

PENGUIN  CLASSICS

JOHN LOCKE

AN ESSAY CONCERNING
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING



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BOOK I: OF INNATE NOTIONS

CHAPTER I

Introduction

§1. Since it is the *understanding* that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion, which he has over them; it is certainly a subject, *An inquiry into the understanding, pleasant and useful* even for its nobleness, worth our labour to inquire into. The understanding, like the eye, whilst it makes us see, and perceive all other things, takes no notice of itself: and it requires art and pains to set it at a distance, and make it its own object. But whatever be the difficulties, that lie in the way of this inquiry; whatever it be, that keeps us so much in the dark to ourselves; sure I am, that all the light we can let in upon our own minds; all the acquaintance we can make with our own understandings, will not only be very pleasant, but bring us great advantage, in directing our thoughts in the search of other things.

§2. This, therefore, being my *purpose* to inquire into the original, *Design* certainty, and extent of human knowledge; together, with the grounds and degrees of belief, opinion, and assent; I shall not at present meddle with the physical consideration of the mind; or trouble myself to examine, wherein its essence consists, or by what motions of our spirits,¹ or alterations of our bodies, we come to have any sensation by our organs, or any ideas in our understandings; and whether those ideas do in their formation, any, or all of them, depend on matter or no. These are speculations, which, however curious and entertaining, I shall decline, as lying out of my way, in the design I am now upon. It shall suffice to my present purpose, to consider the discerning faculties of a man, as they are employed about the objects, which they have to do with: and I shall imagine I have not wholly misemployed myself in the thoughts I shall have on this occasion, if, in this historical, plain method,² I can give any account of the ways, whereby our understandings come to attain those notions of things we have, and can set down any measures of the certainty of our knowledge, or the grounds of those persuasions, which are to be found amongst men, so various, different,

and wholly contradictory; and yet asserted somewhere or other with such assurance, and confidence, that he that shall take a view of the opinions of mankind, observe their opposition, and at the same time, consider the fondness, and devotion wherewith they are embraced; the resolution and eagerness, wherewith they are maintained, may perhaps have reason to suspect, that either there is no such thing as truth at all; or that mankind hath no sufficient means to attain a certain knowledge of it.

Method §3. It is therefore worthwhile, to search out the *bounds* between opinion and knowledge; and examine by what measures, in things, whereof we have no certain knowledge, we ought to regulate our assent, and moderate our persuasions. In order whereunto, I shall pursue this following method.

First, I shall inquire into the *original* of those ideas, notions, or whatever else you please to call them, which a man observes, and is conscious to himself he has in his mind; and the ways whereby the understanding comes to be furnished with them.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to show, what *knowledge* the understanding hath by those ideas; and the certainty, evidence, and extent of it.

Thirdly, I shall make some inquiry into the nature and grounds of *faith*, or *opinion*; whereby I mean that assent, which we give to any proposition as true, of whose truth yet we have no certain knowledge: and here we shall have occasion to examine the reasons and degrees of *assent*.

*Useful to know
the extent of our
comprehension* §4. If by this inquiry into the nature of the understanding, I can discover the powers thereof; *how far* they reach; to what things they are in any degree proportionate; and where they fail us, I suppose it may be of use, to prevail with the busy mind of man to be more cautious in meddling with things exceeding its comprehension; to stop, when it is at the utmost extent of its tether; and to sit down in a quiet ignorance of those things, which, upon examination, are found to be beyond the reach of our capacities. We should not then perhaps be so forward, out of an affectation of an universal knowledge, to raise questions, and perplex ourselves and others with disputes about things, to which our understandings are not suited; and of which we cannot frame in our minds any clear or distinct perceptions, or whereof (as it has perhaps too often happened) we have not any notions at all. If we can find out, how far the understanding can extend its view; how far it has faculties to attain certainty; and in what cases it can only judge and guess, we may learn to content ourselves with what is attainable by us in this state.

§5. For though the *comprehension* of our understandings, comes exceeding short of the vast extent of things; yet, we shall have cause enough to magnify the bountiful Author of our being, for that portion and degree of knowledge, he has bestowed on us, so far above all the rest of the inhabitants of this our mansion. Men have reason to be well satisfied with what God hath thought fit for them, since he has given them (as St Peter says,) πάντα πρὸς ζωὴν καὶ εὐσέβειαν, whatsoever is necessary for the conveniencies of life, and information of virtue;³ and has put within the reach of their discovery the comfortable provision for this life and the way that leads to a better. How short soever their knowledge may come of an universal, or perfect comprehension of whatsoever is, it yet secures their great concernments that they have light enough to lead them to the knowledge of their maker, and the sight of their own duties. Men may find matter sufficient to busy their heads, and employ their hands with variety, delight, and satisfaction; if they will not boldly quarrel with their own constitution, and throw away the blessings their hands are filled with, because they are not big enough to grasp everything. We shall not have much reason to complain of the narrowness of our minds, if we will but employ them about what may be of use to us; for of that they are very capable: And it will be an unpardonable, as well as childish peevishness, if we undervalue the advantages of our knowledge, and neglect to improve it to the ends for which it was given us, because there are some things that are set out of the reach of it. It will be no excuse to an idle and untoward servant, who would not attend his business by candlelight, to plead that he had not broad sunshine. The candle, that is set up in us, shines bright enough for all our purposes. The discoveries we can make with this, ought to satisfy us: and we shall then use our understandings right, when we entertain all objects in that way and proportion, that they are suited to our faculties; and upon those grounds, they are capable of being proposed to us; and not peremptorily, or intemperately require demonstration, and demand certainty, where probability only is to be had, and which is sufficient to govern all our concernments. If we will disbelieve everything, because we cannot certainly know all things; we shall do much what as wisely as he, who would not use his legs, but sit still and perish, because he had no wings to fly.

§6. When we know our own *strength*, we shall the better know what to undertake with hopes of success: and when we have well surveyed the *powers* of our own minds, and made some estimate what we may expect from them, we shall not

Our capacity suited to our state and concerns

Knowledge of our capacity a cure of scepticism and idleness

be inclined either to sit still, and not set our thoughts on work at all, in despair of knowing anything; nor on the other side, question everything, and disclaim all knowledge, because some things are not to be understood. 'Tis of great use to the sailor to know the length of his line, though he cannot with it fathom all the depths of the ocean. 'Tis well he knows, that it is long enough to reach the bottom, at such places, as are necessary to direct his voyage, and caution him against running upon shoals, that may ruin him. Our business here is not to know all things, but those which concern our conduct. If we can find out those measures, whereby a rational creature put in that state, which man is in, in this world, may, and ought to govern his opinions and actions depending thereon, we need not be troubled, that some other things escape our knowledge.

Occasion of this essay §7. This was that which gave the first *rise* to this essay concerning the understanding. For I thought that the first step towards satisfying several inquiries, the mind of man was very apt to run into, was, to take a survey of our own understandings, examine our own powers, and see to what things they were adapted. Till that was done, I suspected we began at the wrong end, and in vain sought for satisfaction in a quiet and sure possession of truths, that most concerned us, while we let loose our thoughts into the vast ocean of *being*, as if all that boundless extent, were the natural and undoubted possession of our understandings, wherein there was nothing exempt from its decisions, or that escaped its comprehension. Thus men, extending their inquiries beyond their capacities, and letting their thoughts wander into those depths, where they can find no sure footing; 'tis no wonder, that they raise questions, and multiply disputes, which never coming to any clear resolution, are proper only to continue and increase their doubts, and to confirm them at last in perfect scepticism. Whereas were the capacities of our understandings well considered, the extent of our knowledge once discovered, and the horizon found, which sets the bounds between the enlightened and dark parts of things; between what is, and what is not comprehensible by us, men would perhaps with less scruple acquiesce in the avowed ignorance of the one, and employ their thoughts and discourse, with more advantage and satisfaction in the other.

What idea stands for §8. Thus much I thought necessary to say concerning the occasion of this inquiry into human understanding. But, before I proceed on to what I have thought on this subject, I must here in the entrance beg pardon of my reader, for the frequent use of the word *idea*, which he will find in the following treatise. It being that term, which, I

think, serves best to stand for whatsoever is the object of the understanding, when a man thinks, I have used it to express whatever is meant by *phantasm*, *notion*, *species*, or whatever it is, which the mind can be employed about in thinking; and I could not avoid frequently using it.[^]

I presume it will be easily granted me, that there are such ideas in men's minds; everyone is conscious of them in himself, and men's words and actions will satisfy him, that they are in others.

Our first inquiry then shall be, how they come into the mind.

CHAPTER II

No Innate Principles in the Mind

§1. It is an established opinion amongst some men, That there are in the understanding certain *innate principles*;¹ some primary notions, κοινὰ ἔννοιαι,² characters, as it were stamped upon the mind of man, which the soul receives in its very first being; and brings into the world with it. It would be sufficient to convince unprejudiced readers of the falseness of this supposition, if I should only show (as I hope I shall in the following parts of this discourse) how men, barely by the use of their natural faculties, may attain to all the knowledge they have, without the help of any innate impressions; and may arrive at certainty, without any such original notions or principles. For I imagine anyone will easily grant, that it would be impertinent to suppose, the ideas of colours innate in a creature, to whom God hath given sight, and a power to receive them by the eyes, from external objects: and no less unreasonable would it be to attribute several truths, to the impressions of nature, and innate characters, when we may observe in ourselves faculties, fit to attain as easy and certain knowledge of them, as if they were originally imprinted on the mind.

The way shown how we come by any knowledge, sufficient to prove it not innate

But because a man is not permitted without censure to follow his own thoughts in the search of truth, when they lead him ever so little out of the common road: I shall set down the reasons, that made me doubt of the truth of that opinion, as an excuse for my mistake, if I be in one; which I leave to be considered by those, who, with me, dispose themselves to embrace truth, wherever they find it.

General assent the great argument §2. There is nothing more commonly taken for granted, than that there are certain principles both *speculative* and *practical* (for they speak of both) universally agreed upon by all mankind; which therefore they argue, must needs be constant impressions, which the souls of men receive in their first beings, and which they bring into the world with them, as necessarily and really as they do any of their inherent faculties.

Universal consent proves nothing innate §3. This argument, drawn from *universal consent*, has this misfortune in it, that if it were true in matter of fact, that there were certain truths, wherein all mankind agreed, it would not prove them innate, if there can be any other way shown, how men may come to that universal agreement, in the things they do consent in; which I presume may be done.

'What is, is'; and 'Tis impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', not universally assented to §4. But, which is worse, this argument of universal consent, which is made use of, to prove innate principles, seems to me a demonstration that there are none such; because there are none to which all mankind give an universal assent.

I shall begin with the speculative, and instance in those magnified principles of demonstration:³ 'Whatsoever is, is'; and 'Tis impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', which of all others, I think have the most allowed title to innate. These have so settled a reputation of maxims universally received, that 'twill, no doubt, be thought strange, if anyone should seem to question it. But yet I take liberty to say, That these propositions are so far from having an universal assent, that there are a great part of mankind, to whom they are not so much as known.

Not on the mind naturally imprinted, because not known to children, idiots, etc. §5. For, first 'tis evident, that all *children* and *idiots*, have not the least apprehension or thought of them: and the want of that is enough to destroy that universal assent, which must needs be the necessary concomitant of all innate truths:

it seeming to me near a contradiction, to say, that there are truths imprinted on the soul, which it perceives or understands not: Imprinting, if it signify anything, being nothing else, but the making certain truths to be perceived. For to imprint anything on the mind, without the mind's perceiving it, seems to me hardly intelligible. If therefore *children* and *idiots* have souls, have minds, with those impressions upon them, they must unavoidably perceive them, and necessarily know and assent to these truths, which since they do not, it is evident that there are no such impressions. For if they are not notions naturally imprinted, how can they be innate? And if they are notions imprinted, how can they be unknown? To say a notion is imprinted

on the mind, and yet at the same time to say, that the mind is ignorant of it, and never yet took notice of it, is to make this impression nothing. No proposition can be said to be in the mind, which it never yet knew, which it was never yet conscious of. For if any one may; then by the same reason, all propositions that are true, and the mind is capable ever of assenting to, may be said to be in the mind, and to be imprinted: since if any one can be said to be in the mind, which it never yet knew, it must be only because it is capable of knowing it; and so the mind is of all truths it ever shall know. Nay, thus truths may be imprinted on the mind, which it never did, nor ever shall know: for a man may live long, and die at last in ignorance of many truths, which his mind was capable of knowing, and that with certainty. So that if the capacity of knowing, be the natural impression contended for, all the truths a man ever comes to know, will, by this account, be every one of them, innate; and this great point will amount to no more, but only to a very improper way of speaking; which whilst it pretends to assert the contrary, says nothing different from those, who deny innate principles. For nobody, I think, ever denied, that the mind was capable of knowing several truths. The capacity they say, is innate, the knowledge acquired. But then to what end such contest for certain innate maxims? If truths can be imprinted on the understanding without being perceived, I can see no difference there can be, between any truths the mind is capable of knowing, in respect of their original: they must all be innate, or all adventitious: in vain shall a man go about to distinguish them. He therefore that talks of innate notions in the understanding, cannot (if he intend thereby any distinct sort of truths) mean such truths to be in the understanding, as it never perceived, and is yet wholly ignorant of. For if these words (*to be in the understanding*) have any propriety, they signify to be understood. So that, to be in the understanding, and, not to be understood; to be in the mind, and, never to be perceived, is all one, as to say, anything is, and is not, in the mind or understanding. If therefore these two propositions, ‘whatsoever is, is’; and, ‘it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be’, are by nature imprinted, children cannot be ignorant of them: infants, and all that have souls, must necessarily have them in their understandings, know the truth of them, and assent to it.

§6. To avoid this, ’tis usually answered, that all men know and assent to them, when they come to the use of reason, and this is enough to prove them innate. I answer,

That men know them when they come to the use of reason, answered

§7. Doubtful expressions, that have scarce any signification, go for clear

reasons, to those, who being prepossessed, take not the pains to examine even what they themselves say. For to apply this answer with any tolerable sense to our present purpose, it must signify one of these two things; either, that as soon as men come to the use of reason, these supposed native inscriptions come to be known, and observed by them: or else, that the use and exercise of men's reasons assists them in the discovery of these principles, and certainly makes them known to them.

If reason discovered them, that would not prove them innate §8. If they mean that by the *use of reason* men may discover these principles; and that this is sufficient to prove them innate; their way of arguing will stand thus, *viz.* that whatever truths reason can certainly discover to us, and make us firmly assent to, those are all naturally imprinted on the mind; since that universal assent, which is made the mark of them, amounts to no more but this; that by the use of reason, we are capable to come to a certain knowledge of, and assent to them; and by this means there will be no difference between the maxims of the mathematicians, and theorems they deduce from them: all must be equally allowed innate, they being all discoveries made by the use of reason, and truths that a rational creature may certainly come to know, if he apply his thoughts rightly that way.

'Tis false that reason discovers them §9. But how can these men think the *use of reason* necessary to discover principles that are supposed innate, when reason (if we may believe them) is nothing else, but the faculty of deducing unknown truths from principles or propositions, that are already known? That certainly can never be thought innate, which we have need of reason to discover, unless as I have said, we will have all the certain truths, that reason ever teaches us, to be innate. We may as well think the use of reason necessary to make our eyes discover visible objects, as that there should be need of reason, or the exercise thereof, to make the understanding see, what is originally engraven in it, and cannot be in the understanding, before it be perceived by it. So that to make reason discover those truths thus imprinted, is to say, that the use of reason discovers to a man, what he knew before; and if men have those innate, impressed truths originally, and before the use of reason, and yet are always ignorant of them, till they come to the use of reason, 'tis in effect to say, that men know, and know them not at the same time.

§10. 'Twill here perhaps be said, that mathematical demonstrations, and other truths, that are not innate, are not assented to, as soon as proposed, wherein they are distinguished from these maxims, and other innate truths. I shall have occasion to speak of assent upon the first proposing, more

particularly by and by. I shall here only, and that very readily, allow, that these maxims, and mathematical demonstrations are in this different; that the one has need of reason, using of proofs, to make them out, and to gain our assent; but the other, as soon as understood, are, without any the least reasoning, embraced and assented to. But I withal beg leave to observe, that it lays open the weakness of this subterfuge, which requires the *use of reason* for the discovery of these general truths: since it must be confessed, that in their discovery, there is no use made of reasoning at all. And I think those who give this answer, will not be forward to affirm, that the knowledge of this maxim, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', is a deduction of our reason. For this would be to destroy that bounty of nature, they seem so fond of, whilst they make the knowledge of those principles to depend on the labour of our thoughts. For all reasoning is search, and casting about, and requires pains and application. And how can it with any tolerable sense be supposed, that what was imprinted by nature, as the foundation and guide of our reason, should need the use of reason to discover it?

§11. Those who will take the pains to reflect with a little attention on the operations of the understanding, will find that this ready assent of the mind to some truths, depends not, either on native inscription, or the *use of reason*; but on a faculty of the mind quite distinct from both of them, as we shall see hereafter. Reason therefore, having nothing to do in procuring our assent to these maxims, if by saying, that *men know and assent to them, when they come to the use of reason*, be meant, that the use of reason assists us in the knowledge of these maxims, it is utterly false; and were it true, would prove them not to be innate.

§12. If by knowing and assenting to them, *when we come to the use of reason*, be meant, that this is the time, when they come to be taken notice of by the mind; and that as soon as children come to the use of reason, they come also to know and assent to these maxims; this also is false, and frivolous. *First*, it is false. Because it is evident, these maxims are not in the mind so early as the use of reason: and therefore the coming to the use of reason is falsely assigned, as the time of their discovery. How many instances of the use of reason, may we observe in children, long time before they have any knowledge of this maxim, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be'? And a great part of illiterate people, and savages, pass many years, even of their rational age, without ever thinking on this, and the like

The coming to the use of reason, not the time we come to know these maxims

general propositions. I grant men come not to the knowledge of these general and more abstract truths, which are thought innate, till they come to the use of reason; and I add, nor then neither. Which is so, because till after they come to the use of reason, those general abstract ideas are not framed in the mind, about which those general maxims are, which are mistaken for innate principles, but are indeed discoveries made, and verities introduced, and brought into the mind by the same way, and discovered by the same steps, as several other propositions, which nobody was ever so extravagant as to suppose innate. This I hope to make plain in the sequel of this discourse. I allow therefore a necessity, that men should come to the use of reason, before they get the knowledge of those general truths; but deny, that men's coming to the use of reason is the time of their discovery.

By this, they are not distinguished from other knowable truths

§13. In the meantime, it is observable, that this saying, that men know, and assent to these maxims, *when they come to the use of reason*, amounts in reality of fact, to no more but

this, that they are never known, nor taken notice of, before the use of reason, but may possibly be assented to sometime after, during a man's life; but when, is uncertain: and so may all other knowable truths, as well as these which therefore have no advantage, nor distinction from others, by this note of being known when we come to the use of reason; nor are thereby proved to be innate, but quite the contrary.

If coming to the use of reason were the time of their discovery, it would not prove them innate

§14. But *secondly*, were it true, that the precise time of their being known, and assented to, were, when men come to the *use of reason*; neither would that prove them innate. This way of arguing is so frivolous, as the supposition of itself is false. For by what kind of logic will it appear,

that any notion is originally by nature imprinted in the mind in its first constitution, because it comes first to be observed, and assented to, when a faculty of the mind, which has quite a distinct province, begins to exert itself? And therefore, the coming to the use of speech, if it were supposed the time, that these maxims are first assented to (which it may be with as much truth, as the time when men come to the use of reason) would be as good a proof that they were innate, as to say, they are innate because men assent to them, when they come to the use of reason. I agree then with these men of innate principles, that there is no knowledge of these general and self-evident maxims in the mind, till it comes to the exercise of reason: but I deny that the coming to the use of reason, is the precise time when

they are first taken notice of; and, if that were the precise time, I deny that it would prove them innate. All that can with any truth be meant by this proposition, that men *assent to them when they come to the use of reason*, is no more but this, that the making of general abstract ideas, and the understanding of general names, being a concomitant of the rational faculty, and growing up with it, children commonly get not those general ideas, nor learn the names that stand for them, till having for a good while exercised their reason about familiar and more particular ideas, they are by their ordinary discourse and actions with others, acknowledged to be capable of rational conversation. If assenting to these maxims, when men come to the use of reason, can be true in any other sense, I desire it may be shown; or at least, how in this, or any other sense it proves them innate.

§15. The senses at first let in particular ideas, and furnish the yet empty cabinet: and the mind by degrees growing familiar with some of them, they are lodged in the memory, and names got to them. Afterwards the mind proceeding further, abstracts them, and by degrees learns the use of general names. In this manner the mind comes to be furnished with ideas and language, the materials about which to exercise its discursive faculty: and the use of reason becomes daily more visible, as these materials, that give it employment, increase. But though the having of general ideas, and the use of general words and reason usually grow together: yet, I see not, how this any way proves them innate. The knowledge of some truths, I confess, is very early in the mind; but in a way that shows them not to be innate. For, if we will observe, we shall find it still to be about ideas, not innate, but acquired: it being about those first, which are imprinted by external things, with which infants have earliest to do, which make the most frequent impressions on their senses. In ideas thus got, the mind discovers, that some agree, and others differ, probably as soon as it has any use of memory; as soon as it is able to retain and receive distinct ideas. But whether it be then, or not, this is certain, it does so long before it has the use of words; or comes to that, which we commonly call the *use of reason*. For a child knows as certainly, before it can speak, the difference between the ideas of sweet and bitter (*i.e.* that sweet is not bitter) as it knows afterwards (when it comes to speak) that wormwood⁴ and sugar-plums,⁵ are not the same thing.

*The steps by which
the mind attains
several truths*

§16. A child knows not that three and four are equal to seven, till he comes to be able to count to seven, and has got the name and idea of equality: and then upon explaining those words, he presently assents to, or

rather perceives the truth of that proposition. But neither does he then readily assent, because it is an innate truth, nor was his assent wanting till then, because he wanted the *use of reason*; but the truth of it appears to him, as soon as he has settled in his mind the clear and distinct ideas, that these names stand for: and then, he knows the truth of that proposition, upon the same grounds, and by the same means, that he knew before, that a rod and cherry, are not the same thing; and upon the same grounds also, that he may come to know afterwards, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', as shall be more fully shown hereafter. So that the later it is before anyone comes to have those general ideas, about which those maxims are; or to know the signification of those general terms, that stand for them; or to put together in his mind, the ideas they stand for; the later also will it be, before he comes to assent to those maxims, whose terms, with the ideas they stand for, being no more innate, than those of a cat or a weasel, he must stay till time and observation have acquainted him with them; and then he will be in a capacity to know the truth of these maxims, upon the first occasion, that shall make him put together those ideas in his mind, and observe, whether they agree or disagree, according as is expressed in those propositions. And therefore it is, that a man knows that eighteen and nineteen, are equal to thirty-seven, by the same self-evidence, that he knows one and two to be equal to three: yet, a child knows this, not so soon as the other; not for want of the use of reason; but because the ideas the words eighteen, nineteen, and thirty-seven stand for, are not so soon got, as those, which are signified by one, two, and three.

*Assenting as soon
as proposed and
understood, proves
them not innate*

§17. This evasion therefore of general assent, when men come to the use of reason, failing as it does, and leaving no difference between those supposed-innate, and other truths, that are afterwards acquired and learnt, men have endeavoured to secure an universal assent to those they call maxims, by saying, they are generally *assented to, as soon as proposed*, and the terms they are proposed in, understood: seeing all men, even children, as soon as they hear and understand the terms, assent to these propositions, they think it is sufficient to prove them innate. For since men never fail, after they have once understood the words, to acknowledge them for undoubted truths, they would infer, that certainly these propositions were first lodged in the understanding, which, without any teaching, the mind at very first proposal, immediately closes with, and assents to, and after that never doubts again.

§18. In answer to this, I demand whether ready *assent*, given to a proposition *upon first hearing*, and understanding the terms, be a certain mark of an innate principle? If it be not, such a general assent is in vain urged as a proof of them; if it be said, that it is a mark of innate, they must then allow all such propositions to be innate, which are generally assented to, as soon as heard, whereby they will find themselves plentifully stored with innate principles. For upon the same ground *viz.* of assent at first hearing and understanding the terms, that men would have those maxims pass for innate, they must also admit several propositions about numbers, to be innate: and thus, ‘that one and two are equal to three, that two and two are equal to four’, and a multitude of other the like propositions in numbers, that everybody assents to, at first hearing, and understanding the terms, must have a place amongst these innate axioms. Nor is this the prerogative of numbers alone, and propositions made about several of them: but even natural philosophy, and all the other sciences afford propositions, which are sure to meet with assent, as soon as they are understood. ‘That two bodies cannot be in the same place’, is a truth, that nobody any more sticks at, than at this maxim, ‘that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be’; ‘that white is not black’; ‘that a square is not a circle’; ‘that yellowness is not sweetness’: these, and a million of other such propositions, as many at least, as we have distinct ideas, every man in his wits, at first hearing, and knowing what the names stand for, must necessarily assent to. If these men will be true to their own rule, and have *assent at first hearing and understanding the terms*, to be a mark of innate, they must allow, not only as many innate propositions, as men have distinct ideas; but as many as men can make propositions wherein different ideas are denied one of another. Since every proposition, wherein one different idea is denied of another, will as certainly find assent at first hearing and understanding the terms, as this general one, ‘it is impossible for the same to be, and not to be’; or that which is the foundation of it, and is the easier understood of the two, ‘the same is not different’: by which account, they will have legions of innate propositions of this one sort, without mentioning any other. But since no proposition can be innate, unless the ideas, about which it is, be innate, this will be, to suppose all our ideas of colours, sounds, tastes, figure, *etc.* innate; than which, there cannot be anything more opposite to reason and experience. Universal and ready assent upon hearing and understanding the terms, is (I grant)

If such an assent be a mark of innate, then that one and two are equal to three; that sweetness is not bitterness; and a thousand the like, must be innate

a mark of self-evidence: but self-evidence, depending not on innate impressions, but on something else (as we shall show hereafter) belongs to several propositions, which nobody was yet so extravagant, as to pretend to be innate.

Such less general propositions known before these universal maxims

§19. Nor let it be said, that those more particular self-evident propositions, which are assented to at first hearing, as, 'that one and two are equal to three'; 'that green is not red', *etc.* are received as the consequences of those more universal propositions, which are looked on as innate principles; since anyone, who will but take the pains to observe what passes in the understanding, will certainly find, that these, and the like less general propositions, are certainly known and firmly assented to, by those, who are utterly ignorant of those more general maxims; and so, being earlier in the mind than those (as they are called) first principles, cannot owe to them the assent, wherewith they are received at first hearing.

'One and one, equal to two', etc. not general nor useful, answered

§20. If it be said, that these propositions, *viz.* 'two and two are equal to four'; 'red is not blue', *etc.* are not general maxims, nor of any great use. I answer, that makes nothing to the argument of universal assent, upon hearing and understanding. For, if that be the certain mark of innate, whatever proposition can be found, that receives general assent, as soon as heard and understood, that must be admitted for an innate proposition, as well as this maxim, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', they being upon this ground equal. And as to the difference of being more general, that makes this maxim more remote from being innate; those general and abstract ideas, being more strangers to our first apprehensions, than those of more particular self-evident propositions; and therefore, 'tis longer before they are admitted and assented to by the growing understanding. And as to the usefulness of these magnified maxims, that perhaps will not be found so great as is generally conceived, when it comes to its due place to be more fully considered.

These maxims not being known sometimes till proposed, proves them not innate

§21. But we have not yet done with *assenting to propositions at first hearing and understanding their terms*; 'tis fit we first take notice, that this, instead of being a mark, that they are innate, is a proof of the contrary: since it supposes, that several, who understand and know other things, are ignorant of these principles, till they are proposed to them; and that one may be unacquainted with these truths, till he hears them from others. For if they were innate,

what need they be proposed, in order to gaining assent; when, by being in the understanding, by a natural and original impression (if there were any such) they could not but be known before? Or doth the proposing them, print them clearer in the mind, than nature did? If so, then the consequence will be, that a man knows them better, after he has been thus taught them, than he did before. Whence it will follow, that these principles may be made more evident to us by others' teaching, than nature has made them by impression; which will ill agree with the opinion of innate principles, and give but little authority to them; but on the contrary, makes them unfit to be the foundations of all our other knowledge, as they are pretended to be. This cannot be denied, that men grow first acquainted with many of these self-evident truths, upon their being proposed: but it is clear, that whosoever does so, finds in himself, that he then begins to know a proposition, which he knew not before; and which from thenceforth he never questions; not because it was innate; but because the consideration of the nature of the things contained in those words, would not suffer him to think otherwise, how, or whensoever he is brought to reflect on them. And if whatever is assented to at first hearing, and understanding the terms, must pass for an innate principle, every well-grounded observation drawn from particulars into a general rule, must be innate. When yet it is certain, that not all, but only sagacious heads light at first on these observations, and reduce them into general propositions, not innate, but collected from a preceding acquaintance, and reflection on particular instances. These, when observing men have made them, unobserving men, when they are proposed to them, cannot refuse their assent to.

§22. If it be said, the understanding hath an *implicit knowledge* of these principles, but not an explicit, before this first hearing, (as they must, who will say, that they are in the understanding before they are known) it will be hard to conceive what is meant by a principle imprinted on the understanding implicitly; unless it be this, that the mind is capable of understanding and assenting firmly to such propositions. And thus all mathematical demonstrations, as well as first principles, must be received as native impressions on the mind: which I fear they will scarce allow them to be, who find it harder to demonstrate a proposition, than assent to it, when demonstrated. And few mathematicians, will be forward to believe, that all the diagrams they have drawn, were but copies of those innate characters, which nature had engraven upon their minds.

*Implicitly known
before proposing,
signifies that the
mind is capable of
understanding them,
or else signifies
nothing*

The argument of assenting on first hearing, is upon a false supposition of no precedent teaching

§23. There is, I fear, this further weakness in the foregoing argument, which would persuade us, that therefore those maxims are to be thought innate, which men *admit at first hearing*, because they assent to propositions, which they are not taught, nor do receive from the force of any argument

or demonstration, but a bare explication or understanding of the terms. Under which, there seems to me to lie this fallacy; that men are supposed not to be *taught*, nor to *learn* anything *de novo*⁶; when in truth, they are taught, and do learn something they were ignorant of before. For first it is evident, they have learned the terms and their signification; neither of which was born with them. But this is not all the acquired knowledge in the case: the ideas themselves, about which the proposition is, are not born with them, no more than their names, but got afterwards. So that in all propositions that are assented to, at first hearing; the terms of the proposition, their standing for such ideas, and the ideas themselves that they stand for, being neither of them innate, I would fain know what there is remaining in such propositions, that is innate. For I would gladly have anyone name that proposition, whose terms or ideas were either of them innate. We by degrees get ideas and names, and learn their appropriated connexion one with another; and then to propositions, made in such terms, whose signification we have learnt, and wherein the agreement or disagreement we can perceive in our ideas, when put together, is expressed, we at first hearing assent; though to other propositions, in themselves as certain and evident, but which are concerning ideas, not so soon or so easily got, we are at the same time no way capable of assenting. For though a child quickly assent to this proposition, ‘that an apple is not fire’; when, by familiar acquaintance, he has got the ideas of those two different things distinctly imprinted on his mind, and has learnt that the names *apple* and *fire* stand for them; yet it will be some years after, perhaps, before the same child will assent to this proposition, ‘that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be’. Because, that though, perhaps, the words are as easy to be learnt; yet the signification of them, being more large, comprehensive, and abstract, than of the names annexed to those sensible things, the child hath to do with; it is longer before he learns their precise meaning, and it requires more time plainly to form in his mind those general ideas, they stand for. Till that be done, you will in vain endeavour to make any child assent to a proposition, made up of such general terms: but as soon as ever he has got those ideas, and learned their names, he forwardly closes with the one, as well as the

other of the forementioned propositions; and with both for the same reason; *viz.* because he finds the ideas he has in his mind, to agree or disagree, according as the words standing for them, are affirmed, or denied one of another in the proposition. But if propositions be brought to him in words, which stand for ideas he has not yet in his mind; to such propositions, however evidently true or false in themselves, he affords neither assent nor dissent, but is ignorant. For words being but empty sounds, any further than they are signs of our ideas, we cannot but assent to them, as they correspond to those ideas we have, but no further than that. But the showing by what steps and ways knowledge comes into our minds, and grounds of several degrees of assent, being the business of the following discourse, it may suffice to have only touched on it here, as one reason, that made me doubt of those innate principles.

§24. To conclude this argument of *universal consent*, I agree with these defenders of innate principles, that if they are *innate*, they must needs *have universal assent*. For that a truth should be innate, and yet not assented to, is to me as unintelligible, as for a man to know a truth, and be ignorant of it at the same time. But then, by these men's own confession, they cannot be innate; since they are not assented to, by those who understand not the terms, nor by a great part of those who do understand them, but have yet never heard, nor thought of those propositions; which, I think, is at least one half of mankind. But were the number far less, it would be enough to destroy *universal assent*, and thereby show these propositions not to be innate, if children alone were ignorant of them.

§25. But that I may not be accused, to argue from the thoughts of infants, which are unknown to us, and to conclude, from what passes in their understandings, before they express it; I say next, that these two general propositions are not the truths, that *first possess the minds* of children; nor are antecedent to all acquired, and adventitious notions: which if they were innate, they must needs be. Whether we can determine it or no, it matters not, there is certainly a time, when children begin to think, and their words and actions do assure us, that they do so. When therefore they are capable of thought, of knowledge, of assent, can it rationally be supposed, they can be ignorant of those notions that nature has imprinted, were there any such? Can it be imagined, with any appearance of reason, that they perceive the impressions from things without; and be at the same time ignorant of those characters, which nature,

itself has taken care to stamp within? Can they receive and assent to adventitious notions, and be ignorant of those, which are supposed woven into the very principles of their being, and imprinted there in indelible characters, to be the foundation and guide of all their acquired knowledge, and future reasonings? This would be, to make nature take pains to no purpose; or, at least, to write very ill; since its characters could not be read by those eyes, which saw other things very well; and those are very ill supposed the clearest parts of truth, and the foundations of all our knowledge, which are not first known, and without which, the undoubted knowledge of several other things may be had. The child certainly knows, that the *nurse* that feeds it, is neither the *cat* it plays with, nor the *blackamoor*⁷ it is afraid of; that the *wormseed*⁸ or *mustard* it refuses, is not the *apple* or *sugar* it cries for; this it is certainly and undoubtedly assured of: but will anyone say, it is by virtue of this principle, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', that it so firmly assents to these, and other parts of its knowledge? Or that the child has any notion or apprehension of that proposition at an age, wherein yet 'tis plain, it knows a great many other truths? He that will say, children join these general abstract speculations with their sucking-bottles, and their rattles, may, perhaps, with justice be thought to have more passion and zeal for his opinion; but less sincerity and truth, than one of that age.

And so not innate §26. Though therefore there be several general propositions, that meet with constant and ready assent, as soon as proposed to men grown up, who have attained the use of more general and abstract ideas, and names standing for them; yet they not being to be found in those of tender years, who nevertheless know other things, they cannot pretend to universal assent of intelligent persons, and so by no means can be supposed innate: it being impossible, that any truth which is innate (if there were any such) should be unknown, at least to anyone, who knows anything else. Since, if they are innate truths, they must be innate thoughts; there being nothing a truth in the mind, that it has never thought on. Whereby it is evident, if there be any *innate truths*, they *must necessarily be the first of any thought on*; the first that appear there.

Not innate, because they appear least, where what is innate shows itself clearest §27. That the general maxims, we are discoursing of, are not known to children, *idiots*, and a great part of mankind, we have already sufficiently proved; whereby it is evident, they have not an universal assent, nor are general impressions. But there is this further argument in it, against their being innate:

that these characters, if they were native and original impressions, *should appear fairest and clearest* in those persons, in whom yet we find no footsteps of them: and 'tis, in my opinion, a strong presumption, that they are not innate; since they are least known to those, in whom, if they were innate, they must needs exert themselves with most force and vigour. For *children, idiots, savages*, and *illiterate* people, being of all others the least corrupted by custom, or borrowed opinions; learning, and education, having not cast their native thoughts into new moulds; nor by superinducing foreign and studied doctrines confounded those fair characters nature had written there; one might reasonably imagine, that in their minds these innate notions should lie open fairly to everyone's view, as 'tis certain the thoughts of children do. It might very well be expected, that these principles should be perfectly known to naturals;⁹ which being stamped immediately on the soul (as these men suppose) can have no dependence on the constitutions, or organs of the body, the only confessed difference between them and others. One would think, according to these men's principles, that all these native beams of light (were there any such) should in those, who have no reserves, no arts of concealment, shine out in their full lustre, and leave us in no more doubt of their being there, than we are of their love of pleasure, and abhorrence of pain. But alas, amongst *children, idiots, savages*, and the grossly *illiterate*, what general maxims are to be found? What universal principles of knowledge? Their notions are few and narrow, borrowed only from those objects, they have had most to do with, and which have made upon their senses the frequentest and strongest impressions. A child knows his nurse and his cradle, and by degrees the playthings of a little more advanced age: and a young savage has, perhaps, his head filled with love and hunting, according to the fashion of his tribe. But he that from a child untaught, or a wild inhabitant of the woods, will expect these abstract maxims and reputed principles of sciences, will I fear, find himself mistaken. Such kind of general propositions, are seldom mentioned in the huts of *Indians*; much less are they to be found in the thoughts of *children*, or any impressions of them on the minds of *naturals*. They are the language and business of the schools, and academies of learned nations, accustomed to that sort of conversation, or learning, where disputes are frequent: these maxims being suited to artificial argumentation, and useful for conviction; but not much conducing to the discovery of truth, or advancement of knowledge. But of their small use for the improvement of knowledge, I shall have occasion to speak more at large, *l. 4. c. 7.*

Recapitulation §28. I know not how absurd this may seem to the masters of demonstration: and probably, it will hardly down with anybody at first hearing. I must therefore beg a little truce with prejudice, and the forbearance of censure, till I have been heard out in the sequel of this discourse, being very willing to submit to better judgements. And since I impartially search after truth, I shall not be sorry to be convinced that I have been too fond of my own notions; which I confess we are all apt to be, when application and study have warmed our heads with them.

Upon the whole matter, I cannot see any ground, to think these two famed speculative maxims innate: since they are not universally assented to; and the assent they so generally find, is no other, than what several propositions, not allowed to be innate, equally partake in with them: and since the assent that is given them, is produced another way, and comes not from natural inscription, as I doubt not but to make appear in the following discourse. And if *these first principles* of knowledge and science, are found *not to be innate, no other speculative maxims can* (I suppose) *with better right pretend to be so.*

CHAPTER III

No Innate Practical Principles

No moral principles so clear and so generally received, as the forementioned speculative maxims

§1. If those speculative maxims, whereof we discoursed in the foregoing chapter, have not an actual universal assent from all mankind, as we there proved, it is much more visible concerning *practical principles*, that they *come short of an universal reception*: and I think it will be hard to instance any one moral rule, which can pretend to so general and ready an assent as, 'What is, is', or to be so manifest a truth as this, 'that it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be'. Whereby it is evident, that they are further removed from a title to be innate; and the doubt of their being native impressions on the mind, is stronger against these moral principles than the other. Not that it brings their truth at all in question. They are equally true, though not equally evident. Those speculative maxims carry their own evidence with them: but moral principles require reasoning and

discourse, and some exercise of the mind, to discover the certainty of their truth. They lie not open as natural characters engraven on the mind; which, if any such were, they must needs be visible by themselves, and by their own light be certain and known to everybody. But this is no derogation to their truth and certainty, no more than it is to the truth or certainty of the three angles of a triangle being equal to two right ones, because it is not so evident, as 'the whole is bigger than a part'; nor so apt to be assented to at first hearing. It may suffice, that these moral rules are capable of demonstration: and therefore it is our own faults, if we come not to a certain knowledge of them. But the ignorance wherein many men are of them, and the slowness of assent, wherewith others receive them, are manifest proofs, that they are not innate, and such as offer themselves to their view without searching.

§2. Whether there be any such moral principles, wherein all men do agree, I appeal to any, who have been but moderately conversant in the history of mankind, and looked abroad beyond the smoke of their own chimneys. Where is that practical truth, that is universally received without doubt or question, as it must be if innate? *Justice*, and keeping of contracts, is that which *most men seem to agree in*. This is a principle, which is thought to extend itself to the dens of thieves, and the confederacies of the greatest villains; and they who have gone furthest towards the putting off of humanity itself, keep faith and rules of justice one with another. I grant that outlaws themselves do this one amongst another; but 'tis without receiving these as the innate laws of nature. They practise them as rules of convenience within their own communities: but it is impossible to conceive, that he embraces justice as a practical principle, who acts fairly with his fellow highwaymen, and at the same time plunders or kills the next honest man he meets with. Justice and truth are the common ties of society; and therefore, even outlaws and robbers, who break with all the world besides, must keep faith and rules of equity amongst themselves, or else they cannot hold together. But will anyone say, that those that live by fraud and rapine, have innate principles of truth and justice which they allow and assent to?

§3. Perhaps it will be urged, that the *tacit assent of their minds agrees to what their practice contradicts*. I answer, first, I have always thought the actions of men the best interpreters of their thoughts. But since it is certain, that most men's practice, and some men's open professions, have either

*Faith and justice not
owned as principles
by all men*

*Objection. Though
men deny them in
their practice, yet they
admit them in their
thoughts, answered*

questioned or denied these principles, it is impossible to establish an universal consent (though we should look for it only amongst grown men) without which, it is impossible to conclude them innate. *Secondly*, 'tis very strange and unreasonable, to suppose innate practical principles, that terminate only in contemplation. Practical principles derived from nature, are there for operation, and must produce conformity of action, not barely speculative assent to their truth, or else they are in vain distinguished from speculative maxims. Nature, I confess, has put into man a desire of happiness, and an aversion to misery: these indeed are innate practical principles, which (as practical principles ought) do continue constantly to operate and influence all our actions, without ceasing: these may be observed in all persons and all ages, steady and universal; but these are inclinations of the appetite to good, not impressions of truth on the understanding. I deny not, that there are natural tendencies imprinted on the minds of men; and that, from the very first instances of sense and perception, there are some things, that are grateful, and others unwelcome to them; some things that they incline to, and others that they fly: but this makes nothing for innate characters on the mind, which are to be the principles of knowledge, regulating our practice. Such natural impressions on the understanding, are so far from being confirmed hereby, that this is an argument against them; since if there were certain characters, imprinted by nature on the understanding, as the principles of knowledge, we could not but perceive them constantly operate in us, and influence our knowledge, as we do those others on the will and appetite; which never cease to be the constant springs and motives of all our actions, to which, we perpetually feel them strongly impelling us.

*Moral rules need a
proof, ergo not
innate*

§4. Another reason that makes me doubt of any innate practical principles, is, that I think, *there cannot any one moral rule be proposed, whereof a man may not justly demand a reason*: which

would be perfectly ridiculous and absurd, if they were innate, or so much as self-evident; which every innate principle must needs be, and not need any proof to ascertain its truth, nor want any reason to gain it approbation. He would be thought void of common sense, who asked on the one side, or on the other side, went to give a reason, 'why it is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be'. It carries its own light and evidence with it, and needs no other proof: he that understands the terms, assents to it for its own sake, or else nothing will ever be able to prevail with him to do it. But should that most unshaken rule of morality, and foundation of all social virtue, 'that one should do as he would be done unto', be proposed

to one, who never heard it before, but yet is of capacity to understand its meaning; might he not without any absurdity ask a reason why? And were not he that proposed it, bound to make out the truth and reasonableness of it to him? Which plainly shows it not to be innate; for if it were, it could neither want nor receive any proof; but must needs (at least, as soon as heard and understood) be received and assented to, as an unquestionable truth, which a man can by no means doubt of. So that the truth of all these moral rules, plainly depends upon some other antecedent to them, and from which they must be deduced, which could not be, if either they were innate, or so much as self-evident.

§5. That men should keep their compacts,¹ is certainly a great and undeniable rule in morality: but yet, if a Christian, who has the view of happiness and misery in another life, be asked why a man must keep his word, he will *give* this as a *reason*: because God, who has the power of eternal life and death, requires it of us. But if an Hobbist be asked why; he will answer, because the public requires it, and the Leviathan² will punish you, if you do not. And if one of the old heathen philosophers³ had been asked, he would have answered: because it was dishonest, below the dignity of a man, and opposite to virtue, the highest perfection of human nature, to do otherwise.

§6. Hence naturally flows the great variety of opinions, concerning moral rules, which are to be found amongst men, according to the different sorts of happiness, they have a prospect of, or propose to themselves: which could not be, if practical principles were innate, and imprinted in our minds immediately by the hand of God. I grant the existence of God, is so many ways manifest, and the obedience we owe him, so congruous to the light of reason, that a great part of mankind give testimony to the law of nature: But yet I think it must be allowed, that several moral rules, may receive from mankind, a very general approbation, without either knowing, or admitting the true ground of morality; which can only be the will and law of a God, who sees men in the dark, has in his hand rewards and punishments, and power enough to call to account the proudest offender. For God, having, by an inseparable connexion, joined *virtue* and public happiness together; and made the practice thereof, necessary to the preservation of society, and visibly *beneficial* to all, with whom the virtuous man has to do; it is no wonder, that everyone should, not only allow, but recommend, and magnify those rules to others, from whose observance of them, he is sure

Instance in keeping compacts

Virtue generally approved, not because innate, but because profitable

to reap advantage to himself. He may, out of interest, as well as conviction, cry up that for sacred; which if once trampled on, and profaned, he himself cannot be safe nor secure. This, though it takes nothing from the moral and eternal obligation, which these rules evidently have; yet it shows that the outward acknowledgement men pay to them in their words, proves not that they are innate principles: nay, it proves not so much, as, that men assent to them inwardly in their own minds, as the inviolable rules of their own practice: since we find that self-interest and the conveniences of this life, make many men, own an outward profession and approbation of them, whose actions sufficiently prove, that they very little consider the law-giver, that prescribed these rules; nor the hell he has ordained for the punishment of those that transgress them.

Men's actions convince us, that the rule of virtue is not their internal principle

§7. For, if we will not in civility allow too much sincerity to the professions of most *men*, but think their actions to be the interpreters of their thoughts, we shall find, that they have *no* such internal veneration for these rules, nor so *full a persuasion of their certainty* and obligation. The great principle of morality, 'To do as one would be done to', is more commended, than practised. But the breach of this rule cannot be a greater vice, than to teach others, that it is no moral rule, nor obligatory, would be thought madness, and contrary to that interest men sacrifice to, when they break it themselves. Perhaps *conscience* will be urged as checking us for such breaches, and so the internal obligation and establishment of the rule be preserved.

Conscience no proof of any innate moral rule

§8. To which, I answer, that I doubt not, but without being written on their hearts, many men, may, by the same way that they come to the knowledge of other things, come to assent to several moral rules, and be convinced of their obligation. Others also may come to be of the same mind, from their education, company, and customs of their country; which *persuasion, however got, will serve to set conscience on work*, which is nothing else, but our own opinion or judgement of the moral rectitude or pravity⁴ of our own actions. And if conscience be a proof of innate principles, contraries may be innate principles: since some men, with the same bent of conscience, prosecute what others avoid.

Instances of enormities practised without remorse

§9. But I cannot see how any *men*, should ever *transgress* those *moral rules, with confidence, and serenity*, were they innate, and stamped upon their minds. View but an army at the sacking of a town, and see what observation, or sense of moral principles, or what touch of conscience, for all the outrages they do. *Robberies, murders,*

rapes, are the sports of men set at liberty from punishment and censure. Have there not been whole nations, and those of the most civilized people, amongst whom, the exposing their children, and leaving them in the fields, to perish by want or wild beasts, has been the practice, as little condemned or scrupled, as the begetting them? Do they not still, in some countries, put them into the same graves with their mothers, if they die in child-birth; or dispatch them, if a pretended astrologer declares them to have unhappy stars? And are there not places, where at a certain age, they kill, or expose their parents without any remorse at all? In a part of Asia, the sick, when their case comes to be thought desperate, are carried out and laid on the earth, before they are dead; and left there, exposed to wind and weather, to perish without assistance or pity.* It is familiar amongst the Mingrelians,⁵ a people professing Christianity, to bury their children alive without scruple.† There are places where they eat their own children.‡ The Caribes⁶ were wont to geld their children, on purpose to fat and eat them.§ And Garcilasso de la Vega tells us of a people in Peru, which were wont to fat and eat the children they got on their female captives, whom they kept as concubines for that purpose; and when they were past breeding, the mothers themselves were killed too and eaten.¶ The virtues, whereby the Tououpinambos⁷ believed they merited paradise, were revenge, and eating abundance of their enemies. || They have not so much as the name for God, Lery (page 216). No acknowledgement of any god, no religion, no worship (page 231). The saints, who are canonized amongst the Turks, lead lives, which one cannot with modesty relate. A remarkable passage to this purpose, out of the Voyage of Baumgarten,⁸ which is a book, not every day to be met with, I shall set down at large, in the language it is published in. ‘Ibi (*sc.* prope Belbes in Ægypto) vidimus sanctum unum Saracenicum inter arenarum cumulos, ita ut ex utero matris prodiit nudum sedentem. Mos est, ut didicimus, Mahometistis, ut eos qui amentes et sine ratione sunt, pro sanctis colant et venerentur. Insuper et eos qui cum diu vitam egerint iniquatissimam, voluntariam demum pœnitentiam et paupertatem, sanctitate venerandos deputant. Ejusmodi verò genus hominum libertatem quandam effrœnem habent, domos quas volunt intrandi, edendi, bibendi, et quod majus est, concumbendi; ex quo concubitu, si proles secuta fuerit,

* Gruber *apud* Thevenot,⁹ part 4. p. 13.

† Lambert *apud* Thevenot,⁹ p. 38.

‡ Vossius¹⁰ *de Nili Origine* c. 18, 19.

§ P. Mart.¹¹ Dec. 1.

¶ *Hist. des Incas*,¹² l. 1. c. 12.

|| Lery,¹³ p. 216.

sancta similiter habetur. His ergo hominibus, dum vivunt, magnos exhibent honores; mortuis verò vel templa vel monumenta extruunt amplissima, eosque contingere ac sepelire maximæ fortunæ ducunt loco. Audivimus hæc dicta et dicenda per interpretem à Mucrelo nostro. Insuper sanctum illum, quem eo loci vidimus, publicitus apprimè commendari, eum esse Hominem sanctum, divinum ac integritate præcipuum; eo quod, nec fæminarum unquam esset, nec puerorum, sed tantummodo asellarum concubitor atque mularum.¹⁴ (*Peregr.* Baumgarten, l. 2. c. 1, p. 73). More of the same kind, concerning these precious saints amongst the Turks, may be seen in Pietro della Valle,¹⁵ in his letter of the 25th of January, 1616. Where then are those innate principles, of justice, piety, gratitude, equity, chastity? Or, where is that universal consent, that assures us there are such inbred rules? Murders in duels, when fashion has made them honourable, are committed without remorse of conscience: nay, in many places, innocence in this case is the greatest ignominy. And if we look abroad, to take a view of men, as they are, we shall find, that they have remorse in one place, for doing or omitting that, which others, in another place, think they merit by.

Men have contrary practical principles §10. He that will carefully peruse the history of mankind, and look abroad into the several tribes of men, and with indifferency survey their actions, will be able to satisfy himself, that there is scarce that principle of morality to be named, or *rule of virtue* to be thought on (those only excepted, that are absolutely necessary to hold society together, which commonly too are neglected betwixt distinct societies) which is not, somewhere or other, *slighted* and condemned by the general fashion of *whole societies* of men, governed by practical opinions, and rules of living quite opposite to others.

Whole nations reject several moral rules §11. Here, perhaps, 'twill be objected, that it is no argument, that the *rule is not known, because it is broken*. I grant the objection good, where men, though they transgress, yet disown not the law; where fear of shame, censure, or punishment, carries the mark of some awe it has upon them. But it is impossible to conceive, that a *whole nation* of men should all *publicly reject* and renounce, what every one of them, certainly and infallibly, knew to be a law: for so they must, who have it naturally imprinted on their minds. 'Tis possible, men may sometimes own *rules of morality*, which, in their private thoughts, they do not believe to be true, only to keep themselves in reputation, and esteem amongst those, who are persuaded of their obligation. But 'tis not to be imagined, that a whole society of men, should publicly and professedly, disown, and cast off a rule,

which they could not, in their own minds, but be infallibly certain, was a law; nor be ignorant, that all men, they should have to do with, knew it to be such: and therefore must every one of them apprehend from others, all the contempt and abhorrence due to one, who professes himself void of humanity; and one, who confounding the known and natural measures of right and wrong, cannot but be looked on, as the professed enemy of their peace and happiness. Whatever practical principle is innate, cannot but be known to everyone, to be just and good. It is therefore little less than a contradiction, to suppose, that whole nations of men should both in their professions, and practice, unanimously and universally give the lie to what, by the most invincible evidence, every one of them knew to be true, right, and good. This is enough to satisfy us, that no practical rule, which is anywhere universally, and with public approbation, or allowance, transgressed, can be supposed innate. But I have something further to add, in answer to this objection.

§12. The breaking of a rule, say you, is no argument that it is unknown. I grant it: but the *generally allowed breach of it anywhere, I say, is a proof, that it is not innate*. For example, let us take any of these rules, which being the most obvious deductions of human reason, and conformable to the natural inclination of the greatest part of men, fewest people have had the impudence to deny, or inconsideration to doubt of. If any can be thought to be naturally imprinted, none, I think, can have a fairer pretence to be innate, than this; ‘parents preserve and cherish your children’. When therefore you say, that this is an innate rule, what do you mean? Either, that it is an innate principle which upon all occasions, excites and directs the actions of all men: or else, that it is a truth, which all men have imprinted on their minds, and which therefore they know, and assent to. But in neither of these senses is it innate. *First*, that it is not a principle, which influences all men’s actions, is, what I have proved by the examples before cited: nor need we seek so far as Mingrelia¹⁶ or Peru, to find instances of such as neglect, abuse, nay and destroy their children; or look on it only as the more than brutality of some savage and barbarous nations, when we remember, that it was a familiar, and uncondemned practice amongst the Greeks and Romans, to expose, without pity or remorse, their innocent infants. *Secondly*, that it is an innate truth, known to all men, is also false. For, ‘parents, preserve your children’, is so far from an innate truth, that it is no truth at all; it being a command, and not a proposition, and so not capable of truth or falsehood. To make it capable of being assented to as true, it must be reduced to some such

proposition as this: 'it is the duty of parents to preserve their children'. But what duty is, cannot be understood without a law; nor a law be known, or supposed without a law-maker, or without reward and punishment: so that it is impossible, that this, or any other practical principle should be innate; *i.e.* be imprinted on the mind as a duty, without supposing the ideas of God, of law, of obligation, of punishment, of a life after this, innate. For, that punishment follows not, in this life, the breach of this rule; and consequently, that it has not the force of a law in countries, where the generally allowed practice runs counter to it, is in itself evident. But these ideas (which must be all of them innate, if anything as a duty be so) are so far from being innate, that 'tis not every studious or thinking man, much less everyone that is born, in whom they are to be found clear and distinct: and that one of them, which of all others seems most likely to be innate, is not so, (I mean the idea of God) I think, in the next chapter, will appear very evident to any considering man.

§13. From what has been said, I think we may safely conclude, That, *whatever practical rule is, in any place, generally, and with allowance, broken, cannot be supposed innate*, it being impossible, that men should, without shame or fear, confidently, and serenely break a rule, which they could not but evidently know, that God had set up, and would certainly punish the breach of (which they must, if it were innate) to a degree to make it a very ill bargain to the transgressor. Without such a knowledge as this, a man can never be certain, that anything is his duty. Ignorance or doubt of the law; hopes to escape the knowledge or power of the law-maker, or the like, may make men give way to a present appetite: but let anyone see the fault, and the rod by it, and with the transgression, a fire ready to punish it; a pleasure tempting, and the hand of the Almighty visibly held up, and prepared to take vengeance (for this must be the case, where any duty is imprinted on the mind) and then tell me, whether it be possible, for people, with such a prospect, such a certain knowledge as this, wantonly, and without scruple, to offend against a law, which they carry about them in indelible characters, and that stares them in the face, whilst they are breaking it? Whether men, at the same time that they feel in themselves the imprinted edicts of an omnipotent law-maker, can, with assurance and gaiety, slight and trample underfoot his most sacred injunctions? And lastly, whether it be possible, that whilst a man thus openly bids defiance to this innate law, and supreme law-giver, all the bystanders; yea, even the governors and rulers of the people, full of the same sense, both of the law and law-maker, should silently

connive without testifying their dislike, or laying the least blame on it? Principles of actions indeed, there are lodged in men's appetites, but these are so far from being innate moral principles, that if they were left to their full swing, they would carry men to the overturning of all morality. Moral laws are set as a curb and restraint to these exorbitant desires, which they cannot be but by rewards and punishments, that will over-balance the satisfaction anyone shall propose to himself in the breach of the law. If therefore anything be imprinted on the mind of all men as a law, all men must have a certain and unavoidable knowledge, that certain, and unavoidable punishment will attend the breach of it. For if men can be ignorant or doubtful of what is innate, innate principles are insisted on, and urged, to no purpose; truth and certainty (the things pretended) are not at all secured by them: but men are in the same uncertain, floating estate with, as without them. An evident indubitable knowledge of unavoidable punishment, great enough to make the transgression very uneligible, must accompany an innate law: unless with an innate law, they can suppose an innate gospel too. I would not be here mistaken, as if, because I deny an innate law, I thought there were none but positive laws. There is a great deal of difference between an innate law, and a law of nature; between something imprinted on our minds in their very original, and something that we being ignorant of, may attain to the knowledge of, by the use and due application of our natural faculties. And I think they equally forsake the truth, who running into the contrary extremes, either affirm an innate law, or deny that there is a law, knowable by the light of nature; *i.e.* without the help of positive revelation.

§14. The difference there is amongst men in their practical principles, is so evident, that, I think, I need say no more to evince, that it will be impossible to find any innate moral rules, by this mark of general assent: And 'tis enough to make one suspect, that the supposition of such innate principles, is but an opinion taken up at pleasure; since those who talk so confidently of them, are so sparing to *tell us, which they are*. This might with justice be expected from those men, who lay stress upon this opinion: and it gives occasion to distrust either their knowledge or charity, who declaring, that God has imprinted on the minds of men, the foundations of knowledge, and the rules of living, are yet so little favourable to the information of their neighbours, or the quiet of mankind, as not to point out to them, which they are, in the variety men are distracted with. But in truth, were there

Those who maintain innate practical principles, tell us not what they are

any such innate principles, there would be no need to teach them. Did men find such innate propositions stamped on their minds, they would easily be able to distinguish them from other truths, that they afterwards learned, and deduced from them; and there would be nothing more easy, than to know what, and how many they were. There could be no more doubt about their number, than there is about the number of our fingers; and 'tis like then, every system would be ready to give them us by tale. But since nobody, that I know, has ventured yet to give a catalogue of them, they cannot blame those who doubt of these innate principles; since even they who require men to believe, that there are such innate propositions, do not tell us what they are. 'Tis easy to foresee, that if different men of different sects should go about to give us a list of those innate practical principles, they would set down only such as suited their distinct hypothesis, and were fit to support the doctrines of their particular schools or churches: a plain evidence, that there are no such innate truths. Nay, a great part of men are so far from finding any such innate moral principles in themselves, that by denying freedom to mankind; and thereby making men no other than bare machines, they take away not only innate, but all moral rules whatsoever, and leave not a possibility to believe any such, to those who cannot conceive, how anything can be capable of a law, that is not a free agent: and upon that ground, they must necessarily reject all principles of virtue, who cannot *put morality and mechanism together*; which are not very easy to be reconciled, or made consistent.

Lord Herbert's innate principles examined

§15. When I had writ this, being informed, that my Lord Herbert had in his books *de Veritate*,¹⁷ assigned these innate principles, I presently consulted him, hoping to find, in a man of so great parts, something that might satisfy me in this point, and put an end to my inquiry. In his chapter 'de Instinctu naturali',¹⁸ p. 76. *edit.* 1656. I met with these six marks of his *notitiæ communes*, 1. *Prioritas*. 2. *Independētia*. 3. *Universalitas*. 4. *Certitudo*. 5. *Necessitas*, i.e. as he explains it, *faciunt ad hominis conservationem*. 6. *Modus conformationis*, i.e. *Assensus nullà interposità morà*.¹⁹ And at the latter end of his little treatise, *De Religione Laici*,²⁰ he says this of these innate principles: 'Adeo ut non uniuscujusvis Religionis confinio arcentur quæ ubique vigent veritates. Sunt enim in ipsà mente cœlitùs descriptæ nullisque traditionibus, sive scriptis, sive non scriptis, obnoxia' (p. 3). And, 'Veritates nostræ Catholicæ, quæ tanquam indubia Dei effata in foro interiori descripta.'²¹ Thus having given the marks of the innate principles or common notions, and asserted their being imprinted on the minds of

men by the hand of God, he proceeds to set them down; and they are these: 1. *Esse aliquod supremum numen.* 2. *Numen illud coli debere.* 3. *Virtutem cum pietate conjunctam optimam esse rationem cultus divini.* 4. *Resipiscendum esse à peccatis.* 5. *Dari premium vel pœnam post hanc vitam transactam.*²² Though I allow these to be clear truths, and such as, if rightly explained, a rational creature can hardly avoid giving his assent to: yet I think he is far from proving them innate impressions *in foro interiori descriptæ.*²³ For I must take leave to observe,

§16. First, that these five propositions are either not all, or more than all, those common notions writ on our minds by the finger of God, if it were reasonable to believe any at all to be so written. Since there are other propositions, which even by his own rules, have as just a pretence to such an original, and may be as well admitted for innate principles, as, at least, some of these five he enumerates, *viz.* ‘do as thou wouldst be done unto’: and, perhaps, some hundreds of others, when well considered.

§17. Secondly, that all his marks are not to be found in each of his five propositions, *viz.* his first, second, and third marks, agree perfectly to neither of them; and the first, second, third, fourth, and sixth marks, agree but ill to his third, fourth, and fifth propositions. For, besides that, we are assured from history, of many men, nay, whole nations, who doubt or disbelieve some or all of them; I cannot see how the third, *viz.* ‘that virtue joined with piety, is the best worship of God’, can be an innate principle, when the name, or sound *virtue*, is so hard to be understood; liable to so much uncertainty in its signification; and the thing it stands for, so much contended about, and difficult to be known. And therefore this can be but a very uncertain rule of human practice, and serve but very little to the conduct of our lives, and is therefore very unfit to be assigned as an innate practical principle.

§18. For let us consider this proposition as to its meaning, (for it is the sense, and not sound, that is, and must be the principle or common notion) *viz.* ‘virtue is the best worship of God’; i.e. is most acceptable to him; which if *virtue* be taken, as most commonly it is, for those actions, which according to the different opinions of several countries, are accounted laudable, will be a proposition so far from being certain, that it will not be true. If *virtue* be taken for actions conformable to God’s will, or to the rule prescribed by God, which is the true and only measure of virtue, when virtue is used to signify what is in its own nature right and good; then this proposition, ‘that virtue is the best worship of God’, will be most true and certain, but of very little use in human life: since it will amount to no more but this, *viz.* ‘that God is pleased with the doing of what he commands’; which a man

may certainly know to be true, without knowing what it is, that God doth command; and so be as far from any rule or principles of his actions, as he was before: and I think very few will take a proposition which amounts to no more than this, *viz.* that God is pleased with the doing of what he himself commands, for an innate moral principle writ on the minds of all men, (however true and certain it may be) since it teaches so little. Whosoever does so, will have reason to think hundreds of propositions, innate principles, since there are many, which have as good a title, as this, to be received for such, which nobody yet ever put into that rank of innate principles.

§19. Nor is the fourth proposition *viz.* 'men must repent of their sins', much more instructive, till what those actions are, that are meant by sins, be set down. For the word *peccata*, or *sins*, being put, as it usually is, to signify in general ill actions, that will draw on punishment upon the doers: what great principle of morality can that be, to tell us we should be sorry, and cease to do that, which will bring mischief upon us, without knowing what those particular actions are, that will do so? Indeed, this is a very true proposition, and fit to be inculcated on, and received by those, who are supposed, to have been taught, what actions in all kinds are *sins*; but neither this, nor the former, can be imagined to be innate principles; nor to be of any use, if they were innate, unless the particular measures and bounds of all virtues and vices, were engraven in men's minds, and were innate principles also, which, I think, is very much to be doubted. And therefore, I imagine, it will scarce seem possible, that God should engrave principles in men's minds, in words of uncertain signification, such as *virtues* and *sins*, which amongst different men, stand for different things: nay, it cannot be supposed to be in words at all, which, being in most of these principles very general names, cannot be understood, but by knowing the particulars comprehended under them. And in the practical instances, the measures must be taken from the knowledge of the actions themselves, and the rules of them abstracted from words, and antecedent to the knowledge of names; which rules a man must know, what language soever he chance to learn, whether English or Japan, or if he should learn no language at all, or never should understand the use of words, as happens in the case of dumb and deaf men. When it shall be made out, that men ignorant of words, or untaught by the laws and customs of their country, know that it is part of the worship of God, not to kill another man; not to know more women than one; not to procure abortion; not to expose their children; not to take from another what is his, though we want it ourselves, but on the contrary,

relieve and supply his wants; and whenever we have done the contrary, we ought to repent, be sorry, and resolve to do so no more: when, I say, all men shall be proved actually to know, and allow all these and a thousand other such rules, all which come under these two general words made use of above, *viz. virtutes et peccata, virtues and sins*, there will be more reason for admitting these, and the like, for common notions, and practical principles; yet after all, universal consent (were there any in moral principles) to truths, the knowledge whereof may be attained otherwise, would scarce prove them to be innate; which is all I contend for.

§20. Nor will it be of much moment here, to offer that very ready, but not very material answer, *viz. That the innate principles of morality, may, by education, and custom, and the general opinion of those, amongst whom we converse, be darkened, and at last quite worn out of the minds of men.* Which assertion of theirs, if true, quite takes away the argument of universal consent, by which this opinion of innate principles is endeavoured to be proved; unless those men will think it reasonable, that their private persuasions, or that of their party, should pass for universal consent; a thing not unfrequently done, when men presuming themselves to be the only masters of right reason, cast by the votes and opinions of the rest of mankind, as not worthy the reckoning. And then their argument stands thus: the principles which all mankind allow for true, are innate; those that men of right reason admit, are the principles allowed by all mankind; we and those of our mind, are men of reason; therefore we agreeing, our principles are innate: which is a very pretty way of arguing, and a short cut to infallibility. For otherwise it will be very hard to understand, how there be some principles, which all men do acknowledge, and agree in; and yet there are none of those *principles*, which are *not by depraved custom, and ill education, blotted out* of the minds of many men: which is to say, that all men admit, but yet many men do deny, and dissent from them. And indeed the supposition of such first principles, will serve us to very little purpose; and we shall be as much at a loss with, as without them, if they may by any human power, such as is the will of our teachers, or opinions of our companions, be altered or lost in us: and notwithstanding all this boast of first principles, and innate light, we shall be as much in the dark and uncertainty, as if there were no such thing at all: it being all one to have no rule, and one that will warp any way; or amongst various and contrary rules, not to know which is the right. But concerning innate principles, I desire these men to say, whether they can

Objection. *Innate principles may be corrupted, answered*

or cannot, by education and custom, be blurred and blotted out: if they cannot, we must find them in all mankind alike, and they must be clear in everybody: and if they may suffer variation from adventitious notions, we must then find them clearest and most perspicuous, nearest the fountain, in children and illiterate people, who have received least impression from foreign opinions. Let them take which side they please, they will certainly find it inconsistent with visible matter of fact, and daily observation.

*Contrary principles
in the world* §21. I easily grant, that there are great numbers of *opinions*, which, by men of different countries, educations, and tempers, are received and *embraced as first and unquestionable principles; many whereof*, both for their absurdity, as well as oppositions one to another, *it is impossible should be true*. But yet all those propositions, how remote soever from reason, are so sacred somewhere or other, that men even of good understanding in other matters, will sooner part with their lives, and whatever is dearest to them, than suffer themselves to doubt, or others to question, the truth of them.

*How men commonly
come by their principles* §22. This, however strange it may seem, is that which every day's experience confirms; and will not, perhaps, appear so wonderful, if we consider the *ways*, and steps *by which* it is brought about; and how really it may come to pass, that *doctrines*, that have been derived from no better original, than the superstition of a nurse, or the authority of an old woman; may, by length of time, and consent of neighbours, *grow up to the dignity of principles* in religion or morality. For such, who are careful (as they call it) to principle children well, (and few there be who have not a set of those principles for them, which they believe in) instil into the unwary, and, as yet, unprejudiced understanding, (for white paper receives any characters) those doctrines they would have them retain and profess. These being taught them as soon as they have any apprehension; and still as they grow up, confirmed to them, either by the open profession, or tacit consent, of all they have to do with; or at least by those, of whose wisdom, knowledge, and piety, they have an opinion, who never suffer those propositions to be otherwise mentioned, but as the basis and foundation, on which they build their religion or manners, come, by these means to have the reputation of unquestionable, self-evident, and innate truths.

§23. To which we may add, that when *men*, so instructed, are grown up, and reflect on their own minds, they cannot find anything more ancient there, than those opinions, which were taught them, before their memory

began to keep a register of their actions, or date the time, when any new thing appeared to them; and therefore make no scruple to *conclude, that those propositions, of whose knowledge they can find in themselves no original, were certainly the impress of God and nature* upon their minds; and not taught them by anyone else. These they entertain and submit to, as many do to their parents, with veneration; not because it is natural; nor do children do it, where they are not so taught; but because, having been always so educated, and having no remembrance of the beginning of this respect, they think it is natural.

§24. This will appear very likely, and almost unavoidable to come to pass, if we consider the nature of mankind, and the constitution of human affairs; wherein *most men cannot live, without employing their time in the daily labours of their callings; nor be at quiet in their minds, without some foundation or principles to rest their thoughts on.* There is scarce anyone so floating and superficial in his understanding, who hath not some revered propositions, which are to him the principles on which he bottoms his reasonings; and by which he judgeth of truth and falsehood, right and wrong; which some, wanting skill and leisure, and others the inclination, and some being taught, that they ought not, to examine; there are few to be found, who are not exposed by their ignorance, laziness, education, or precipitancy, to *take them upon trust.*

§25. This is evidently the case of all children and young folk; and custom, a greater power than nature, seldom failing to make them worship for divine, what she hath inured them to bow their minds, and submit their understandings to, it is no wonder, that grown *men*, either perplexed in the necessary affairs of life, or hot in the pursuit of pleasures, should *not* seriously sit down to *examine their own tenets*; especially when one of their principles is, That principles ought not to be questioned. And had men leisure, parts, and will, who is there almost, that dare shake the foundations of all his past thoughts and actions, and endure to bring upon himself, the shame of having been a long time wholly in mistake and error? Who is there, hardy enough to contend with the reproach, which is everywhere prepared for those, who dare venture to dissent from the received opinions of their country or party? And where is the man to be found, that can patiently prepare himself to bear the name of whimsical, sceptical, or atheist, which he is sure to meet with, who does in the least scruple any of the common opinions? And he will be much more *afraid to question those principles*, when he shall think them, as most men do, the standards set up by God in his mind, to be the rule and touchstone of all other opinions. And what can

hinder him from thinking them sacred, when he finds them the earliest of all his own thoughts, and the most revered by others?

§26. It is easy to imagine, *how* by these means it comes to pass, that *men* worship the idols²⁴ that have been set up in their minds; grow fond of the notions they have been long acquainted with there; and *stamp the characters of divinity, upon absurdities and errors*, become zealous votaries²⁵ to bulls and monkeys; and contend too, fight, and die in defence of their opinions. ‘Dum solos credit habendos esse Deos, quos ipse colit.’²⁶ For since the reasoning faculties of the soul, which are almost constantly, though not always warily nor wisely employed, would not know how to move, for want of a foundation and footing, in most men, who through laziness or avocation, do not; or for want of time, or true helps, or for other causes, cannot, penetrate into the principles of knowledge, and trace truth to its fountain and original, ’tis natural for them, and almost unavoidable, to take up with some borrowed principles; which being reputed and presumed to be the evident proofs of other things, are thought not to need any other proof themselves. Whoever shall receive any of these into his mind, and entertain them there, with the reverence usually paid to principles, never venturing to examine them; but accustoming himself to believe them, because they are to be believed, may take up from his education, and the fashions of his country, any absurdity for innate principles; and by long poring on the same objects, so dim his sight, as to take monsters lodged in his own brain, for the images of the Deity, and the workmanship of his hands.

Principles must be examined §27. By this progress, how many there are, who arrive at principles, which they believe innate, may be easily observed, in the variety of opposite principles, held, and contended for, by all sorts and degrees of men. And he that shall deny this to be the method, wherein most men proceed to the assurance they have, of the truth and evidence of their principles, will perhaps, find it a hard matter, any other way to account for the contrary tenets, which are firmly believed, confidently asserted, and which great numbers are ready at any time to seal with their blood. And, indeed, if it be the privilege of innate principles, to be received upon their own authority, without examination, I know not what may not be believed, or how anyone’s *principles* can be questioned. If they may, and *ought to be examined*, and tried, I desire to know how first and innate principles can be tried; or at least it is reasonable to demand the marks and characters, whereby the genuine, innate principles, may be distinguished from others; that so, amidst the great variety of pretenders, I may be kept from mistakes,

in so material a point as this. When this is done, I shall be ready to embrace such welcome, and useful propositions; and till then I may with modesty doubt, since I fear universal consent, which is the only one produced, will scarce prove a sufficient mark to direct my choice, and assure me of any innate principles. From what has been said, I think it past doubt, that there are no practical principles wherein all men agree; and therefore none innate.

CHAPTER IV

*Other Considerations concerning Innate Principles,
both Speculative and Practical*

§1. Had those, who would persuade us, that there are innate principles, not taken them together in gross; but considered, separately, the parts, out of which those propositions are made, they would not, perhaps, have been so forward to believe they were innate. Since, if the ideas, which made up those truths, were not, it was impossible, that the propositions, made up of them, should be innate, or our knowledge of them be born with us. For if the ideas be not *innate*, there was a time, when the mind was without those principles; and then, they will not be innate, but be derived from some other original. For, where the ideas themselves are not, there can be no knowledge, no assent, no mental, or verbal propositions about them.

*Principles not innate,
unless their ideas be
innate*

§2. If we will attentively consider new-born *children*, we shall have little reason to think, that they bring many ideas into the world with them. For, bating,¹ perhaps, some faint ideas, of hunger, and thirst, and warmth, and some pains, which they may *have* felt in the womb, there is *not* the least appearance of any settled ideas at all in them; especially of *ideas, answering the terms, which make up those universal propositions*, that are esteemed innate principles. One may perceive how, by degrees, afterwards, ideas come into their minds; and that they get no more, nor no other, than what experience, and the observation of things, that come in their way, furnish them with; which might be enough

*Ideas, especially those
belonging to principles,
not born with
children*

to satisfy us, that they are not original characters, stamped on the mind.

§3. 'It is impossible for the same thing to be, and not to be', is certainly (if there be any such) an innate principle. But can anyone think, or will anyone say, that *impossibility* and *identity*, are two innate ideas? Are they such as all mankind have, and bring into the world with them? And are they those, that are the first in children, and antecedent to all acquired ones? If they are innate, they must needs be so. Hath a child an idea of *impossibility* and *identity*, before it has of *white* or *black*; *sweet* or *bitter*? And is it from the knowledge of this principle, that it concludes, that wormwood² rubbed on the nipple, hath not the same taste, that it used to receive from thence? Is it the actual knowledge of 'impossibile est idem esse, et non esse',³ that makes a child distinguish between its mother and a stranger; or, that makes it fond of the one, and fly the other? Or does the mind regulate itself, and its assent by ideas, that it never yet had? Or the understanding draw conclusions from principles, which it never yet knew or understood? The names *impossibility* and *identity*, stand for two ideas, so *far from being innate*, or born with us, that I think it requires great care and attention, to form them right in our understandings. They are so far from being brought into the world with us; so remote from the thoughts of infancy and childhood, that, I believe, upon examination, it will be found, that many grown men want them.

*Identity, an idea
not innate*

§4. If *identity* (to instance in that alone) be a native impression; and consequently so clear and obvious to us, that we must needs know it even from our cradles; I would gladly be resolved, by one of seven, or seventy years old, whether a man, being a creature, consisting of soul and body, be the same man, when his body is changed? Whether Euphorbus and Pythagoras, having had the same soul, were the same man, though they lived several ages asunder? Nay, whether the cock too, which had the same soul, were not the same with both of them?⁴ Whereby, perhaps, it will appear, that our *idea of sameness*, is *not* so settled and clear, as to deserve to be thought *innate* in us. For if those innate ideas, are not clear and distinct, so as to be universally known, and naturally agreed on, they cannot be subjects of universal, and undoubted truths; but will be the unavoidable occasion of perpetual uncertainty. For, I suppose, everyone's idea of *identity*, will not be the same, that Pythagoras, and thousands others of his followers, have: and which then shall be the true? Which innate? Or are there two different ideas of *identity*, both innate?

§5. Nor let anyone think, that the questions, I have here proposed, about

the *identity* of man, are bare, empty speculations; which if they were, would be enough to show, that there was in the understandings of men *no innate idea of identity*. He, that shall, with a little attention, reflect on the resurrection, and consider, that divine justice shall bring to judgement, at the last day, the very same persons, to be happy or miserable in the other, who did well or ill in this life, will find it perhaps, not easy to resolve with himself, what makes the same man, or wherein *identity* consists: and will not be forward to think he, and everyone, even children themselves, have naturally a clear idea of it.

§6. Let us examine that principle of mathematics, *viz.* ‘that the whole is bigger than a part’. This, I take it, is reckoned amongst innate principles. I am sure it has as good a title, as any, to be thought so; which yet, nobody can think it to be, when he considers the ideas it comprehends in it, *whole* and *part*, are perfectly relative; but the positive ideas, to which they properly and immediately belong, are extension and number, of which alone, *whole* and *part*, are relations. So that if *whole* and *part* are innate ideas, extension and number must be so too, it being impossible to have an idea of a relation, without having any at all of the thing to which it belongs, and in which it is founded. Now, whether the minds of men have naturally imprinted on them the ideas of extension and number, I leave to be considered by those, who are the patrons of innate principles.

§7. That ‘God is to be worshipped’, is, without doubt, as great a truth as any can enter into the mind of man, and deserves the first place amongst all practical principles. But yet, it can by no means be thought innate, unless the ideas of *God*, and *worship*, are innate. That the idea, the term *worship* stands for, is not in the understanding of children, and a character stamped on the mind in its first original, I think, will be easily granted, by anyone, that considers how few there be, amongst grown men, who have a clear and distinct notion of it. And, I suppose, there cannot be anything more ridiculous, than to say, that children have this practical principle innate, ‘that God is to be worshipped’; and yet, that they know not what that worship of God is, which is their duty. But to pass by this.

§8. If any idea can be imagined *innate*, the *idea of God* may, of all others, for many reasons, be thought so; since it is hard to conceive, how there should be innate moral principles, without an innate idea of a *Deity*: without a notion of a law-maker, it is impossible to have a

notion of a law, and an obligation to observe it. Besides the atheists, taken notice of amongst the ancients, and left branded upon the records of history, hath not navigation discovered, in these latter ages, whole nations, at the Bay of Soldania^{5*} in Brasil,† in Boranday,^{6‡} and the Caribee Islands,⁷ *etc.* amongst whom there was to be found no notion of a God, no religion. Nicolaus del Techo¹⁴ *in literis, ex Paraquaria de Caaiguarum conversione*, has these words§: ‘Reperi eam gentem nullum nomen habere, quod Deum, et Hominis animam significet, nulla sacra habet, nulla Idola.’¹⁵ These are instances of nations where uncultivated nature has been left to itself, without the help of letters, and discipline, and the improvements of arts and sciences. But there are others to be found, who have enjoyed these in a very great measure, who yet, for want of a due application of their thoughts this way, want the idea, and knowledge of God. ’Twill I doubt not be a surprise to others, as it was to me, to find the Siamites¹⁶ of this number. But for this, let them consult the King of France’s late envoy thither,¶ who gives no better account of the Chinese themselves. || And if we will not believe La Loubere,¹⁷ the missionaries of China, even the Jesuits themselves, the great encomiasts¹⁸ of the Chinese, do all to a man agree and will convince us that the sect of the Litterati, or Learned, keeping to the old religion of China, and the ruling party there, are all of them atheist. *Vid.* Navarette¹⁹ in the Collection of Voyages, vol. the first, and *Historia cultus Sinensium*.²⁰ And, perhaps, if we should, with attention, mind the lives, and discourses of people not so far off, we should have too much reason to fear, that many, in more civilized countries, have no very strong, and clear impressions of a deity upon their minds; and that the complaints of atheism, made from the pulpit, are not without reason. And though only some profligate wretches own it too barefacedly now; yet, perhaps, we should hear, more than we do, of it, from others, did not the fear of the magistrate’s sword,²¹ or their neighbour’s censure, tie up people’s tongues; which, were the apprehensions of punishment, or shame taken away, would as openly proclaim their atheism, as their lives do.^B

§9. But had all mankind, everywhere, a *notion of a God*, (whereof yet

*Rhoe⁹ *apud* Thevenot,⁹ p. 2.

†Jo. de Lery,¹⁰ c. 16.

‡Martiniere¹¹ $\frac{201}{322}$. Terry¹² $\frac{17}{545}$ & $\frac{23}{545}$. Ovington¹³ $\frac{489}{606}$.

§*Relatio triplex de rebus Indicis Caaiguarum* $\frac{43}{70}$.

¶*La Loubere du Royaume de Siam*. T. 1. c. 9. sect. 15. & c. 20. sect. 22. & c. 22. sect. 6.

||*Ib.* T. 1. c. 20. sect. 4. & c. 23.

history tells us the contrary) it would *not* from thence follow, that the idea of him was *innate*. For, though no nation were to be found without a name, and some few dark notions of him; yet that would not prove them to be natural impressions on the mind, no more than the names of fire, or the Sun, heat, or number, do prove the ideas they stand for, to be innate, because the names of those things, and the ideas of them, are so universally received, and known amongst mankind. Nor on the contrary, is the want of such a name, or the absence of such a notion out of men's minds, any argument against the being of a God, any more, than it would be a proof, that there was no loadstone²² in the world, because a great part of mankind, had neither a notion of any such thing, nor a name for it; or be any show of argument to prove, that there are no distinct and various species of angels,²³ or intelligent beings above us, because we have no ideas of such distinct species, or names for them: for men being furnished with words, by the common language of their own countries, can scarce avoid having some kind of ideas of those things, whose names, those they converse with, have occasion frequently to mention to them: and if it carry with it the notion of excellency, greatness, or something extraordinary; if apprehension and concernment accompany it; if the fear of absolute and irresistible power set it upon the mind, the idea is likely to sink the deeper, and spread the further; especially if it be such an idea, as is agreeable to the common light of reason, and naturally deducible from every part of our knowledge, as that of a God is. For the visible marks of extraordinary wisdom and power, appear so plainly in all the works of the creation, that a rational creature, who will but seriously reflect on them, cannot miss the discovery of a *Deity*: and the influence, that the discovery of such a being must necessarily have on the minds of all, that have but once heard of it, is so great, and carries such a weight of thought and communication with it, that it seems stranger to me, that a whole nation of men should be anywhere found so brutish, as to want the notion of a God; than that they should be without any notion of numbers, or fire.

§10. The name of God being once mentioned in any part of the world, to express a superior, powerful, wise, invisible being, the suitableness of such a notion to the principles of common reason, and the interest men will always have to mention it often, must necessarily spread it far and wide; and continue it down to all generations: though yet the *general reception of this name, and some imperfect and unsteady notions, conveyed thereby*, to the unthinking part of mankind, *prove not the idea to be innate*; but only that they,

who made the discovery, had made a right use of their reason, thought maturely of the causes of things, and traced them to their original; from whom other less considering people, having once received so important a notion, it could not easily be lost again.

§11. This is all could be inferred from the notion of a *God*, were it to be found universally in all the tribes of mankind, and generally acknowledged, by men grown to maturity in all countries. For the generality of the acknowledging of a *God*, as I imagine, is extended no further than that; which if it be sufficient to prove the *idea of God, innate*, will as well prove the idea of fire, innate; since, I think, it may truly be said, that there is not a person in the world, who has a notion of a *God*, who has not also the idea of fire. I doubt not, but if a colony of young children should be placed in an island, where no fire was, they would certainly neither have any notion of such a thing, nor name for it, how generally soever it were received, and known in all the world besides; and perhaps too, their apprehensions would be as far removed from any name, or notion of a *God*, till some one amongst them had employed his thoughts, to inquire into the constitution and causes of things, which would easily lead him to the notion of a *God*; which having once taught to others, reason, and the natural propensity of their own thoughts, would afterwards propagate, and continue amongst them.

Suitable to GOD's goodness, that all men should have an idea of Him, therefore naturally imprinted by Him; answered

§12. Indeed it is urged, that it is *suitable to the goodness of God, to imprint, upon the minds of men, characters and notions of himself*, and not to leave them in the dark, and doubt, in so grand a concernment; and also by that means, to secure to himself the homage and veneration, due from so intelligent a creature as man; and therefore he has done it.

This argument, if it be of any force, will prove much more than those, who use it in this case, expect from it. For if we may conclude, that *God* hath done for men, all that men shall judge is best for them, because it is suitable to his goodness so to do, it will prove, not only, that *God* has imprinted on the minds of men an idea of himself; but that he hath plainly stamped there, in fair characters, all that men ought to know, or believe of him, all that they ought to do in obedience to his will; and that he hath given them a will and affections conformable to it. This, no doubt, everyone will think it better for men, than that they should, in the dark, grope after knowledge, as St Paul tells us all nations did after *God*, *Acts XVII.27*, than that their wills should clash with their understandings, and their appetites cross their duty. The Romanists²⁴ say, 'tis best for men, and so suitable to

the goodness of God, that there should be an infallible judge of controversies on Earth; and therefore there is one: and I, by the same reason, say, 'tis better for men that every man himself should be infallible. I leave them to consider, whether by the force of this argument they shall think, that every man is so. I think it a very good argument, to say, the infinitely wise God hath made it so: and therefore it is best. But it *seems to me a little too much confidence of our own wisdom, to say, I think it best, and therefore God hath made it so;* and in the matter in hand, it will be in vain to argue from such a topic, that God hath done so, when certain experience shows us, that he hath not. But the goodness of God hath not been wanting to men without such original impressions of knowledge, or ideas stamped on the mind: since he hath furnished man with those faculties, which will serve for the sufficient discovery of all things requisite to the end of such a being; and I doubt not but to show that a man by the right use of his natural abilities, may, without any innate principles, attain the knowledge of a God, and other things that concern him. God having endued man with those faculties of knowing which he hath, was no more obliged by his goodness, to implant those innate notions in his mind, than that having given him reason, hands, and materials, he should build him bridges, or houses, which some people in the world, however of good parts, do either totally want, or are but ill provided of, as well as others are wholly without *ideas of God*, and principles of morality; or at least have but very ill ones. The reason in both cases being, that they never employed their parts, faculties, and powers, industriously that way, but contented themselves with the opinions, fashions, and things, of their country, as they found them, without looking any further. Had you or I been born at the Bay of Soldania,²⁵ possibly our thoughts, and notions, had not exceeded those brutish ones of the Hottentots²⁶ that inhabit there: and had the Virginia King Apochancana,²⁷ been educated in England, he had, perhaps, been as knowing a divine, and as good a mathematician, as any in it. The difference between him, and a more improved Englishman, lying barely in this, that exercise of his faculties was bounded within the ways, modes, and notions of his own country, and never directed to any other, or further inquiries: and if he had not any idea of a God, it was only because he pursued not those thoughts, that would have led him to it.

§13. I grant, that *if there were any ideas to be found imprinted on the minds of men, we have reason to expect, it should be the notion of his maker,* as a mark GOD set on his own workmanship,

*Ideas of GOD
various in
different men*

to mind man of his dependence and duty; and that herein should appear the first instances of human knowledge. But how late is it before any such notion is discoverable in children? And when we find it there, how much more does it resemble the opinion, and notion of the teacher, than represent the true God? He that shall observe in children, the progress whereby their minds attain the knowledge they have, will think, that the objects they do first, and most familiarly converse with, are those that make the first impressions on their understandings: nor will he find the least footsteps of any other. It is easy to take notice, how their thoughts enlarge themselves, only as they come to be acquainted with a greater variety of sensible objects, to retain the ideas of them in their memories; and to get the skill to compound and enlarge them, and several ways put them together. How by these means they come to frame in their minds an idea men have of a deity, I shall hereafter show.

§14. Can it be thought, that the ideas men have of God, are the characters, and marks of himself, engraven in their minds by his own finger, when we see, that in the same country, under one and the same name, *men have far different*, nay, often *contrary and inconsistent ideas* and conceptions *of him*? Their agreeing in a name, or sound, will scarce prove an innate notion of Him.

§15. What true or tolerable notion of a *deity*, could they have, who acknowledged, and worshipped hundreds? Every deity, that they owned above one, was an infallible evidence of their ignorance of Him, and a proof, that they had no true notion of God, where unity, infinity, and eternity, were excluded. To which if we add their gross conceptions of corporeity, expressed in their images, and representations of their deities; the amours, marriages, copulations, lusts, quarrels, and other mean qualities, attributed by them to their gods; we shall have little reason to think, that the heathen world, *i.e.* the greatest part of mankind, had such ideas of God in their minds, as he himself, out of care, that they should not be mistaken about him, was author of. And this universality of consent, so much argued, if it prove any native impressions, 'twill be only this: that God imprinted on the minds of all men, speaking the same language, a name for Himself, but not any idea: since those people, who agreed in the name, had at the same time, far different apprehensions about the thing signified. If they say, that the variety of deities worshipped by the heathen world, were but figurative ways of expressing the several attributes of that incomprehensible being, or several parts of his providence: I answer, what they might be in

their original, I will not here inquire; but that they were so in the thoughts of the vulgar, I think nobody will affirm: and he that will consult the voyage of the Bishop of Beryte,²⁸ c. 13. (not to mention other testimonies) will find, that the theology of the Siamites, professedly owns a plurality of gods: or, as the Abbé de Choisy more judiciously remarks, in his journal *du Voyage de Siam*,²⁹ $\frac{107}{177}$, it consists properly in acknowledging no God at all.

§15.³⁰ If it be said, that *wise men* of all nations came to *have true conceptions* of the unity and infinity of the Deity, I grant it. But then this,

First, excludes universality of consent in anything, but the name, for those wise men being very few, perhaps one of a thousand, this universality is very narrow.

Secondly, it seems to me plainly to prove, that the truest and best notions men had of God, were not imprinted, but acquired by thought and meditation, and a right use of their faculties: since the wise and considerate men of the world, by a right and careful employment of their thoughts and reason, attained true notions in this, as well as other things; whilst the lazy and inconsiderate part of men, making the far greater number, took up their notions, by chance, from common tradition and vulgar conceptions, without much beating their heads about them. And if it be a reason to think *the notion of God innate*, because all wise men had it, virtue too must be thought innate; for that also wise men have always had.

§16. This was evidently the case of all Gentilism: nor hath even amongst Jews, Christians, and Mahometans,³¹ who acknowledge but One God, this doctrine, and the care is taken in those nations to teach men, to have true notions of a GOD, prevailed so far, as to make men to have the same, and true ideas of Him. How many, even amongst us, will be found upon inquiry, to fancy him in the shape of a man, sitting in heaven; and to have many other absurd and unfit conceptions of him? Christians, as well as Turks, have had whole sects owning, and contending earnestly for it, that the Deity was corporeal, and of human shape: and though we find few amongst us, who profess themselves anthropomorphites,³² (though some I have met with, that own it) yet, I believe, he that will make it his business, may find amongst the ignorant, and uninstructed Christians, many of that opinion. Talk but with country-people, almost of any age; or young people, almost of any condition, and you shall find, that though the name of GOD be frequently in their mouths; yet the notions they apply this name to, are so odd, low, and pitiful, that nobody can imagine, they were taught by a rational man; much less, that they were characters writ by the finger of

God Himself. Nor do I see how it derogates more from the goodness of God, that he has given us minds unfurnished with these ideas of Himself, than that he hath sent us into the world, with bodies unclothed; and that there is no art or skill born with us. For being fitted with faculties to attain these, it is want of industry, and consideration in us, and not of bounty in Him, if we have them not. 'Tis as certain, that there is a God, as that the opposite angles, made by the intersection of two straight lines, are equal. There was never any rational creature, that set himself sincerely to examine the truth of these propositions, that could fail to assent to them: though yet be past doubt, that there are many men, who having not applied their thoughts that way, are ignorant both of the one and the other. If anyone think fit to call this (which is the utmost of its extent) universal consent, such an one I easily allow: but such an universal consent as this, proves not the idea of *God*, no more than it does the idea of such angles, *innate*.

*If the idea of GOD
be not innate, no
other can be supposed
innate*

§17. Since then though the knowledge of a GOD, be the most natural discovery of human reason, yet *the idea of him*, is *not innate*, as, I think, is evident from what has been said; I imagine there will be scarce any other idea found, that

can pretend to it: since if God had set any impression, any character on the understanding of men, it is most reasonable to expect it should have been some clear and uniform idea of Himself, as far as our weak capacities were capable to receive so incomprehensible and infinite an object. But our minds being, at first, void of that idea, which we are most concerned to have, it is *a strong presumption against all other innate characters*. I must own, as far as I can observe, I can find none, and would be glad to be informed by any other.

*Idea of substance
not innate*

§18. I confess, there is another idea which would be of general use for mankind to have, as it is of general talk, as if they had it; and that is the *idea of substance*, which we neither have, nor can have, by *sensation* or *reflection*. If nature took care to provide us any ideas, we might well expect it should be such, as by our own faculties we cannot procure to ourselves: but we see on the contrary, that since by those ways, whereby other ideas are brought into our minds, this is not, we have no such *clear* idea at all, and therefore signify nothing by the word *substance*, but only an uncertain supposition of we know not what (*i.e.* of something whereof we have no particular distinct positive) idea, which we take to be the *substratum*, or support, of those ideas, we do know.

§19. Whatever then we talk of innate, either *speculative*, or *practical principles*, it may, with as much probability, be said, that a man hath 100 *l.* sterling in his pocket, and yet denied, that he hath either penny, shilling, crown, or any other coin, out of which the sum is to be made up; as to think, that certain propositions are innate, when the ideas about which they are, can by no means be supposed to be so. The general reception and assent that is given, doth *not* at all prove, that the ideas expressed in them, are *innate*: for in many cases, however the ideas came there, the assent to words expressing the agreement, or disagreement, of such ideas, will necessarily follow. Everyone that hath a true idea of *God*, and *worship*, will assent to this proposition, that God is to be worshipped, when expressed, in a language he understands: and every rational man, that hath not thought on it today, may be ready to assent to this proposition tomorrow; and yet millions of men may be well supposed to want one, or both, those ideas today. For if we will allow savages, and most country-people, to have ideas of *God* and *worship* (which conversation with them, will not make one forward to believe) yet I think, few children can be supposed, to have those ideas which therefore they must begin to have sometime or other; and then they will also begin to assent to that proposition, and make very little question of it ever after. But such an assent upon hearing, no more proves the ideas to be innate, than it does, that one born blind (with cataracts, which will be couched³³ tomorrow) had the innate ideas of the Sun, or light, or saffron, or yellow; because when his sight is cleared, he will certainly assent to this proposition, that the Sun is lucid, or that saffron is yellow: and therefore if such an assent upon hearing, cannot prove the ideas innate, it can much less the propositions made up of those ideas. If they have any innate ideas, I would be glad to be told, what, and how many they are.

No propositions can be innate, since no ideas are innate

§20. To which let me add: if there be any innate ideas, any ideas in the mind, which the mind does not actually think on; they must be lodged in the memory, and from thence must be brought into view by remembrance; *i.e.* must be known, when they are remembered, to have been perceptions in the mind before, unless remembrance can be without remembrance. For to remember, is to perceive anything with memory, or with a consciousness, that it was known or perceived before: without this, whatever idea comes into the mind is new, and not remembered: this consciousness of its having been in the mind before, being that, which distinguishes remembering from all other ways of thinking.

No innate ideas in the memory

Whatever idea was never perceived by the mind, was never in the mind. Whatever idea is in the mind, is either an actual perception, or else having been an actual perception, is so in the mind, that by the memory it can be made an actual perception again. Whenever there is the actual perception of an idea without memory, the idea appears perfectly new and unknown before to the understanding. Whenever the memory brings any idea into actual view, it is with a consciousness, that it had been there before, and was not wholly a stranger to the mind. Whether this be not so, I appeal to everyone's observation: and then I desire an instance of an idea, pretended to be innate, which (before any impression of it by ways hereafter to be mentioned) anyone could revive and remember as an idea, he had formerly known; without which consciousness of a former perception, there is no remembrance; and whatever idea comes into the mind without that consciousness, is not remembered, or comes not out of the memory, nor can be said to be in the mind before that appearance. For what is not either actually in view, or in the memory, is in the mind no way at all, and is all one as if it never had been there. Suppose a child had the use of his eyes till he knows and distinguishes colours; but then cataracts shut the windows, and he is forty or fifty years perfectly in the dark; and in that time perfectly loses all memory of the ideas of colours, he once had. This was the case of a blind man I once talked with, who lost his sight by the smallpox, when he was a child, and had no more notion of colours, than one born blind. I ask whether anyone can say this man had then any ideas of colours in his mind, any more than one born blind? And I think nobody will say, that either of them had in his mind any idea of colours at all. His cataracts are couched, and then he has the ideas (which he remembers not) of colours, *de novo*,³⁴ by his restored sight, conveyed to his mind, and that without any consciousness of a former acquaintance. And these now he can revive, and call to mind in the dark. In this case all these ideas of colours, which when out of view can be revived with a consciousness of a former acquaintance, being thus in the memory, are said to be in the mind. The use I make of this is, that whatever idea being not actually in view, is in the mind, is there only by being in the memory; and if it be not in the memory, it is not in the mind; and if it be in the memory, it cannot by the memory be brought into actual view, without a perception that it comes out of the memory, which is this, that it had been known before, and is now remembered. If therefore there be any innate ideas, they must be in the memory, or else nowhere in the mind; and if they be in the memory, they can be revived

without any impression from without, and whenever they are brought into the mind, they are remembered, *i.e.* they bring with them a perception of their not being wholly new to it. This being a constant, and distinguishing difference between what is, and what is not in the memory, or in the mind; that what is not in the memory, whenever it appears there, appears perfectly new, and unknown before; and what is in the memory, or in the mind, whenever it is suggested by the memory, appears not to be new, but the mind finds it in itself, and knows it was there before. By this it may be tried, whether there be any innate ideas in the mind before impression from *sensation* or *reflection*. I would fain meet with the man, who when he came to the use of reason, or at any other time, remembered any of them: and to whom, after he was born, they were never new. If anyone will say, there are ideas in the mind, that are not in the memory; I desire him to explain himself, and make what he says intelligible.

§21. Besides what I have already said, there is another reason, why I doubt, that neither these, nor any other principles are innate. I that am fully persuaded, that the infinitely wise GOD made all things in perfect wisdom, cannot satisfy myself, why he should be supposed to print upon the minds of men, some universal *principles*; whereof those *that* are pretended innate, and *concern speculation, are of no great use; and those that concern practice, not self-evident; and neither of them distinguishable from some other truths, not allowed to be innate.* For to what purpose should characters be graven on the mind, by the finger of God, which are not clearer there, than those, which are afterwards introduced, or cannot be distinguished from them? If anyone thinks there are such innate ideas and propositions, which by their clearness and usefulness, are distinguishable from all that is adventitious in the mind, and acquired, it will not be a hard matter for him to tell us, which they are; and then everyone will be a fit judge, whether they be so, or no. Since if there be such innate ideas and impressions, plainly different from all other perceptions and knowledge, everyone will find it true in himself. Of the evidence of these supposed innate maxims, I have spoken already; of their usefulness, I shall have occasion to speak more hereafter.

*Principles not innate,
because of little use,
or little certainty*

§22. To conclude, some ideas forwardly offer themselves to all men's understandings; some sorts of truths result from any ideas, as soon as the mind puts them into propositions: other truths require a train of ideas placed in order, a due comparing of them, and deductions made with attention,

*Difference of men's
discoveries depends
upon the different
application of their
faculties*

before they can be discovered, and assented to. Some of the first sort, because of their general and easy reception, have been mistaken for innate: but the truth is, ideas and notions are no more born with us, than arts and sciences; though some of them, indeed, offer themselves to our faculties, more readily than others; and therefore are more generally received; though that too, be according as the organs of our bodies, and powers of our minds, happen to be employed; *God having fitted men with faculties and means, to discover, receive, and retain truths, accordingly as they are employed.* The great difference that is to be found in the notions of mankind, is, from the different use they put their faculties to, whilst some (and those the most) taking things upon trust, misemploy their power of assent, by lazily enslaving their minds, to the dictates and dominion of others, in doctrines, which it is their duty carefully to examine; and not blindly, with an implicit faith, to swallow: others employing their thoughts only about some few things, grow acquainted sufficiently with them, attain great degrees of knowledge in them, and are ignorant of all other, having never let their thoughts loose, in the search of other inquiries. Thus, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones, is a truth, as certain as anything can be; and I think more evident, than many of those propositions, that go for principles; and yet there are millions, however expert in other things, who know not this at all, because they never set their thoughts on work about such angles: and he that certainly knows this proposition, may yet be utterly ignorant of the truth of other propositions, in mathematics itself, which are as clear and evident as this; because, in his search of those mathematical truths, he stopped his thoughts short, and went not so far. The same may happen concerning the notions we have of the being of a deity; for though there be no truth, which a man may more evidently make out to himself, than the existence of a God, yet he that shall content himself with things, as he finds them, in this world, as they minister to his pleasures and passions, and not make inquiry a little further into their causes, ends, and admirable contrivances, and pursue the thoughts thereof with diligence and attention, may live long without any notion of such a being: and if any person hath, by talk, put such a notion into his head, he may, perhaps, believe it: but if he hath never *examined* it, his knowledge of it will be no perfecter, than his, who having been told, that the three angles of a triangle are equal to two right ones, takes it upon trust, without examining the demonstration; and may yield his assent as a probable opinion, but hath no knowledge of the truth of it; which yet his faculties, if carefully employed, were able to make

clear and evident to him. But this only by the by, to show how much our *knowledge depends upon the right use of those powers nature hath bestowed upon us*, and how little upon such innate principles, as are in vain supposed to be in all mankind for their direction; which all men could not but know, if they were there, or else they would be there to no purpose: and which, since all men do not know, nor can distinguish from other adventitious truths, we may well conclude there are no such.

§23. What censure, doubting thus of innate principles, *Men must think and may deserve from men, who will be apt to call it, pulling up know for themselves* the old foundations of knowledge and certainty, I cannot tell: I persuade myself, at least, that the way I have pursued, being conformable to truth, lays those foundations surer. This I am certain, I have not made it my business, either to quit or follow any authority in the ensuing discourse: truth has been my only aim; and wherever that has appeared to lead, my thoughts have impartially followed, without minding, whether the footsteps of any other lay that way, or no. Not that I want a due respect to other men's opinions; but after all, the *greatest reverence is due to truth*; and I hope, it will not be thought arrogance to say, That perhaps, we should make greater progress in the discovery of rational and contemplative *knowledge*, if we *sought it in the fountain, in the consideration of things themselves*; and made use rather of our own thoughts, than other men's to find it. For, I think, we may as rationally hope to see with other men's eyes, as to know by other men's understandings. So much as we ourselves consider and comprehend of truth and reason, so much we possess of real and true knowledge. The floating of other men's opinions in our brains, makes us not one jot the more knowing, though they happen to be true. What in them was science, is in us but opiniatrey,³⁵ whilst we give up our assent only to reverend names, and do not, as they did, employ our own reason to *understand* those *truths*, which gave them reputation. Aristotle³⁶ was certainly a knowing man, but nobody ever thought him so, because he blindly embraced, and confidently vented the opinions of another. And if the taking up of another's principles, without examining them, made not him a philosopher, I suppose it will hardly make anybody else so. In the sciences, everyone has so much, as he really knows and comprehends: what he believes only, and takes upon trust, are but shreds; which however well in the whole piece, make no considerable addition to his stock, who gathers them. Such borrowed wealth, like fairy-money,³⁷ though it were gold in the hand from which he received it, will be but leaves and dust when it comes to use.

*Whence the opinion
of innate principles*

§24. When men have found some general propositions that could not be doubted of, as soon as understood, it was, I know, a short and easy way to conclude them innate. This being once received, it eased the lazy from the pains of search, and stopped the inquiry of the doubtful, concerning all that was once styled innate: and it was of no small advantage to those who affected to be masters and teachers, to make this the principle of *principles*, that principles must not be questioned: for having once established this tenet, that there are innate principles, it put their followers upon a necessity of receiving some doctrines as such; which was to take them off from the use of their own reason and judgement, and put them upon believing and taking them upon trust, without further examination: in which posture of blind credulity, they might be more easily governed by, and made useful to some sort of men, who had the skill and office³⁸ to principle and guide them. Nor is it a small power it gives one man over another, to have the authority to be the dictator of principles, and teacher of unquestionable truths; and to make a man swallow that for an innate principle, which may serve to his purpose, who teacheth them. Whereas had they examined the ways, whereby men came to the knowledge of many universal *truths*, they would have found them to result in the minds of men, from the being of things themselves, when duly considered; and that they were discovered by the application of those faculties, that were fitted by nature to receive and judge of them, when duly employed about them.

Conclusion §25. *To show how the understanding proceeds herein, is the design of the following discourse;* which I shall proceed to, when I have first premised, that hitherto to clear my way to those foundations, which, I conceive are the only true ones, whereon to establish those notions we can have of our own knowledge, it hath been necessary for me to give an account of the reasons, I had to doubt of innate principles: and since the arguments which are against them, do some of them, rise from common received opinions, I have been forced to take several things for granted, which is hardly avoidable to anyone, whose task it is to show the falsehood, or improbability, of any tenet; it happening in controversial discourses, as it does in assaulting of towns; where, if the ground be but firm, whereon the batteries³⁹ are erected, there is no further inquiry of whom it is borrowed, nor whom it belongs to, so it affords but a fit rise for the present purpose. But in the future part of this discourse, designing to raise an edifice uniform, and consistent with itself, as far as my own experience and observation will assist me, I hope,

to erect it on such a basis, that I shall not need to shore it up with props and buttresses, leaning on borrowed or begged foundations: or at least, if mine prove a castle in the air, I will endeavour it shall be all of a piece, and hang together. Wherein I warn the reader not to expect undeniable cogent demonstrations, unless I may be allowed the privilege, not seldom assumed by others, to take my principles for granted; and then, I doubt not, but I can demonstrate too. All that I shall say for the principles I proceed on, is, that I can only *appeal* to men's own unprejudiced *experience*, and observation, whether they be true, or no; and this is enough for a man who professes no more, than to lay down candidly and freely his own conjectures, concerning a subject lying somewhat in the dark, without any other design, than an unbiased inquiry after truth.