduct an •analysis of the concept of red, or give a •verbal definition of 'red'. On this view •of mine, *we* aren't to blame for the confusion that reigns among our ideas, for this is an imperfection in our nature: to pick out the causes of odours and tastes, for instance, and the content of these qualities, is beyond us. But I *am* to blame for the confusion in a case where distinct ideas are within my power and it matters that I should have them, for example if I accept spurious gold as genuine because I haven't conducted the tests that bring out the marks of real gold.

Phil: 5 But it will be said that no idea is confused (or, as you would say, obscure) *in itself*, since any given idea has to be as the mind perceives it to be, and that sufficiently distinguishes it from all other ideas. •That threatens us

with having no use for 'confused' ('obscure') in application to ideas, for what's the use of an adjective that applies to everything? •6 To remove this difficulty we have to take it that the fault in question (confusion or obscurity) is one that an idea can have •not •in itself but •in relation to names: what makes an idea confused or obscure is its being such that it could just as well be called by some other name than the one it is expressed by.

Theo: It shouldn't be made a matter of names, it seems to me. Alexander the Great is reported to have seen in a dream a plant that he dreamed would cure his friend Lysimachus. . . . He had many plants brought to him, among which he recognized the one he had seen in his dream. But suppose that by bad luck his idea of the plant hadn't sufficed for it to be recognized, so that he needed to be taken back over the dream itself: obviously in that case his idea would have been imperfect and obscure (which I prefer to calling it 'confused'), not because

it didn't relate properly to some •name

(for he had no name for it), but

because it didn't relate properly to the •thing,

i.e. to the medicinal plant. This would be a case where Alexander had remembered some details while being unsure about others. Names serve to designate things, which is why someone who goes wrong in relating an idea to a name will usually go wrong about the thing he wants the name to stand for.

Phil: 7 Composite ideas are the most liable to this imperfection, and it can result from an idea's being made up of too few simple ideas. For example the idea of *a beast with spots*, which is too general and doesn't suffice to distinguish amongst the lynx, the leopard and the panther, although each of these is distinguished by its own particular name.

Theo: Our ideas could still be defective in this way even if we were in the same position as Adam was before he had named the animals. If one knew that among the spotted beasts there was one with extraordinarily penetrating vision, but didn't know whether it was the tiger or the lynx or some other species, that inability to distinguish it would be an imperfection. So it isn't so much a matter of a •name as of •the reality that can provide a subject for the name, and which makes the animal worthy of its own particular name. What emerges from this is that the idea of *a beast with spots* is good in itself, and not at all confused or obscure, if its only role is to mark the •genus; but if the •species is to be designated by a complex idea whose ingredients include that one and also some other insufficiently remembered idea, then that complex idea is obscure and imperfect.

Phil: 8 An opposite defect occurs when the simple ideas that make a composite one are numerous enough but are too jumbled and disorderly; like a picture that seems so confused that it is fit only to represent a cloudy sky. If a picture *did* represent a cloudy sky, then it wouldn't be said to involve confusion, any more than would a second picture that was made in imitation of the first picture! But if the picture is said to be *a portrait* then it can rightly be called 'confused' because one can't tell whether it depicts a man or a monkey or a fish. But it can happen that when the picture is viewed in a cylindrical mirror the confusion disappears and one sees that it is a •picture of• Julius Caesar. Thus, none of these mental pictures (so to speak) can be called 'confused' •in itself•, however its parts are put together; for the pictures, whatever they are like, can be plainly distinguished from all others so long as they are not brought under some ordinary name which, as far as one can see, doesn't fit them any better than does some other name with a different meaning.

Theo: This •picture whose parts one sees distinctly without seeing what they result in until one looks at them in a certain way is like •the idea of *a heap of stones*, which is truly confused—not just in your sense •of 'confused'• but also in mine—until one has distinctly grasped how many stones there are and some other properties of the heap. If there were thirty-six stones, say, one wouldn't know just from looking at them in a jumble that they could be arranged in a triangle or in a square—as in fact they could, because $36 = 3 \times 12$ and also $= 4 \times 9$. Similarly, in looking at a thousand-sided figure one can have only a confused idea of it until one knows the number of its sides, which is 10^3 . So what matters aren't •names but the distinct •properties that the idea must be found to contain when one has brought order into its confusion. It is sometimes hard to find the key to the confusion—the way of viewing the object that shows one its intelligible properties; rather like those pictures that Father Nicéron has shown how to construct, which must be viewed from a special position or by means of a special mirror if one is to see what the artist was aiming at.

Phil: 9 Still, it can't be denied that ideas may be defective in a third way that really *does* depend on the misuse of names, namely when our ideas are uncertain or undetermined. We encounter this every day: men who don't hesitate to use the ordinary words of their language before learning their precise meanings change the ideas they make the words stand for almost as often as they use them in their discourse! **10** So we can see what a lot *names* have to do with words' being called 'distinct' or 'confused'. It will be hard to say what it is for an •idea to be confused •or not distinct• if we don't bring in distinct •names as the signs of •distinct things.

Theo: Yet I have just explained it without bringing in names—both when 'confusion' is taken in your sense to stand for

what I call ‘obscurity’ and when it is taken in my sense to stand for one’s having a notion for which one doesn’t have an analysis. I have also shown that every obscure idea is in fact indeterminate or uncertain—as in the case where one has seen a beast with spots and one knows that something must be combined with this general notion but doesn’t clearly remember what. So the first and third defects that you have listed amount to the same thing. Still, it is certainly true that many mistakes do arise from the misuse of words, for it results in a kind of error in calculation—as though in calculating one failed to note carefully the position of each counter, or wrote the numerals so badly that one couldn’t tell a 2 from a 7, or carelessly changed or omitted something. This misuse of words may consist either in **(1)** not associating a word with any idea at all, or else in **(2)** associating a word with an imperfect idea of which a part is empty, left blank so to speak; and in either of these cases the thought contains a gap or a ‘blind’ part that is filled only by the name. Or the defect may consist in **(3)** associating several different ideas with a word; one may be unsure which idea should be selected (in which case the idea is obscure, just as much as when a part of it is ‘blind’); or it may be that one selects them turn about, ignoring the discrepancies amongst them and using first one and then another as the sense of a single word in a single argument, in a way that is apt to generate error. Uncertain thought, then, either **(1, 2)** is empty and lacks ideas, or **(3)** floats amongst two or more ideas. This does harm if we want to indicate something determinate, or if we want to hold a word to one particular sense that we have previously given it or in which it is used by others—especially in the ordinary language of the populace at large or of the experts. It generates no end of pointless, shapeless disputes in conversations, in lecture-halls and in books. . . .

Phil: 12 If there is any confusion of ideas other than •that which has a secret reference to names, at least it is •the latter that has done most to disorder men’s thoughts and discourses.

Theo: I agree about that; but some notion of the thing, and of one’s purpose in using the name, is usually involved as well. . . .

Phil: The way to prevent such confusion is to associate each name steadily with a certain collection of simple ideas united in a determinate number and order. But although we may *wish* that men would behave like that, it would be too optimistic to *hope* that they will do so. The trouble is that it doesn’t make thought and talk easier, and doesn’t do anything for men’s vanity. Indeed, all it is good for is something that isn’t always what men are aiming at—namely discovering and defending the truth! Loosely associating names with

undetermined ideas,

variable ideas, and

(in blind thoughts) almost no ideas,

serves both •to cover the speaker’s ignorance and—this being regarded as real learnedness and as a sign of superior knowledge—•to perplex and confound others.

Theo: These language troubles also owe much to people’s straining to be elegant and fine in their use of words. If it will help them to express their thoughts in an attractive way they see no objection to employing figures of speech in which words are diverted slightly from their usual senses. . . . Such figures of speech are given names (such as ‘synecdoche’ and ‘metaphor’) *when they are noticed*, but usually they aren’t. Given this indeterminacy in the use of language, a situation where we need · but don’t have· some kind of laws governing the signification of words. . . ., what is a

judicious person to do? If in writing for ordinary readers he abides strictly by fixed meanings for the terms he uses, he will be depriving himself of the means for making what he writes attractive and forceful. What he must do—and this is enough—is to be careful not to let the variations generate errors or fallacious reasoning. The ancients distinguished the ‘exoteric’ or popular mode of exposition from the ‘esoteric’ one that is suitable for those who seriously want to discover the truth; and that distinction is relevant here. If anyone wants to write like a mathematician in metaphysics or moral philosophy there’s nothing to stop him from rigorously doing so; some have announced that they would do this, and have promised us mathematical demonstrations outside mathematics, but hardly ever has anyone succeeded. I believe that people are repelled by the amount of trouble they would have to take for a tiny number of readers. . . . Yet I think that if anyone did go about it in the right way, he would have no reason to regret his labour. I have been tempted to try it myself.

Phil: 13 You will agree with me, though, that composite ideas may be very clear and distinct in one part and very obscure and confused in another.

Theo: There are no grounds for questioning that. For instance, we have very distinct ideas of a good proportion of the •solid, visible parts of the human body, but we have almost none of the bodily •fluids.

Phil: In a man who speaks of ‘a body of a thousand sides’ the idea of the •shape may be very obscure in his mind though the idea of the •number is very distinct in it.

Theo: That isn’t an apt example. A regular thousand-sided polygon is known just as distinctly as is the number one thousand, because in it one can discover and demonstrate all sorts of truths.

Phil: But one has no *precise* idea of a thousand-sided figure—no idea that would enable one to distinguish such a shape from one that has only nine hundred and ninety-nine sides.

Theo: That example shows that the •idea is being confused—by you and by Locke—with the •image. If I am confronted with a regular •thousand-sided• polygon, my eyesight and my imagination can’t give me a grasp of the thousand that it involves: I have only a confused idea both of the figure and of its number until I distinguish the number by counting. But once I have found the number, I know the given polygon’s nature and properties very well, in so far as they are those of a chiliagon [= ‘thousand-sided figure’, pronounced *kill-e-a-gon*]. The upshot is that I have this •idea of a chiliagon, even though I can’t have the •image of one: one’s senses and imagination would have to be sharper and more practised if they were to enable one to distinguish such a figure from a polygon that had one side less. But knowledge of shapes doesn’t *depend* on the imagination, any more than knowledge of numbers does, though imagination may be *a help*; and a mathematician may have precise knowledge of the nature of nine- and ten-sided shapes, because he has means for constructing and studying them, yet not be able to tell one from the other on sight. The fact is that a labourer or a builder, perhaps knowing little enough of the •geometrical• nature of the shapes, may have an advantage over a great geometrician in being able to tell them apart just by looking and without counting; just as there are porters and pedlars who will tell you to within a pound what their loads weigh—the worlds ablest expert in statics couldn’t do as well! It is true that this empiric’s kind of knowledge, gained through long practice, can greatly help swift action such as the engineer often needs in emergencies where any delay would put him

in danger. Still, this •clear image that one may have of a regular ten-sided shape or of a 99-pound weight—this accurate sense that one may have of them—consists merely in a •confused idea: it doesn't serve to reveal the nature and properties of the shape or the weight; that requires a •distinct idea. The point of this example is to bring out the difference between. . . ideas and images.

Phil: 15 We are apt to think that we have a positive comprehensive idea of •*eternity*, which amounts to thinking that there is no part of •that duration that isn't clearly known in our idea. But however great a duration someone represents to himself, since what is in question is a *boundless* extent there must always remain a part of his idea that is still beyond what he represents to himself and is very obscure and undetermined. That's how it comes about that in disputes and reasonings concerning eternity (or any other infinite) we are very apt to tangle ourselves in obvious absurdities.

Theo: This example doesn't appear to me to suit your purpose either, but it is just the thing for *my* purpose, which is to cure you of your notions about this topic! What you are caught up in here is that same confusion of the •image with the •idea. We have a comprehensive—i.e. accurate—idea of eternity, since we have the definition of it, although we have no image of it at all. Ideas of infinities aren't made by putting parts together, and the mistakes people make when

reasoning about the infinite don't arise from their having no image of it.

Phil: 16 But isn't it true that when we talk of matter as being infinitely divisible, though we have clear ideas of division, we have only very obscure and confused ideas of corpuscles? Take the smallest atom of dust you ever saw, and then consider: Do you have any distinct idea between the 100,000th and the 1,000,000th part of it?

Theo: This is that same mistake of taking the image for the idea; I'm amazed to see them so confused with one another. Having an *image* of something so small is utterly beside the point. Such an image is impossible, given how our bodies are now constituted. If we *could* have it, it would be pretty much like the images of things that now appear to us as within range of our awareness; but we would have to pay a price for having such an image because things of which we can now form images would be lost to us, becoming too large to be imagined. There are no images of *size* in itself, and the images of it that we do have depend on comparing things with our organs and with other objects. It is useless to bring the imagination into this. So what emerges from your latest remarks is that you are expending your ingenuity on creating needless difficulties for yourself by asking for too much.

Chapter xxx: Real and chimerical ideas

Philaethes: 1 The way an idea relates to things makes it real or chimerical, complete or incomplete, true or false.

·I shall give these dichotomies a chapter each·. By ‘real ideas’ I mean ones that have a basis in nature and have a conformity with a real being, with the existence of things, or with archetypes [= ‘things of which they are copies’]. Ideas that aren’t real are fantastical or chimerical.

Theophilus: There is a slight unclarity in that explanation: an idea can have a basis in nature without •conforming to that basis, as when it is said that our sensations of colour and warmth don’t •resemble any pattern or archetype. And another point: An idea should be classified as real if it is *possible*, even when nothing *actual* corresponds to it. Otherwise the idea of a species would become ‘chimerical’ if all the members of the species went out of existence.

Phil: 2 Simple ideas are all real, for though whiteness and coldness are no more in snow than pain is—according to some people—yet the ideas of them are the effects in us of powers in things external to us; and these constant effects serve us just as well in distinguishing things as they would if they were exact resemblances of something in the things themselves.

Theo: This is the first of the two points I have just been making; and now it appears that you *don’t* insist that a real idea must conform with an archetype. According to the opinion (which I don’t approve, though) of those who think that God arbitrarily settled what ideas we are to have to indicate the qualities of objects, with no resemblance and

not even a natural relationship ·between idea and thing·, our •ideas would not ‘conform’ to the things they are ideas *of* any more than our conventionally meaningful •words ‘conform’ to ideas or to things themselves.

Phil: 3 The mind is •passive in respect of its simple ideas; but when it forms a composite idea by bringing several simple ideas together under one name, there is a •voluntary element. For one man will include in the complex idea of *gold* or of *justice* simple ideas that another man leaves out of it.

Theo: The mind also deals actively with simple ideas when it teases them apart—i.e. analyses a complex idea into its simple constituents—so as to scrutinize the parts separately. This is just as voluntary as is the combining of several ideas to form a complex one. . . . The mind can’t go wrong in making such combinations and giving them names, provided that •it doesn’t join incompatible ideas, and provided that •the name in question is still virgin, so to speak, i.e. hasn’t already been associated with some notion. . . .

Phil: 4 Because mixed modes and relations have no reality except what they have in the minds of men, all that is needed for them to be real is the *possibility* of existing or of being mutually compatible.

Theo: The reality of relations does indeed depend on *mind*, as does the reality of truths; but what they depend is not the *human* mind but the supreme intellect ·of God· that determines all of them from all time. As for mixed modes: . . . whether or not they depend on mind, the ideas of them are real just so long as the modes are •possible, i.e. •distinctly conceivable. And that requires that the

constituent ideas be •compossible, i.e. able to be in mutual agreement.

Phil: 5 But composite ideas of substances are all made in reference to things existing outside us, and are intended to represent substances *as they really are*; so such ideas are •real only to the extent that they are combinations of simple ideas that really do occur together in things that exist outside us. And on the other hand, •chimerical composite ideas of substances are ones made up of collections of simple ideas that never were found together in any substance—such as the ideas that constitute

a centaur,

a body that resembles gold except that it weighs less than water, or

a body that appears to the senses to be homogeneous all through but is capable of perception and voluntary motion,

and so on.

Theo: You give one account of the real/chimerical distinction for ideas of modes, and a different one for ideas of substantial

things: you have two distinctions with nothing in common between them that I can see. You regard modes as real when they •are possible, but you don't allow the reality of ideas of substantial things unless the things •are existent. But if we try to bring in questions of existence, we'll •sometimes• hardly be able to discover whether a given idea is chimerical or not; for if something is possible but happens not to occur in the place or the time where we are, it may •have existed previously or •be going to exist in the future, or it may •exist now in some other part of the universe, or even *here* without our knowing about it. . . . So it seems best to say that possible ideas become 'merely chimerical' when the idea of actual existence is *groundlessly* attached to them—as •is done by those who think they can find the Philosopher's Stone, and •would be done by anyone who thought that there was once a race of centaurs. If instead we take what exists as our only guide, we'll be needlessly diverging from accepted ways of speaking; for these don't allow one to say that someone who speaks of roses or carnations in winter-time is speaking about a chimera unless he thinks that he can find such flowers in his garden!. . .

Chapter xxxi: Complete and incomplete ideas

Philaethes: 1 Real ideas are *complete* when they perfectly [= 'completely', 'fully'] represent the archetypes that the mind supposes them to be copying—the things that they represent, and to which the mind relates them. Incomplete ideas represent their archetypes only partially. **2** All our simple ideas are complete. The idea of whiteness or sweetness that

is observed in sugar is complete because all that is needed for completeness is that the idea should correspond fully to the powers that God has put into that body to produce those sensations.

Theophilus: I see that you call ideas 'complete' and 'incom-

plete' where Locke calls them 'adequate' and 'inadequate'. One might also call them 'perfect' and 'imperfect'. I once defined 'adequate idea' (or 'perfect idea') as *an idea that is so distinct that all its components are distinct*; the idea of a number is pretty much like that. So even an idea that is distinct, and thus does contain the definition or criteria of the object, can still be inadequate or imperfect—namely if these criteria or components aren't all distinctly known as well. For example,

•gold is a metal that resists cupellation and is insoluble in nitric acid;

that is a distinct idea, for it gives the criteria or the definition of *gold*. [Cupellation is a procedure for removing impurities from gold; the gold 'resists' the process, i.e. isn't removed by it.] But it isn't a perfect idea because we know too little about •the nature of cupellation and about •how aquafortis operates. The result of having only an imperfect idea of something is that a single thing can have several mutually independent definitions: sometimes we'll be unable to derive one from another, or see in advance that they must belong to a single thing, and then mere experience teaches us that they do belong to it together. Thus *gold* can be further defined as *the heaviest body we have*, or *the most malleable body we have*, and other definitions could also be constructed; but until men have penetrated more deeply into the nature of things they won't be able to see why the capacity to be separated out by the above two assaying procedures—cupellation and testing with aquafortis—is something that belongs to the heaviest metal. Whereas in geometry, where we *do* have perfect ideas, things run quite differently. We can *prove* that closed plane sections of cones and of cylinders are the same, namely ellipses; and we can't help knowing this if we give our minds to it, because our notions pertaining to it are perfect ones. I regard the perfect/imperfect division as merely a

subdivision within distinct ideas; and it seems to me that confused ideas such as our idea of sweetness (which you spoke of) don't deserve the label 'complete'. For although they express the power that produces the sensation, they don't *fully* express it; or at any rate we can't know that they do. If we understood the content of our idea of sweetness, *then* we could then judge whether the idea suffices to explain everything that experience shows us about sweetness. But we could understand that content only through the idea's moving from 'confused' to 'distinct'.

Phil: So much for simple ideas; now let us turn to complex ones. They are ideas either of •modes or of •substances. **3** Complex ideas of modes are collections of simple ideas that the mind *chooses* to put together, without reference to any real archetypes or standing patterns existing anywhere; so they are—they *have to be*—complete ideas. Here is why:

They aren't •copies that could be compared with their archetypes; rather, they are themselves •archetypes that the mind has made as a basis for classifying and naming things; so they can't *lack* anything, because each of them has the combination of ideas that the mind wished to make, and that gives it the perfection that the mind intended it to have.

We can't attach sense to the suggestion that the understanding might have a *more complete or perfect* idea of *triangle* than that of *three sides and three angles*. Whoever put together the ideas of

danger,

not being ruffled by fear,

calm thought about what it would be best to do, and then *doing* it without being deterred by the danger,

thereby formed the idea of *courage*. And he achieved what he wanted to, namely a complete idea conforming to *his*

choice of meaning for ‘courage’. It is otherwise with ideas of substances, in which we aim to copy what really exists.

Theo: The ideas of *triangle* and of *courage* have their archetypes in the possibility of things, just as much as does the idea of *gold*. It makes no difference to the nature of an idea whether it was invented in advance of experience or rather was something that stuck in someone’s mind after he had perceived a combination that nature had made. The combining of ideas to form modes isn’t entirely voluntary—

isn’t a mere matter of choose-as-you-like—for one might go wrong in this by bringing together incompatible elements, as do the people who design supposed perpetual motion machines! [He develops a little the point that ‘one can fabricate impossible modes’, giving an example from geometry. Then:] So whether it be of a mode or of something substantial, an idea can be complete or incomplete, depending on whether one has a good or a poor grasp of the partial ideas that go to make up the whole idea. One mark of a perfect idea is that it shows conclusively that the object is possible.

Chapter xxxii: True and false ideas

Philaethes: 1 Since truth and falsehood belong only to propositions, it follows that when ideas are called ‘true’ or ‘false’ some tacit proposition or affirmation is involved. 4 Specifically, there is a tacit supposition that the idea in question conforms to something. 5 Above all, that it conforms to what others designate by the same name (as when they speak of ‘justice’); also to what really exists (as the idea of man does, and the idea of centaur doesn’t); and also to the designated thing’s *essence*, on which its properties depend. And by this last standard, all our ordinary ideas of substances are false. . . .

Theophilus: I think that one could understand ‘true’ and ‘false’, as applied to ideas, in that way; but as these different senses—involving ‘conformity’ to three quite different things—aren’t in harmony with one another and can’t conveniently be brought under a common notion, I would prefer to call ideas ‘true’ or ‘false’ by reference to a different tacit affirmation that they all include, namely the affirmation of a *possibility*. Thus, calling an idea ‘possible’ (‘impossible’) if there could (could not) be something that it was the idea of, I propose that we call possible ideas ‘true’ and impossible ones ‘false’.

Chapter xxxiii: The association of ideas

Philaethes: **1** One often notices oddities in the thinking of others, and no-one is free from them. **2** This doesn't come wholly from obstinacy or self-love, for even fair-minded men are frequently guilty of this fault. **3** It is sometimes not even sufficient to attribute it to education and prejudice. It is rather a sort of madness, **4** and anyone who always behaved in that manner *would* be mad. **5** This defect comes from a non-natural connection of ideas that originates in chance or custom. **6** Inclinations and interests are involved. The tracks followed by repeated movements of the animal spirits are worn into a smooth path. [The 'animal spirits' were believed to be a superfine gas or fluid that could move around the body at an enormous speed.] If a tune is familiar, one retrieves it as soon as one is given a start. **7** This is the source of our likings and dislikings other than the ones we are born with. A child is made sick by eating too much honey; then when he grows up it makes him sick just to hear the word 'honey'. **8** It is especially easy for children to be influenced in his way, and one ought to guard against it. **9** This unruly **association of ideas** has great influence in all our actions and passions. . . . **10** Darkness recalls the idea of ghosts to children, because of the stories they have been told about them. **11** One doesn't think of somebody one hates without thinking of the harm that he did or might inflict on one. **12** One avoids a room where one has seen a friend die. **13** It sometimes happens that a mother who has lost a much-loved child thereby loses all her joy, until time erases from her mind the imprint of that idea—which in some cases doesn't happen. **14** A man perfectly cured of madness by an extremely painful operation acknowledged all through his life how much he owed to the man who had performed the

operation, and yet he couldn't stand the sight of him. . . . **17** This same non-natural connection occurs in our intellectual habits: *being* is linked in some people's minds with *matter*, as though there were nothing immaterial. . . .

Theophilus: I'm wholly in sympathy with this important observation, which could be confirmed by endless examples. [He gives some.] It's one of the commonest examples of a non-natural association that can generate error—this associating of words with things despite the presence of an ambiguity. For a better understanding of the source of the non-natural connecting of ideas, you should note what I said earlier (xi.11 [page 50]) when discussing the reasoning of beasts, namely that men as well as beasts are apt to join in their memory and imagination anything that they have found to be joined in their perceptions and their experiences. That's all there is to the reasoning of •beasts, if I may call it 'reasoning'; and there is often nothing more to it with •men, namely when they are mere empirics who govern themselves only by their senses and by particular instances without inquiring into whether the same principles are still at work. An 'empiric' notices and relies on regularities in how things go, but isn't curious about what explains them. We often don't know what principles are involved; and when that is so we must take seriously the association of one kind of event with another if there have been many instances of it, for in that case it is reasonable to expect or recall one perception on the occurrence of another that is ordinarily linked with it, especially when it is a matter of taking precautions. But a single very strong impression may, by its very intensity, instantly have as much effect as could be had by a repetition of mild impressions over a long period of time; and so this

intensity may etch into the imagination as deep and vivid an image as prolonged experience produces. That is how it comes about that one casual but violent impression brings together in our imagination and memory a pair of ideas that were both there already, binding them every bit as strongly and durably, and making us just as inclined to link them and to expect one to follow the other, as if the connection between them had been verified for us by long familiarity. In such a case there is the same effect—an association of

ideas—though not for the same reason. Authority, sectarian allegiance, and custom also produce the same effect as do experience and reason, and it isn't easy to free oneself from these inclinations. But it wouldn't be very difficult to protect oneself from false judgments in these matters, if men devoted themselves sufficiently seriously to the pursuit of truth, and proceeded methodically in cases where they recognized that it is important to them that the truth be found.