Section 2. Of the Origin of Ideas

1. Summed up by this aphorism: “The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.” Hume calls the immediate objects of sensation sentiments.

2. Reason: if someone tells you that some person is in love, you might form a “just conception” of his situation, but you can “never mistake that conception for the real disorders and agitations of the passion.” When we recall our past sentiments and affections, our thought, Hume says, copies these objects faithfully; however, it does so with colors that are “faint and full” in comparison to those in which our original perceptions were clothed.

3-4. Hume proposes to distinguish between two species of perceptions of the mind, divided according to their “different degrees of force and vivacity.” (1) Thoughts/ideas and (2) impressions. Thoughts are, broadly speaking, “less forcible and lively,” and narrowly speaking, the less lively perceptions we are conscious of when we reflect on our impressions, which are more lively. Examples of (2) are our perceptions when we see, hear (these being external impressions), or will, hate, love, or desire, etc. (the conative states, these being internal impressions) Hume says that our thoughts seem initially to be unbounded, as we don’t need sensation to conceive of “incongruous shapes and appearances,” which aren’t found in nature for sensation to uptake, and can “travel” anywhere in universe. Also, what has never been sensed may yet be conceived, and nothing is beyond thought, except perhaps what implies an “absolute contradiction.”

NB: Notice that it is perception, and not idea, in Humean parlance, that is similar to Locke’s use of idea!

5. But this all an appearance. Thought much more confined than we think. Like Locke, Hume thinks that “all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience.” (Hume, in Sec. 5, Part 2, ¶ 10 also characterizes these operations as “mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing.) Our idea of a golden mountain is just the unity of the consistent ideas of gold and mountain. And similarly for that of virtuous horse. Thus, Hume says “all the materials of thinking are derived either from our outward or inner sentiment.” That is, all our ideas are merely copies of our impressions.

6-7. Two arguments for that statement. Call the first his Argument from Enumeration. Consider our idea of God. Hume says that this is an example of our augmenting without limit the qualities of goodness and intelligence, whose precedence is originally in a sentiment or feeling. All other ideas are similarly derived, i.e., copied from a corresponding impression. Hume says it is on the onus on those who disagree to produce an idea that is not derived in this manner.

Call his second his No Disproof in Experience argument. He argues that without “any species of sensation,” “we always find, that he is as little susceptible of the correspondent ideas.” A “negroe” has no notion of the relish of wine, a blind man none of colors, a man of mild manners none of “inveterate revenge or cruelty.” Also, other beings have ideas that we don’t, because we have never admitted them “in the only manner, by which an idea can have access to the mind,” that is, by the “actual feeling and sensation.”
8. Exception: we can imagine missing shades in a spectrum of colors that we have not perceived before. He gives this example: a man has enjoyed sight for 30+ years, and experienced all the colors, except one shade of blue. Hume says that if a palette of blue containing all its shades except one, which is empty, were placed before him, he could “raise up from himself” the idea of that particular shade, even though he’s never seen it. But this, Hume argues, is the exception that makes the rule that in general, ideas arise from their correspondent impressions.

9. So all ideas, esp abstract ones, naturally “faint and obscure,” while all impressions, i.e., sensations, outward or inward, are “strong and vivid.” The “limits between [impressions] are more exactly determined,” while the former are “apt to be confounded with other resembling ideas.”

Section 3. Of the Association of Ideas

1-2. There is a principle of connection between the thoughts or ideas of the mind, even those that appear at first to be completely discursive. Hume thinks that there are three principles of connection/association: (1) resemblance, (2) contiguity in place or time, (3) cause or effect.

3. Examples of the principles: Of resemblance: a picture leads our thoughts to the original; Of contiguity in time or place, the mention of an apartment in a building leads us to enquire or discourse concerning the other apartments in the building; of causation, when we think of a wound, we can scarcely refrain from thinking about the pain that tends to follow one.

4-6. There is rarely anything a reasonable person does that is not done in pursuit of happiness, and so in the hope of attaining the gratification of some passion or affection. Therefore, artistic geniuses all have some plan or object, some aim or intention that is discernible either at the outset or in the composition of his work. So the events in a narrative composition must be connected by some bond, and “form a kind of Unity” that represents the end of the writer. This unity is provided by the principles of association, which any individual may make use of pursuant to his design/end.

7-18. Hume turns now to enquire how these principles affect the passions and imagination. Poets like Ovid employ resemblance. A historian employs that of contiguity in time or place. Hume says that the “most usual species of connexion among the different events, which enter into any narrative composition, is that of cause and effect.” This because knowledge of causes is knowledge of the strongest connection between events and also the most instructive, providing lessons for the future. So a historian is esp concerned with this principle of connection. And if we look closely enough, we will notice that actually, the poet is concerned also with cause and effect, just not to the same degree. Poets are more concerned with the principle of resemblance, which help to enliven the passions and the imagination by acquainting us with the scene or action. Thus, Hume remarks, we find them caviling over details, fixating on “minute circumstances,” doing so to “enliven imagery” and “gratify the fancy,” which serve to “transfuse” the affections and passions from one scene or object to the next, thereby maintaining the reader’s interest.

This is why, Hume says, epic poetry tends to begin in medias res, rather than at the beginning, as they run up to great lengths quickly as a result of focusing on bringing out the resemblance between events. Historical accounts, on the other hand, start at the beginning, and sacrifice detail for comprehensiveness. So, properly speaking, resemblance is a way of providing cause and effect, except the “connexion is only required to be closer and more sensible, on account of the lively imagination and strong passions, which must be touched by the poet in his narration.” This also explains why compositions that show “no manner of connexion together” brings about loss of interest in the reader.
Hume concludes thus: “It is sufficient, at present, to have established this conclusion, that the three connecting principles of all ideas are the relations of Resemblance, Contiguity, and Causation.”

Section 4. Sceptical Doubts Concerning the Operations of the Understanding

Part 1

1. “All the objects of human reason or enquiry may naturally be divided into two kinds, to wit, Relations of Ideas and Matters of Fact.” Those belonging to Relations of Ideas are propositions that are either intuitively or demonstratively certain. For example, $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$ in a triangle is a Relation of Idea. These propositions can be discovered “by the mere operation of thought,” independently of any “existent in the universe.”

2. Matters of Fact, however, do depend on existents for their evidence. And even if their evidence is profuse, their opposite is still not contradictory. For example that the sun will not rise to-morrow “is no less intelligible a proposition, and implies no more contradiction, than the affirmation, that it will rise.” Hume suggests that anything that implies a contradiction cannot be distinctly conceived by the mind. (He states this explicitly later, in Part 2, ¶ 18 (p. 115)).

3. It will be useful to “enquire what is the nature of that evidence, which assures us of any real existence and matter of fact, beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory.”

4. Hume says that all reasoning concerning matters of fact “seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect.” Through it, we are able to go beyond evidence of our memory and senses. He gives his famous example of a man finding a watch or other machine on a desert island, and says that such a man would infer that there had once been men on that island. Our evidence for that is causal – i.e., we suppose constantly that “there is a connexion between the present fact and that which is inferred from it.” In all our reasonings of matters of fact, we see this relation either as near or remote, direct or collateral. Example of latter: heat and light are collateral effects of fire.

5. Hume says that if we are to uphold the strength of our evidence in such matters (of fact, that is), we must investigate how we come to arrive at knowledge of the relation of cause and effect itself.

6. Knowledge of the relation of Cause and effect, Hume says, does not arise from a priori reasoning in any instance, but is something derived from experience, when we find constant conjunction between particular objects. Example: Adam cannot infer from the “fluidity and transparency of water,” despite his entirely perfect rational capacities, that “it would suffocate him, or from the light and warmth of fire, that it would consume him.” Thus, Hume says: “No object ever discovers, by the qualities which appear to the senses, either the causes, which produced it, or the effects, which will arise from it; nor can our reason, unassisted by experience, ever draw any inference concerning real existence and matter of fact.” “Who will assert, that he can give the ultimate reason, why milk or bread is proper nourishment for a man, not for a lion or a tyger?”

7-8. Likewise, we like to imagine that we can discover effects through reason alone without experience. We think that if we were brought suddenly into this world, we would have inferred, when we saw a billiard ball rolling toward another, that the one would communicate motion to the other upon impact. But this is evidently not so, says Hume – our habitual experience of the constant conjunction there “covers our natural ignorance.”

9-13. “The mind can never possibly find the effect in the supposed cause, by the most accurate scrutiny and examination. For the effect is totally different from the cause, and consequently can never be
discovered in it.” So, since we cannot infer anything about the effect of an object when it is first presented to us independent of experience, except as a “first imagination or invention,” that is, as an arbitrary supposition, we must also treat the “supposed tye or connexion between the cause and effect, which binds them together, and renders it impossible, that any other effect could result from the operation of that cause” made afterwards as an arbitrary supposition. Example: when we see a billiard ball hit another in a straight line, and notice the transfer of motion, and it is suggested to us that subsequent similar sequences of events will follow this pattern, we should still treat that suggestion as arbitrary.

Hume says that only after this conjunction is observed in experience regularly are we able to reduce “the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation.” But as to the causes of general causes, that is, ultimate causes, we can never discover them, and a fortiori, come to have knowledge of them. So the best we can do is produce general principles to explain natural phenomena, as the mixed mathematics seek to do with the assistance of geometry, which is unassailable in its “accuracy of reasoning.” This shows the vainness of trying to ascertain ultimate causes and effects from objects, much less a principle/law of connexion between them that is inseparable or inviolable.

Part 2

14-15. In 14, Hume says that he wants to find what the foundation of our conclusions from experience, on which we ultimately base our reasonings concerning matters of fact, is. Hume seeks to defend his thesis that even after we have observed the operations of cause and effect sufficiently, “our conclusions from that experience are not founded on reasoning (note: better thought of as “argument” for now, but later, Hume distinguishes between “reasoning” in common life, and reasoning per se), or any process of the understanding.” So, that the foundation of our conclusions from experience is not tied up with any act of the understanding or argument of any sort is a claim Hume will defend.

17. Example: Our senses tell us that objects of a certain color, weight, and consistency – that is, bread – fit us for nourishment and support. Nevertheless, every time we come across a body of like color, consistency, and weight with bread, we do not hesitate to eat it, and expect the same result of nourishment. Hume, as expressed in 15, wants to examine the foundation of such conclusions from experience. Like Locke, he asserts that we know nothing about what connects the subject’s sensible qualities with its “secret powers” (think of them as Locke’s primary or original qualities). But this means that our judgments regarding their constant conjunction aren’t formed from anything that we know of their nature. It follows then that while we may justly infer that future experiences involving an object alike in appearance with another that we’ve experienced many times before will be attended with the same effects, we aren’t justified in saying that this inference is made by a process of reasoning. (So Hume is making something of a psychological claim here, that while this is what humans do, it isn’t what rational humans would do.) There’s a missing connecting link between the observation and the general claim made in virtue (only) of which it can be considered an act of reasoning and argument.

Since Hume thinks he’s stumbled upon a new, surprising claim, he seeks to enumerate “all the branches of human knowledge,” and show that “none of [his doubter] can afford…an argument” to show that there exists such a connecting proposition or intermediate step.

18. All reasonings divisible into two kinds: demonstrative (concerning relations of ideas) and moral reasoning (concerning matters of fact and existence). Matters of fact are not demonstrative because their contradictories can be clearly conceived (cf. Sec 4, Pt. 1, ¶ 2). (“Now whatever is intelligible, and can be
distinctly conceived, implies no contradiction, and can never be proved false by any demonstrative argument or abstract reasoning

19. Hume says that supposing the missing link to be a premise of probability commits the fallacy of circular reasoning. Here’s the reconstructed argument:

(1) Arguments/reasonings concerning matters of fact are founded on the relation of cause and effect.
(2) Our knowledge of the relation of cause and effect is founded on experience.
(3) Our conclusions from experience depend on probable arguments (that “the future will be conformable to the past”)

Therefore, we infer that other objects that are similar in appearance will, in the future, be attended with the same effects.

Hume says that such an argument used to justify conclusions from experience is circular because (3) depends implicitly on the conclusion for support (look at ¶ 21 below). That is, it’s neither intuitive nor demonstrative.

(Cf. Bk. IV., Ch. 15 of Locke)

20. So such “experimental conclusions” not founded in reasoning/argument. If they were, then the conclusion would be “as perfect at first, and upon one instance, as after ever so long a course of experience.”

21. Hume repeats points made in ¶ 18. By inferring from *I have found, in all past instances, such sensible qualities conjoined with such secret powers to similar sensible qualities will always be conjoined with similar secret powers*, the man “is not guilty of a tautology, nor are these propositions in any respect the same.” But to say that it is experimental is exactly to admit that the argument begs the question. “For all inferences from experience suppose, as their foundation, that the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities.”

To simplify Hume’s point, think of it this way: I see that bread has certain consistency, weight, texture, and that eating it provides nourishment. To infer that *the next object I see with these same characteristics of bread will produce the same nourishing effects*, however, presupposes that all future objects with these same characteristics of bread will produce the same effects; otherwise, the inference is not warranted. That’s the problem Hume’s pointing out.

So from the above, just as drawing conclusions from experience presupposes that the future will remain the same, i.e., that the course of nature remains the same, inferring facts about the secret powers of objects from their sensible qualities presupposes that the course of nature remains the same in the future, for their sensible qualities may remain the same even though their secret powers and hence, effects, have undergone drastic changes.

22-23. Could it be though, Hume asks for completeness’ sake, that there is an argument out there, which we haven’t discovered, that supplies the missing premise between conclusions from experience and probable arguments?

Hume defends his intuition that there isn’t. He points to the fact that “the most ignorant and stupid peasants, nay infants, nay even brute beasts, improve by experience, and learn the qualities of natural objects, by observing the effects, which result from them,” such that a child who has felt pain from touching the flame of a candle will in the future be careful to avoid things similar in appearance. But it is silly, Hume thinks, to think that the child is led to this belief from any process of argument or
ratiocination. Hume assumes that if such an argument is evident to the child, it can’t be merely abstruse, and inarticulable – it just doesn’t exist. Therefore, Hume concludes that conclusions from experience are not based in argument or a process of the understanding.

Section 5. Sceptical Solution of These Doubts

Part 1

1. Hume states that many of the activities that we initially take up to combat what we consider our bad manners and vices may serve “by imprudent management, to foster a predominant inclination….” E.g., someone who accepts a philosophy that rejects riches and honors as empty and transitory, and thinks human life vain, might actually be indulging a natural indolence for which the philosophy is “a pretence of reason, to give itself a full and uncontrouled indulgence” and thereby avoid the “bustle of the world.” Both philosophy and religion are liable to this. Hume says that academic skepticism, however, isn’t. This because the academics always “talk of doubt and suspence of judgment, of danger in hasty determinations, of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice. …Each passion is mortified by it, except the love of truth; and that passion never is, nor can be carried to too high a degree.” Hume says that the reason many people hate skepticism is because “by flattering no irregular passion,” it opposes “so many vices and follies,” when in fact, by virtue of these qualities, it is the “most innocent” philosophy.

2-4. But academic skepticism, unlike the caricature painted by its naysayers, doesn’t “undermine the reasonings of common life, and carry its doubts so far as to destroy all action, as well as speculation.” Hume argues that even if one found out that the step taken by the mind, when drawing a conclusion from experience, wasn’t based in argument or any process of the understanding, he would not then cease to reason the way he typically does in common life, as most of our knowledge depends on such reasoning. For example, he asks us to consider what a man, suddenly brought into this world, would conclude based on his first experience of one event following another. Hume argues that since the particular powers, by which all natural operations are performed, never appear to the senses,” and it would be arbitrary to conclude based on one succession of events that the one causes the other, he would not employ his reasoning beyond what was immediately present to his senses. But once he has acquired more experience, and has observed a constant conjunction of two objects, he immediately infers the existence of one object from the appearance of the other. As argued before, since he hasn’t acquired, in all his experience, any idea of the secret power by which one is attended by the other, there is a principle, not derived from a process of the understanding or argument, that determines the man to draw the conclusion. What is it?

5-6. It is habit or custom, which is the reason behind repetition of any particular act or operation’s producing a “propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding.” This is not the ultimate cause of two events occurring in succession (for that would be ascertainable a priori), Hume stresses, but a principle about human nature, one that is the cause of our conclusions from experience. This hypothesis, Hume thinks, is the only one that explains why “we draw, from a thousand instances, an inference, which we are not able to draw from one instance, that is, in no respect, different from them. Reason is incapable of any such variation. The conclusion, which it draws from considering one circle, are the same which it would form upon surveying all the circles in the universe.” He concludes: “All inferences from experience, therefore, are effects of custom, not of reasoning.”
“Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us, and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom, we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact, beyond what is immediately presented to the memory and senses. …There would be an end at once of all action, as well as of the chief part of speculation.”

7-9. Hume states that conclusions from experience carry us beyond our memory and senses legitimately only if some fact was present to our senses or memory, from which we are allowed to make those conclusions. An example w/r/t to the senses, a man may not conclude that a desert country had once been inhabited by sophisticated peoples due to its remains of “pompous” buildings unless he in fact saw these remains. Similarly, w/r/t to the memory, if we never read that such and such a historical event happened in a book, we would not have the requisite testimonial chain that would carry us up eye-witness accounts that provide the foundation for our conclusion.

Hume says that our conclusions caused by custom are “the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances” and are “an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought or understanding is able, either to produce, or to prevent.”

In Part 2, Hume seeks to examine the nature of conclusions of experience, which he now calls a “belief,” and “of the customary conjunction, whence it is derived.” (For what it’s worth, Hume also says this next part is optional for those less interested in abstract matters.)

Part 2

10. The imagination of man very fertile, and can do all manner of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing its original stock of ideas. Question: since the content of fiction (created beliefs) can be the same as a genuine belief, how do we distinguish between them?

11. Answer: some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the belief, but not to the former, and which depends not on the will, but is, rather, like all other sentiments, excited by nature at the time of its emergence.

This explains how our habit or custom of recalling the circumstances of an attendant event usually conjoined to some other when the latter is presented to the senses or memory almost never recalls the contrary of those circumstances, despite being compatible with it. The sentiment or feeling is annexed to belief, but not fiction.

12-13. Belief is thus more firm, lively, forcible, and steady a conception of an object than what the imagination is ever able to attain by itself. As such, since belief and fiction can share the same contents, yet thought does not confuse them, it “is evident that belief consists not in the peculiar nature or order of ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind.” So belief is “something felt by the mind,” which distinguishes them from the fictions of the imagination, which feeling imbues them with more weight and influence, makes it hard to forget, and renders it the “governing principle of our actions. Further, they are much more apt to cause pleasure or pain than fictions.

So, “sentiment of belief is nothing but a conception more intense and steady than what attends the mere fictions of the imagination, and that this manner of conception arises from a customary conjunction of the
object with something present to the memory or senses.” Hume now seeks to find other operations of the mind like belief, in order to “trace up these phenomena to principles still more general.”

14. Hume reminds us again that the three principles of association or connexion that impels human nature to follow ideas introduced to our thoughts with their correlative ideas are Resemblance, Contiguity, and Causation.

Hume says that he should like to ask now whether this habit of association/connexion in fact helps to achieve the forcibleness, liveliness, vividness, and steadiness that he says is distinctive of belief.

15. With respect to the relation of Resemblance, Hume says yes. E.g., the idea of a friend upon seeing a picture of him makes the passion that is occasioned by the idea more forceful and vigorous. When the picture is not of him, our thought is not conveyed to him.

16. W/r/t Contiguity, Hume says “it is clear that distance diminishes the force of every idea.” E.g., when one is a few miles from home, whatever thoughts relating to it come to one’s mind are more vivid, than when one is few hundred miles from home.

17-19. Causation, most certainly. E.g., the son of a friend who is long dead, when before us, revives the correlative idea of his father more clearly and vividly than if he hadn’t been before us.

20. NB: In these phenomena, the belief of the correlative object is always presupposed. If it wasn’t, the relation could have no effect on us. E.g., the influence of the picture presupposes we believe that this friend once existed, and contiguity to home can’t excite our ideas unless we believed it really existed.

So Hume says regarding belief that “this belief, where it reaches beyond the memory or senses, is of a similar nature, and arises from similar causes, with the transition of thought and vivacity of conception here explained. For example, when we throw a piece of dry wood into a fire, our minds are carried immediately to conceive that it “augments, not extinguishes the flame.” This transition of thought proceeds not from reason, but has its origin in custom and experience. And because it begins from an object present to the senses, “it renders the idea or conception of flame more strong and lively than any loose, floating reverie of the imagination. That idea arises immediately. The thought moves instantly toward it, and conveys to it all that force of conception, which is derived from the impression present to the senses.”

21. So our beliefs about causal sequences are harmonious with causal relations in nature because of custom. Hume lauds custom, by exciting ideas in us of objects commonly conjoined with the object presented to us, as that which allows us to move beyond the “narrow sphere of our memory and senses,” to adjust means to end, and to “employ our natural powers to the producing of good or avoiding of evil.”

22. Lastly, since custom is so essential to basic human survival needs, Hume argues that it is not probable that it could be a species of reason, reason being too slow for the operative quickness needed by custom, and absent in a child’s early years, and also liable to error. It seems to comport more with the wisdom of nature to secure this act of the mind, so essential, in some instinct or mechanical tendency, which is infallible in its operations, and which may “discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding.” This is comparable to nature’s having taught us the use of our muscles and limbs without giving us knowledge of the muscles and nerves. Hume concludes thus that this instinct of habit is implanted by nature, and is responsible for carrying our thoughts forward “in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends.
Section 6. Of Probability

1. No such thing as chance (absence of cause); chance is epistemic, not metaphysical. Chance is what we call events of whose cause we are ignorant.

2-4. There is *probability*, which is the likelihood that some event will follow another based on how often in experience the one concurs with the other. Regular concurrence of particular events “begets that reliance or security, which constitutes the nature of belief and opinion.” Some sequences of events are entirely uniform and constant, and so highly probable (fire has always burned), others are more irregular and uncertain (opium considered to be a soporific). Sometimes, a highly probable effect that is expected doesn’t occur, and we suppose that there is some disorder in the cause, and try to figure out what prevented the effect. When we determine the effect, we “transfer all the different events in the same proportion as they have appeared in the past. …As a great number of views do here concur in one event, they fortify and confirm it to the imagination, beget that sentiment which we call *belief*, and give its object the preference above the contrary event, which is not supported by an equal number of experiments, and recurs not so frequently to the thought in transferring the past to the future.

Section 7. Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion

Part 1

1-2. The chief hurdle to improvement in moral or metaphysical sciences is “the obscurity of the ideas and ambiguity of the terms,” while that of the mathematics is “the length of inferences and compass of thought, requisite to the forming of any conclusion.” “An oval is never mistaken for a circle. …The isosceles and scalenum are distinguished by boundaries more exact than vice and virtue, right and wrong.” One nice, perhaps redeeming, feature about moral reasoning, however, is that “the inferences are always much shorter in these disquisitions, and the intermediate steps, which lead to the conclusion, much fewer than in the sciences which treat of quantity and number.”

3. Hume says that in metaphysics, there are no terms more obscure and uncertain than *power, force, energy, or necessary connexion*. Thenceforth, he will attempt to fix the precise meaning of these terms.

4-5. Hume reiterates a point previously made: all of our ideas are nothing but copies of our impressions (remember the exception in Sec 2: missing shades of a color), so that it is impossible for us to think of anything that we haven’t antecedently felt, “either by external or internal senses.” Now, he says that since complex ideas may be explained by enumerating the simple ideas of which they are composed, yet sometimes these simple ideas still are ambiguous and obscure, the proper way to throw light on these ideas is to revisit, to “produce,” the impressions or original sentiments from which the ideas were copied. “To be fully acquainted, therefore, with the idea of power or necessary connexion, let us examine its impression.” Also, Hume will search for the impression in all its possible sources.

6-8. We are not in a single instance of considering the operation of causes in external objects able to discover any power or necessary connection that binds the effect to the cause and makes one the “infallible consequence of the other.” So, we get an *outward* sense that the impulse of one billiard ball is attended by motion in the other. But the mind gets no sentiment, or “inward impression from this succession of objects.” So nothing in a single instance of cause and effect suggests the idea of power or necessary connexion.

This is the general point made before that the sensible qualities of bodies that produce *ideas of sensation* in us are complete in themselves, and do not suggest any other ideas outside themselves, and *a fortiori*, do not suggest the powers or principle of connexion in them that we take to link them to their effects. So
external impressions not candidate as source of our ideas of the powers or necessary connexion, contra Locke.

9. Hume suggests that one might think that we can receive ideas of power or necessary connexion from reflection on the operations of our own minds, as we gain ideas of power or energy from reflecting on the simple command of our will, by which we “move the organs of our body, or direct the faculties of the mind.” That is, he wants to examine if our ideas of power of necessary connexion come from internal impressions.

10. Even there, Hume argues, one cannot get the impression of necessary connexion, as the influence of our volition on the organs of our body is known only by experience, which doesn’t tell us what the powers that cause it are, and which connect them to the effect resulting infallibly in voluntary motion. So the desired analogy to the will doesn’t work.

11. This is not least because the principle of the union of (supposed) immaterial soul and material body, and how one exerts influence over the other, is the most mysterious phenomenon in nature, not less extraordinary than if we could control the orbit of planets just by wishing it. If we could, by consciousness, perceive this power or energy in the will, we would know this power, and how it connects up with its effect. We would also know the “secret union of soul and body, and the nature of both these substances by which the one is able to operate, in so many instances, upon the other.” But we evidently don’t.

12-13. Also, if we knew this power in the spirit, we would know also why though we can move the fingers and our tongue, e.g., we cannot control our heart or liver, e.g. This is because our knowledge of these matters is based on experience, not any process of the understanding or reason. So a man with palsy in the limbs is as much conscious of the power that actuates movement in his limbs as a man who doesn’t have palsy. That is, both of them know the influence of the will from experience alone. “Experience only teaches us, how one event constantly follows another; without instructing us in the secret connexion, which binds them together, and renders them inseparable.”

15. The preceding establishes that “our idea of power is not copied from any sentiment or consciousness of power within ourselves. …The power or energy by which [motion is effected by command of the will] is unknown and inconceivable.”

16-19. Another candidate: maybe we get this idea of power from the impression that we get when we, by a command of the will, “raise up a new idea,” contemplate it, turn it on all sides, before discarding it for another idea. The same arguments against the analogy to volition are run against this candidate. (Compare with 11 above) Knowing this power requires that we know the “very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect: For these are supposed to be synonymous.” But we don’t. (Cf. 12-13) Also, if we knew this power in our minds, we would know why the command of the mind over itself is limited, just as volition is over the body, but this is something we know only through experience, which cannot tell us the nature of the cause whose power connects it to the effect, itself being limited in its connection. Further, we notice that when we are sick, we are less able to master our thoughts than when we are in health. We don’t know the cause of this, which, if we knew, we would be able to control. Evidently, there is some “secret mechanism or structure of parts, upon which the effect depends, and which, being entirely unknown to us, renders the power or energy of the will equally unknown and incomprehensible.”

20-25. Hume examines a popular philosophical theory that seeks to account for the phenomena of necessary connexion, mind/body interaction etc., namely, Occasionalism, which is most often associated with Malebranche. Hume remarks that while the “vulgar” appeal to God (deus ex machina) to explain
things that don’t follow the usual course of events in nature, Occasionalists use God to explain everything in nature. So, Hume says of Berkeley, Descartes, Malebranche, etc., that “they acknowledge mind and intelligence to be, not only the ultimate and original cause of all things, but the immediate and sole cause of every event, which appears in nature.” He thinks that even deism is a better option than Occasionalism; Occasionalism diminishes, “instead of magnifying, the grandeur of those attributes which [Occasionalists] affect to celebrate.” He says that it is more befitting of the Creator, and “argues more wisdom,” for him to “contrive at first the fabric of the world with such perfect foresight, that, of itself, and by its proper operation, it may serve all the purposes of providence, than if the great Creator were obliged every moment to adjust its parts, and animate by his breath all the wheels of that stupendous machine.”

He presents two arguments against Occasionalism. First, he says that it overreaches the limits of human reason, and states conclusions that are too remote from common experience.

Second, he thinks that Occasionalism is at heart an argument from ignorance. But if we use God to explain what we don’t know about, say, the necessary connexion of motion upon impulse of two bodies due to our ignorance, we also have to appeal to something else to explain how this “supreme mind” operates either on itself or on bodies, as Occasionalists say he does, since this is more mysterious than the problem of explaining communication of motion. “Were our ignorance, therefore, a good reason for rejecting any thing, we should be led into that principle of denying all energy in the Supreme Being as much as in the grossest matter.”

**Part 2**

26. Hume recaps his arguments from above leading to his thesis that we receive our ideas of necessary connexion and secret powers not from either internal impressions that arise from reflection of the mind on its own operations or external impressions that arise from our observation and experience of naturally occurring events. It seems then that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, “that these words are absolutely without any meaning, when employed either in philosophical reasonings, or common life. How do we avoid this conclusion?”

27-28. One way: What he has said many times before regarding our observation of events that follow each other regularly. For example, the first time we see a billiard ball strike another, we don’t know that the other will be moved. Thus, when we observe the other moved by the impact, we only think that the one event was *conjoined* with the other, not that it was *connected*. But after many similar instances with the same effect, we pronounce them to be *connected*. “This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion.” Hume says that there has been no alteration in the original observation from the other, so that the only alteration is that the mind now “feels these events to be connected in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other.”

“When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, by which they become proofs of each other’s existence.…”

29. Therefore, we have only a very weak understanding of cause and effect, on which all our reasonings concerning matters of fact or existence depend. Hume gives two definitions of cause:

(i) An object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second, OR
(i*) An object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other.

We may consider the relation of cause and effect in these two lights, but none other.

So, in conclusion, since the customary connexion or transition of the imagination is the only respect in which our observation of two events repeatedly being conjoined differs from observation of the first instance of their conjunction, and the idea of cause and effect arises not from inward or outward impression, the original of our idea of cause and effect is simply our feeling a new sentiment or impression of the customary connexion in the thought or imagination between one object and its usual attendant.

(Cf. p. 147 for Hume’s own good summary of this section.)

Section 10. Of Miracles

Part 1

1-2. Hume sets out to examine if there are good reasons to believe in miracles/prodigies. He voices approval of an argument presented by a contemporary, which states that our evidence for the truth of “the Christian religion,” whose authority is based in scripture or tradition, is weaker than the evidence for the truth of our senses (something Locke would have agreed to). This is because our evidence for its truth is testimonial, and so though supposedly passed down from eyewitness accounts of the apostles, can only have gotten weaker down the chain. But since weaker evidence (of testimony) can never supplant stronger evidence (of the senses), and scripture and tradition “carry not such evidence with them as sense,” assenting to it would be “directly contrary to the rules of just reasoning.” Hume likes this argument, but he wants to give another “like” argument of his own invention that is stronger.

3-4. Experience is our only guide in reasoning concerning matters of fact, but it isn’t infallible in that capacity. Some constant conjunctions recur with greater frequency than others, and we adjust our belief that one event will follow another in proportion with the evidence. That is, we weigh the frequency of an event with its opposites, and we adjust our degree of assurance, i.e., probability, regarding the causal belief accordingly.

5. Testimony is perhaps the most important, most useful, most common, and most necessary species of reasoning for human life. What gives testimony its assurance among us is our observation of its regular conformity with the facts, i.e., its veracity. We expect that if witnesses were not of good memory, or sensible to shame, or inclined to truth and probity, veracity of testimony would not be so frequent. Therefore, were it not for our discovery of these qualities in human nature through our experience of witness reports and their regular conformity with facts, we would place no trust in testimony. So experience again is what begets our trust in testimony, as experience is what begets our belief that one event will cause another. (Note the obvious difference: testimony doesn’t cause facts.; this is just a rough analogy!)

6-7. Hume says since evidence derived from witnesses and human testimony is founded on past experience, that the ultimate standard for determining all disputes regarding the veracity of testimony and witnesses is experience and observation. Hume enumerates the factors that may cause “diminution of assurance” in testimony: (1) testimonial disagreement (conflicting testimony); (2) the character or number of the witnesses; (3) manner of delivery of testimony (whether the testifier shows a vested interest or bias, whether he shows hesitance in his delivery, etc.) (4) the conjunction of these.
8-13. Example of application of above: Suppose someone testifies something extraordinary and marvelous. Then our confidence in it should be greater or less in proportion with how unusual the attested fact is. This follows from the principle above: that our evidence derived from testimony is founded in experience, and therefore, testimony counter to experience should arouse suspicion immediately, since experience is the ultimate standard. This reduces our confidence in the testifier’s authority and credibility.

By definition, miracles are not only marvelous, they’re also miraculous: that is, they run counter to universal correlations observed in nature (i.e., what Hume calls “proofs,” which are a species of probability that is so uniform as to not admit of reasonable doubt, and which are associated with and called “laws of nature” in science). So if some testimony contradicts a law of nature, such as that dead man should come back to life, which by definition is proved, then there is uniform experience amounting to a proof against that testimony. This proof can only be destroyed by a superior, opposite proof, from testimony.

Hume concludes that the maxim - “That no testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle, unless the testimony be of such a kind, that its falsehood would be more miraculous, than the fact, which it endeavors to establish.” In Part 2, Hume argues that no such proof is available.

Part 2

14. Hume says that he’s been too generous: “we have supposed that the testimony, upon which a miracle is founded, may possibly amount to an entire proof, and that the falsehood of that testimony would be a real prodigy: But it is easy to show, that we have been a great deal too liberal in our concession, and that there never was a miraculous event established on so full an evidence.

15-23: First, Hume argues that the 3 factors enumerated in Pt. 1, ¶ 6-7 are never combined in so strong a degree as to provide the degree of assurance that is needed to overrule evidence from our own observations and experience. Second, Hume makes the psychological point about human nature that it desires “the passion of surprise and wonder” to such a degree as to marginalize what we would otherwise believe most probable, it being founded on “the greatest number of past observations.” (“But if the spirit of religion join itself to the love of wonder, there is an end to common sense….”) He gives an example of how rumors of marriage between two people who have met not more than once spread like wildfire, illustrating man’s love for telling interesting news. Religious miracles, therefore, are believed and reported with even greater credulity. Third, he makes the anthropological point that we notice that the more civilized and enlightened a people are, the less supernatural and miraculous beliefs abound, although the inclination towards the marvelous “can never be thoroughly extirpated from human nature.”

It is not strange, then, Hume suggests, that miraculous events never happen in our days, because it is not strange that men in all ages lie for the purposes of self-aggrandizement.

24-28. Hume gives many anecdotes from history to demonstrate the unreliable nature of testimony, which men bend to suit their own designs. He says that testimonies relating to miracles, esp those establishing the rightness of a religion, are so diverse and inevitably contradictory. But just as a judge distrusts the testimony of either party when one party (of two witnesses) says that the defendant was at the scene of crime at the time of its commission, while the other party (also of two witnesses) says that he wasn’t, we should distrust the miracles, all of which have opposites. The reporters of these miracles often have an agenda, “whether it magnifies his country, his family, or himself, or in any other way strikes in with his natural inclinations and propensities.” “What greater temptation than to appear a missionary, a prophet, an ambassador from heaven?” asks Hume. These considerations are not meant to cast doubt on the
truthfulness of historians, on whose accounts we depend for much of our knowledge, but are meant to help us be wary of false testimony.

30-35. Hume says that further, the tendency of the “gazing populace” and the “vulgar” to receive whatever promotes wonder is also counterbalanced by the tendency of their celebrations of them to afterwards sink into neglect. Where such reports fly about, therefore, the appropriate response is to measure them against their conformity with regular experience and observation. So Hume concludes that no testimony for any kind of miracle has “ever amounted to a probability, much less to a proof. …It is experience only, which gives authority to human testimony; and it is the same experience, which assures us of the laws of nature. When, therefore, these two kinds of experience are contrary, we have nothing to do but subtract the one from the other, and embrace an opinion, either on one side or the other, with that assurance which arises from the remainder. But according to the principle here explained, this subtraction, with regard to all popular religions, amounts to an entire annihilation; and therefore we may establish it as a maxim, that no human testimony can have such force as to prove a miracle, and make it a just foundation for any such system of religion.”

36-41. The rest of this chapter deals with how Hume thinks that testimony concerning some miracle as a foundation for a religion destroys its credibility, even though abundant testimony about the same miracle might, in certain circumstances, compel him to belief. For example, if all authors agree that Jan. 1, 1600 saw darkness cover the world for 8 days, and travelers from foreign countries all bring the same story to us, Hume would say that such an account receives a proof from testimony. In that case, he would chalk the event up to some “corruption” or “dissolution” of nature, which does happen, though if rarely. But if all historians were to say Queen Elizabeth was interred for a month after she died, before rising again and resuming her throne, the proper belief is that her death was pretended.

With religion, however, Hume says that any miracle ascribed to it is “a full proof of a cheat,” and we justly reject it without further examination. This is because the “violations of truth are more common in testimony concerning religious miracles, than in that concerning any other matter of fact....” We must thus lower our credence levels in all testimony concerning miracles in religion significantly, as mere reason itself is not sufficient to convince us of the veracity of miracles, prophecies (a kind of miracle), etc.

Hume also has a last shot at Christian belief. He says that if prophecy wasn’t beyond human capacity, it would be absurd to use it as an argument for a “divine mission or authority from heaven. So that, upon the whole, we may conclude, that the Christian religion not only was at first attended with miracles, but even at this day cannot be believed by any reasonable person without one.” And since Hume has argued for the near universal incredulity of miracles, the Christian religion suffers from almost a fatal flaw.

Section 11. Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State

1-8. Hume and his friend, who later plays the part of Epicurus in dialogue form, set out to discuss whether Epicurus’ renowned atheism and lack of belief in an afterlife pose a threat to “the ties of morality” and “the peace of civil society.”

9. “Epicurus” wants to find out if natural religion (the practice of basing religious principles and doctrines on science and reason) has anything to do with the “public interest.” He wants to persuade his audience (Hume, who is playing the part of the educated Athenian populace) that it doesn’t, because it is at best speculative philosophy.

10-11. Hume critiques the design argument commonly given by philosophical theologians to prove God’s existence. The design argument consists of the claims that (a) there is such order in nature that are marks
of intelligence and design, and (b) this order could have been effected by mere chance or the blind and unguided force of matter. Therefore, there is some “workman” who is responsible for the order.

12-14. Hume says that when we infer causes from effects, we must not ascribe more than just the quality needed to produce the effect. E.g.: if we note that a 10lb object is raised on a scale, we can infer that the counterbalancing object is more than 10lbs, but not that it exceeds 100lbs. Just so, when we assign a cause to an effect, we obey the principle that ascribing anything more than necessary is arbitrary, and without reason.

The same rule holds then to assigning, say, rational intelligent beings or unconscious matter as causes. We can also never infer any effects from the cause that we assign that aren’t observed in experience.

“Allowing, therefore, the gods to be the authors of the existence or order of the universe; it follows, that they possess that precise degree of power, intelligence, and benevolence, which appears in their workmanship; but nothing farther can ever be proved, except we call in the assistance of exaggeration and flattery to supply the defects of argument and reasoning. …We can never be allowed to mount up from the universe, the effect, to Jupiter, the cause; and then descend downwards, to infer any new effect from that cause; as if the present effects alone were not entirely worthy of the glorious attributes, which we ascribe to that deity. The knowledge of the cause being derived solely from the effect, they must be exactly adjusted to each other; and the one can never refer to anything farther, or be the foundation of any new inference and conclusion.”

15. “Let your gods, therefore, O philosophers, be suited to the present appearances of nature: And presume not to alter these appearances by arbitrary suppositions, in order to suit them to the attributes, which you so fondly ascribe to your deities.”

16. Hume says that when priests and poets, supported by the authority of the Athenians, speak of a silver or golden age, they are excused. But philosophers who say the same thing put their authority on the line. If someone, he continues, by observing natural effects, inferred that a “more perfect production than the present world would be more suitable to such perfect beings as the gods,” he would be flouting his principle previously argued, namely, that one should not ascribe to any celestial beings any perfection or attribute “but what can be found in the present world.”

17. Hume asks whether the existence of evil and disorder is compatible with the “honour of the gods.” He suggests that their existence might be solved by supposing that Jupiter’s actions, his benevolence and power, are limited by general laws and the intrinsic features of matter. Even so, Hume asks why Jupiter’s attributes of benevolence and power are taken for granted. Even more curiously, why suppose these attributes, which are more than sufficient to account for the effects that we observe in nature?

18. So one may justly infer a cause that accounts for visible phenomena in the universe. But one cannot justly infer from that cause any single fact, and alter or add to the phenomena in any single particular.

20. Someone might contend that atheism destroys the foundation of morality, one that says that the virtuous is rewarded and those vicious punished. Hume counters that whatever the foundation of morality is, he is sensible, from experience, that every advantage is on the side of virtue, and none on that of viciousness. And we can’t say more, even allowing that there are authors of existence and order in the universe. To add that we should expect distributive justice as part of a full system of morality would be a speculation, and a commission of the fallacy mentioned before of ascribing to a cause the power to create an effect greater than what is observed, or that is not observed, in nature. (“…every argument, deduced from causes to effects, must of necessity be a gross sophism…..”)
21-23. Again, Hume rehashes points about inferring things about the cause that we infer from observing the full effect: “We never can have any reason to infer any attributes, or any principles of action in him, but so far as we know them to have been exerted and satisfied.” So while we can ascribe possible attributes to the gods, based on what we think may possibly be exerted in effects that we haven’t observed, we cannot infer such things. So, distributive justice, e.g., might be allowed as an attribute of the gods if we observe it in nature. So if we observe that there is in nature distributive justice to an extent, we cannot say that the gods exert it not in its full extent: what we observe in nature is exactly that extent we can ascribe to the gods.

“The experienced train of events is the great standard, by which we all regulate our conduct. …While we argue from the course of nature, and infer a particular intelligent cause, which first bestowed, and still preserves order in the universe, we embrace a principle, which is both uncertain and useless. It is uncertain; because the subject lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience. It is useless; because our knowledge of this cause being derived entirely from the course of nature, we can never, according to the rules of just reasoning, return back from the cause with any new inference, or making additions to the common and experienced course of nature, establish any new principles of conduct and behaviour.”

24-26. Hume now looks at the possible rebuttal from design advocates that experience affords proofs of God’s existence by analogy. Why, Hume asks qua Athenian audience, if one admits of inferring from seeing a half-finished building that it was a work of design, and that it will receive new additions until it is completed, does he not also admit of inferring from the disorder and ills of nature that it was the work of a superior intelligence, and that therefore, since the superior intelligence leaves nothing imperfect, it will receive alterations until it is completed and perfect, like the half-finished building?

Epicurus’ response is that there is an “infinite difference” between works of human art and those supposed to be of the superior intelligence. We know by experience the motives and designs of man, the connections between his projects and inclinations. The proper analogy, therefore, for this superior intelligence of which we have no experience, is that of knowing a man only from a single work – the universe. We are hence, since we don’t know its creator’s inclinations, not allowed to draw any inferences about a more finished scheme or plan for the universe, as we are of the half-finished building.

27. So w/r/t human nature, we can, based on our experience of its “coherence of designs and inclinations,” infer another intention once we have discovered one, and then another, and so draw a long chain of conclusions about his past or future conduct. Not so with the supreme Being. (Hume comically says that “this method of reasoning can never have place with regard to a Being, so remote and incomprehensible, who bears much less analogy to any other being in the universe than the sun to a waxen taper. …What we imagine to be a superior perfection may really be a defect.”)

So Hume says “no new fact can ever be inferred from the religious hypothesis; no event foreseen or foretold; no reward or punishment expected or dreaded, beyond what is already known by practice and observation.”

“Epicurus” concludes that natural religion/philosophical theology has nothing to do with the political interests of government, nor does confining it to the schools corrupt men. Thus, natural religion does not give us measures of conduct different from what experience furnishes us with.

28. Hume suggests that belief in a supreme distributive justice that rewards and punishes in the afterlife does help to restrain some men who believe. Further, philosophical doctrines in a political state should be allowed to be freely disseminated. No state has suffered or will suffer from such a marketplace of ideas Hume contends.
Section 12. Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy

Part 1

1. Hume canvasses the different kinds of skepticism, what is meant by “skepticism,” since some religious philosophers doubt that anyone can be a skeptic.

2-4. Cartesian, or antecedent skepticism, which consists in a pre-philosophical universal doubt, is a kind of skepticism that is self-defeating. It can never erase doubt in the reliability of our faculties and erases conviction in reasoning. Moderate skepticism, consisting in healthy impartiality in our judgments, and doubt of questionable things only, however is reasonable.

5-6. Consequent skepticism is a skepticism that casts doubt on the adequacy of the senses to provide knowledge. He wants to investigate what he considers its more pressing problems, not those that merely indicate that the senses alone are not to be wholly depended on (Hume later calls this sort of objection “popular”), but must be corrected by reason by considerations derived from the nature of the medium, the distance of the object, and the disposition of the organ (e.g., the crooked appearance of an oar in water, the different aspects of objects viewed at from different distances, etc.).

7-9. By instinct, and prephilosophically, every sensible creature supposes that the images presented by his senses are the external objects themselves, and “never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other.” That is, without reasoning, we suppose an external universe that does not depend on our perception to exist, and which would exist even if all sensible creatures were destroyed or absent.

10-13. But the slightest philosophy destroys this natural instinct, since it teaches us that nothing is ever present to the mind but an image or perception. And if one bites the bullet and agrees to this consequent skepticism, this view about the inadequacy of the senses, he further impugns our nature, since its instinct to treat as genuine objects its perceptions will be proven to be fallible and erroneous. Yet there isn’t a proof forthcoming of the existence of external objects.

So by what can it be shown that external objects that are entirely different from, though resembling perceptions, really cause our perceptions, without being driven either to idealism or Occasionalism? Experience is silent on this subject, since it knows only the perceptions present to it, and “cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. But neither does appealing to God provide a recourse, as this is “making a very unexpected circuit. If his veracity were at all concerned in this matter, our senses would be entirely infallible; because it is not possible that he can ever deceive. Not to mention, that, if the external world be once called in question, we shall be at a loss to find arguments, by which we may prove the existence of that Being or any of his attributes.”

That is, Hume is making two points: one, that he disagrees with Descartes that our senses are infallible, it’s just we use it inappropriately. Second, that once we grant to the skeptic that all we know immediately are our own images/perceptions, we also can’t derive from the principle of inferring cause from effect that there exists a God, since there is no “clear or convincing argument” that proves that perceptions are connected with any external objects (contra Locke). So Hume says…

14. …This is a topic, therefore, on which the “profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph, when they endeavour to introduce an universal doubt into all subjects of human knowledge and enquiry.”
15. Hume rejects what he considers an accepted doctrine (which may be though to assume the externality of objects) held by Locke among others, that primary qualities are actually in the objects themselves, while secondary objects exist as representations only. This is because we have an idea of the primary qualities only through the secondary qualities (e.g., we can never have the idea of extension without something tangible or visible, i.e., we acquire the idea of extension through sight and feeling), so that if all the ideas perceived by the senses are in the mind, so are all the ideas of primary qualities.

16. Recap: The first objection to the evidence of the senses is that its opinion that there is an external existence is contrary to reason. The second objection is that assuming that all we know are our own perceptions, then there is no real distinction between primary and secondary qualities, and we don’t have any experience with the supposed something that is left when we strip the secondary and primary qualities, no skeptic will find it worth his time to “refute” what others have affirmed of it, that there is some substance underneath all that that really exists externally. (Examples of philosophers who have thought this: Descartes, Locke. Locke’s arguments, remember, for the existence of an external world and objects in it are that 1) it defies common sense to deny that there are independently existing external objects, and 2) this because we cannot think away the images forced on us by objects, except by closing our eyes, whereas we can with images that we imagine ourselves. (These are found in his Essay, Bk. IV, Ch. II, sec. 14)

Part 2

17-19. There is also the matter of skepticism with respect to reason. Some philosophers cast doubt on reason by making absurd claims that are counter to common sense. Hume uses examples from the philosophy of time and space. W/r/t time, there’s the philosophical doctrine that each part of time makes up time, which is composed of an infinite number of real parts. But there could not then be real finite parts, as each of them is infinitely divisible. So Hume says that nothing can be more skeptical than the skepticism that leads to endorsing this “absurdity”.

20-21. Skeptical objections w/r/t moral reason, i.e., concerning matters of fact, can be divided into two kinds: (1) popular, and (2) philosophical. Popular objections are those that, e.g., cite difference in opinion, (cf. Pt. 1, ¶ 6). He wants to focus on philosophical objections. These are easily defeated by common life observations.

22. A good example of a philosophical objection is what he has given, namely, that concerning how the idea of the relation of cause and effect cannot have been derived either externally from observation of constant conjunctions or internally from observation of the volitional nature of one’s will, and hence must have some other cause as principle, which is habit.

23. “For here is the chief and most confounding objection to excessive scepticism, that no durable good can ever result from it; while it remains in its full force and vigour. …A Stoic or Epicurean displays principles, which may not only be durable, but which have an effect on conduct and behaviour. But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail.” (Notice Hume derides Pyrrhonism as “excessive!”)

Part 3
24-25. Hume now moves on to consider his favored form of skepticism, a more “mitigated” skepticism – *Academical* philosophy.

A degree of doubt and caution and modesty ought to accompany all kinds of decision and scrutiny for the just reasoner, which serves to check their passions, and thereby make them impartial seekers of knowledge. In a related way, mitigated skepticism requires that we recognize the narrow limitation of our understanding, in such a way as to make us conduct enquiries only in those subjects that are adapted to it. Experience/common life is the only standard. To this end, Pyrrhonian doubt receives its greatest force (which Hume otherwise rejects). If we can’t even understand why we believe, after one thousand repetitions of it, that a stone will fall when dropped every time, how are we to suppose that we can understand the origin of the world or its future state?

26. From above, it is useful to examine, if briefly, the “natural powers of the human mind, and to compare them with their objects, in order to recommend it to us.”

27-33. Only the abstract sciences (like mathematics) admit of demonstrations. Demonstrations are not possible in philosophy – any such portrayal of a putative proof in philosophy is “sophistry and illusion.” This because, for one, no negation of a matter of fact can involve a contradiction, i.e., all such negations can be clearly and intelligibly conceived. Not even the non-existence of a being, Hume says. But a false mathematical proposition, such as that that the cube root of 64 is equal to the half of 10, cannot be clearly and intelligibly conceived.

Since all of our practical reasonings and behaviour are rooted in moral reasoning (i.e., based in matters of fact), experience forms the greater part of human knowledge.

Moral reasonings concern *particular or general* facts. The sciences that deal with the former are all actions in life, treatises of history, chronology, geography, astronomy. Those that deal with general facts are natural philosophy, politics, chemistry, physics, etc., “where the qualities, causes, and effects of a whole species of objects are inquired into.” Divinity/theology incorporates both, and though it has a foundation in reason, inasmuch as it is supported partly by experience, its most solid foundation is faith and divine revelation.

Morals and criticism are not properly objects of the understanding, but rather, taste and sentiment.