

It appears, I think, from what has been said, that there is no more reason to account our senses fallacious, than our reason, our memory, or any other faculty of judging which nature hath given us. They are all limited and imperfect; but wisely suited to the present condition of man. We are liable to error and wrong judgment in the use of them all; but as little in the informations of sense as in the deductions of reasoning. And the errors we fall into with regard to objects of sense are not corrected by reason, but by more accurate attention to the informations we may receive by our senses themselves.

Perhaps the pride of philosophers may have given occasion to this error. Reason is the faculty wherein they assume a superiority to the unlearned. The informations of sense are common to the philosopher and to the most illiterate; they put all men upon a level; and therefore are apt to be undervalued. We must, however, be beholden to the informations of sense for the greatest and most interesting part of our

knowledge. [302] The wisdom of nature has made the most useful things most common, and they ought not to be despised on that account. Nature likewise forces our belief in those informations, and all the attempts of philosophy to weaken it are fruitless and vain.

I add only one observation to what has been said upon this subject. It is, that there seems to be a contradiction between what philosophers teach concerning ideas, and their doctrine of the fallaciousness of the senses. We are taught that the office of the senses is only to give us the ideas of external objects. If this be so, there can be no fallacy in the senses. Ideas can neither be true nor false. If the senses testify nothing, they cannot give false testimony. If they are not judging faculties, no judgment can be imputed to them, whether false or true. There is, therefore, a contradiction between the common doctrine concerning ideas and that of the fallaciousness of the senses. Both may be false, as I believe they are, but both cannot be true. [303]

ESSAY III.

OF MEMORY.

CHAPTER I.

THINGS OBVIOUS AND CERTAIN WITH REGARD TO MEMORY.

In the gradual progress of man, from infancy to maturity, there is a certain order in which his faculties are unfolded, and this seems to be the best order we can follow in treating of them.

The external senses appear first; memory soon follows—which we are now to consider.

It is by memory that we have an immediate knowledge of things past.* The senses give us information of things only as they exist in the present moment; and this information, if it were not preserved by memory, would vanish instantly, and leave us as ignorant as if it had never been.

Memory must have an object. Every man who remembers must remember some-

thing, and that which he remembers is called the object of his remembrance. In this, memory agrees with perception, but differs from sensation, which has no object but the feeling itself. [304]

Every man can distinguish the thing remembered from the remembrance of it. We may remember anything which we have seen, or heard, or known, or done, or suffered; but the remembrance of it is a particular act of the mind which now exists, and of which we are conscious. To confound these two is an absurdity, which a thinking man could not be led into, but by some false hypothesis which hinders him from reflecting upon the thing which he would explain by it.

In memory we do not find such a train of operations connected by our constitution as in perception. When we perceive an object by our senses, there is, first, some impression made by the object upon the organ of sense, either immediately, or by means of some medium. By this, an im-

* An immediate knowledge of a past thing is a contradiction. For we can only know a thing immediately, if we know it as itself, or as existing; but what is past cannot be known as itself, for it is non-existent.—H.
[302-304]

* But have we only such a mediate knowledge of the real object in perception, as we have of the real object in memory? Or Hume's error, touching the object of memory, see, in general, Note B.—H.
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pression is made upon the nerves and brain, in consequence of which we feel some sensation; and that sensation is attended by that conception and belief of the external object which we call perception. These operations are so connected in our constitution, that it is difficult to disjoin them in our conceptions, and to attend to each without confounding it with the others. But, in the operations of memory, we are free from this embarrassment; they are easily distinguished from all other acts of the mind, and the names which denote them are free from all ambiguity.

The object of memory, or thing remembered, must be something that is past; as the object of perception and of consciousness must be something which is present. What now is, cannot be an object of memory; neither can that which is past and gone be an object of perception or of consciousness.

Memory is always accompanied with the belief of that which we remember, as perception is accompanied with the belief of that which we perceive, and consciousness with the belief of that whereof we are conscious. Perhaps in infancy, or in a disorder of mind, things remembered may be confounded with those which are merely imagined; but in mature years, and in a sound state of mind, every man feels that he must believe what he distinctly remembers, though he can give no other reason of his belief, but that he remembers the thing distinctly; whereas, when he merely imagines a thing ever so distinctly, he has no belief of it upon that account. [305]

This belief, which we have from distinct memory, we account real knowledge, no less certain than if it was grounded on demonstration; no man in his wits calls it in question, or will hear any argument against it.* The testimony of witnesses in causes of life and death depends upon it, and all the knowledge of mankind of past events is built on this foundation.

There are cases in which a man's memory is less distinct and determinate, and where he is ready to allow that it may have failed him; but this does not in the least weaken its credit, when it is perfectly distinct.

Memory implies a conception and belief of past duration; for it is impossible that a man should remember a thing distinctly, without believing some interval of duration, more or less, to have passed between the time it happened, and the present moment; and I think it is impossible to shew how we could acquire a notion of duration if we had no memory. Things remembered must be things formerly perceived or

known. I remember the transit of Venus over the sun in the year 1769. I must therefore have perceived it at the time it happened, otherwise I could not now remember it. Our first acquaintance with any object of thought cannot be by remembrance. Memory can only produce a continuance or renewal of a former acquaintance with the thing remembered.

The remembrance of a past event is necessarily accompanied with the conviction of our own existence at the time the event happened. I cannot remember a thing that happened a year ago, without a conviction as strong as memory can give, that I, the same identical person who now remember that event, did then exist. [306]

What I have hitherto said concerning memory, I consider as principles which appear obvious and certain to every man who will take the pains to reflect upon the operations of his own mind. They are facts of which every man must judge by what he feels; and they admit of no other proof but an appeal to every man's own reflection. I shall therefore take them for granted in what follows, and shall, first, draw some conclusions from them, and then examine the theories of philosophers concerning memory, and concerning duration, and our personal identity, of which we acquire the knowledge by memory.

CHAPTER II.

MEMORY AN ORIGINAL FACULTY.

FIRST, I think it appears, that memory is an original faculty, given us by the Author of our being, of which we can give no account, but that we are so made.

The knowledge which I have of things past, by my memory, seems to me as unaccountable as an immediate knowledge would be of things to come; and I can give no reason why I should have the one and not the other, but that such is the will of my Maker. I find in my mind a distinct conception, and a firm belief of a series of past events; but how this is produced I know not. I call it memory, but this is only giving a name to it—it is not an account of its cause. I believe most firmly, what I distinctly remember; but I can

* An immediate knowledge of things to come, is equally a contradiction as an immediate knowledge of things past. See the first note of last page. But if, as Reid himself allows, memory depend upon certain enduring affections of the brain, determined by past cognition, it seems a strange assertion, on this as on other accounts, that the possibility of a knowledge of the future is not more inconceivable than of a knowledge of the past. Maupertuis, however, has advanced a similar doctrine; and some, also, of the advocates of animal magnetism.—H.

* But see below, p. 362.—H.