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*Hume Studies* Volume XVIII, Number 2 (November, 1992) 137-150.

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# Some Reflections on Hume on Existence

*Stanley Tweyman*

In this paper, I focus on two claims which Hume makes with regard to existence. The first, which appears in a single paragraph in *A Treatise of Human Nature* 1.2.6,<sup>1</sup> is that existence cannot be distinguished from what we believe exists by a “*distinction of reason*.” The second appears in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* when Cleanthes criticizes Demea’s a priori argument. Much of Cleanthes’ criticism of Demea’s argument is developed from the Humean claim that, “Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent.”<sup>2</sup> My efforts are directed to showing that, although Hume takes very little space developing each of these points, certain difficulties attend each claim—difficulties which Hume either does not (in the case of the first) or cannot (in the case of the second) address when the claim itself is being made.

## **Distinctions of Reason and the Thought of Existence**

Among the distinctions which Hume introduces very early in the *Treatise* is that between simple and complex perceptions. Simple perceptions are those which admit of no distinction or separation, whereas those which are complex can be distinguished into the simple perceptions of which they are composed through the power that the imagination possesses of producing a separation wherever it perceives a difference. A simple perception, therefore, is a perceptual primitive that is not reducible into parts, that is, into the other more basic perceptions. Hume argues that although simple perceptions are not amenable to further distinctions in terms of parts, they are still susceptible to distinctions of reason. As examples of this distinction, he speaks of “figure and the body figur’d; motion and the body mov’d” (T 24). The actual example employed in his discussion (T 25) is the distinction between the colour and figure in a globe of white marble. Hume points out that when presented with a globe of white marble, the colour is inseparable and indistinguishable from the form or figure. However, if we also observe a globe of black marble and a cube of white marble, and compare them with the globe of white marble, we will be able to distinguish the colour and figure of the latter through the resemblances it has with the other two objects. That is, the colour of the globe resembles the colour of the cube, and the figure of the globe

resembles the figure of the black marble. The awareness of these resemblances Hume refers to as “a kind of reflection” or “comparison,” and that to which we are attending—in this case the colour of the figure—he refers to as an “aspect” (T 25). Thus, although simple perceptions lack parts, they do possess aspects—aspects which are discovered through finding resemblances between the perception in question and others: “we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible” (T 25).

The fact that Hume offers a separate name for the operation under discussion makes it appear as though it is a separate operation of the mind not yet covered in his discussion. However, this is not the case. Distinctions of reason are made through comparing an idea with other ideas in order to determine certain resemblances between them. But all comparisons between ideas are regarded by Hume as attempts to establish philosophical relations between them: “The word RELATION is ... used ... for that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them” (T 13). The text reveals that by the expression “that particular circumstance” in the preceding quotation Hume is referring to some resemblance or other which enables the two ideas to be compared: “*resemblance*: ... is a relation, without which no philosophical relation can exist; since no objects will admit of comparison, but what have some degree of resemblance” (T 14). What follows from this discussion is that distinctions of reason are nothing but the determination of philosophical relations between a certain idea and others. Since philosophical relations exist between complex ideas, and since all distinctions of reason are nothing but the establishment of philosophical relations, it follows that distinctions of reason can occur with respect to complex ideas. Nevertheless, this argument is misleading in itself since it obfuscates the very special role which distinctions of reason play. The problem here, then, is one of determining when a special label is warranted when we are involved with the comparison of ideas.

The notion of a simple idea discussed earlier presupposes that there be some limit to the separations possible within an idea. And Hume holds that there are such limits:

the *idea*, which we form of any finite quality, is not infinitely divisible, but that by proper distinctions and separations we may run up this idea to inferior ones, which will be perfectly simple and indivisible. In rejecting the infinite capacity of the mind, we suppose it may arrive at an end in the division of its

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ideas; ... the imagination reaches a *minimum*, and may raise up to itself an idea, of which it cannot conceive any sub-division, and which cannot be diminished without a total annihilation. (T 27)

In the light of this passage it is clear that the very examples which Hume has employed when introducing the notion of distinctions of reason, namely, the globe of black marble and the cube of white marble, cannot be considered examples involving simple ideas: it is possible to imagine, for example, that the globe is split into two equal parts. Therefore, not only are distinctions of reason possible in the case of complex ideas, but Hume's own discussion of the matter employs complex ideas.

The equivocation involved in the term "simple idea" can now be made explicit. On the one hand, by a simple idea Hume means one which is such that *no* distinction or separation is possible with respect to it. The example Hume uses is the idea of a grain of sand:

When you tell me of the thousandth and ten thousandth part of a grain of sand, I have a distinct idea of these numbers and of their different proportions; but the images, which I form in my mind to represent the things themselves, are nothing different from each other, nor inferior to that image, by which I represent the grain of sand itself, which is suppos'd so vastly to exceed them. ... the idea of a grain of sand is not distinguishable, nor separable into twenty, much less into a thousand, ten thousand, or an infinite number of different ideas. (T 27)

On the other hand, the discussion offered on distinctions of reason points out that Hume is also prepared to call any idea "simple" when considered from the point of view of qualities it possesses that we find to be inseparable from each other. That is, since colour and figure are always found together, any idea viewed solely in terms of these attributes can be called a simple idea. The important point brought out then is that because of the second sense of simple idea uncovered, Hume is committed to the view that distinctions of reason are possible in the case of complex ideas, when this term is taken as the opposite of simple idea in the first sense. Putting the matter generally, we can say that distinctions of reason are possible in the case of *all* our ideas with respect to those features of our ideas such as colour and figure that are not separable by the imagination alone. Further, although all philosophical relations are *based* (T 14) on some resemblance between ideas, distinctions of reason are employed solely *to establish a*

resemblance between a simple idea (in the second sense discussed) and some other idea so that an inseparable aspect of the simple idea can be discerned. Accordingly, of the seven different philosophical relations discussed by Hume (T 14-15), distinctions of reason employ only resemblance, and resemblance is employed in order to isolate aspects of simple ideas.

In *Treatise* 1.2.6, "Of the idea of existence, and of external existence," Hume maintains that although there is no impression or idea of any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceived as existent, there is no separate idea of existence which can be associated, or conjoined with, ideas of objects which we believe exist.<sup>3</sup> He then attempts to show that existence also cannot be distinguished from the ideas of objects which we believe exist by a distinction of reason. Given that, "Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent" (T 67), and that there is no separate impression or idea of existence, it may seem that existence is inseparable from the idea of an object, just as colour is inseparable from figure, and motion from the body moved. In fact, it is because we can never conceive of any thing except as existent, that Hume argues that a distinction of reason is impossible in regard to existence. The argument through which he tries to prove that existence cannot be distinguished from the idea of an object by a distinction of reason is contained in one paragraph:

Our foregoing reasoning concerning the *distinction* of ideas without any real *difference* will not here serve us in any stead. That kind of distinction is founded on the different resemblances, which the same simple idea may have to several different ideas. But no object can be presented resembling some object with respect to its existence, and different from others in the same particular; since every object, that is presented, must necessarily be existent. (T 67)

On this point, Phillip D. Cummins writes:

Hume's argument turns on his premise that an indispensable condition for drawing a distinction without a difference and being able to assign a common quality to a group of objects is experience of an object which does not resemble the objects in the group in the way they resemble one another. Hume takes it to be a necessary inference that since in acquiring an idea of existence all the objects (impressions and ideas) being compared are perceptions of which one is conscious, they all exist. Consequently, no object differs from the rest with respect to existence. This implies that no idea of existence

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(understood as a quality of objects) can be generated by the required comparisons."<sup>4</sup>

But Hume and Professor Cummins are clearly wrong about this. Let us return briefly to the colour/figure example. To distinguish the colour from the figure, we compare the colours of the objects (both are white)—a comparison which is facilitated by the contrast in their respective shapes. Simply put, we notice that the colour, white, is found in a variety of shapes, even though in no case is the colour white separable from the shape over which it is dispersed. "[W]hen we would consider its colour only, we turn our view to its resemblance with the cube of white marble" (T 25).<sup>5</sup> What is important here is that resemblances in colour be noted amidst contrasting shapes. Now, if existence were related to whatever can be conceived, as colour is related to figure, then it would be possible to distinguish existence from what can be conceived, provided that we perform the relevant contrasting comparison required for a distinction of reason. We should notice the similarity which everything which can be conceived shares with regard to existence, amidst contrasting natures or characters between or among the ideas or objects conceived. Whether we think of a dog or a table or a computer, we should notice the common feature, existence, despite the differences which exist between or among what is being conceived as existing. The pervasiveness of an inseparable aspect of what can be conceived does not rule out distinguishing that aspect from the object by a distinction of reason, as long as a contrasting comparison of the sort discussed can occur.

Although I have shown that Hume's analysis of a distinction of reason does not rule out distinguishing existence from the object apprehended as existent because it is the case that whatever we can conceive, we conceive as existing, I will now proceed to show why, given Hume's account of our awareness of existence, a distinction of reason between existence and the object apprehended as existing is impossible.

When Hume says that, "Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent" (T 67), he means that, "Whatever we conceive, we conceive as *possibly existing*."

Whatever can be conceiv'd by a clear and distinct idea necessarily implies the possibility of existence. (T 43)

'Tis an establish'd maxim in metaphysics, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence*, or in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible*. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and

from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible. (T 32)

Hence, all perceptions are conceived with the modality of possibility. That certain perceptions or objects are regarded as possibly existing and others as actually existing is discussed in the context of Hume's theory of belief.

In the appendix to the *Treatise*, he clarifies his account of belief presented in *Treatise* 1.3. He argues there that belief is either "some new idea, such as that of *reality* or *existence*, which we join to the simple conception of an object, or it is merely a peculiar *feeling* or *sentiment*" (T 623). For Hume, a satisfactory account of belief also provides a satisfactory account of reality or existence. The awareness of existence is explained through the awareness of belief. We need not review Hume's arguments to provide that a belief is not "some new idea, such as that of *reality* or *existence*"—these arguments are sufficiently well known.<sup>6</sup> What must be emphasized here is that his analysis of belief focuses on the *manner* of conception rather than focusing on the *content* of a conception:

there is a greater firmness and solidity in the conceptions, which are the objects of conviction and assurance, than in the loose and indolent reveries of a castle-builder, ... They strike upon us with more force; they are more present to us; the mind has a firmer hold of them, ... These ideas take faster hold of my mind, than the ideas of an enchanted castle. They are different to the feeling; but there is no distinct or separate impression attending them. (T 624-625)

For Hume, therefore, the modalities of possibility and actuality are analyzed in terms of the *way* in which perceptions are apprehended, rather than in terms of *what* is apprehended. To believe that something may exist, and to believe that something does exist are functions of the force and vivacity attending the relevant perceptions. To have a languid perception is to believe that the object corresponding to that (those) idea(s) may exist; to have a more vivacious perception is to believe that the object corresponding to the perception does exist. The force and vivacity of the perception will determine whether the object corresponding to the perception is regarded as something which may exist or as something which does exist.

Force and vivacity are inseparable, although variable, features or aspects of perceptions: what we apprehend is a perception with a certain force and vivacity. Now, since all perceptions have some degree

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of force and vivacity, we are able to distinguish, in thought, the force and vivacity of a perception from the perception itself through a distinction of reason, or contrasting comparison with other perceptions.<sup>7</sup> There is no more difficulty in distinguishing the force and vivacity of a given perception from the perception with that force and vivacity through a distinction of reason than there is in distinguishing (again through a distinction of reason) the colour from the figure of an object.

It must be emphasized, however, that since force and vivacity cause our beliefs in the modalities of possibility and actuality, distinguishing force and vivacity from a given perception through a distinction of reason is not tantamount to distinguishing possible or actual existence from the perception. Since possibility and actuality are neither separate ideas, nor aspects of an idea as are colour and figure, it follows that they are not separable in any sense from what is conceived. For Hume, the *content* of a perception never discloses the modality with which it is being apprehended. And since force and vivacity cause, but are not identical to, our apprehension of possible or actual existence, it can be seen that existence cannot be separated from an idea by a distinction of reason.

In the final paragraph of *Treatise* 1.2.6, Hume explains how our conceptions differ depending on whether what is apprehended is apprehended as possibly existing or as actually existing:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connections and durations. (T 68)

In other words, what I apprehend remains unchanged whether it is regarded as possibly existing or actually existing: what is alterable is the "relations, connections and durations" my perceptions are regarded as possessing, and these will depend upon whether what is believed is regarded as possibly existing or actually existing. For Hume, therefore, ascriptions of possible and actual existence are caused by the force and vivacity of our perceptions, and these ascriptions are dispositional. To believe that something may exist is to be disposed to ascribe relations, connections, and durations to it which differ from those we would be disposed to ascribe were we to believe that that object actually exists.<sup>8</sup> Now, since how we are disposed to regard our perceptions is not a further aspect of that perception—or these perceptions—it remains the

case that for Hume, existence—possible and actual—cannot be distinguished from our perceptions by a distinction of reason.

**The Dialogues on Whatever We Conceive as Existent, We Can Also Conceive as Non-Existent**

In part 9 of the *Dialogues*, Demea presents his a priori argument of God's necessary existence. Cleanthes then proceeds to offer a number of criticisms of this argument. Most of the criticisms which Cleanthes offers are developed from the Humean claim that whatever we conceive as existent we can also conceive as non-existent. Cleanthes argues that since the non-existence of the Deity is conceivable, 1) the existence of the Deity is not demonstrable (Cleanthes regards this criticism as decisive); 2) we cannot understand what is meant by "the Deity's necessary existence"; and 3) matter may be the necessarily existent being (according to Demea's explanation that there must be a necessarily existent being as the cause of the contingent). On the other hand, for those like Demea who claim to find the non-existence of the Deity inconceivable, Cleanthes' criticisms would have the force of counterbalancing Demea's position, without actually refuting it. In no instance has Cleanthes been able to demonstrate or prove that an error is present in Demea's position. Rather, in each instance, Cleanthes has shown Demea that the latter has failed to examine alternative views to the ones he is presenting and attempting to defend in part 9.

I argued fully in my book *Scepticism and Belief in Hume's Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* that when the *Dialogues* opens, Cleanthes is presented as a dogmatist, and, therefore, as one who is likely to err in his reasoning because he lacks the necessary preparative to the study of philosophy—the inculcation of sceptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of human reason. Cleanthes admits no role for scepticism in enquiry, exhibits no doubt, caution, or modesty in defining his position, and lacks an impartiality in putting forth his argument—the latter being exhibited through his claim that the Argument from Design tends to the confirmation of "true religion" (D 106). In short, Cleanthes fits the pattern Hume finds in all dogmatists: "while they see objects only on one side, and have no idea of any counterpoising argument, they throw themselves precipitately into the principles, to which they are inclined; nor have they any indulgence for those who entertain opposite sentiments."<sup>9</sup> Hume's suggested cure is that the dogmatist be exposed to the argument of the Pyrrhonian, which takes place in parts 2 through 8. Philo urged that he was arguing with Cleanthes "in his own way" (D 111), and showed the latter that the Argument from Design, insofar as it seeks to establish analogically the intelligence of the Deity and his externality to what He has designed, is indefensible. The Argument from Design

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was shown to involve an infinite regress (part 4), to be susceptible of reduction to absurdity (part 5), and to utilize data which are equally supportive (and therefore not supportive at all) of an open-ended list of alternative hypotheses to a Designer of the world who is intelligent and external (parts 6-8). Cleanthes has no answer to Philo's Pyrrhonian objections; at the end of this sceptical attack, Philo proclaims a complete victory for the Pyrrhonian: the only reasonable response, he urges at the end of part 8, is a total suspense of judgement. Once this suspense of judgement is reached, and therefore Cleanthes' dogmatic approach has been removed, Hume is able, in part 12, to assess Philo's Pyrrhonian objections and reach the position of mitigated scepticism—the position which he himself endorses in the first *Enquiry*.

If Cleanthes has been turned from his dogmatic stance, and is now able to appreciate "counterpoising" arguments, how would Hume proceed to show this to us? Since all the arguments leading to a suspense of judgement in regard to the Design Argument have already been presented by Philo in parts 2 through 8, Cleanthes cannot be expected to provide additional objections against this argument. An alternate means of revealing this change in Cleanthes is to have him respond to a *different* argument in a manner similar to Philo's response to the Design argument. I submit that this is at least part of Hume's motivation in including the a priori argument in part 9 and in having Cleanthes serve as its main critic. None of Cleanthes' criticisms in part 9, as I showed earlier, can refute Demea's argument. At most, they reveal the one-sidedness of Demea's argument, and the fact that he has not taken into account any "counterpoising" arguments. The starting-point of Cleanthes' a posteriori Argument from Design calls attention to the design present throughout the world (means to ends relations and a coherence of parts), and Philo's efforts are directed to showing that this in itself will never be adequate to establish how the design came about; the starting-point of Demea's a priori argument calls attention to the succession of causes and effects throughout the world, and Cleanthes' efforts are directed to showing that this in itself will never be adequate to establish how this succession came about. In other words, Cleanthes' criticisms in part 9 serve to illustrate to Philo, and to the reader, the success Philo has achieved with Cleanthes through his sceptical objections in parts 2 through 8.

In part 2 of the *Dialogues*, Cleanthes argued that the cause of the design of the world is an intelligent being. After hearing Philo's criticisms in part 2, Cleanthes proceeds in part 3 to address Philo's criticisms through two imaginary illustrative analogies—the Articulate Voice speaking from the clouds and the Vegetable Library. That Cleanthes utilizes imaginary examples is understandable in light

of the fact that in his Design Argument, he is concerned with the cause of the design of *all* there is in nature. Since the scope of the argument and of Philo's criticism is all there is, Cleanthes cannot, in attempting to illustrate his position, have recourse to (any part of) what there is. Hence, the propriety of imaginary examples. Similarly, since Philo's objections to Cleanthes' Design Argument continue to the point where a suspense of judgement has been achieved (and therefore no further counterpoising arguments are available), if Hume wanted to illustrate the impact which Philo's arguments have had on Cleanthes, he could not do so through the Design Argument. A new argument is needed, with which Cleanthes can proceed to deal in a manner similar to the way in which Philo has dealt with his Design Argument.

If my interpretation of Cleanthes' criticisms is correct, then Cleanthes' criticisms in part 9 are counterpoising or Pyrrhonian in nature. Demea claims that he finds the non-existence of the Deity inconceivable; Cleanthes claims that he finds the non-existence of the Deity conceivable. Since each claim is introspective, the claims have equal weight. This is the strength of Pyrrhonian doubt, and this is what leads to a suspense of judgement when Pyrrhonian arguments are employed.

The *Dialogues* offers no more on the topic of the conceivability/inconceivability of the Deity's existence than has been examined thus far. The passage in paragraph 5 of part 9<sup>10</sup> is normally taken to be all that Hume has to offer on this topic. This, however, is a mistake. Hume offers additional considerations in the *Treatise* which, he holds, establish conclusively the conceivability of the non-existence of the Deity. I turn to these now.

In *Treatise* 1.3.7 he asks, "Wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?"

The answer is easy with regard to propositions, that are prov'd by intuition or demonstration. In that case, the person, who assents, not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determin'd to conceive them in that particular manner, either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas. Whatever is absurd is unintelligible; nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration. (T 95)

His point is that wherever the denial of a claim is inconceivable, the ideas involved are inseparable or necessarily connected. To prove that the denial of a claim is inconceivable, therefore, requires attempting to separate the ideas involved; that is, affirming in thought the first relatum (for example, 4 + 3) and at the same time denying the second

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(in this case, = 7). The result, of course, is that we can no longer think of the first relatum. By this experiment, we establish that (4 + 3) is necessarily connected with (= 7). It is precisely this type of thought experiment, carried out in *Treatise* 1.3.3 on “whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence,” which Hume employs to prove that we can never demonstrate the necessity of a cause to every new existence, or modification of existence.<sup>11</sup>

Inconceivability, for Hume, requires that we deal with two relata, and determine that the first is unthinkable when we attempt to separate it from the second. In the first part of this paper, I showed that ascriptions of existence for Hume are caused by the force and vivacity of our perceptions, and are dispositional. Since there is no separate idea of existence (or inseparable “aspect” of a perception which constitutes our awareness of existence), it follows that existential claims, such as God exists, do not involve two relata. Hence, the mental experiment which reveals the necessary connection between relata is inapplicable to all existential claims, including God exists. Since existential claims involve only one idea, the denial of the existential claim will always be conceivable.

On my interpretation of the illustrative function of part 9 of the *Dialogues*, the omission of this material on necessity is deliberate, and precisely what we should expect.

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1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Niddich (Oxford, 1987) (hereafter cited as “T”).
2. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Stanley Tweyman (London; New York, 1991), 149 (hereafter cited as “D”).
3. His argument for this focuses on the fact that there are no distinct impressions which are inseparably conjoined: “Tho’ certain sensations may at one time be united, we quickly find they admit of a separation, and may be presented apart. And thus, tho’ every impression and idea we remember be consider’d as existent, the idea of existence is not deriv’d from any particular impression” (T 66).
4. Phillip D. Cummins, “Hume on the Idea of Existence,” *Hume Studies* 17, no. 1 (April 1991): 77.
5. Similarly, Hume writes of figure: “When we wou’d consider only the figure of the globe of white marble, we form in reality an idea both of the figure and colour, but tacitly carry our eye to its resemblance with the globe of black marble” (T 25).

6. Hume's *Treatise* 1.3.7, and the appendix to the *Treatise*.
7. I have discussed this matter further in my *Reason and Conduct in Hume and His Predecessors* (The Hague, 1974), 42-46.
8. External existents are held to have spatial relations which possible existences do not have. External existents are regarded as having causal connections which possible existences do not have, and external existents are normally regarded as existing even when not perceived, whereas perceptions are regarded as existing only to the extent that they are perceived. Hume's explanation of the belief in the continuous and uninterrupted existence of objects is treated in *Treatise* 1.4.2.
9. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975), 161 (hereafter cited as "E").
10. This paragraph reads:

I shall begin with observing, that there is an evident absurdity in pretending to demonstrate a matter of fact, or to prove it by any arguments *a priori*. Nothing is demonstrable, unless the contrary implies a contradiction. Whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as non-existent. There is no Being, therefore, whose non-existence implies a contradiction. Consequently there is no Being, whose existence is demonstrable. (D 149)

Hume makes the same point in the seventh last paragraph of the first *Enquiry*:

All other enquiries of men regard only matter of fact and existence; and these are evidently incapable of demonstration. Whatever *is* may be *not be*. No negation of a fact can involve a contradiction. The non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence. The proposition, which affirms it not to be, however false, is no less conceivable and intelligible, than that which affirms it to be. (E 163-64, sec. 12, "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy")

11. "We can never demonstrate the necessity of a cause to every new existence, or new modification of existence, without shewing at the same time the impossibility there is, that any thing can ever begin to exist without some productive principle; and where the latter proposition cannot be prov'd, we must despair of ever being able to prove the former. Now that the latter proposition is utterly incapable of a demonstrative proof, we may satisfy ourselves by considering, that as all distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct,

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'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause" (T 79-80).