

# An Essay Concerning Human Understanding

## Book II: Ideas

John Locke

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[Brackets] enclose editorial explanations. Small ·dots· enclose material that has been added, but can be read as though it were part of the original text. Occasional •bullets, and also indenting of passages that are not quotations, are meant as aids to grasping the structure of a sentence or a thought. Every four-point ellipsis . . . . indicates the omission of a brief passage that seems to present more difficulty than it is worth. Longer omissions are reported on, between [brackets], in normal-sized type.

First launched: July 2004

Last amended: August 2007

### **Contents**

<b>Chapter i: Ideas in general, and their origin</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Chapter ii: Simple ideas</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Chapter iii: Ideas of one sense</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter iv: Solidity</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Chapter v: Simple ideas of different senses</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter vi: Simple ideas of reflection</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Chapter vii: Simple ideas of both sensation and reflection</b>	<b>27</b>

<b>Chapter viii: Some further points about our simple ideas</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter ix: Perception</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Chapter x: Retention</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Chapter xi: Discerning, and other operations of the mind</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter xii: Complex ideas</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Chapter xiii: Simple modes, starting with the simple modes of space</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Chapter xiv: Duration and its simple modes</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Chapter xv: Duration and expansion, considered together</b>	<b>57</b>
<b>Chapter xvi: Number</b>	<b>60</b>
<b>Chapter xvii: Infinity</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>Chapter xviii: Other simple modes</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Chapter xix: The modes of thinking</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>Chapter xx: Modes of pleasure and pain</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Chapter xxi: Power</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>Chapter xxii: Mixed modes</b>	<b>93</b>
<b>Chapter xxiii: Complex ideas of substances</b>	<b>97</b>
<b>Chapter xxiv: Collective ideas of substances</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Chapter xxv: Relation</b>	<b>109</b>
<b>Chapter xxvi: Cause and effect, and other relations</b>	<b>111</b>

<b>Chapter xxvii: Identity and diversity</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>Chapter xxviii: Other relations</b>	<b>122</b>
<b>Chapter xxix: Clear and obscure, distinct and confused ideas</b>	<b>127</b>
<b>Chapter xxx: Real and fantastical ideas</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>Chapter xxxi: Adequate and inadequate ideas</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Chapter xxxii: True and false ideas</b>	<b>137</b>
<b>Chapter xxxiii: The association of ideas</b>	<b>141</b>

## Chapter xxv: Relation

**1.** Besides the ideas, simple and complex, that the mind has of things considered on their own, it gets other ideas from comparison between different things. [For Locke, a ‘comparison’ can be any kind of *considering together* of two things, not necessarily *likening* them to one another.] When the understanding thinks about a thing, it isn’t confined to that precise object: it can look beyond it, to see how it relates to some other thing. When the mind sets one thing alongside another (so to speak) and carries its view from one to the other, this is what we call *relation* and *respect*. A word is called *relative* if applying it to one thing signifies such a respect and leads the thought from the original subject to something else. The things that are thus brought together are said to be *related*. [Locke develops all this at some length, contrasting the non-relational thought that *Caius is white* with the relational thoughts that *Caius is a husband* and that *Caius is whiter than freestone*.]

[Section **2** points out that many relative terms come in pairs: ‘father’ and ‘son’, ‘bigger’ and ‘smaller’. Some relative terms *could* be paired in this way but happen not to be; Locke gives the example of ‘concubine’. He concludes:] All names that are more than empty sounds must signify some idea that either •is •an idea of a quality• in the thing to which the name is applied, and then it is *positive* and is looked on as united to and existing in the thing in question, or •arises from the respect •or relation• the mind finds the thing to bear to some other thing, and then it includes a *relation*.

[In section **3** Locke mentions terms that are tacitly relative though they are sometimes not seen to be so—for example ‘old’, ‘great’, ‘imperfect’, etc. Section **4** points out that two

people might have very different ideas of *man* yet exactly the same idea of *fatherhood*—different *relata*, same relation. Section **5** points out that a relation ceases to hold if one of the related things ceases to exist. When his only child dies, Caius ceases to be a father though he hasn’t altered within himself. Also, a thing can be related to many other things, some of the relations being ‘contrary’ to others: Caius is older than Titus and younger than Sempronia.]

**6.** Anything that can exist, or be considered as one thing, is positive •in contrast to being relative•; and so not only simple ideas and substances but also modes are positive beings. Their parts are very often relative one to another, but the whole considered together as one thing is a positive or absolute thing or idea: it produces in us the complex idea of one thing, and this idea is in our minds as one picture, under one name, even though it is an aggregate of different parts. The parts of •the idea of• a triangle have relations to one another, yet the idea of the whole is a positive absolute idea; •a thing’s triangularity doesn’t involve how it relates to anything else•. The same may be said of a family, a tune, etc. Any relation must be between two things considered as two things. . . .

**7.** Concerning relation in general, there are four points to be made. First, any single •item can be related in an almost infinite number of ways to other things. The •item in question may be

- a simple idea
- a substance
- a mode
- a relation

a *name of* a simple idea or substance or mode or relation.

·It is a remarkable fact that even •a relation or •a word can stand in relations to other things, but I shall not linger on that, and shall instead take the example of the many in which •a substance can stand to other things·. Thus, one single man may at once be involved in all these relations, and many more: father, brother, son, grandfather, grandson, father-in-law, son-in-law, husband, friend, enemy, subject, general, judge, patron, client, professor, European, Englishman, islander, servant, master, possessor, captain, superior, inferior, bigger, less, older, younger, contemporary, like, unlike, and so on almost to infinity, he being capable of as many relations as there can be ways of considering him together with something else. . . .

**8.** Secondly, although relations aren't contained in the real existence of things, but are something extraneous and added-on, the ideas that relative words stand for are often clearer and more distinct than of the substances to which they belong. The notion we have of *a father* is a great deal clearer and more distinct than our idea of *man*. . . . That is because I can often get the notion of a relation from my knowledge of one action or one simple idea, whereas to know any substantial being I need an accurate collection of many ideas. . . . Thus having the notion that *one laid the egg out of which the other was hatched* I have a clear idea of *the relation of parent to chick* between the two cassowaries in St. James's Park, although I have only an obscure and imperfect idea of those birds themselves.

**9.** Thirdly, although ever so many relations hold between one

thing and another, they are all made up of simple ideas of sensation or reflection—which I think are the whole materials of all our knowledge. To establish this I shall show it of •the most considerable relations that we have any notion of, and also of •some that seem to be the most remote from sense or reflection. The seemingly remote ones will be shown also to have their ideas from sense or reflection: the notions we have of those relations are merely certain simple ideas, and so originally derived from sense or reflection.

**10.** Fourthly, relation is thinking of one thing along with another, so that any word is relative if it necessarily leads the mind to any ideas ·of qualities· other than the ones that are supposed to exist in the thing to which the word is being applied. For example, 'father', 'brother', 'king', 'husband', 'blacker', 'merrier', etc. are relative, because each implies something else separate and exterior to the existence of the man to whom the word is applied. By way of contrast, such terms as 'black', 'merry', 'thoughtful', 'thirsty', 'angry', 'extended' are all absolute [= 'positive' = 'not relative'], because they don't signify anything beyond the man to whom they are applied.

**11.** Having laid down these ·four· premises concerning relation in general, I shall now proceed to show through examples how all our ideas of relation, however refined or remote from sense they seem to be, are made up of nothing but simple ideas. I shall begin with the most comprehensive relation, wherein all things that do or can exist are concerned, namely the relation of *cause and effect*. My next topic is the derivation of this from the two fountains of all our knowledge, sensation and reflection.

## Chapter xxvi: Cause and effect, and other relations

1. As we attend to the changes that things constantly undergo, we can't help noticing that various qualities and substances begin to exist, and that they come into existence through the operations of other things. From this observation we get our ideas of *cause* and *effect*. We use the general name 'cause' for whatever produces any simple or complex idea, and 'effect' is our name for what is produced. When we find that applying a certain degree of heat to a piece of wax regularly turns it into a fluid, we call the simple idea of heat the *cause* of the fluidity, and call fluidity the *effect* of the heat. . . . Whatever we consider as conducing to, or operating to bring into existence, any particular simple idea or substance or mode that didn't before exist, we take to be a *cause* and we label it accordingly.

2. So a cause is what makes some other thing—either simple idea, substance or mode—come into existence; and an effect is what is brought into existence by some other thing. We have no great difficulty in grouping the various origins of things into two sorts.

First, when a thing is made of which no part existed before—e.g. a new particle of matter comes into existence, having previously had no being. We call this *creation*.

Secondly, when a thing is made out of particles all of which already existed, although the whole thing of which they are made didn't previously exist. Examples would be a man, an egg, a rose, etc. When this happens with a substance that is produced in the ordinary course of nature by an •internal force that works in •imperceptible ways, having been triggered by some external agent or cause, we call it *generation*. When the cause is •external to the thing that comes into existence, and the effect is produced by

separating or joining parts in ways that •we can perceive, we call it *making*; all artificial things are in this category. When any simple idea [here = 'quality'] is produced that wasn't in that subject before, we call it *alteration*. Thus a man is generated, a picture made, and either of them •may be altered. . . . Things that are made to exist which weren't there before are *effects*, and things that operated to •produce the existence are *causes*. In every case the notion of cause and effect arises out of ideas received through sensation or reflection; and the cause-effect relation, however widely applicable it may be, at last terminates in [= 'comes down to'] simple ideas. For all you need to have the idea of cause and effect is to consider any simple idea or substance as beginning to exist through the operation of something else; you don't have to know *how* it was done.

[In section 3 Locke remarks that many of our *temporal* descriptions are really relational, though they don't appear to be so on the surface. For example, when we say 'Queen Elizabeth reigned for forty-five years', we are implicitly likening the length of her reign to the time taken by forty-five annual revolutions of the sun. Similarly with all other measures of time.]

[In section 4: not only measured time, but also some other temporal descriptions are covertly relational; for example 'old' means one thing applied to a dog and another applied to a human being, because calling a thing 'old' is comparing its duration with the usual duration of things *of that kind*. Where we know nothing of the latter, as with the sun, or a diamond, 'young' and 'old' have no application.]

[In section 5: spatial words such as 'large' and 'small' are

also covertly relative, in the same way as ‘young’ and old’. A large apple is smaller than a small horse. Statements about *where* things are located are openly relational.]

**6.** So likewise ‘weak’ and ‘strong’ are relative, comparing the subject with some ideas we have at that time of something having greater or less power. When we say ‘a weak man’ we mean one who has less strength than men usually have, or than men of his size usually have. . . . Similarly,

when we say ‘Creatures are all weak things’ we use ‘weak’ as a relative term, signifying the disproportion in power between God and his creatures. An abundance of words in ordinary speech—perhaps the majority of them—stand only for relations, though at first sight they seem to have no such meaning. For example, in the statement ‘The ship has necessary stores’, ‘necessary’ and ‘stores’ are both relative words; one having a relation to accomplishing the intended voyage, and the other to future use. . . .

## Chapter xxvii: Identity and diversity

**1.** Another context in which the mind compares things [= ‘considers things together’] is their *very being*: when we consider something as existing at a given time and place and compare it with itself existing at another time, we are led to form the ideas of *identity* and *diversity*. [In this context ‘diversity’ means ‘non-identity’. To say that *x is diverse from y* is to say only that *x is not y*.] When we see a thing—any thing, of whatever sort—to be in a certain place at a certain time, we are sure that it is *that very thing* and not *another thing existing at that time in some other place*, however alike the two may be in all other respects. And in this consists *identity*, when the ideas to which it is attributed don’t vary from what they were at the moment of their former existence that we are comparing with the present. We never find—and can’t even conceive of—two things of the same kind existing in the same place at the same time, so we rightly conclude that whatever exists in a certain place at a certain time excludes all others of the same kind, and is there itself alone. So when we ask

whether a thing is ‘the same’ or not, we are always referring to something that existed at a given time in a given place, a thing that at that instant was certainly the same as itself and not the same as anything else. From this it follows that •one thing can’t have two beginnings of existence because it is impossible for one thing to be in different places at the same time, and •two things can’t have one beginning, because it is impossible for two things of the same kind to exist in the same instant at the very same place. Thus, what had one beginning is the same thing; and what had a different beginning in time and place from that is not the same but diverse. The difficulties philosophers have had with this relation of identity have arisen from their not attending carefully to the precise notions of the things to which it is attributed.

**2.** We have ideas of only three sorts of substances: *God*, *finite intelligences*, and *bodies*. **1** God is without beginning,

eternal, unalterable, and everywhere; and so there can be no doubt concerning his identity. **2** Each finite spirit had its determinate time and place of beginning to exist, so its relation to that time and place will always determine its identity for as long as it exists. **3** The same holds for every particle of matter, which continues as the same as long as no matter is added to or removed from it. . . . These three sorts of 'substances' (as we call them) don't exclude *one another* out of the same place, but we can't conceive any of them allowing another *of the same kind* into its place. If that were to happen, the notions and names of identity and diversity would be useless, and there would be no way of distinguishing substances or anything else from one another. For example: if two bodies could be in the same place at the same time, then those two portions of matter would be one and the same, whatever their size. Indeed, *all* bodies would be one and the same, because allowing two bodies to be in one place ·at one time· allows for all bodies to do so. To suppose this ·to be possible· is to obliterate the distinction between identity and diversity, the difference between *one* and *more*. . . .

·That all concerned the identity of *substances*·. There remain *modes* and *relations*, but because they ultimately depend on substances [Locke says they are 'ultimately terminated in substances'], the identity and diversity of each particular one of them will be determined in the same way as the identity of particular substances.

Questions of identity and diversity don't arise for things whose existence consists in a sequence ·of events·, such as the actions of finite beings, e.g. motion and thought. Because each of these ·events· perishes the moment it begins, they can't exist at different times or in different places, as enduring things can; and therefore no motion or thought can be the same as any earlier motion or thought.

**3.** There has been much enquiry after the *principle of individuation*; but what I have said enables us easily to discover what that is: it is *existence itself*, which ties a being of a given sort to a particular time and place that can't be shared by any other being of the same kind. This seems easier to conceive in *simple* substances or modes, but if we are careful we can just as easily apply it to *compound* ones. Consider an atom, i.e. a continued body under one unchanging surface, existing at a particular time and place: it is evident that at that instant it is the same as itself. For being at that instant what it is and nothing else, it is the same and so must continue as long as its existence is continued; for so long it will be the same and no other. [That sentence is Locke's.] Similarly, if two or more atoms are joined together into a single mass, every one of those atoms will be the same by the foregoing rule. And while they exist united together, the mass whose parts they are must be the same mass, or the same body, however much the parts have been re-arranged. But if one atom is removed from the mass, or one new one added, it is no longer the same mass, or the same body. The identity of living creatures depends not on a mass of the same particles but on something else. For in them the variation of large amounts of matter doesn't alter the identity. An oak growing from a sapling to a great tree, and then lopped, is still the same oak; and a colt grown up to be a horse, sometimes fat, sometimes lean, is the same horse throughout all this. In neither case is there the same mass of matter, though there truly is the same oak, or horse. That is because in these two cases, a mass of matter and a living body, identity isn't applied to the same thing.

**4.** How, then, does an oak differ from a mass of matter? The answer seems to me to be this: the *mass* is merely the cohesion of particles of matter anyhow united, whereas the



*oak* is such a disposition of particles as constitutes the parts of an oak, and an organization of those parts that enables the whole to receive and distribute nourishment so as to continue and form the wood, bark, and leaves, etc. of an oak, in which consists the vegetable life. Thus, something is *one plant* if it has an organization of parts in one cohering body partaking of one common life, and it continues to be *the same plant* as long as it partakes of the same life, even if that life is passed along to new particles of matter vitally united to the living plant, in a similar continued organization suitable for that sort of plants. This organization is at any one instant in some one *collection of matter*, which distinguishes it from all others at that instant; and what has the identity that makes the same *plant* is

that *individual life*, existing constantly from that moment forwards and backwards, in the same continuity of imperceptibly succeeding parts united to the living body of the plant.

It also makes all the parts of it be parts of the same plant, for as long as they exist united in that continued organization that is fit to convey that common life to all the parts so united.

**5.** The identity of lower animals is sufficiently like that for anyone to be able to see, from what I have said, what makes one animal and continues it the same. It can be illustrated by something similar, namely the identity of machines. *What is a watch?* Clearly it is nothing but a construction of parts organized to a certain end—an end that it can attain when sufficient force is applied to it. If we suppose this machine to be one continued body whose parts were repaired, added to, or subtracted from, by a constant addition or separation of imperceptible parts, with one common life, it would be very much like the body of an animal; with the difference that

in an animal the fitness of the organization and the motion wherein life consists begin together, because the motion comes from within; but in a machine the force can be seen to come from outside, and is often lacking even when the machine is in order and well fitted to receive it—for example, when a clock isn't wound up.

**6.** This also shows what the identity of the *same man* consists in, namely: a participation in the same continued life by constantly fleeting particles of matter that are successively vitally united to the same organized body. If you place the identity of man in anything but this, you'll find it hard to make an embryo and an adult the same man, or a well man and a madman the same man. Your only chance of doing this is by tying 'same man' to 'same soul', but by that standard you will make it possible for Seth, Ismael, Socrates, Pilate, St. Augustine, and Cesare Borgia to be the same man. If identity of soul alone makes the same man, and nothing in the nature of matter rules out an individual spirit's being united to different bodies, it will be possible that those men with their different characters and living at widely different times, may have been the same man! That strange way of using the word 'man' is what one is led to by giving it a meaning from which body and shape are excluded. . . .

**7.** So unity of substance does not constitute all sorts of identity. To conceive and judge correctly about identity, we must consider what idea the word it is applied to stands for: it is one thing to be the same *substance*, another the same *man*, and a third the same *person*, if 'person', 'man', and 'substance' are names for three different ideas; for such as is the idea belonging to that name, such must be the identity. If this had been more carefully attended to, it might have prevented a great deal of that confusion that often occurs regarding identity, and especially personal identity, to which

I now turn ·after one more section on ‘same man’·.

**8.** An animal is a living organized body; and consequently the same animal, as I have said, is the same continued life communicated to different particles of matter, as they are successively united to that organized living body. And whatever other definitions are propounded, there should be no doubt that the word ‘man’ as we use it stands for the idea of an animal of a certain form. ·The time-hallowed definition of ‘man’ as ‘rational animal’ is wrong·. If we should see •a creature of our own shape and ·physical· constitution, though it had no more reason all its life than a cat or a parrot, we would still call him a man; and anyone who heard •a cat or a parrot talk, reason, and philosophize would still think it to be a cat or a parrot and would describe it as such. One of these two is •a dull, irrational man, the other •a very intelligent rational parrot. [Locke then quotes a tediously long traveller’s tale about encountering a rational parrot. His point is that someone who believes this account will go thinking of this rational animal as a parrot, not as a man.]

**9.** With ‘same man’ in hand, let us turn to ‘same person’. To find what *personal* identity consists in, we must consider what ‘person’ stands for. I think it is *a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing at different times and places*. What enables it to think of itself is its *consciousness*, which is inseparable from thinking and (it seems to me) essential to it. It is impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving that he perceives. When we see, hear, smell, taste, feel, meditate, or will anything, we know that we do so. It is always like that with our present sensations and perceptions. And it is through this that everyone is to himself that which he calls ‘self’, not raising the question of whether the same self is continued in the same substance. Consciousness

always accompanies thinking, and makes everyone to be what he calls ‘self’ and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things; in this alone consists personal identity, i.e. the sameness of a rational being; and as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of that person; it is the same self now that it was then; and this present self that now reflects on it is the one by which that action was performed.

**10.** Given that it is the same *person*, is it the same identical *substance*? Most people would think that it *is* the same substance if these perceptions with their consciousness always remained present in the mind, making the same thinking thing always consciously present and (most people would think) evidently the same to itself. What seems to make the difficulty—that is, to make it at least questionable whether the same person must be the same substance—is the following fact. •Consciousness is often interrupted by forgetfulness, and at no moment of our lives do we have the whole sequence of all our past actions before our eyes in one view; even the best memories lose the sight of one part while they are viewing another. Furthermore, •for the greatest part of our lives we don’t reflect on our past selves at all, because we are intent on our present thoughts or (in sound sleep) have no thoughts at all, or at least none with the consciousness that characterizes our waking thoughts. In all these cases our consciousness is interrupted, and we lose the sight of our past selves, and so doubts are raised as to whether or not we are the same thinking thing, i.e. the same substance.

That may be a reasonable question, but it has nothing to do with personal identity. For the latter, the question is about what makes the same *person*, and not whether the

same identical *substance* always thinks in the same person. Different substances might all partake in a single consciousness and thereby be united into one person, just as different bodies can enter into the same life and thereby be united into one animal, whose identity is preserved throughout that change of substances by the unity of the single continued life. What makes a man be himself *to himself* is sameness of consciousness, so personal identity depends entirely on that—whether the consciousness is tied to one substance throughout or rather is continued in a series of different substances. For as far as any thinking being can repeat the idea of any past action with the same consciousness that he had of it at first, and with the same consciousness he has of his present actions, so far is he the same personal self. For it is by the consciousness he has of his present thoughts and actions that he is *self to himself* now, and so will be the same self as far as the same consciousness can extend to actions past or to come. Distance of time doesn't make him two or more persons, and nor does change of substance; any more than a man is made to be two men by having a long or short sleep or by changing his clothes.

**11.** Our own bodies give us some kind of evidence for this. All the particles of your body, while they are vitally united to a single thinking conscious self—so that you feel when they are touched, and are affected by and conscious of good or harm that happens to them—are a part of yourself, i.e. of your thinking conscious self. Thus the limbs of his body are to everyone a part of himself; he feels for them and is concerned for them. Cut off a hand and thereby separate it from that consciousness the person had of its heat, cold, and other states, and it is then no longer a part of himself, any more than is the remotest material thing. Thus we see the substance of which the personal self consisted at one

time may be varied at another without change of personal identity; for there is no doubt that it is the same person, even though one of its limbs has been cut off.

**12.** But it is asked: *Can it be the same person if the substance changes?* and *Can it be different persons if the same substance does the thinking throughout?*

·Before I address these questions in sections 13 and 14, there's a preliminary point I want to make. It is that· neither question is alive for those who hold that thought is a property of a purely material animal constitution, with no immaterial substance being involved. Whether or not they are right about that, they obviously conceive personal identity as being preserved in something other than identity of substance; just as animal identity is preserved in identity of life, not of substance. ·This pair of questions does present a challenge to· •those who hold that only immaterial substances can think, ·and that sameness of person requires sameness of immaterial substance. Before •they can confront their materialist opponents, they· have to show why personal identity can't be preserved through a change of immaterial substances, just as animal identity is preserved through a change of material substances. Unless they say that what makes the same life ·and thus the animal identity· in lower animals is one immaterial spirit, just as (according to them) one immaterial spirit makes the same person in men—and Cartesians at least won't take that way out, for fear of making the lower animals thinking things too.

**13.** As to the first question, *If the thinking substance is changed, can it be the same person?*, I answer that this can be settled only by those who know •what kind of substances they are that think, and •whether the consciousness of past actions can be transferred from one such substance to another. Admittedly, if the same consciousness were •the same

individual action, it couldn't be transferred because in that case bringing a past headache (say) into one's consciousness would be bringing back *that very headache*, and *that* is tied to the substance to which it occurred. But a present consciousness of a past event isn't like that. Rather, it is a present *representation of* a past action, and we have still to be shown why something can't be represented to the mind as having happened though really it did not. How far the consciousness of past actions is tied to one individual agent, so that another can't possibly have it, will be hard for us to determine until we know

- what kind of action it is that can't be done without a reflex act of perception accompanying it, and
- how such an action is done by thinking substances who can't think without being conscious of it.

In our present state of knowledge it is hard to see how it can be impossible, in the nature of things, for an intellectual substance to have represented to it as done by itself something that it never did, and was perhaps done by some other agent. . . . Until we have a clearer view of the nature of thinking substances, we had better assume that such changes of substance within a single person never do *in fact* happen, basing this on the goodness of God. Having a concern for the happiness or misery of his creatures, he won't transfer from one substance to another the consciousness that draws reward or punishment with it. . . .

**14.** The second question, *Can it be different persons if the same substance does the thinking throughout?*, seems to me to arise out of the question of whether the following is possible:

An immaterial being that has been conscious of the events in its past is wholly stripped of all that consciousness, losing it beyond the power of ever

retrieving it again; so that now it (as it were) opens a new account, with a new starting date, having a consciousness that can't reach back beyond this new state.

Really, the question is whether if this happened it could be the same *person* who had first one consciousness and then another, with no possibility of communication between them. [Locke says that this must be regarded as possible by 'those who hold pre-existence', that is, who believe in reincarnation. He attacks them, thereby attacking the separation of 'same person' from 'same consciousness', and proposes a thought-experiment:] Reflect on yourself, and conclude that you have in yourself an immaterial spirit that is what thinks in you, keeps you the same throughout the constant change of your body, and is what you call 'myself'. Now try to suppose also that it is the same soul that was in Nestor or Thersites at the siege of Troy. This isn't obviously absurd; for souls, as far as we know anything of their nature, can go with any portion of matter as well as with any other; so the soul or thinking substance that is now *yourself* may once really have been the soul of someone else, such as Thersites or Nestor. But you don't now have any consciousness of any of the actions either of those two; so can you conceive yourself as being the same *person* with either of them? Can their actions have anything to do with you? Can you attribute those actions to yourself, or think of them as yours more than the actions of any other men that ever existed? Of course you can't. . . .

**15.** So we can easily conceive of being the same person at the resurrection, though in a body with partly different parts or structure from what one has now, as long as the same consciousness stays with the soul that inhabits the body. But the soul alone, in the change of bodies, would not be accounted enough to make the same man—except by

someone who identifies the soul with the man. If the soul of a prince, carrying with it the consciousness of the prince's past life, were to enter and inform the body of a cobbler who has been deserted by his own soul, everyone sees that he would be the same person as the prince, accountable only for the prince's actions; but who would say it was the same man? The body contributes to making the man, and in this case I should think everyone would let the body settle the 'same man' question, not dissuaded from this by the soul, with all its princely thoughts. To everyone but himself he would be the same cobbler, the same man. I know that in common parlance 'same person' and 'same man' stand for the same thing; and of course everyone will always be free to speak as he pleases, giving words what meanings he thinks fit, and changing them as often as he likes. Still, when we want to explore what makes the same spirit, man, or person, we must fix the ideas of spirit, man, or person in our minds; and when we have become clear about what we mean by them, we shan't find it hard to settle, for each of them, when it is 'the same' and when not.

**16.** But although the same •immaterial substance or soul does not by itself, in all circumstances, make the same man, it is clear that •consciousness unites actions—whether from long ago or from the immediately preceding moment—into the same person. Whatever has the consciousness of present and past actions is the same person to whom they both belong. If my present consciousness that I am now writing were also a consciousness that •I saw an overflowing of the Thames last winter and that •I saw Noah's ark and the flood, I couldn't doubt that I who write this now am the same self that saw the Thames overflowed last winter and viewed the flood at the general deluge—place that self in what substance you please. I could no more doubt this than

I can doubt that I who write this am the same *myself* now while I write as I was yesterday, whether or not I consist of all the same substance, material or immaterial. For sameness of substance is irrelevant to sameness of self: I am as much involved in—and as justly accountable for—•an action that was done a thousand years ago and is appropriated to me now by this self-consciousness as I am for •what I did a moment ago.

**17.** *Self* is that conscious thinking thing that feels or is conscious of pleasure and pain and capable of happiness or misery, and so is concerned for itself as far as that consciousness extends. (This holds true whatever substance the thinking thing is made up of; it doesn't matter whether it is spiritual or material, simple or compounded.) You must find that while your little finger is brought under your consciousness it is as much a part of yourself as is your head or your heart. If the finger were amputated and this consciousness went along with it, deserting the rest of the body, it is evident that the little finger would then be the person, the same person; and •this• self would then would have nothing to do with the rest of the body. As with spatial separation so also with temporal: something with which the consciousness of this present thinking thing can join itself makes the same person, and is one self with it, as everyone who reflects will perceive.

**18.** Personal identity is the basis for all the right and justice of reward and punishment. What everyone is concerned for, for himself, is happiness and misery—with no concern for what becomes of any substance that isn't connected with that consciousness. [Locke goes on to apply that to his 'finger' example, supposing that the finger takes the original consciousness with it, and that the rest of the body acquires a new consciousness.]

**19.** This illustrates my thesis that personal identity consists not in the identity of substance but in the identity of consciousness. If Socrates and the present mayor of Queenborough agree in *that*, they are the same person; if Socrates awake doesn't partake of the same consciousness as Socrates sleeping, they aren't the same person. And to punish Socrates awake for something done by sleeping Socrates without Socrates awake ever being conscious of it would be as unjust as to punish someone for an action of his twin brother's merely because their outsides were so alike that they couldn't be distinguished.

**20.** It may be objected: 'Suppose I wholly lose the memory of some parts of my life beyond any possibility of retrieving them, so that I shall never be conscious of them again; aren't I still the same person who did those actions, had those thoughts that I once was conscious of, even though I have now forgotten them?' To this I answer that we must be careful about what the word 'I' is applied to. This objector is thinking of sameness of the *man*, and calls it 'I' because he assumes that the same man is the same *person*. But the assumption isn't necessarily correct. If one man could have distinct disconnected consciousnesses at different times, that *same man* would certainly make different *persons* at different times. That this is what people in general think can be seen in the most solemn declaration of their opinions: human laws don't punish the madman for the sane man's actions, or the sane man for what the madman did, because they treat them as two persons. This is reflected in common speech when we say that someone is 'not himself' or is 'beside himself'. Those phrases insinuate that the speaker thinks—or that those who coined the phrases thought—that the self was changed, the self-same person was no longer in that man.

**21.** 'It is still hard to conceive that Socrates, the same individual man, might be two persons.' To help us with this we must consider what is meant by 'Socrates', or 'the same individual man'. There are three options. The same man might be any of these:

- 1** the same individual, immaterial, thinking substance; in short, the numerically-same soul and nothing else,
- 2** the same animal, without any regard to an immaterial soul,
- 3** the same immaterial spirit united to the same animal.

Help yourself! On any of these accounts of 'same man', it is impossible for personal identity to consist in anything but consciousness, or reach any further than that does.

According to **1**, a man born of different women, and in distant times, might still be the same man. Anyone who allows *this* must also allow that the same man could be two distinct persons. . . .

According to **2** and **3**, •Socrates in this life cannot be the same man as •anyone in the after-life. The only way to do this—allowing for the possibility that •Socrates in Athens and •Socrates in Limbo are the same man—is through an appeal to sameness of consciousness; and that amounts to equating human identity—'same man'—with personal identity. But that equation is problematic, because it makes it hard to see how the •infant Socrates can be the same man as •Socrates after the resurrection. There seems to be little agreement about what makes a man, and thus about what makes the same individual man; but whatever we think about that, if we are not to fall into great absurdities we must agree that sameness of person resides in consciousness.

**22.** You may want to object: 'But isn't a man drunk and sober the same person? Why else is he punished for what he does when drunk, even if he is never afterwards conscious of

it? He is just as much a single person as a man who walks in his sleep and is answerable, while awake, for any harm he did in his sleep.' ·Here is my reply to that·. Human laws punish both, with a justice suitable to the state of knowledge of those who administer the law: in these cases they can't distinguish for sure what is real from what is counterfeit; and so they don't allow the ignorance in drunkenness or sleep as a plea. Granted: punishment is tied to personhood, which is tied to consciousness, and the drunkard may not be conscious of what he did; but the courts justly punish him, because •his bad actions are proved *against* him, and •his lack of consciousness of them can't be proved *for* him. It may be reasonable to think that on the great day when the secrets of all hearts are laid open, nobody will be held accountable for actions of which he knows nothing; everybody will receive his sentence with his conscience ·agreeing with God's judgment by· accusing or excusing him.

**23.** Nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person. The identity of substance won't do it. For whatever substance there is, and whatever it is like, without consciousness there is no person. A substance without consciousness can no more be a person that a carcass can. [In the remainder of this section, and in section **24**, Locke discusses possible cases: two persons who take turns in animating one animal body ('the night man and the day man'); and one person who alternately animates two different animal bodies. The central emphasis throughout is on the uselessness in these questions of the concept of the same immaterial substance.]

**25.** I agree ·that on the question of contingent fact· the more probable opinion is that this consciousness is tied to, and is a state of, a single immaterial substance. Please yourself about that. However, every thinking being that can

experience happiness or misery must grant that

there is something, *himself*, that he is concerned for and wants to be happy; and that this self has existed continuously for a period of time and therefore may exist for months and years to come, with no set limit to its duration, and thus may be the same self carried by consciousness into the future.

It is through this consciousness that he finds himself to be the same self that acted thus and so some years ago and through which he is happy or miserable now. In all these thoughts we place sameness of *self* in sameness not of *substance* but of *consciousness*. Substances might come and go through the duration of such a consciousness; and *for as long as a substance is in a vital union with the thing containing this consciousness* it is a part of that same self. Thus, any part of my body, while vitally united to that which is conscious in me, is a part of myself (·for example my little finger, while it relates to me in such a way that if it is damaged I feel pain·); but when the vital union is broken, what was a part of myself a moment ago is now not so, any more than a part of another man's self is a part of me. [The rest of the section illustrates and repeats this line of thought.]

**26.** 'Person', I take it, is the name for this *self*. Wherever you find what you call 'myself', anyone else may say there is 'the same person'. 'Person' is a forensic term [= 'a term designed for use in legal proceedings'], having to do with actions and their merit; and so it applies only to active thinking beings that are capable of a law, and of happiness and misery. It is only through consciousness that this personality [Locke's word] extends itself beyond present existence to what is past, becoming concerned and accountable; the person owns and attributes *past* actions to itself for the same reason that

it does the *present*. All this is founded in a concern for happiness, which unavoidably accompanies consciousness—something that is conscious of pleasure and pain desires that the self that is conscious should be happy. As for past actions that the self cannot through consciousness square with or join to the present self—it can no more be concerned with them than if they had never been done. To •receive pleasure or pain, i.e. reward or punishment, on account of any such action is all of a piece with •being born happy or miserable, without any •merit or• demerit at all. Suppose a man were punished now for what he had done in another life of which he cannot have any consciousness, how does that •so-called• punishment differ from simply being created miserable? . . .

**27.** In treating this subject I have considered as perhaps-possible some states of affairs—e.g. the one about the prince and the cobbler—that will look strange to some readers, and perhaps *are* strange. But I think they are permissible, given our ignorance about the nature of the thinking thing in us which we look on as *ourselves*. If we knew with regard to this thinking thing

- what it is, or
- how it is tied to a certain system of fleeting animal spirits [see note in viii.12], or
- whether or not it can perform its operations of thinking and memory outside of a body organized as ours is, and
- whether God has decided that every such spirit •or thinking thing• shall be united to only one such body, with its memory depending on the health of that body's organs,

we might see the absurdity of some of the cases I considered. But as we are in the dark about these matters, we ordinarily

think of the •thinking thing or• soul of a man as an immaterial substance, owing nothing to matter and compatible with any kind of matter; and on that basis there cannot from the nature of things be any absurdity in supposing that the same soul might at different times be united to different bodies, making *one man* with each of them for as long as they were united. . . .

**28.** To conclude: •any substance that begins to exist must during its existence necessarily be the same; •any complex of substances that begins to exist must during the existence of its component parts be the same; •any mode that begins to exist is throughout its existence the same. . . . It appears from this that the difficulty or obscurity that people have found in this matter has arisen from the poor use of words rather than from any obscurity in things themselves. For whatever makes the specific idea to which the name is applied, if we steadily keep to that idea it will be easy for us to distinguish same and different, with no doubts arising. •I defend this in the next, final section•.

**29.** •Suppose we take a man to be *a rational spirit*, then it is easy to know what is the same man, namely the same spirit—whether or not it is embodied. •Suppose our idea of a man is *a rational spirit vitally united to a body with a certain structure*; then such a rational spirit will be the same man as long as it is united to such a body, though it needn't be the same body throughout. •If anyone's idea of a man is that of the vital union of parts in a certain shape [here = 'structure'], as long as that vital union and shape remain in a compound body, remaining the same except for a turnover in its constituent particles, it will be the same man. For the complex idea we use when classifying a thing as being of a certain kind also determines what it is for a thing of that kind to continue in existence.



## Chapter xxviii: Other relations

**1.** We can compare [= 'relate'] or refer things one to another in respect of time, place, and causality, all of which I have discussed. We can also do so in countless other respects, of which I shall mention some. First, a simple idea [here = 'quality'] that is capable of *parts* or *degrees* enables us to compare the things that have it to one another in respect of that simple idea—for example whiter, sweeter, equal·ly white·, more ·sweet·, etc. These relations depend on the equality and excess of the same simple idea in several subjects, and may be called *proportional*. . . .

**2.** Secondly, we can also relate things, or think of one thing in a way that brings in the thought of another, in respect of the circumstances of their origin or beginning. Such relations can't change through time, so they are as lasting as are the things related. Examples include father and son, brothers, first cousins, etc.—all the blood relationships, close and distant; and countrymen, i.e. those who were born in the same country, or region. I call these *natural relations*. We can see here how mankind have fitted their notions and words to daily needs and not to the truth and extent of things. For the relation of begetter to begotten is exactly the same in other species as in men; yet we don't ordinarily say 'This bull is the grandfather of that calf' or 'Those two pigeons are first cousins'. [Locke develops this point, remarking that some of our human-relational terms are needed in the law, and notes that cultures differ in this respect. He concludes:] This makes it easy to guess why in some countries they don't even have a word meaning what 'horse' does for us, while in others, where they care more about the pedigrees of their horses than about their own, they have not only names for particular horses but also words for their various

blood-relationships to one another.

**3.** Thirdly, sometimes things are brought together in a single thought on the basis of moral rights, powers, or obligations. Thus a *general* is one who has power to command an army; and an *army* under a general is a collection of armed men obliged to obey one man. A *citizen* is one who has a right to certain privileges in a given place. Such relations depend on men's wills, or on agreement in society, so I call them 'instituted' or 'voluntary'. Unlike the natural relations, most (if not all) of these are in some way alterable; two people related in such a way may cease to be so, while they both continue in existence. These relations, like all the others, involve relating two things to one another; but in many cases the relative nature of the term is overlooked because we have no standard relative name for one of the two subjects of the relation. For example, 'patron' and 'client' are easily recognized as relational ·because they come as a pair—if x is y's patron then y is x's client·—but 'constable' and 'dictator' are not, because there is no special name for those who are under the command of a dictator or of a constable. . . .

**4.** Fourthly, another sort of relation has to do with whether or not men's voluntary actions conform to some rule in terms of which they are judged. I think this may be called *moral* relation, because it concerns our moral·ly significant·actions. It deserves to be examined thoroughly, for there is no part of knowledge where we should be more careful to get fixed ideas and to do what we can to avoid obscurity and confusion. ·It will be my topic throughout the rest of this chapter·.

When human actions—with their various ends, objects, manners, and circumstances—are brought under distinct complex ideas, these are mixed modes, many of them with associated names. Taking *gratitude* to be a readiness to acknowledge and return kindness received, and *polygamy* to be the having of more than one wife at a time, when we form these notions in our minds we have there a couple of settled ideas of mixed modes. But our concern with our actions isn't merely to know what complex ideas apply to them and thus how they should be classified. We have another, greater, concern which is to know whether the actions thus classified are morally good or bad.

**5.** Good and evil, as I showed in xx.2 and xxi.42, are nothing but pleasure or pain, or what procures pleasure or pain for us. So *moral* good and evil is only the conformity or disagreement of our voluntary actions to some law, through which good or evil is drawn on us by the will and power of the law-maker. Such •good or evil, •pleasure or pain, that the law-maker decrees to follow from our observance or breach of the law is what we call •reward or punishment.

**6.** Of these moral rules or laws on the basis of which men generally judge the moral status of their actions, there seem to me to be three sorts, with three different enforcements, or rewards and punishments. Before listing them in section 7 and discussing them in 8–10, I defend my assumption that any kind of law *does* have a system of punishment and reward associated with it. It would be utterly pointless for one thinking being to lay down a rule to govern the actions of another unless he had it in his power to reward compliance and punish deviation from his rule by some good or evil that isn't the natural consequence of the action itself. A *natural* convenience or inconvenience would operate by itself, without help from a law. This association with reward

and punishment is, if I am not mistaken, the true nature of all law, properly so called.

**7.** The laws that men generally relate their actions to, in judging whether they are right or wrong, seem to me to be these three. 1. The divine law. 2. The civil law. 3. The law of opinion or reputation, if I may so call it. By their relation to the first of these, men judge whether their actions are *sins* or *duties*; by the second, whether *criminal* or *innocent*; and by the third, whether *virtues* or *vices*.

**8.** First, there is the divine law, by which I mean the law that God has set for the actions of men, whether announced to them by the light of nature or by the voice of revelation. Nobody is so cloddish as to deny that God has given men a rule by which to govern themselves. He has •a right to do it, because we are his creatures; he has •goodness and wisdom to direct our actions to what is best; and he has •power to enforce it by infinitely weighty rewards and punishments in the after-life. For nobody can take us out of his hands. This is the only true touchstone of moral rectitude; and it is by comparing their actions to this law that men judge the most considerable moral good or evil in their actions—that is, judge whether as duties or sins they are likely to procure them happiness or misery from the hands of God.

**9.** Secondly, there is the civil law, the rule set by a nation to govern the actions of those who belong to it. Men relate their actions to this also, in judging whether or not they are criminal. Nobody ignores civil law, because the rewards and punishments that enforce it are ready at hand and are suitable to the power that makes this law, That is the force of the commonwealth, which is obliged to protect the lives, liberties, and possessions of those who live according to its law, and has the power to take away life, liberty, or goods from anyone who disobeys, that being the punishment of

offences against this law.

**10.** Thirdly, there is the law of opinion or reputation. ‘Virtue’ and ‘vice’ are names that are everywhere said and thought to apply to actions on the basis of their being inherently right or wrong; and as far as they really *are* applied in that way they to that extent coincide with the divine law above-mentioned. But whatever people say, we can see that the names ‘virtue’ and ‘vice’, in particular instances of their use throughout the various nations and societies in the world, are constantly attributed only to such actions as are in *approved of* or *disapproved of* in the country or society concerned. It isn’t surprising that men everywhere should call ‘virtuous’ the actions that they judge to be praiseworthy, and call ‘vicious’ the ones they regard as blameable; for otherwise they would condemn themselves by thinking something right without commending it, or wrong without blaming it. Thus what people say and think about virtue and vice is measured by the approval or dislike, praise or blame, which is silently agreed on in a society or tribe or club. When men unite into political societies they hand over to the public the decisions about how •their force is to be used, so that they can’t employ it against any fellow-citizens further than the law of the country directs; but they hang onto •the power of approving or disapproving of the actions of members of their society; and by this approval and dislike they establish amongst themselves what they call virtue and vice.

**11.** You will agree that this is the common measure of virtue and vice if you consider the fact that although what passes for vice in one country may be counted a virtue, or at least not a vice, in another; yet everywhere virtue and praise go together, as do vice and blame. Virtue is everywhere what is thought praiseworthy, and nothing *but* what is publicly esteemed is called virtue. . . . Differences

in personal character, education, fashion, interests and so on can bring it about that what is thought praiseworthy in one place is censured in another; and so in different societies virtues and vices may sometimes have exchanged places; but in the main they have kept the same everywhere. •What has kept standards of virtue and vice pretty much •the same as one another is what has kept them all pretty much •the same as the standards of right and wrong laid down by God. Here is why. •Nothing can be more natural than to encourage with esteem and reputation what everyone finds to his advantage, and to blame and discountenance the contrary; and •nothing so directly and visibly advances the general good of mankind in this world as obedience to the laws that God has set for them, and nothing breeds such mischief and confusion as the neglect of those laws; and so •it is no wonder that esteem and discredit, virtue and vice, should to a large extent coincide with the unchangeable rule of right and wrong that the law of God has established. If people generally went wrong by placing their commendation or blame on the side that didn’t really deserve it, they would be renouncing all sense and reason, and also renouncing their own interests, to which they are in fact constantly true. Even men who *behave* badly bestow their *approval* in the right places; few of them are so depraved that they don’t condemn, at least in others, the faults they themselves are guilty of. . . .

**12.** You might want to object:

When you say that the law by which men judge of virtue and vice is nothing but the consent of private men who haven’t enough authority to make a law, you are forgetting your own notion of a law, omitting something that •according to you• is necessary and essential to a law, namely a power to enforce it.

I reply that if you imagine that commendation and disgrace don't strongly motivate men to accommodate themselves to the opinions and rules of those with whom they have dealings, you can't know much about the nature or history of mankind! Most people *do* govern themselves chiefly, if not solely, by this *law of fashion*; so they do what keeps them in reputation with their peers, having little regard for the laws of God or the law of the land. Some men—perhaps indeed *most* men—seldom reflect seriously on the penalties for breaking God's laws; and amongst those that do, many go ahead and break the law anyway, entertaining thoughts of future reconciliation *with God*, and making their peace *with him* for such breaches. As for the punishments due from the laws of the commonwealth, men frequently comfort themselves with hopes of impunity. But no man who offends against the fashion and opinion of the society he belongs to and wants to be accepted by can escape the punishment of their censure and dislike. Not one man in ten thousand is stiff and thick-skinned enough to bear up under the constant dislike and condemnation of his own social circle. Someone who can content himself to live in constant disgrace and disrepute with his own particular society must have a strange and unusual constitution! Many men have sought solitude and been reconciled to it; but nobody who thinks at all—nobody with the least sense of *a man* about him—can live in society under the constant dislike and poor opinion of his associates. That is too heavy a burden for humans to bear. . . .

[Section **13** briefly sums up the three laws.]

**14.** We test the goodness of an action by relating it to *•a rule* (like testing the quality of gold by rubbing it against a touchstone); the outcome of that test determines how we name the action, and that name is the sign of what value we attribute to it. Whether we take *•the rule* from the fashion of

the country or from the will of a *•human or divine* law-maker, the mind can easily see how a given action relates to it, and so it has a notion of moral good/evil, which is an action's conformity/nonconformity to that rule, and therefore is often called moral rectitude. This rule is merely a collection of several simple ideas, so that to judge whether an action conforms to it one has only to organize *•one's thought of* it so as to see whether the simple ideas belonging to *it* correspond to the ones that the law requires. And so we see how moral notions are founded on, and come down to, the simple ideas we have received from sensation or reflection. For example, consider the complex idea we signify by the word 'murder': when we have dismantled it and examined all its parts we shall find them to be a collection of simple ideas derived from reflection or sensation. *•From reflection*: the ideas of willing, considering, intending in advance, malice; and also of life, perception, and self-motion. *•From sensation*: the collection of those simple sensible ideas that are *•of qualities* to be found in *a man*, and of *an action* through which a man no longer has perception or motion—*•i.e.* through which a man becomes dead. All these simple ideas are brought together in *•the meaning of* the word 'murder'. When I find that this collection of simple ideas agrees or disagrees with the esteem of the country I have grown up in, and is regarded by most men there as worthy praise or blame, I call the action *•virtuous or vicious* accordingly. If I have the will of a supreme invisible law-giver for my rule, then I call the action *•good or bad, sin or duty*, according to whether I think it has been commanded or forbidden by God. And if I compare the action to the civil law, the rule made by the legislative power of the country, I call it *•lawful or unlawful, a crime or not a crime*. . . .

**15.** To conceive moral-ly significant actions correctly, we must look at them in two different ways. **1** First, as they are in themselves, each made up of a certain collection of qualities represented by simple ideas. Thus 'drunkenness' and 'lying' signify certain collections of simple ideas, which I call mixed modes; and understood in this way they are just as much positive absolute ideas with nothing relational, and so nothing moral, about them as are 'the drinking of a horse' and 'the speaking of a parrot'. **2** Secondly, our actions are considered as good, bad, or neither; and this is a relational way of looking at them, because what makes them regular or irregular, good or bad, is their conformity to or disagreement with some rule; and the comparison with a rule puts them into the category of relation. Thus duelling—a positive, non-relational label—is a sin in relation to the law of God, valour and virtue according to some laws of fashion, and a capital crime according to the laws of some lands. In this case the action has one name ('duelling') taken just as a positive mode, and another name ('sin' etc.) as it stands in relation to the law; and the two names make it easy to grasp the difference between the non-relational and relational ways of looking at it; just as with substances we can have one name ('man') to signify the thing and another ('father') to signify the relation.

**16.** The positive idea of an action is often expressed in a word that also conveys the action's moral relation, so that a single word expresses both the action itself and its moral rightness or wrongness. [Locke then warns against assuming that an action that falls under the non-moral part of such a word's meaning must also fall under the moral part. He concludes with an example:] Taking a madman's sword away from him without authority, though it is properly called 'stealing', understood as the non-relational name of a mixed mode, is

nevertheless not a sin or transgression in relation to the law of God.

[In section **17** Locke says that he thinks he has dealt with 'some of the most considerable' kinds of relation, and that there is no easy way to classify relations in general, because they are so numerous and various. He then announces a final trio of points.]

**18.** First, it is evident that all relations ultimately come down to the simple ideas we have acquired from sensation or reflection [Locke: 'all relation terminates in and is ultimately founded on those simple ideas']. So when we think or meaningfully say anything of a relational kind, all we have in our thoughts are some simple ideas, or collections of simple ideas, compared one with another. Nothing could be more obvious than this in the case of relations of the sort called 'proportional': when a man says 'Honey is sweeter than wax', it is plain that his thoughts terminate in the simple idea *sweetness*. This is equally true of all the rest of our relational thoughts, though often the simple ideas are not taken notice of because the compounds containing them are so complex. When the word 'father' is used, its meaning involves the particular species or collective idea signified by the word 'man', the sensible simple ideas signified by the word 'generation', and the effects of generation including all the simple ideas signified by the word 'child'. [Locke gives a second example—a partial analysis of the meaning of 'friend', in which the fifth ingredient is] the idea of *good*, which signifies anything that may advance his happiness. This thought terminates at last in particular simple ideas; the word 'good' in general can signify any one of these, but if it is entirely removed from all simple ideas it signifies nothing. . . .

**19.** Secondly, in relations we usually—if not always—have as clear a notion of the relation as we have of the things related. . . . If I know what it is for one man to be born of a woman, I know what it is for another man to be born of the same woman, and so have as clear a notion of *brothers* as of *births*. Perhaps clearer! For if I believed that his mother dug Titus out of the parsley-bed (as they used to tell children) and thereby became his mother, and that afterwards in the same way she dug Caius out of the parsley-bed, I would have as clear a notion of the relation of *brothers* between them as if I had all the skill of a midwife. . . . But though •the ideas of particular relations can be as clear and distinct in the minds of thoughtful people as those of mixed modes, and more determinate than those of substances, •words expressing relations are often as doubtful and uncertain in their meanings as names of substances or mixed modes, and much more than names of simple ideas. That is because

a relational word is the mark of a comparison between two things—an upshot of considering them together—and this is something that occurs only in men’s thoughts; it is merely an idea in men’s minds; and it often happens that men apply a single relational word to different comparisons of things, according to their own imaginations, which don’t always correspond with those of others using the same word.

**20.** Thirdly, in moral relations (as I call them) I get a true relational thought by comparing the action with the rule, whether the rule itself is true or false. •Similarly• if I measure a thing by a yardstick, I know whether the thing is longer or shorter than that supposed yard; but whether the yardstick I am using really is exactly a yard long is another question. Even if the rule I am invoking is wrong, and I am mistaken in relying on it, still I may perceive accurately that the action in question does, or that it doesn’t, conform to it.

## Chapter xxix: Clear and obscure, distinct and confused ideas

**1.** I have shown the origin of our ideas, and surveyed their various sorts; and I have considered how the simple ones differ from the complex, and observed how the complex ones are divided into those of modes, substances, and relations. All this, I think, needs to be done by anyone who wants a thorough grasp of how the mind develops in its understanding and knowledge of things. You may think I have spent long enough examining ideas, but please let me say a little more about them. The first point is that some are clear and others obscure, some distinct and others confused.

**2.** The perception of the mind is most aptly explained by words relating to eyesight, so we shall best understand what ‘clear’ and ‘obscure’ mean as applied to ideas by reflecting on what they mean when applied to the objects of sight. Light is what reveals visible objects to us, so we describe as ‘obscure’ anything that isn’t placed in a good enough light to reveal in detail its shape and colours. Similarly, a simple idea is ‘clear’ when it is like an idea that one might receive in a well-ordered sensation or perception from an object of the kind that it comes from. While the memory retains

them thus, and can produce them to the mind whenever it has occasion to consider them, they are *clear* ideas. In so far as they either lack some of the original exactness, or have lost any of their first freshness and are (so to speak) faded or tarnished by time, to that extent they are obscure. Complex ideas are clear when •their constituent simple ideas are clear and •the number and order of the simple ideas in the complex one is determinate and certain.

**3.** The causes of obscurity in simple ideas seem to be either •dull sense-organs, or •weak and fleeting impressions made by the objects, or else •a weakness in the memory which can't retain them in the condition in which they were originally received. Think of the sense-organs or perceptual faculties in terms of sealing wax. •Frozen wax is too hard and won't take an impression when the seal is pressed down on it in the usual way; •the wax that is all right won't take an impression because the seal isn't pressed down hard enough; and •very warm wax is too soft to retain the impression the seal gives it. In any of these cases the print left by the seal will be *obscure*. It is presumably clear enough how this applies to the obscurity of ideas.

**4.** A *clear* idea—I repeat—is one of which the mind has a perception that is as full and evident as it receives from an outward object operating properly on a healthy sense-organ. And 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 another idea from which it ought to be different. This rather compressed and difficult account will become clearer in the course of the next two sections.

**5.** It may be objected: 'If the only way for an idea to be confused is for it to be inadequately distinguishable from another idea from which it should be different, it is hard to

see how there can be any confused ideas. Whatever an idea is like, it can't be different from what the mind perceives it to be; and that very perception sufficiently distinguishes it from all other ideas, for they can't be *other* ideas—that is *different* ideas—without being perceived to be so. So no idea can be indistinguishable from another idea from which it ought to be different, unless you mean that it is different from itself; for from all *other* ideas it is obviously different.'

**6.** To remove this difficulty, and to help us to conceive correctly what the confusion is that ideas are sometimes accused of, we should note that things brought under different names are supposed to be different enough to be distinguished from one another, that so each sort can be marked off by its own special name and talked about, as need arises, separately from anything else. Quite obviously, most pairs of different names are supposed to stand for pairs of different things. Now, every idea that a man has is visibly what it is, and is distinct from all other ideas; so what makes it *confused* is its being such that it may as well be called by a name other than the one it is expressed by. Some things are supposed to fall under one of those names and others under the other; but in the sort of case just described—where someone has an idea that could go with either name—the difference has been lost.

**7.** The usual faults that lead to such confusion are, I think, of the following four kinds. First, omission. A complex idea (for they are the ones most liable to confusion) may be made up of too few simple ideas, containing only ideas all of which are common to other things as well; in which case the idea leaves out the differences that entitle it to a different name. Thus someone who has an idea of merely *a beast with spots* has only a confused idea of a *leopard*, because it isn't distinguished from that of a *lynx* and other sorts of spotted

beasts. . . . You might want to consider how much the custom of defining words by general terms contributes to making the ideas we try to express by them confused and undetermined. This much is obvious: confused ideas bring uncertainty into the use of words, and take away the advantages of having distinct names.

**8.** Secondly, ·jumbling·. Another fault that makes our ideas confused occurs when, although the particulars that make up a ·complex· idea are numerous enough, they are so jumbled that it isn't easy to see whether the idea belongs more properly to the name that is given it than to some other. The best way to understand this kind of confusion is to attend to a sort of pictures usually shown as surprising pieces of art, in which the colours, as they are laid by the pencil on the page itself, mark out very odd and unusual figures with no discernible order in their layout. This sketch, made up of parts in which no symmetry or order appears, is in itself no more a confused thing than the picture of a cloudy sky. The latter may have as little order of colours or shapes as the former, but nobody thinks it a confused picture. Then what makes it [i.e. the first picture] be thought of as confused, if not its lack of symmetry? (And that lack plainly doesn't make it confused; for a picture that perfectly imitated this one ·would also lack symmetry etc., yet· wouldn't be called confused.) I answer that the picture is thought to be confused when it is given a name that isn't discernibly more appropriate to it than some other name. For example, when it is said to be the picture of a man (or of Caesar), then any reasonable person counts it as confused if it can't be seen to fit 'man' (or 'Caesar') any more than it fits 'baboon' (or 'Pompey'). . . . That is how it is with our ideas, which are as it were the pictures of things. No one of these mental sketches, however its parts are put together, can be

called 'confused' until it is classified under some ordinary name that can't be seen to fit it any more than does some other name whose meaning is agreed to be different.

**9.** Thirdly, ·wavering·. A third defect that frequently qualifies our ideas as 'confused' occurs when one of them is uncertain and undetermined. We sometimes see people who use the ordinary words of their language without waiting to learn their precise meaning, and change the idea they make this or that term stand for, almost as often as they use it. Someone who does this because he isn't sure what to include in, and what to exclude from, his idea of *church* or *idolatry* every time he thinks of either, and doesn't hold steady to any one precise combination of ideas that makes it up, is said to have a 'confused idea' of idolatry or of the church. The reason for saying this is the same as for speaking of 'confusion' where there is jumbling. It is because a changeable idea—if indeed we can call it one idea—can't belong to one name rather than another; and so it loses the distinction that distinct names are designed for.

**10.** What I have said shows how much names—which are supposed to be steady signs of things, and through their differences to keep different things distinct ·in our minds·—are the occasion for labelling ideas as 'distinct' or 'confused', through the mind's secretly and covertly relating its ideas to such names. This may be more fully understood in the light of my treatment of words in Book III. Without bringing in the relation of ideas to distinct names, as the signs of distinct things, it will be hard to say what a 'confused idea' is. . . .

**12.** I think that this is the kind of confusion that is special to *ideas*, though even it involves a secret reference to *names*. Even if there is some other way for ideas to be confused, the one I have described is what mostly disorders men's



thoughts and discourses (for what men have in their minds whenever they converse with one another, and usually even when they are silently thinking, are *ideas ranked under names*). . . . The way to prevent this is to unite into one complex idea, as precisely as possible, all those ingredients that differentiate a given idea from others; and always to apply the same name to that complex. But this exactness is rather to be wished for than to be expected, because it is laborious and requires self-criticism, and it doesn't serve any purpose except the discovery of naked truth—which isn't everyone's goal! And since the loose application of names to *undetermined*, *variable*, and almost *no* ideas, serves both to cover our own ignorance and to perplex and confound others—which counts as learning and superiority in knowledge!—it is no wonder that most men should engage in such faults themselves while complaining of it in others. But although I think that much of the confusion to be found in the notions of men could be avoided through care and ingenuity, I am far from concluding that it is all wilful. Some ideas are so rich and complex that (a) the memory doesn't easily retain the very same precise combination of simple ideas under one name; (b) much less are we able constantly to guess what precise complex idea such a name stands for in another man's use of it. From (a) follows confusion in a man's own reasonings and opinions within himself; from (b) confusion in talking and arguing with others. I shall return to words, their defects and misuses, in Book III.

**13.** A complex idea is made up of a collection of different simple ones, so that it can be very clear and distinct in one part yet obscure and confused in another. When someone speaks of a chiliahedron, or a body with a thousand sides, the ideas of the shape may be confused though that of the number is distinct. He can talk about and do proofs

concerning that part of his complex idea that depends on the number 1000, which may lead him to think that he has a distinct idea of a chiliahedron; yet he plainly doesn't have a precise idea of its shape that would enable him to distinguish a chiliahedron by its shape from a figure that has only 999 sides. Unawareness of this problem causes no small error in men's thoughts and confusion in their talk.

[Section **14** develops this point, contrasting two pairs of physical things: (a) a 1000-sided one and a 999-sided one, and (b) a cubic one and a five-sided one. We can distinguish the members of (a) through the different numbers (by counting the sides) but not by their different shapes, whereas we can distinguish the members of (b) in either way.]

**15.** We often use the word 'eternity', and think we have a positive comprehensive idea of it, which means that every part of that duration is clearly contained in our idea. Someone who thinks this may indeed have

a very clear idea of duration,  
a clear idea of a very great length of duration, and  
a clear idea of the comparison of the latter with a still greater duration.

But he can't possibly include in his idea of any duration, however great, the *whole extent* of a duration in which he supposes no end; so the part of his idea that reaches beyond the bounds of that large duration he represents to his own thoughts—that is, beyond the largest duration that he represents clearly—is very obscure and undetermined. That is why, in disputes and reasonings concerning eternity or any other infinite, we are apt to blunder and to involve ourselves in obvious absurdities.

[In the long section **16** Locke discusses the attempts one might make to think clearly and positively about infinity. This discussion doesn't add any doctrine to what has been

said in xvii. All our attempts to think of infinite duration, or of infinitely extended or infinitely divisible space, he says, end up as attempts to think of infinite *number*. 'When we talk about infinite divisibility of body, or about infinite extension, our distinct and clear ideas are only of *numbers*; and after some progress of division the clear distinct ideas of

*extension* are quite lost.' As for the idea of infinite number, Locke dramatizes the inaccessibility (he thinks) of that by remarking that the attempt to reach it by successive additions of 400,000,000 is *no better* than trying to reach it by successive additions of 4.]

### Chapter xxx: Real and fantastical ideas

1. There are other ways in which ideas can be thought of in relation to things from which they are taken, or things they are supposed to represent. These, I think, yield a trio of distinctions. Ideas may be

real or fantastical,  
adequate or inadequate,  
true or false.

I shall treat the first pair in this chapter, the second in xxxi, and the third in xxxii. By *real* ideas I mean ones that have a foundation in nature, and conform to the real being and existence of things, or to their archetypes [= 'patterns or models from which they are copied']. *Fantastical* or chimerical ideas are ones that have no foundation in nature, and don't conform to that objective reality to which they are tacitly referred as to their archetypes. Let us apply this distinction to the sorts of ideas that I have distinguished.

2. First, our *simple ideas* are all real, all agree to the reality of things. That isn't to say that they are all images or representations of what exists, for I have shown that this isn't so except with the primary qualities of bodies. But

though whiteness and coldness are no more in snow than pain is, yet the ideas of whiteness and coldness, as well as of pain, are effects in us of powers in things outside us; they are *real* ideas in us, through which we distinguish the qualities that are really in things themselves. These various appearances were designed by God to be signs enabling us to know and distinguish things that we have to deal with; and our ideas can serve that purpose for us by being *constant effects* rather than *exact resemblances* of outer things. Their status as 'real' comes from how they dependably *correspond* with the constitutions of real beings; and it doesn't matter whether they correspond as *effects* or as *likenesses*. So our simple ideas are all real and true, because they answer and agree to the powers of things that produce them in our minds; that being all it takes to make them real. . . .

3. Though the mind is wholly passive in respect of its simple ideas, it isn't so in respect of its complex ideas. They are combinations of simple ideas that have been assembled and united under one general name, and clearly the human mind has a certain freedom in forming them. How can

it happen that one man's idea of gold, or of justice, is different from another's? It can only be because one •has included or omitted from his complex idea some simple idea that the other •has not. Well, then: which of these •voluntarily constructed complex ideas• are real, and which merely imaginary combinations? What collections agree to the reality of things, and what not? •My answer to that comes in two parts, one section each•.

4. Second: •*mixed modes* and *relations* have no reality except what they have in the minds of men, so all that is required for any such idea to be 'real' is that it be such that there *could* be something real to which it conformed. These ideas are themselves archetypes—•their own archetypes•—and so there can be no question of their differing from their archetypes •and thus from themselves! So the only way such an idea can chimerical is by its containing a jumble of inconsistent ideas.

Even when a complex idea isn't inconsistent, it may be 'fantastical' in a certain sense because someone uses it as a meaning of a word that doesn't ordinarily have that meaning—like using 'justice' to mean what is commonly meant by 'liberality'. But this fantasticalness relates more to propriety of speech than reality of ideas. Consider these two ideas:

- being undisturbed in danger, calmly considering what it is best to do, and steadily doing it,
- being undisturbed in danger, without thinking or

doing anything.

Each of these is a mixed mode, a complex idea of a state of being that could exist. The former of them fits the word 'courage' better than the other, which has no commonly accepted name in any known language; but there is nothing at all wrong with the latter considered just in itself.

5. Third: our •*complex 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 an idea is real only to the extent that it is a compound of simple ideas •of qualities• that are really united in things without us. On the other side, those are fantastical that are made up of collections of simple ideas •of qualities• that were never really united, never found together in any substance—such as

- a rational creature, consisting of a horse's head, joined to a body of human shape, or
- a body that is yellow, malleable, fusible, and fixed [= 'easily volatilized'], but lighter than common water, or
- a uniform, unstructured body that is capable of perception and voluntary motion.

Whether such substances *can* exist we don't know; but we should count the ideas of them as merely imaginary because they don't conform to any pattern existing that we know, and consist of collections of ideas •of qualities• that no substance has ever shown us united together. But they are not *as* imaginary as the complex ideas that contain in them some inconsistency or contradiction among their parts.

## Chapter xxxii: Adequate and inadequate ideas

1. Of our real ideas, some are adequate and some inadequate. I call 'adequate' the ones that •perfectly represent the archetypes that the mind supposes them to have been copied from, which it intends them to stand for, and to which it refers them. 'Inadequate' ideas are ones that •only partly or incompletely represent those archetypes to which they are referred. Let us now apply this distinction to each of our three big categories of ideas.

2. First: all our •*simple ideas* are adequate. They are nothing but the effects of certain powers in things that are fit, and ordained by God, to produce such sensations in us; so they must correspond to and be adequate to those powers, and we are sure they agree with the reality of things. If sugar produce in us the ideas of whiteness and sweetness, we are sure there is a power in sugar to produce those ideas in our minds, or else they couldn't have been produced by it. Thus, because each sensation corresponds to the power that operates on our senses, the idea so produced is a real idea, (and not a fiction of the mind, which has no power to produce any simple idea); and it cannot but be adequate since it ought only to correspond to that power. So all simple ideas are adequate.

It is true that we often talk inaccurately about the causes of these simple ideas of ours, using expressions that suggest that those ideas are real beings in the causally operative things. The fire's power of producing in us the idea of pain we correctly report by saying that the fire •'is painful to the touch'; but we handle differently its power to cause in us ideas of light and heat, saying that the fire itself •'is bright' and •'is hot', as though light and heat were not merely ideas in us but qualities in, or of, the fire. When I speak of things as

having secondary *qualities*, please understand me as talking only about those powers. (I need to call them 'qualities' in order to fit in with common ways of talking, for otherwise I wouldn't be well understood.) If there were no organs fit to receive the impressions fire makes on the sight and touch, or no mind joined to those organs to receive the ideas of light and heat through those impressions from the fire or sun, there would be no light or heat in the world (any more than there would be pain if there were no creature to feel it), even though Mount Aetna flamed higher than ever. In contrast, solidity, extension, shape, and motion and rest would still be really in the world if there were no sentient being to perceive them. . . .

3. Second: our •*complex ideas of modes*, being voluntary collections of simple ideas that the mind puts together, without reference to any real archetypes or standing patterns existing anywhere, have to be adequate ideas. They aren't intended to be copies of things really existing; we have them only as archetypes made by the mind to serve as standards for classifying and naming things; so they can't lack anything. Each of them has the combination of ideas, and thus the perfection, that the mind intended it to have. Thus by having the idea of *a figure with three sides meeting at three angles* I have a complete idea that needs nothing more to make it perfect. That the mind is satisfied with the perfection of this one of its ideas is plain in that it has no thought of how there can be a *more* complete or perfect idea of *triangle* than that.

Contrast this with our ideas of substances: we want *them* to copy things as they really are, and to represent to us that constitution on which all the substances' properties depend; and we see that our ideas don't reach the intended level of

perfection. We find that they still lack something that we would like them to contain, and so they are all inadequate. But mixed modes and relations, being archetypes without patterns, and so having nothing to represent but themselves, *must* be adequate because everything is adequate to itself! Whoever first put together the idea of

danger perceived, absence of disorder from fear, calm consideration of what was justly to be done, and doing it without disturbance or being deterred by the danger of it

certainly had in his mind the complex idea made up of that combination; and as he intended it to be nothing but what is, and to contain only the simple ideas that it has, it couldn't fail to be an adequate idea. And by laying this up in his memory with the name 'courage' attached to it, he gave himself a standard by which to measure and describe actions, according to whether they agreed with it. This idea thus made and laid up as a pattern must necessarily be adequate, as it is referred to nothing but itself, and takes its origin purely from the will of him who first made this combination.

[Section 4 makes the point that a second person may intend to use 'courage' with the same meaning—expressing the same idea—as the first, and yet get it wrong, associating the word with some other idea. In that case, *his* idea of courage is inadequate.]

[In 5 the point is developed further. Locke concludes:] In this way, but in no other, any idea of modes can be wrong, imperfect, or inadequate. And on this account our ideas of mixed modes are more liable to be faulty than any other kind; but this has to do with proper speaking rather than with true knowledge.

6. Third: I have shown above ·in xxiii· what ideas we have

of *substances*. Now, those ideas have in the mind a double reference: **1** Sometimes they are referred to a supposed *real essence* of each species of things. **2** Sometimes they are designed only to be pictures and representations in the mind of existing things, containing ·simple· ideas of the qualities we can discover in those things. In each of these respects, ideas of substances—these copies of those originals and archetypes—are imperfect and inadequate. ·I shall explain why for **1** in this section and the next, and for **2** in sections 8–10·.

Men usually make the names of substances stand for things considered as having certain *real essences*, which are what put them into this or that species. And because *names* stand for nothing but the ideas in men's minds, men must constantly refer their *ideas* to such real essences as though they were what the idea was meant to represent. It is regarded as a commonplace, especially among those who have grown up with the scientific ideas taught in this part of the world, that each individual substance has a specific essence which makes it belong to a certain kind. Almost anyone who calls himself 'a man' takes himself to mean that he has the real essence of *man*. But if you ask what those real essences are, men obviously don't know. It follows, then, that the ideas in their minds, purporting to represent *unknown* real essences, must be so far from being adequate that they can't be supposed to be any representation of them at all. complex ideas of substances are certain collections of simple ideas ·of qualities· that have been observed or supposed constantly to exist together. But such a complex idea can't be the real essence of any substance; for then the properties we discover in that body would depend on that complex idea, and be deducible from it, and their necessary connection with it be known; as all the properties of a triangle depend on and (as far as we can discover them) are deducible

from the complex idea of *three lines enclosing a space*. But our complex ideas of substances obviously don't contain such ideas on which all the other discoverable qualities of the substance depend. The common idea men have of iron is *a body of a certain colour, weight and hardness*, and they also think of iron as *malleable*; but this property has no necessary connection with that complex idea; and there is no more reason to think that malleableness depends on that colour etc. than to think that colour etc. depends on malleableness. Yet it is *very* common for men to think that what puts things into different *sorts* is their different *real essences*, unknown as they are.

Consider the particular portion of matter that makes the ring I have on my finger: most men will unhesitatingly suppose it to have a real essence that makes it gold, and from which flow the qualities I find in it, namely its special colour, weight, hardness, fusibility, fixedness, and change of colour upon a slight touch of mercury, etc. When I enquire into and search for the essence from which all these properties *·supposedly·* flow, it becomes obvious to me that I can't discover it. The furthest I can go is to make this presumption: because the portion of matter is nothing but *body*, its real essence or internal constitution on which its other qualities depend must be *the shapes, sizes, and connection of its solid parts*. I have no distinct perception of any of this, so I can have no idea of that essence.

If anyone says that the real essence and internal constitution on which these properties depend isn't the shape, size, and arrangement or connection of its solid parts, but something else called its particular *form*, this takes me still further away from having any idea of its real essence. *·Before 'form' came into the story, I did have something·*. For I have an idea of shape, size, and situation of solid parts *in general*, though I have none of the *particular* shape, size, etc. that

produce the qualities that I have mentioned—qualities that I find in the portion of matter circling my finger and not in the different portion of matter with which I trim my pen. But when I am told that something other than shape, size, etc. is its essence, something called 'substantial form', I confess to having no idea *at all* of this, but only of the sound of the word 'form', which is a good distance from an idea of a real essence or constitution!

I am equally ignorant of *·the details of·* the real essence of this particular substance and of the real essences of all other natural kinds of substance. I think that others who examine their own knowledge will find themselves to be ignorant in the same way.

**7.** When men apply the word 'gold' to this particular portion of matter on my finger, don't they usually mean the word to imply the matter's belonging to a particular species of bodies by virtue of its having a real internal essence? Yes, they do. So for them the word 'gold' must be referred primarily to that essence, and so the idea that goes with it must also be referred to that essence and be intended to represent it. *·But an idea can't represent something of which the idea's owner knows nothing·*. So those who use the word 'gold', not knowing the real essence of gold, have an idea of gold that is *inadequate* because it doesn't contain that real essence that the mind intends it to. The same applies to all other natural kinds of substance.

**8.** Setting aside the useless supposition of unknown real essences, we can try to copy the substances that exist in the world by putting together the ideas of the *sensible qualities* that are found coexisting in them. This brings us much nearer to a likeness of them than is achieved by those who think in terms of real specific essences; but we still don't arrive at perfectly adequate ideas of the substances in

question; our ideas don't exactly and fully contain all the qualities that are to be found in their archetypes. That is because those qualities and powers of substances are so many and various that nobody's complex idea contains them all. Men rarely put into their complex idea of any substance all the simple ideas of qualities that they know to exist in that substance. Wanting to make the meanings of their words as clear and manageable as they can, they usually put into their specific ideas of the sorts of substance only a few of the simple ideas of qualities that are to be found in them. But these have no special claim to be included while others are left out, so that clearly in both these ways—that is, in the ideas of sensible qualities that they include, as well as in their secret reference to real essences—our ideas of substances are deficient and inadequate. It isn't merely that our ideas *do* omit many of the discoverable qualities of the substance; they *must* do so, for the following reason. Except for shape and size in some cases, the simple ideas out of which we make our complex ideas of substances are all *powers* that are also relations to other substances. For example, a loadstone's magnetic quality is its *power* to *attract iron*; a flower's yellowness is its *power* to *affect our eyesight* in a certain way. So we can never be sure that we know all the powers of a body until we have tried out how it can change or be changed by other substances when related to them in various ways. It is impossible to try all of that for any one body, much less for all bodies, so we can't possibly bring any substance under an adequate idea made up of a collection of *all* its properties.

[In sections 9–10 Locke develops this line of thought, emphasizing how numerous the qualities of any kind of substance are, and how relatively accidental it is which subset of them get into the meaning of the common name for a kind

of substance. He concludes section 10 with this remark about numerousness:] This won't appear so much a paradox to anyone who thinks about that fairly simple figure *the triangle*—how much mathematicians have learned about it, and how far they still are from knowing all its properties.

**11.** So all our complex ideas of substances are imperfect and inadequate. The same would hold for mathematical figures if our complex ideas of them had to collect—one by one—their properties in reference to other figures. In that case, how uncertain and imperfect our idea of an *ellipse* would be, containing only a few of its properties! In fact, though, we have in our plain [Locke's word] idea the whole essence of that figure, from which we discover its other properties and demonstratively see how they flow from it.

**12.** Thus the mind has three sorts of abstract ideas. First, *simple ideas*, which are copies, and are certainly adequate. That is because such an idea is intended to express nothing but the power in things to produce in the mind such a sensation or idea, so that when that sensation is produced it must be the effect of that power. . . .

**13.** Secondly, the *complex ideas of substances* are copies too, but not perfect ones, not adequate. This is very evident to the mind, which plainly perceives that whatever collection of simple ideas it makes of any real kind of substance, it can't be sure that it matches all the qualities that are in that substance. . . . Furthermore, even if we had in our complex idea an exact collection of all the secondary qualities or powers of any substance, that wouldn't give us an idea of the essence of that thing. The powers or qualities that are observable by us are not the real essence of that substance; they depend on it, and flow from it. Besides, a man has no idea of substance in general, nor knows what substance is in itself. See xxiii.1–2.

**14.** Thirdly, *complex ideas of modes and relations* are originals, and archetypes; they aren't copies, aren't made after the pattern of any real existence that the mind intends them to fit and exactly to correspond to. Each of these collections

of simple ideas that the mind itself puts together contains in it precisely all that the mind intends that it should. . . . The ideas of modes and relations, therefore, have to be adequate.

### Chapter xxxii: True and false ideas

**1.** Though 'true' and 'false' are strictly applicable only to propositions, *ideas* are also often described as true or false. (What words are *not* used with great latitude, and with some deviation from their strict and proper meanings?) I think, though, that when ideas are termed 'true' or 'false' there is still some secret or tacit proposition on which that description is based. Look at particular occasions where ideas are called true or false, and you'll find some kind of affirmation or negation at work. Ideas, being nothing but bare appearances or perceptions in our minds, can't properly and simply in themselves be said to be true or false, any more than a single name can be said to be true or false.

**2.** Indeed both ideas and words may be called 'true' in a metaphysical sense of the word according to which anything that exists is 'true'—that is, really is such as it is. Even when something is called 'true' in that sense, though, there is perhaps a secret reference to our ideas, looked on as the standards of that truth. That amounts to a mental proposition, though it is usually not taken notice of.

**3.** But our present topic is not that metaphysical sense of 'true', but rather the more ordinary meanings of 'true' and 'false'. In the ordinary sense, then: the ideas in our

minds are only so many perceptions or appearances there, so none of *them* are false. The idea of a centaur has no more falsehood in it when it appears in our minds than the name 'centaur' has falsehood in it when someone speaks or writes it. Truth or falsehood resides always in some *affirmation or negation*, mental or verbal; none of our ideas can be false until the mind passes some judgment on it, that is, affirms or denies something of it.

**4.** Whenever the mind refers one of its ideas to something extraneous to it, the idea becomes a candidate for being true or false, because in such a reference the mind tacitly assumes that the idea *fits* the external thing. According to whether that assumption is true or false, so can the idea itself be described. The most usual cases of this are the following ·three·.

**5.** First, when the mind assumes that one of its ideas matches the idea in other men's minds called by the same common name; for example, when the mind intends or judges its ideas of *justice*, *temperance*, *religion* to be the same as what other men give those names to.

Secondly, when the mind supposes that one of its ideas fits some real existence. Thus the ideas of *man* and *centaur*,



supposed to be the ideas of real substances, are true and false respectively, one having a conformity to what has really existed, the other not.

Thirdly, when the mind refers an idea to the *real constitution and essence* of a thing on which all the thing's properties depend. In this way most if not all our ideas of substances are false.

**6.** . . . It is chiefly, if not only, concerning its *abstract* complex ideas that the mind makes such assumptions. Its natural tendency is towards knowledge; and it finds that if it dwelt only on particular things its progress would be very slow and its work endless; so it shortens its route to knowledge, and makes each perception [here = 'idea'] more comprehensive, by binding things into bundles and grouping into *sorts*, so that what knowledge it gets of any of them it may confidently extend to all of that *sort*. This enables it to advance by longer strides towards knowledge, which is its great business. . . .

**7.** . . . . When the mind has acquired an idea that it thinks it may be useful in thought or in talk, the first thing it does is to abstract it, and then get •a name for it; and so tuck it away in its store-house, the memory, as containing the essence of a sort of things of which •that name is always to be the mark. When someone sees a new thing and asks 'What is it?', he is only asking what its •name is, as though the name carried with it the knowledge of the species, or of its essence. . . .

**8.** •This abstract idea is something in the mind between •the thing that exists and •the name that is given to it. (•The •idea is what connects the •name with the •thing; for example, what makes 'ring' the right word for the thing around my finger is that **1** word 'ring' is associated with a certain abstract idea, and **2** that idea fits or conforms to the thing

encircling my finger.) So the rightness of our knowledge and the propriety and intelligibility of our speaking both rely on our ideas. That is why men so freely suppose that the abstract ideas they have in their minds •agree to the outer things to which they are referred, and •are also the ones that commonly go with the names with which they associate them. Without this double conformity of their ideas, they would •think wrongly about things in themselves, and •talk unintelligibly about them to others. I shall discuss •talk in sections 9–12 and •thought in 13–18.

**9.** First, when the truth of our ideas is judged by whether they match the ideas other men have and commonly signify by the same name, any of them *can* be false. But simple ideas are least liable to be mistaken in this way, because your senses and daily experience easily satisfy you regarding what the simple ideas are that various common words stand for. There aren't many of them, and if you do suspect you are wrong about one of them you can easily correct that by going to the objects that involve them. So it seldom happens that anyone goes wrong in his names of simple ideas, applying the name 'red' to the idea *green*, for example, or the name 'sweet' to the idea *bitter*. . . .

**10.** Complex ideas are much more liable to be false in this manner, and the complex ideas of *mixed modes* much more than those of *substances*. That is because substances (and especially ones that have common names in the language in question) have some conspicuous sensible qualities that ordinarily serve to distinguish one sort of substance from another; and this easily preserves careful users of the language from applying words to sorts of substances to which they don't belong. But with mixed modes we are much more uncertain. It isn't so easy to determine of various actions whether they are to be called 'justice' or 'cruelty', 'generosity'

or 'extravagance'. And so by the standard of match with the ideas that other men call by the same name, our idea may be false. The idea in our minds that we call 'justice' ought perhaps to have another name.

**11.** But whether or not our ideas of mixed modes *are* more liable than any other sort to be different from the idea that other men mark by the same names, it is certain at least that this sort of falsehood is much more commonly *attributed to* our ideas of mixed modes than to any other. When a man is thought to have a false idea of justice (or gratitude, or glory), it is simply because his idea doesn't match the one that is the sign of justice (or gratitude, or glory) in the minds of other men.

**12.** Here is what I think is the reason for this. An abstract idea of a mixed mode is a precise collection of simple ideas that *someone has chosen to put together*; and so the essence of each sort is a human construct, which means that when we want to know whether a given item belongs to a given sort we have nowhere to look except to the relevant abstract idea. And if I want a *standard* by which to judge what I am saying or thinking about the given item, I can only appeal to the abstract ideas of the people who I think use the relevant name with its most proper meaning. That concludes my discussion of the truth and falsehood of our ideas in relation to their names.

**13.** Secondly—picking up again from the end of section 8—as to the truth and falsehood of our ideas in reference ·not to other people's ideas, but· to the real existence of things: when *that* is the standard of their truth, the only ones that can be called 'false' are our complex ideas of substances.

**14.** Simple ideas are merely perceptions that God has fitted us to receive, and has enabled external objects to produce

in us; and so their ·truth consists purely in their being ·appearances that are suitable to those powers God has placed in external objects. They *are* thus suitable, for if they were not, the objects wouldn't produce them. So all such ideas are true. Nor do they fall under the charge of falsity if the mind judges (as in most men I believe it does) that these ideas are in the things themselves. God in his wisdom has set them as marks to help us to distinguish one thing from another, and it makes no difference to the nature of our simple idea ·or to its doing for us what God meant it to do· whether we think that the idea of blue is in the violet itself or in our mind only. [Locke goes on to expand this point a little, concluding thus:] The name 'blue' stands for that mark of distinction that is in a violet and that we can discern only through our eyes, whatever it ·ultimately· consists in, that being—perhaps fortunately—beyond our capacities to know in detail.

**15.** Simple ideas wouldn't be convicted of falsity if through the different structure of our sense-organs it happened that one object produced in different men's minds different ideas at the same time—for example, if the idea that a violet produced in one man's mind by his eyes were what a marigold produced in another man's, and vice versa. This could never be known, because one man's mind couldn't pass into another man's body to perceive what appearances were produced by his organs; so neither the ideas nor the names would be at all confounded, and there would be no falsehood in either. . . . I am nevertheless inclined to think that the sensible ideas produced by any object in different men's minds are usually pretty exactly alike. Many reasons could be offered for this opinion, but that is besides my present business, so I shan't trouble you with them. Anyway, the contrary supposition, if it could be proved, would be

of little use either for the improvement of our knowledge or convenience of life; so we needn't trouble ourselves to examine it.

[In sections **16–18** Locke repeats, with a little more detail, what he has said before. **16**: simple ideas can't be 'false' because of a wrong relation to external things. **17**: Nor can complex ideas of modes be 'false' in that way, because they aren't supposed to represent external things, though they can be 'false' in their relation to common language. **18**: ideas of substances *can* be 'false' in relation to external things, either by including a secret reference to a real essence, or by aiming to include only ideas of perceptible properties of the substance-kind in question but getting the list of them wrong.]

**19.** Though in compliance with the ordinary way of speaking I have shown in what sense and for what reason an *idea* may be called 'true' or 'false', if we look more closely we find that in all those cases what is really true or false is some *judgment* that the mind makes or is supposed to make. Truth and falsehood always involve some affirmation or negation, explicit or tacit; they are to be found only where *signs are joined or separated according to the agreement or disagreement of the things they stand for*. The signs we chiefly use are either ideas and words, with which we make mental and verbal propositions respectively. Truth lies in so joining or separating these representatives, according to whether the things they stand for do in themselves agree or disagree; and falsehood in the contrary, as I'll show more fully later on in IV.v.

**20.** So any idea that we have in our minds, however it relates to external things or to ideas in the minds of other men, can't properly be called false because of such a relation. Mistake and falsehood enter the picture in four ways.

**21.** First, there is falsehood when the mind has an idea that it mistakenly *judges* to be the same as what other men have in their minds and signify by the same name, i.e. to conform to the ordinary received meaning or definition of that word. This kind of error usually concerns mixed modes, though other ideas also are liable to it.

**22.** Secondly, falsehood occurs when the mind, having a complex idea made up of a collection of simple ones such as nature never puts together, *judges* it to fit a species of creatures really existing—for example, joining the weight of tin to the colour, fusibility and fixedness of gold.

**23.** Thirdly, there is falsehood when the mind makes a complex idea that unites some simple ideas of qualities that do really exist together in some sort of thing, while omitting others that are inseparable from the first lot, and *judges* this to be a perfect complete idea of a sort of things which really it is not. For example, having joined the ideas of substance, yellow, malleable, most heavy, and fusible, the mind takes that to be the complete idea of *gold*, when really gold's fixedness and solubility in aqua regia are as inseparable from those other ideas or qualities as they are from one another.

**24.** Fourthly, the mistake is even greater when I *judge* that this complex idea contains in it the real essence of some existing body, when really it contains only a few of the properties that flow from its real essence and constitution. [In the rest of this section Locke defends his saying 'only a few'. He remarks yet again on how many properties of triangles flow from the seemingly simple real essence of *triangle*, and concludes:] I imagine it is the same with substances: their real essences are quite small, but the properties flowing from that internal constitution are endless.

**25.** To conclude, a man has no notion of anything external to himself except through the idea he has of it in his mind; he is free to call the idea whatever he pleases, and to make an idea that neither fits the reality of things nor agrees to the idea commonly signified by other people's words; but he can't make a wrong or false idea of a thing that is known to him only through his idea of it. For example, when I form an idea of the legs, arms, and body of a man, and join to this a horse's head and neck, I don't make a false idea of anything, because it represents nothing external to me. But when I call it the idea of a 'man' or a 'Tatar' and imagine it to represent

some real being without me, or to be the same idea that others call by the same name, *then* I may err. That leads to the idea's being called 'false', though really the falsehood lies not in the idea but in the tacit mental proposition attributing to it a fit and a resemblance that it doesn't have. . . .

[In section **26** Locke suggests that the true/false dichotomy, as applied to ideas on the basis of their fitting/not-fitting the 'patterns to which they are referred', might be better expressed in the language of 'right' and 'wrong'. The point is purely verbal.]

### Chapter xxxiii: The association of ideas

**1.** Almost anyone who observes the opinions, reasonings, and actions of other men will have noticed something that struck him as odd and that really is in itself wild. Everyone is quick-sighted enough to spot the least flaw of this kind in someone else and to condemn it as unreasonable—as long as the flaw is different from his own version of it. His own beliefs and conduct may show him to be guilty of something worse of the same general kind, but he doesn't see it in himself and he'll probably never be convinced that it is there.

**2.** This flaw doesn't come wholly from self-love, though that often has a lot to do with it. Men of fair minds, not prone to extravagant self-flattery, are frequently guilty of it; and in many cases one hears the arguments of such a man with amazement, astonished at the obstinacy of a worthy man who doesn't yield to the evidence of reason even when it is

laid before him as clear as daylight.

**3.** This sort of unreasonableness is usually blamed on education and prejudice, and for the most part truly enough; but that doesn't get to the bottom of the disease, or show distinctly enough what its ultimate source is or where it is located. *Upbringing* is often rightly assigned as the cause, and 'prejudice' is a good general name for the thing itself; but you need to dig deeper if you want to trace this sort of madness to the root from which it comes, explaining it in a way that will show how this flaw originates in sober and rational minds, and what it consists in.

**4.** You will pardon my calling it by so harsh a name as 'madness' when you reflect that *opposition to reason* deserves that name, and really is madness; and almost everyone has it severely enough to act or argue in some kinds of cases

in ways which, if they spread throughout his life, would make him a candidate for a mad-house rather than for polite society. I don't mean when he is overpowered by an unruly passion, but in the steady calm course of his life. In further defence of this harsh name, and the unpleasant accusation that it carries against most of mankind, I remark that when in xi.13 I enquired a little, in an aside, into the nature of madness, I found it to have very same cause as the flaw I am now speaking of. This struck me as right when I was thinking just about madness, without any thought of our present topic.

•One final point in defence of the label 'madness' is this. If this flaw is a weakness to which all men are liable—a taint that so universally infects mankind—the greater should be our care to expose it under its right name, motivating people to give greater care to its prevention and cure.

**5.** Some of our ideas have a •natural correspondence and connection with one another, and it is reason's business to trace these and to hold the ideas together in the union and correspondence that is based on *their individual natures*. There is also *another* connection of ideas, arising wholly from •*chance or custom*: ideas that have no kinship in themselves come to be so strongly linked in some men's minds that it is very hard to separate them; as soon as one comes into the understanding its associate appears too, and if more than two are thus united the whole inseparable group show themselves together.

**6.** This strong tie between ideas that are not allied by nature is created by the mind either by choice or by chance, which is why there are different ties in men with different inclinations, education, interests, etc. Custom creates habits of •*thinking* in the understanding, as well as of •*deciding* in the will, and of •*movement* of the body. The habitual bodily movements

•at the most basic level• seem to be movements of the animal spirits: once these are started up, they continue in the ways they have been used to; and when these have been trodden for long enough they are worn into smooth paths, along which the motion becomes easy and seemingly natural. As far as we can understand thinking, ideas seem to be produced thus in our minds—that is, produced through the movements of the animal spirits, so that the smoothing of paths (so to speak) explains intellectual as well as behavioural habits. Even if ideas aren't produced in that way, the notion of a worn path may nevertheless serve to explain their following one another in an habitual sequence once it has been begun, as well as it does to explain such motions of the body. A musician who is used to a particular tune will find that as soon as it begins in his head the ideas of its notes will follow on in due order in his understanding without any care or attention on his part, as regularly as his fingers move in the right order over the keys of the organ to play the tune he has begun, while his mind is on something else. This example suggests that the motion of the organist's animal spirits really is the natural cause of his sequence of ideas of the notes, as well as of the regular dancing of his fingers; but I shan't go into that. In any case, this comparison may help us a little to conceive of *intellectual habits*, and of the *tying together of ideas*.

**7.** That there are such *associations of ideas made by custom* in the minds of most men won't, I think, be questioned by anyone who has attended thoroughly to himself or to others. Most of the sympathies and antipathies that can be seen in men might reasonably be assigned to this cause. The sympathies etc. work as strongly and produce effects in as regular a manner as if they were *natural*; and that leads people to think they *are* natural, though really they arose

from an accidental connection of two ideas which—either because the first impression was so strong, or because the person subsequently *allowed* the two ideas to occur together in his mind—came to be so united that they always afterwards kept company together in that man’s mind, as if they were a single idea. I say ‘most of the antipathies’, not ‘all’, because some of them are truly natural, depend on our original constitution, and are born with us. But many others are counted natural which would, if they had been observed with enough care, have been known to arise from unheeded early impressions or from wanton fancies. An adult has a surfeit of honey, after which he reacts badly—with nausea etc.—to any mention or thought of honey. He knows when this weakness of his began, and what caused it. But if it had come from an over-dose of honey *when he was a child*, all the same effects would have followed but he wouldn’t have recognized its cause and would have regarded the antipathy as natural.

**8.** My present purposes in this book don’t require me to distinguish accurately between natural and acquired antipathies; but I have a different reason for mentioning that distinction. It is to issue a warning: those who have children, or have charge of their upbringing, should think it worth their while to watch carefully to prevent the undue connection of ideas in the minds of young people. Early childhood is the time most susceptible to lasting impressions; and although discreet people attend to impressions that could harm the health of the body, and protect the young against them, those that could harm the mind, and have their effects in the understanding or the passions, have been much less heeded than they deserve. Indeed, those relating purely to the understanding have, I suspect, been wholly overlooked by nearly everyone..

[In sections **9–10** Locke develops this theme a little.]

**11.** A man is harmed by another, and thinks about that man and his action over and over; and by brooding over them strongly or frequently, he cements those two ideas together so as to make them almost one. Whenever he thinks of the man, the pain and distress he suffered from him comes into his mind as well, so that he hardly distinguishes them, and has as much an aversion to the one as to the other. This is how hatreds often spring from slight and innocent occasions, and quarrels are propagated and continued in the world.

[Section **12** presents another example.]

**13.** When this combination of ideas is settled, and for as long as it lasts, reason is powerless to help us and relieve us from the effects of it. For once an idea is in our minds, it will operate according to its nature and circumstances and cannot be swerved or dislodged by reason. This lets us see how the following can happen:

Someone has a recurring emotional pattern that his reason can’t overthrow, though it is unreasonable, and this person listens to his reason in other cases. This disorder is, however, cured by *the passing of time*.

The death of a child who was the daily delight of his mother’s eyes and the joy of her soul rips from her heart the whole comfort of her life and utterly torments her. To use the consolations of *reason* in this case is as useless as to preach *ease* to someone on the rack in the hope that rational discourses will allay the pain of his joints being torn apart. There is no way of reasoning the woman out of her tie between the thought of the child and the thought of her loss of pleasure, but the two thoughts may be separated by

the passing of *time*, through which the tie is weakened by disuse. In some such people the union between these ideas is never dissolved, and they spend their lives in mourning, and carry an incurable sorrow to their graves.

[Sections 14–16 add anecdotes—some of them quite extraordinary—concerning associations of ideas.]

**17.** *Intellectual* habits and defects that come about in this way are just as frequent and as powerful as habits of behaviour and feeling, though less notice is taken of them. Let the ideas of •being and of •matter be strongly joined either by education or by prolonged thought, and while they are tied together in a person's mind, what thoughts and arguments will he put up concerning unembodied Spirits? Because in this person's thought the idea of something *real* always brings with it the idea of something *material*, he will regard the notion of *unembodied Spirit*—something real and immaterial—as weird and almost contradictory.

Let someone from early childhood associate the idea of •God with the idea of •shape, and what absurdities will he be liable to believe concerning the Deity?

Let the idea of •infallibility be inseparably joined in someone's mind to the idea of •some person, and the man whose mind has this association will swallow any absurdity that is affirmed by the supposedly infallible person—for example that a single body can be in two places at once.

**18.** Some such wrong and unnatural combinations of ideas will be found at the root of the irreconcilable opposition between different sects of philosophy and religion; for we can't imagine that every follower of a sect *deliberately sets himself to reject*, knowingly, truth that is offered by plain reason. Self-interest is at work here, but even *it* can't bring a whole society of men to such a universal perversity, with every single one of them maintaining something that he knows to be false. We must allow that at least some

of them *do* what they all *claim to do*, namely to pursue truth sincerely; so there must be something that blinds the understandings of these sectarians, not letting them see the falsehood of what they embrace as real truth. What thus puts their reasons in chains and leads men blindfolded away from common sense turns out to be my present topic:

Some •ideas that are not naturally allied to one another, are—by upbringing, custom, and the constant din of the sect—so joined in the sectarians' minds that •they always appear there together; and the sectarians can no more separate •them in their thoughts than if they were only a single idea—which is what they treat •them as being.

This gives sense to jargon, demonstration to absurdities, and consistency to nonsense! It is the foundation of the greatest errors in the world. I almost wrote 'of all the errors in the world'; and if it isn't quite as bad as that, it does produce the most dangerous errors because when it operates it hinders men from seeing and examining. [Locke adds some fine rhetorical flourishes.]

**19.** I have now given an account of the origin, sorts, and extent of our *ideas*, with several other points concerning these *instruments or materials of our knowledge* (may I call them that?). The project on which I embarked requires me now to go on immediately to show how the understanding uses ideas and what *knowledge* we have through them. In my first general view of the topic, I thought that this was all that would remain to be done at this point. But now that I have reached it, I find that *ideas* are so closely connected with *words*, and in particular that *abstract ideas* are so regularly related to *general words*, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our knowledge (which all consists in propositions) without considering first the nature, use, and meanings of language. That, therefore, is the business of the next Book.