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Dialogue between Berkeley and Hume

LOUIS FRÉDÉRIC ANCILLON

Translated from the French by CHARLOTTE STANLEY

Berkeley: How can we look at ourselves without laughing?¹

Hume: It is good to be merry, but I don't see the connection here.

Berkeley: Oh! It was never more sensible. What did I do in my *Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*² and what did you do in your *Philosophical Essays*?³ While metaphysicians of every century, exhausting themselves in research on the first principles of things, lean on the reality of concrete objects on the one hand, and on the reality of axioms and their correspondence with what happens outside of us on the other, we have amused ourselves by taking these two foundations away from them, the only ones on which they could stand; in return for which, they are, if I'm not mistaken, up in the air, and (if the expression were not too free for such serious personages) literally "tossed in a blanket." Two little Idealisms have done it: one, which is yours and is called *transcendent*, denies (in things) the ontological connection of cause and effect [87] which produces and regulates their existence; the other, which is mine, denies the things themselves. Could it be called *physical [corporel]*, *sensible [sensible]*, *phenomenal [phénoménique]* idealism? I don't know. To me there is even something a little unnatural in the association of these words; but names do not mean anything here, and while waiting for my view to receive the honors of a labeling commensurate to yours and which distinguishes it from yours with both brevity and accuracy, I consider it the match and the twin of yours. At least it strikes metaphysics just as severely. That science, which we

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grasp and destroy from two sides, seems to be like a tree in our hands. I intercept all communication between the roots and the ground; you remove all the effects of the sky on the top: think how the middle must fare.⁴

Hume: Your comparison is valid, and I believe that under the rubric *Berkeley-Hume* or *Hume-Berkeley* wonderful things should happen. But I'm not entirely happy with the role you're assigning to me, and it seems to me that in my *Enquiries* I explained your system forcefully enough, with enough good will and partiality for you to admit me into your domain, while allowing me mine, where, moreover, you'll always be welcome when you do me the honor of working in it. I hope that in your domain you'll allow me to pass alternately with my caterpillar's teeth from the root to the top, and from the top to the root of your metaphysical tree, all for the greater good of the cause. Two sappers build a better trench than one.

Berkeley: I admire your zeal; I'll even add what your modesty doesn't allow you to say: that your superior talents would make an excellent acquisition for the good cause. But, between us, let it be said that you scare me, your views and intentions are suspect to me. I have religion; I only [88] destroy in order to build. I don't like false attacks, and I don't like the great truths that make man's happiness to be attacked under the pretext of uprooting prejudices and combatting error. See the title of my book: *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous. The design of which is plainly to demonstrate the reality and perfection of human knowledge, the incorporeal nature of the soul, and the immediate providence of a Deity: in opposition to Sceptics and Atheists.*

Hume: Nothing is more edifying than this title; thus the effect it must have produced on all godly souls worked as well on me. But you know that edification, no more *than comparison, is not always reason*, and that I look more than twice before confusing the end with the means which lead there and favoring the latter over the former. I have the misfortune of always seeing not only where one is going, but also and especially what means one uses. The most excellent lodging in the most beautiful countryside in the world would displease me if I had gotten there by underhanded means or by cheating customs officials. Ask me no more about it for the moment, and since we're on the subject of scruples, permit me to tell you that I also have one, even two, which would prevent me from associating with you when you wouldn't exclude me as an ungodly man or at least (for you are fair) as a man whose faith isn't as robust as your own.

Berkeley: And what are these scruples?

Hume: Oh, not much, a mere bagatelle.—Look, someone other than I who had more pretensions to subtlety of mind, to singularity more than sincerity, wouldn't look so closely, [89] and would be easily won over to your colors.

Berkeley: But what else?

Hume: A very small thing, I tell you.—In that regard, before we separate, do you want the usual compliments on the infinite art which reigns in your book, and all the resources of dialectics, genius, erudition, and eloquence that you deploy in it? If, in the midst of all the well-deserved praise that has already been heaped on you in this respect, my own can still count for something in your eyes, I give it to you with all my heart and with rare sincerity.

Berkeley: In truth, my colleague, I think you're making fun of me. To part in the most interesting stage of a discussion that is just beginning! And compliments from you to me! No, you'll explain yourself, if you please, and with complete sincerity and frankness. A Scotsman and an Irishman know no other way, and, as for me, the three united kingdoms would hardly bolster me against the horror and loathing inspired in me by the insipidity of those compliments that are now in vogue and the pitiable state of those they flatter. In fact, I beseech you, and don't think that I pardon you for having intentionally tossed all this stuff into a philosophical conversation. We were discussing the very small circumstance which consoles you from the dispensation I thought I'd given you in my self-styled fabric of skepticism; I want to know it and soon.

Hume: Well, it's simply that I believe neither your book nor the general principle that the body doesn't exist, no matter how one goes about establishing it, and that I am undertaking to prove the faults of one and the falsity of the other. Are you satisfied?

Berkeley: Not very, for you have only prepared me for a flick of your hand, and instead you're knocking me over. And what's worse, you're not the man I need to give me an explanation of [90] the judgment that you've just hurled against me. You're a skeptic, and only a dogmatic believer who's very determined and bristling with arguments that are decisive and demonstrative could acquit himself of a debt such as the one you've just contracted. At least, in an affair of this importance I don't feel at all disposed to subject myself to objections, doubts, simple hassles, and all the stratagems of a captious and equivocal dialectic.

Hume: Never mind that; you'll be satisfied, and contrary to my usual pattern I'll be very affirmative (you'll judge upon what score). You see, people like to vary their roles in the world. One wearies of and grows bored with doubting and skewering everything. The least we can do in private is to make amends for the pressure we're under in public to uphold the stance we take there, which is undoubtedly fine and important, but, let's admit, ridiculous and unnatural. And then, the skepticism of our days, what else is it but a dogmatism that is at times simulated, false, and hypocritical and at times openly and insolently sharp, decisive, and imperious?

Berkeley: You're right. Begin then, I'm listening to you, and I even have no intention of interrupting you. It would be odd, however, if you were to belie the witty man who said, after having read my work, that *one could neither believe nor refute it*.⁵

Hume: Perhaps he should add: *neither understand it nor at least assure oneself that one has understood it*; which would explain very well why, not believing it, one is in no state to refute it, or why, incapable of refuting it, one still has no strength to believe it. One always fights badly in the dark and in the thicket; take this either for a first error that I'm giving you as an advance inheritance, or as an apology for those that I'll have if I die. [91]

Berkeley: At present let us cease the exordia and the prefaces; or will the avant-garde be afraid?

Hume: Not at all; it's advancing, make ready to receive it. First of all, allow a general view of all the work to make you realize the first impression that its reading had on me. It gave me all sorts of surprises. Even if I try your patience, I'll count them on my fingers in order to avoid the transitions and tedious parts that they entail.

First surprise! You make the brain itself into an idea, and consequently, also the five senses and the whole body.⁶ Thus you can no longer talk about sensations; that would be saying that a great idea, an idea of specific dimensions or an infinite number of small ideas, however you feel like explaining it to us, becomes the vehicle that seizes all other ideas, except of course yours, which finds no place there and doesn't come up [to the mind].

Second surprise! It has always been believed, it seems to me, that Idealism consisted in making all the ideas of size, form, colors, durability, softness, cold, and heat emerge from the soul exclusively, while both the crowd and philosophers, who rightly are with the crowd on this point, place their origin in exterior objects, and they fought Idealism by proving that there is something outside of us which in one way or another fosters these kinds of ideas. But, you say and you repeat everywhere that you admit exterior objects, that *you don't make things out of ideas, but rather ideas out of things*,⁷ which completely changes the state of the question, reduces it to a pure word game, or makes the reader no longer know where he is in all this.

Third surprise! In addition, it has always been believed until now that in order to be Idealist, it was sufficient to place the source of sensations exclusively in the soul;⁸ but it seems that you're adding a type of milieu [92] that is neither soul nor sensation, nor the presence of bodies; or rather that you're interjecting into the notion of Idealism the continuous and immediate action of the creative mind, which doesn't belong there.⁹

Fourth surprise! Each one of your dialogues contains different material, and there's no consistency of means. The first one truly deals with the subject; it must prove that what we call extension, shape, movement, colors, distance, pleasure, pain, cold, heat, in a word, the impressions received by the soul, aren't in bodies, and as good philosophy, one must agree. The second dialogue comprises a very neat and eloquent tirade on the visual beauties of nature, which singularly contrasts with the result of the preceding dialogue, which was that there is no nature; and since it's examined in it whether matter could be either cause or instrument or the occasion for our sensations, it's completely foreign to the point under consideration. Even if all the systems imagined in order to give an explanation of the way in which bodies enter into the formation of our ideas were false, nothing would result from the insufficiency of the solutions they offer against the truth of the principle that there are bodies, supposing moreover that this principle were proved. The third dialogue is especially astonishing: it seems to reverse the first two; it brings back everything that the first two had eliminated. The two characters exchange roles, and without our knowing how, Hylas is the true Idealist, Philonous talks like a determined Dualist, and even sermonizes his disciple on his incredulity very movingly without it occurring to the latter to point out to him that it's his work, and that he is suddenly changing his thesis.

Berkeley: You need not go into the other surprises. It isn't necessary to go as far as seven; that would be too much like the seven mortal sins. But your general remarks make me desire the closer examination they seem to lead one to expect. [93]

Hume: My division will be very simple. I'll speak against the form and substance of the book.

Berkeley: That effectively exhausts the subject, and when a book sins both in form and substance, it would be wrong to ask more of it. It's *omne tulit punctum* ["it has won all the points"]. Let's look at the form.

Hume: By that I mean the eternal ambiguity of the words *sensations*, *sensible qualities*, *body*, *matter*, and others; details into which your interlocutor should not follow you, because you cause him to get lost at the risk of no longer being able to see yourself, as are the words *substratum*, *support*, *substance*, reduced to supposedly distinct ideas; rays of light that he sheds from time to time, but that he doesn't know how to extend, and that he has the imprudence to take up again at the least sign from you; admissions made with laughable frivolity; definitions that are either useless, incomplete, false, or risky, that he should not allow himself, and which are a weapon that he gives you with which to skewer him; definitions from you that he should never let you get by, each one of which would have stopped you in your tracks if your

adversary had known his job: for example, that *sensible things are the only ones that the senses perceive immediately*¹⁰ (this *immediately* stands you in good stead, and is, however, but an ambiguity); that ideas are *either active or passive*;¹¹ that *objects that are immediately perceived are ideas*;¹² that *material substance must be understood solely as sensible bodies, those that can be seen and touched*;¹³ that *matter is a substance removed from thought and existing outside the mind*;¹⁴ or on the contrary, that *it is something sensible whose existence consists in being perceived*;¹⁵ and so many other assertions that are either complicated or arbitrary, that it would suffice to deny in order to either put a stop to the discussion or make it interminable; arguments whose evidence is more than doubtful as, [94] among many others, this one: *From the production of the effects of which I am a witness, I conclude that actions exist*.¹⁶ Fine, but you continue: *From the fact that actions exist, I conclude that so do volitions*.¹⁷ You will conclude that by yourself, because I think: *non sequitur*. Finally, the strange pretension to want it proved to you by experience alone a thing of which it has been agreed in advance that experience alone isn't a judge, that reason doesn't enter in, while you reason *ad infinitum* and pile up metaphysical axioms. That's what I mean by the form of the work, and I assure you that with this method, I'm undertaking to prove everything or to fight it.

Berkeley: At your reckoning then, *Alceste, I am indeed guilty*.¹⁸ But let's not laugh about such a serious matter, especially as it would only be with a third of life and existence. Your surprises have gotten through to me. Your remarks on the form of my book make me gasp; finish me off by letting loose all the rest of your metaphysical indignation on the essential element that you've already designated for your blows.

Hume: This essential element, these are the results you have attained, and the conclusions you are expressing. You give your opinion on the existence or non-existence of bodies and matter; you then try to make sense of our sensations without them. I'm only touching on the first of these two theses with trepidation because I've already warned you that I had violent suspicions about the possibility in general of obtaining a very clear idea of the opinion you are defending, and about my capacity in particular in this regard. All I know in my understanding is that you seem to me to be completely in error, but still here isn't the place to reveal it. I'll limit myself to expressing your idea if I can: isn't this it? Our soul has sensations. The [95] seat of these sensations is the soul itself, in such a way that in the supposition that there were something outside of it, sensation would be found only in it; nothing else is capable of it. These sensations are the perceptions of extension, shape, colors, sounds, tastes, and everything having to do with the body, which is no more for it [the soul] and in relation to it than a total feeling which makes all

the others possible. It [the soul] judges that these sensations express qualities belonging to something which is not it, which it sees beyond itself, and which is called *body, matter, exterior objects*; the name is not important here. But, according to you, this judgment is illusory. These sensations, taken together or grouped diversely and gathered together under generic or specific names, already constitute all that is understood by *objective reality, body, substance, matter*;¹⁹ in such a way that by these words can be designated indiscriminately either what it [the soul] wrongly judges to be outside of itself, or what happens inside itself, and its own modification; and that it happens thus that the Idealist is at bottom the true Realist, since nothing is so real as sensations, and that the Realist or the Materialist in the common meaning of the term happens to be the Idealist, because instead of confining himself to what he sees, touches, and feels, he conjures up a being to the knowledge of which none of our senses can lead us, out of his idea of substance, bodies and matter. If I'm not mistaken, that's the substance and the commentary of the diverse places of your book where your opinion seems to be found, and this opinion rests on the following assertions very well calculated on the need of your system, without which neither its meaning nor its perpetual return could be understood, but which, for your adversary, will be only *petitio principii*. Thus you say: *Things cannot be conceived of as existing outside of the understanding of all minds.*²⁰ By these things you designate what the Dualist regards as the last physical reason existing outside of him, qualities that he knows through the senses, and you insinuate already what you will say more clearly elsewhere, as your [96] own system, that is, that nothing exists except to the extent that it's represented either by divine understanding or your own and that it's this representation alone which makes and creates things; in other words, that there is nothing different from our representations or our sensations. But who will grant you that, since that's what is to be proved? And besides, it's not a question of conceiving, that is to say, of understanding, and of explaining the way things come about; you can't do it anymore than we can. You continue: *All things that we perceive immediately are ideas, and no idea can exist outside of the mind.*²¹—There is pure equivocation in *immediately* which recurs constantly. It's well known that nothing comes between or can come between sensation and the soul that feels it, since sensation is merely the soul itself modified in a certain way. But if there's something outside of myself beyond the qualities that it [the soul] acquaints me with from whence these qualities are derived, these qualities will be placed between this exterior principle, whatever it is that has them or produces them, and myself and my sensation; and consequently it's mediately or by the mediation of these qualities that I must perceive it. You say: *Sensible things can't exist except in an understanding or*

*spirit!*²² New, or rather, the same equivocation. Sensations or sensible qualities, in as much as the soul is affected by them, can undoubtedly exist only in a mind, in this view; but the exterior and physical principle of these sensations, which itself can't make a sensation (I grant you that), but which must be discovered through the path of reason, this principle can exist outside of the soul, outside of God, who created it and knows it; at least that's the question for you to refute. *The existence of things*, you continue, *consists in their quality of being perceived*; that's what is being denied. In order for things to have *the quality they have of being perceived*, it's undoubtedly necessary for them to exist; but since *the quality of being perceived* is only a part or a particular circumstance of existence, it isn't necessary for them to be perceived in the sense that you mean; [97] that is to say, that they're announced to us through sensations, in order for us to say that they exist.²³ At the least, we have an idea just as clear (I don't say distinct) of existence absolute and existence from every thinking being, as of relative existence; if indeed in all systems the notion of existence isn't unfathomable. I have the same response to make to that: *Only those things exist which perceive or are perceived*,²⁴ and to fifty similar phrases which are merely the same idea turned around in all possible ways; everything rests on proofs, I tell you, and you don't offer any. While waiting for them to come, allow me to pass to what can be regarded as the second part of your work, or rather as a second work; that is, the one where, after having rejected the usual way of explaining our sensations, you propose another one.

Berkeley: Apparently you won't do this in order to praise it, for, it seems, you aren't exactly on the tack of a panegyric. However, nature causes trouble; we are father to our children and I feel certain emotions in seeing them on the point of being smashed against the rocks. Will you be really beastly, Hume?

Hume: No, because it would be too easy; and since questions to which no answer is expected abbreviate much, I'll limit myself to asking you how, in a matter already as thorny and delicate as the one you are dealing with, and which required only simplicity, clarity, and care to avoid the irrelevant matter, you could have thrown in such a furious episode as the one in which we learn that there are no minds or thinking beings considered as beings, but simple ideas, representations, sensations; that these ideas exist without things, these representations without represented objects, and these sensations without the senses [98] which transmit them to us; or rather that everything comes back to the same thing, that the existence of these ideas, these representations, these sensations, is still only an idea, a representation, a sensation; that they exist consequently because they exist, and only in as much as they exist; that God hasn't properly created anything, not produced anything by

an act of his will, but that creation is only the idea and the representation that God had in his fashion of these same ideas and representations that we have, since to exist and to cause to exist means only to be represented, to represent and to perceive; that consequently there is a God:—that is clear and demands no other proof!—We learn that the Bible says all that; that the first chapter of Genesis can be understood in this way, and that Moses was a perfect Idealist. I confess to you that all of that is so beautiful, so grand, so dazzling, that I cease to see anything in it. I don't know how others are made; but as for myself, I'd risk living and dying an unbeliever if I needed all that in order to believe in a God, a providence, an immortal soul; and Skepticism seems to me badly fought by fiction.

Berkeley: At least you'll admit that all that is new.

Hume: New? Absolutely not; what was Malebranche saying when he imagined that we see everything in God? It's useless for you to say that isn't the same as your idea;²⁵ if you have one that can be grasped, that's it. What then is Pantheism (which is itself merely a subtle and purified Spinozism) if not a doctrine in which first of all, as in yours, the whole visible world is but a series of representations, and in which, next, all our representations are only realized because they exist with suitable modifications in the divine understanding; so that in this sense, God is Everything, Everything is God, and outside of God there's nothing? [99]

Berkeley: Heavens above! I a Malebranchist! Something of a Spinozist! Assuredly a Pantheist! Really Hume, I think you want to get me in trouble with the church.

Hume: You wouldn't be the first who, with good intentions, spoiled everything with the church.

Often one doesn't know which fly has bitten.

But let's drop that; I have another project in mind that I indicated to you at the beginning of our conversation, that not only was I discontent with the way in which you had claimed to prove that there are no bodies, sources and principles of sensible qualities, but also that the thesis in itself seemed unsustainable to me no matter how one chose to uphold it. I want to prove it, and, what's more, to be brief; but before beginning, I have a small confession to make to you.

Berkeley: What is it?

Hume: It's that I'm bored with you, and I'd like to talk with someone else.

Berkeley: What a gracious compliment; however, I imagine it has a meaning that doesn't spring to mind right away.

Hume: Here it is. I'm furious against your Hylas, a character who is dull, insipid, unbearable, a real puppet of dialogue, who can be manipulated at

will, who always holds the opinion of the last person who spoke, who neither presses home his objections, nor suspects the bad responses to them. I want to fight him, he will die only by my hand, and in order to be more sure of holding him, I want to be him for a minute, to steal his name, but not his likeness, and to [100] play his role. All right, put yourself there; you keep your costume and are still Philonous; begin.

Philonous or Berkeley: What do you mean by *substance, body, matter, elements of matter, sensible qualities, entities, realities*? For, in the rules, one must begin by defining.

Hylas or Hume: Define? I myself never define those things.

Philonous or Berkeley: Then there's no way to continue.

Hylas or Hume: Did I ask you the definition of *the soul, of a mind, a sensation, an idea, of the distinction that you make between a positive and negative idea*, whether you mix up that which gives an idea with that which creates image and portrait, a clear and consequently sufficient idea with a distinct and adequate one to which very few objects lend themselves? I would be wary of doing that, for we'd become so learned that we'd no longer understand each other. In your dialogues you yourself have made the very true remark that one must never make against a system objections that can be made against all systems and thus against the one being defended. Apply that to the definitions you're demanding from me. When I fight I want the terrain to be swept clean, the area to be clear, because then one can see one's antagonist and that always gives pleasure. It's enough for you to know, then, that I'm an entirely common man, that I speak in sentences like everyone else, and take words as I find them, with the meaning they have in the language of honest people. Thus, by *body, matter, substance*, and whatever, I mean what outside of myself (in the judgment, that is to say, of my soul which will then have to be either corrected or followed) causes [101] sensible qualities to be qualities of something and stand for something; you will know no more about them.

Philonous or Berkeley: But at least you'll explain to me how it's possible that in your system all these effects on the soul can be produced by that which can neither be seen, touched, or heard.

Hylas or Hume: God forbid that I tell you that, for a thousand reasons, the first being that no one can tell you that. I'm vexed by certain explanations, as by certain definitions. It's a matter of a fact that is either real and certain, or alleged and illusory (that remains to be decided), and not the manner in which the fact appears. Besides, have I asked *you* how it happens that the soul, being all alone in your system, nevertheless has an order of ideas which has no connection to all its other ideas that could be called psychological and moral; and that it [the soul] judges the first ones, their

origin and source, completely opposite to the way it judges the latter ones? Do you know this? Do you think it matters for the subject at hand to know?

Philonous or *Berkeley*: No, but still it's necessary to grasp the thing; and you're like a porcupine, unapproachable from every side.—Look, to finish up, I'd like to let you talk alone, and settle this matter as you please.

Hylas or *Hume*: My settlement will be very simple. We examine whether the judgment that the soul brings to bear on that part of its ideas that we call sensations, and by virtue of which it projects, so to speak, outside of itself the type, model, and occasion, is a judgment to which we could subscribe and which proves effectively that there are bodies. [102] Everything you say in your first dialogue concerning the weakness of us all when we let ourselves lean towards a tendency that only a bit of philosophy can correct, of locating in bodies themselves the sensations they give us and of drawing a conclusion about what they really are from what they seem to be, is very true. You expose with as much wisdom as clarity the proven errors of the senses, both by the corrective that the senses themselves bring in joining forces, in lending each other reciprocal aid, and by the infinite diversity of the judgments that the same person or different persons bring to bear on the same object, and which seem to leave it nothing that belongs to it. Your natural philosophy and your observing mind have served you in a superior way in this very precious part of your work. But be careful then lest one knows all that and accords it to you. Be careful that they aren't just mistakes of detail that have nothing in common not only with the general assertion, *there are bodies*, but even with a whole group of particular assertions on the different sorts of bodies, their properties, their effects, their usages, about which there's no division of opinion.²⁶ Be careful lest another thing result from that, except that our sensations do not make us know bodies such as they are in themselves, but not at all that they don't exist and are nothing; that it's not experience alone that can either invalidate or establish the certainty of their existence, since in recognizing that they're different from the sensible qualities that we assume emanate from them, we already declare that they're outside of the sphere of the senses; but the reasoning that joins to experience for the part that experience can have in it, must pronounce on this matter. Now, you have precisely maintained the contrary, and you have always triumphed when it was granted to you that experience attested only to sensible qualities, and didn't know bodies. Here then is my profession of faith in three words; these three words are *possibility, likelihood, certainty of bodies*. I admit their possibility. I grant you that it would be possible that there were none, not in the sense in which you deny them, that is, by [103] maintaining that our sensations arise neither from the soul nor bodies, which renders them unintelligible, but in as

much as our souls could have been made in such a way that they would have drawn this order of ideas out of their own bosom, just as they draw out all the others, all those of which it's agreed that nothing outside of ourselves either produces them immediately or resembles them. Notice, however, that in this case, that is, if our souls had been, so to speak, preformed and organized so that without any material and sensible universe they would have all of the ideas relating to a material and sensible universe, no more and no less, that could be conceived against all odds by a peculiarity of nature. Note, I say, that in this supposition, at least, these souls would not have always judged and firmly believed that these ideas came to them from outside. You'll admit that this judgment, and the invincible tendency which leads us there, is an embarrassing phenomenon in your hypothesis (which I'm accepting for the moment). You'll say that this original error, this lie inherent in the soul, is but one more peculiarity of nature that can be grouped with the first, consisting in having and drawing out of one's own breast all the ideas that relate to a material and sensible universe, without this universe existing. And, as I'm limiting myself here purely to what is strictly possible and intelligible, without prejudice from what I have left to say about this phenomenon, I can still grant it to you as something bizarre and askew, inexplicable but conceivable, while still having you observe the great and notable difference between these two ways for the soul to see in a field of possibility where I want to follow you. In the first way of seeing it [the soul] has sensations, and nothing outside corresponds to them; the source is within. It's conceived as a character trait whose imprint would have been sufficiently given by the will of the creator, but also as a need in its current position; we couldn't live without this order of ideas, from wherever it came to us. By the second way of seeing, [104] the soul, in addition, is persuaded that outside of itself there are objects corresponding to these sensations, and these objects don't exist. This persuasion has nothing in common with the sensations that it accompanies; it's not a natural and necessary continuation of them; it could be separated from them; moreover, it's perfectly useless for the life and preservation of man. If all the world were disabused today concerning the existence and reality of bodies, with sensations remaining and always giving us the same services, nothing would change in all the domain of the animal and reasonable economy. You see then that I'm extremely generous in consenting to put these two interests of the soul in one same category, in order to grant you without restriction that, everything considered, it would be possible that there were no body. Perhaps I'd be even more generous if I made you less aware of how much I am; but philosophers, like many others, give nothing for nothing, and one doesn't pride oneself on delicacy in debate. Self-interest, at least,

doesn't enter into my liberality, and if I pass on the preceding considerations in order to grant you the possibility of the non-existence of the body, it won't be a great sacrifice to you to grant me that it's also very possible that bodies do exist such as we conceive of them. You say that absolute existence, by virtue of which an object exists without being seen by any intelligent being, is contradictory; but that's because you've chosen to define existence as *the faculty of being seen*, which I've already taken up elsewhere; and because you confuse knowing precisely and perfectly what a body is (just as we know what a sensible quality is) with knowing in general that bodies exist, believing in them and picturing them as we vaguely picture so many other things whose existence we don't question. Impossible assumptions are admitted in debate, when there's no other way to make oneself understood, and when the conclusion drawn is the correct one. Allow me an impossible assumption here then, on which I beg you to reflect. Intelligence is undoubtedly, in God as in every intelligent being, inseparable from the will, because in order to will [105] something, one must know, and when one has known, one must will. But for the moment, let's imagine God without intelligence, but with only will. Since it alone produces and creates, don't you see that the world would exist through it and only through it—an absolute existence about which no one would know anything, not even the sovereign intelligence that I'm taking out of the picture through my assumption. These bodies that aren't seen or represented, but produced by an all-powerful will that I assume to be blind and without representation, would exist then and would be something even though they didn't awake any ideas anywhere. Now, reinject this intelligence or these intelligences that have been left out of consideration; will these bodies exist any more than they did? Will they feel even the least change? Won't their representation be a very distinct phenomenon or effect of their reality and their existence? If you mean by the *faculty of being perceived* the possibility to be perceived at the moment when you will place a perceiving being in relation to them [bodies], doesn't this possibility inherent in their nature in the relation in which you put them with this perceiving being [être] already suppose their existence [of bodies], which by that very thing is distinct and independent from it? How then could you conclude that it's impossible for something to exist beyond our sensations from our impossibility of picturing what it is distinctly and intuitively?

I've announced the likelihood of bodies. Independently from what would be inconceivable in the judgment of the soul on the subject, if this judgment had no basis, all probabilities come together in favor of its correctness and truth. They [probabilities] are even so strong here and so singular that I'd feel the need to banish them in all kinds of matters if I shut my eyes to their

evidence in this one [matter]. It's easy to say, Well, we're wrong to believe there's something outside of ourselves different from our sensations, and this isn't the only case where nature mocks us. One must compare error to error, judgment to judgment; and if there's no parity, have enough good faith to recognize it. Errors of the senses [106] aren't really errors; it's errors of the mind which, through ignorance, haste, and frivolity at times wants to know through the senses that which isn't solely derived from them [the senses]; at times it [the mind] doesn't know how to use the senses suitably; attributes to one that which belongs to the other; separates them [the senses] when they should be combined, and combines them when their separate results should be taken into account; neglects the difference of the milieux which their action traverses, of instruments which support it [the mind], and of a thousand circumstances of which the smallest is often decisive; at times, finally, draws conclusions beyond what the senses authorize it to conclude. All the wrong here is on the side of the one who judges, and not the organ which inspires its judgment. All these precisions fall down when it's merely a matter of believing in the existence of bodies, because the precisions get lost in a totality of impression to which all the senses conspire and imprint the character of truth by this unanimous coming together. Errors of the senses, in as much as we are able to be aware of them, all come rather late in our life and diminish with time, through reflection, the study of nature and of ourselves; as they are almost always voluntary, they're born, weaken, cease finally, to the degree that we learn more, and are subject to continual revision and correction; while the judgment about the reality and the existence of bodies is the first and almost the last that we carry, it doesn't leave us for one minute of our life, and is mixed up with consciousness of ourselves. It has a sort of necessity and unchangeability that it shares with only that small number of moral truths that this same character of permanence renders unquestionable. Errors of the senses are only ever partial; they never fall but on the nature of certain bodies, on their properties, their manner of appearance, and the circumstances which accompany it; everything there is individual and local; they even suppose that there's a corporeal universe; on the contrary, the judgment which declares it real is a total judgment, which renders all the others possible but guarantees none and consequently does not participate in the uncertainty [107] of any. Both philosophers and the vulgar should also fear errors of the senses, but the latter much less than the former because if the vulgar have fewer means to protect themselves from errors, they also have many fewer occasions to fall into them; there's no risk of drowning when one hugs the shore. But all are united in the judgment that outside of our sensations there's something which isn't these sensations themselves, and if

the common man doesn't form the judgment through the same reasoning, with the same circumspection and all the distinctions which the philosopher brings to it, he nevertheless does form it roughly. Not believing when he eats a piece of bread either that it is something he couldn't see or touch or savor of this bread which can nourish him without the sensible qualities of this food; or that it is the sensible qualities such as form, color, taste which alone can sustain him and make him live without the help of the rest that he imagines with these qualities; instead, he knows very well, in his way, that you can't have the one without the other. Every scholar is an ordinary man on this point, and you yourself, Berkeley (in all conscience), you congratulate yourself on your book, not as a true and proven work, but as an unusual and perplexing one. It seems to me, finally, that in all the errors of the senses one sees that if nature exposes us to them, it's not only because it would always depend on us not to fall into these errors, as I have pointed out, while the error which bears on the existence of bodies in general seems necessary and inevitable, but also because up to a certain point they [these errors] have their uses, they form the mind, prepare it for useful tasks and sharpen its wisdom. It's not impossible to discover more than one goal there; but, and I alluded to this above, what is the good of putting ourselves under the unshakable obligation of believing all our lives in the existence of bodies, as in our own existence, and being mistaken in this, while this illusion serves absolutely no purpose? In order to live, all we need is sensations, and if we always had some, according to you, [108] we would always act in accordance with the impetus they give us, even though we'd know that they're our own work, and that there's nothing outside ourselves that produces them, just as we act according to the ideas of reason and conscience without imagining that they come from outside ourselves. In gathering together these diverse reflections, it seems difficult to me not to find in my feelings a superiority of probability that attaches me to them more than ever. It's true that these reflections are rather simple, and perhaps you'll find my tone a little bourgeois for a metaphysician. I ask your pardon, but in my eyes common sense is always good sense and good sense is the basis of philosophy. At times philosophy must go beyond common sense by revealing to us truths that common sense couldn't attain, but never against it; at times it must explain and analyze common sense, but never contradict or reverse it because it hasn't succeeded in harmonizing common sense with more sublime concepts; and I believe that the touchstone for the latter [more sublime concepts] is always either to have common sense on their side, or at least not to have it against them. That said, permit me, in all gentleness, to appropriate and claim for this part of my discourse the ingenious emblem and motto which is found at the head of your

third dialogue.²⁷ In it you agree with the received ideas whose respectable and sacred character you've apparently felt on this matter, just by retaining the names "body" and "matter," and by completely changing their meaning. As for me, I leave to words their proper meaning, and by dint of philosophy I find myself again, or at least (because one must always be modest) I think I find myself, in spite of that, on the great path of plain good sense. Thus it's I who, with all due respect, am the fountain whose water the great basin receives, whatever its height.

Philonous or *Berkeley*: Ho! Ho! This is serious. You aren't content with having spattered, shaken, and dislocated my carriage; you even want to tear off its coat of arms and nail it to yours? That won't happen right now; that prize must be earned, and you recall that you've promised me something concerning the certainty [109] of bodies; I can't let you off on this.

Hylas or *Hume*: It seems to me that it wouldn't be entirely letting me off to give the name of moral certainty to the weight of probability about which you must feel pressed, especially in a matter which doesn't allow of any direct demonstration. However, since it's necessary to tie the noose tighter with you, I beg you to weigh the following considerations:

1) In the soul there are two entirely different operations, as I've already pointed out to you: the one through which the soul has sensations, and the one through which it judges that these sensations don't belong to it so much that the occasion or cause are found outside itself and in an order of things that it distinguishes from its sensations. This second judgment is unique; none of the other ideas that the soul formulates through attention, reflection, abstraction, and reasoning is followed by it; the soul feels the ideas belong to it and attributes them solely to itself. But there's no intrinsic and psychological connection between the apperception of a sensation and the judgment that this sensation comes in part from outside; however, all the other faculties and even all the other procedures of the soul hold together sufficiently and up to a certain point explain one another. This operation alone in your system would remain unintelligible, having its reason neither in the soul nor outside of it, and it would be simply in order to be wrong and have one more error, and what other error? That the soul would do here what it doesn't do anywhere else, and without being determined here by any of the secret incentives that we know it to have.

2) Most of our sensations are voluntary, but the general sensation, the one that makes all the others possible, which contains them and includes all of them, the one in a word which [110] gives us the idea of a physical and corporeal universe, is an involuntary sensation, and the judgment that declares it tied to something which is neither us nor our sensation is also

involuntary. You'll say that all the instincts are involuntary, including this judgment, and it doesn't follow that it contains the truth.—You can only understand two things by instinct: either a disposition, a tendency of the sentient being towards a certain class of objects, a natural, general, blind, and invincible tendency; or the detailed applications of which this penchant is susceptible. This very simple distinction puts me equally in a state either to grant you or deny you that the judgment of the soul of which we are speaking is an instinct; without prejudicing my thesis, this judgment contains the truth. For, if there is instinct in the primitive, blind, necessary tendency that carries us there, this tendency, like all the others, must be explainable by the nature of the being who carries it in himself. But I've already shown that this judgment in the soul has nothing in common with all the other faculties, with sensations that would always run their course without it, that it's even contrary to what the soul thinks of all its other ideas; this tendency, like all those given to us by nature, ought to have a goal, not to say clear and obvious, not to say useful, but necessary and indispensable for the preservation, the well-being, the aim of the creature who is endowed with it; and under this point of view, no instinct is wrong; they are all essentially sure, infallible, and directed towards the truth. But, I have shown you that with our sensations alone taken on the same footing of all the other ideas whose origin the soul isn't going to look for outside of itself, the physical and moral world would go just as it does, and that this strangeness (for this is strange in your system) of always throwing precisely this class of ideas outside of itself serves no purpose. But then, you say, bodies are useless.—I'll answer that I know nothing about this, and that as I'm not proving to you *a priori* that bodies are necessary, it seems to me ridiculous to want *a priori* to prove that they're useless, and that consequently there mustn't be any. Let's prove, if we can, [111] *a posteriori* that there they exist, and let's not trouble ourselves about the reasons that the Sovereign Being can have had for producing them; but this gets me off my subject. Thus then for the first meaning of the word *instinct* applied to the judgment of the soul on the cause of its sensations, and you see that it doesn't do away with this difficulty of what's involuntary and forced, so to speak, in this judgment. I pass on to the second meaning of instinct under which this word would be extended to the daily and detailed applications to which each of our natural penchants is liable. They're all more or less free and arbitrary, subject to the power of reason. Take, in man especially (for he's the one under consideration here), all the instincts he derives from nature: love of life, physical needs, moral tendencies, like the desire to know and to feel, paternal tenderness, love of country, the aptitude for religious ideas; do you know even one of them of which we aren't more or less masters, whose temperament, education, climate, custom, reason, religious

principles, all sorts of causes and circumstances can't vary, modify, produce or suspend, fortify, extend, multiply or weaken, restrain, or destroy the particular acts? That which I grant you is done by instinct; is one then forced by instinct to do it always and in the same way? Now, try a little, I ask you, no longer to believe at all in the existence of bodies or merely to suspend the belief in them, or to limit belief to certain bodies, in a word to control this instinct the way you control so many others. You well know that your book doesn't meet this challenge. It's not a question of what you've written, but of what you've believed. It's not a question of what you think you've believed, but of what you've believed fully, sincerely, constantly; and it's not a question of you or even of all philosophers put together, but of the whole human race, which, given over to instinct, can alone teach us its power. Let all men make a small effort to make of this tendency to believe in bodies, what they make of all their tendencies that they more or less keep or lose, extend or constrict, regulate, [112] change, apply to their liking; and here they'll see a great difference, and in order to explain it, they'll feel that to say *it is instinct* is not to explain everything, but that in this regard still one is as if forced to come out of oneself in order to understand what is impervious to any explanation without that.

3) For a long time it has been noticed that the deprivation of a sense, whichever one, brings about the deprivation of all the ideas relating to this sense; but it seems to me that not enough has been made of this observation, which however is essential in the matter at hand. What happens when one of our senses is either wounded or destroyed also happens when two, three are cut from communication with exterior objects, and would necessarily happen if we lacked all five of them. It's certain that if a man could live deprived of all physical feeling and all the organs that it assumes, he'd have absolutely no sort of ideas about bodies, without ceasing nonetheless (at least nothing obliges denying it) to have all the other ideas of which the soul is capable by itself, and that it's agreed on by the two sides to regard as the result of its own force. Where does that come from in the hypothesis that there's nothing outside of us that produces our sensations? Has the soul of this monstrous being in appearance changed by this elimination of the senses? In the opposing view to yours, isn't the soul just as likely as before to draw these ideas from its own bosom? And if, as a last refuge, one claimed that this soul, fated to inhabit a body deprived in whole or in part of the organs of sense, had been consequently formed in such a way that it lacked the power to contain by itself the ideas that we call sensations, I'd ask why all these ideas come back to it in proportion as you give back to the body, one after the other, the senses of which you thought it was deprived?

4) One other observation about which I find there's been still less insistence than on the preceding one and which leads to the same result: that is that, in possession of all the senses that nature [113] has dealt out to us, we find their usage so determined that there's no way we can use them differently, to have them make exchanges amongst themselves of function and agency, to secure from one an order of ideas that another is made to give us; for example, to hear through the eyes or see through the ears; which would be of little account if it were sufficient for the soul only and its own activity to produce sensations, if there were no need for an exterior circumstance which one would want to indicate when one spoke of body and matter.

5) Moreover, I think I see a contradiction as singular as it is palpable in the avowal that one is obliged to make of the possibility of bodies, joined to the determination not to admit there are any and that what we see is bodies; for if we are mistaken in admitting them, we must declare what we've seen above to be untenable, that is, that it's not possible that they exist, since if the manner in which we arrive at assuring ourselves of their existence is faulty and isn't deserving of confidence, it's impossible to imagine any means of knowledge that's certain and infallible in this regard, which comes back to denying that the existence of bodies implies contradiction, an absurdity that I've already dealt with above.

6) Finally, in the supposition that there are no bodies which, by their real presence, determine the nature, the sequence, and the degree of our sensations, how will you explain the difference between the state of waking and the state of sleeping, and will you extricate yourself from the alternative of saying either that we are always awake or always asleep?²⁸

Philonous or Berkeley: I thank you, Hylas, for your trouble.

Hylas or Hume: No, please, my dear colleague, I won't be satisfied with a thank you; I covet your fountain, the pretty motto that accompanies it, what you've called your coat of arms, [114] and what you have almost promised me if I succeeded in putting the metaphysics of the subject we are discussing in harmony with common sense. I have done it.—Well now, Monsieur of the Fountain, make room for me, for now I am the winner.

Philonous or Berkeley: It is sure, at least, that in all you have just said, there is more than enough to convince me that I have not entirely completed the task that I set out to do in my book, and that other weapons are needed to bridge this gap. I'll think about this some more. But it isn't everything to be dead and buried, as I feel I am; I must still be polite and visit you in your terrain as you have visited me in mine and from which my terrain will resonate for a long time.

Hylas or Hume: What do you mean?

Philonous or Berkeley: I mean that I feel like attacking the transcendent idealism that you profess with the same blows that you have made on the physical idealism that I love so much.

Hylas or Hume: So be it. Vengeance is sweet, but you forget that the scene changes and one must throw off masks. I am no longer Hylas but Hume, as formerly; you are no longer Philonous, but Berkeley; those were *noms de guerre* that we used for a while.

Berkeley: Alas, I did poorly with mine.

Hume: Why did you take it? Great men always lose by not showing themselves as they are.

Berkeley: That is very nice, Mr. Hume, very nice, very flattering, much more than is necessary to be true; but in fact I want to defend causality against you; and first of all, if I'm not mistaken, here is your reasoning and a sketch of [section] seven of your *Philosophical Essays*.²⁹ [115]

You say that the first time someone saw a billiard ball roll towards another one, there was no way of knowing *a priori* what the result of their collision would be. The first time someone saw the sun rise, he could not say that it would rise the next day; and the same for everything that is called fact, event, contingency, whose opposite always remains possible. When repeated experiences have shown us these phenomena a thousand times in a uniform and constant order, we have never been able to notice anything else save that they happened and were positioned one after the other. We have called the one which precedes "cause" and the one that follows "effect." But we were not authorized to go further and to say that there is something in the one that comes first which necessarily produces and determines the following, and to deduce from that the principle that every effect has a cause and every cause must produce an effect, since this principle can be deduced neither by reason nor by experience. Reason doesn't suggest it to us, for if it were the fruit of reason, we would have it prior to all experience. But I have shown that it is only attained through long and multiple experiences. Neither does experience give it to us, because if it were the result of experience, we wouldn't simply see that things succeed each other or coexist, but we would see further what necessarily places them together. But I've shown that experience doesn't get to that point. Thus, the principle of causality comes neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori*: Thus it is not a principle, that is to say, a proposition which is necessary and which alone allows us to pass with a demonstrated certainty from the visible universe to the no less real but invisible one, which in the eyes of the philosopher contains all the scope of the first: Thus the habit of constantly seeing a certain series of phenomena and the association of ideas

which results from it is but a way of speaking. Isn't that, in substance, your system, Hume? [116]

Hume: That's it.

Berkeley: Now I find only one shortcoming in it to which I will limit myself because you will soon agree it equals many others put together: that is, that your consequences are badly drawn from your principles and do not flow from them at all. You say that one never foresees, one can never foresee nor predict with certainty, facts and events when one only knows the first one because whoever says *fact* and *event* says what can either exist or not.—Agreed, but from that it does not follow that the principle of causality cannot exist in our soul prior to all experience; because we carry within us many other confused impressions which precede all action of exterior objects, whose origin is lost deep in our being, and contain more truth to the extent that they are the work of nature and not our own work; because we don't know our own soul enough to explain how everything in it comes to be there; because we must not confuse the existence of a notion and its certainty with the way we were able to attain them, and less still with the applications we make of them and the occasions which come up to use them. From the fact that we deduce from the thousandth time we see a billiard ball move towards another one or from the thousandth sunrise, a very different consequence from the one we would have deduced from the first movement or the first sunrise, you will very clearly conclude that it is experience that brings on, determines, and inspires the application of causality, but not that it is to experience alone that we are beholden; unless you need to argue like that to infer from the insufficiency and the nullity of this experience that this principle has no respectable origin. Besides, you should notice that there is a great difference between saying that everything that exists has necessarily a sufficient reason for its existence, and saying that everything that has a sufficient reason necessarily exists. [117] There is even a contradiction in this last assertion, for it is because everything is contingent that there must be a sufficient reason for everything; that which contains an absolute and mathematical necessity dispenses with it; and the sufficient reason of a contingent being must consequently itself be contingent. Your example of the first billiard ball or the first sunrise doesn't then prove what you want to prove. From the first look at one or the other, no one could guess what will happen next, because for that, the sufficient reasons which will determine this succession would have to be necessary also; which implies: it does not then result from this powerlessness that one does not yet have the principle of sufficient reason engraved on the soul, but merely that one cannot yet apply it, and one cannot yet apply it because that would assume an absurdity; to wit that the

sufficient reason of a contingent thing to come, a reason by that very thing contingent also, is at the same time a necessary reason. The only application that the spectator of this first billiard ball or this first sunrise will make of this principle is to say that whatever happens following this first phenomenon, there'll be sufficient reason, and this possible application is sufficient to prove the antecedence of the principle which, at the time that one has facts, is applied with more precision. In the first case, that is to say, when the phenomenon is new, you require that I see the effect in the cause, and I point out to you that the pretension is contradictory, because it assumes what should not be assumed here, the necessity of the one and the other, and that, being contradictory, the pretension does not touch the existence of the general principle prior to any phenomenon. In the second case, that is, when the experiences are repeated, you accuse me of only applying my principle when I see the cause in the effect, and I repeat to you that I have already applied it to the first phenomenon, but as the nature of the thing permitted it, vaguely and conditionally, and I repeat [118] to you that a principle applied with more or less certainty and precision is not for all that a principle of new creation. You continue and you say in substance: Experience doesn't provide the idea of causality because it offers us only results that are consecutive or which coexist, without showing what we call their cause, and because being composed only of sufficient reasons (according to us), that is to say, contingent and consequently of contingent effects, experience can't authorize us to jump to any necessary and universal conclusion like the one that forms the principle of causality.—Granted, but is it not therefore said to you that the principle of causality is a principle of experience in regard to the manner in which we attain it and in the absolute, general expression that we give it. Thus, of the two very just observations furnished to you by the supposition of a man positioned at times at the head of all the possible experiences and seeing only the first one, at times in the middle or at the end of all those presented by the duration of the world and of which you infer that the principle of causality comes to us neither *a priori* nor *a posteriori*, and consequently from no respectable source; from these two observations, I say, I draw a completely contrary conclusion, and I think I can name it simultaneously, but (as you well know) under a different meaning and relation, an *a priori* and *a posteriori* principle; *a priori* to the extent that without any work by our soul, at least that is palpable, with no long, difficult and uncertain abstractions, the principle is in us like the principle of contradiction of which it is only an immediate consequence, for if something can exist without cause and without sufficient reason, it can also be and not be simultaneously—be in one way and at the same time in another completely opposite way. The very real

opposition that we see between an always incomplete and necessarily contingent experience, and a necessary and universal principle proves nothing against the latter, since it doesn't derive from experience as its source; this opposition could well be merely apparent, if this principle, like every modification and essential way of seeing of our soul, were only the immediate [119] expression of a universal and eternal law observed in the whole realm of God's works, but verified by human weakness in relation to a very small part of these works. From this point of view, the principle of causality is *a priori*, and it's *a posteriori* if we consider only the opportunities that experience gives us to use and apply it. The explanation that I'm giving you here of its origin and certainty, if it isn't without obscurity, like all the primitive ideas we find we have without having given them to ourselves, seems to me at least to relate and answer to what we're seeking; whereas I avow to you that the solution you've invented teaches nothing of what we want to know, in my view. You say that it's the habit of seeing things tied together by the law of resemblance, contiguity, and succession which has made us imagine that things were tied together by causality; but that would be to promote that which is in question; that would be to push aside the difficulty and not to resolve it. For it will be maintained that the law of resemblance, contiguity, and succession is itself based on the law of causality, and what will you answer? You'll be asked from whence comes this habit of labeling cause and effect that which is not; that which, according to you, doesn't at all present itself as such, that which could equally be called similar, contiguous and successive? If this habit weren't itself the sentiment of causality? And it will happen that you'll have explained nothing, and you'll be suspected of having imagined this habit only in order to preserve a sort of contradiction, that of basing the principle of causality on experience, albeit in your own way, after having shown that experience can't give the least idea of it, and having said of it all possible evil.

Hume: What would you have wanted me to say then?

Berkeley: That's a good one! Is it up to me to give you the proofs for an opinion that is your own, and which, in my opinion, [120] has no proofs in its favor? But wait:—I'm thinking of something.—Couldn't you have made of the soul a *plastic nature*?³⁰ Yes, a plastic nature!—What is called *plastic*—that is indeed it.—No, it isn't entirely that,—Here it is: couldn't you have made of the soul a *plastic-logical* or a *logical-plastic* nature?

Hume: The soul, a nature—a nature—I'd die before I said such a thing; but then what do you mean?

Berkeley: What do I mean! That's the question! These things are intuitively understood, are felt, but aren't talked about; where would we be if we tried to make ourselves clear? And then, isn't it too bad to examine and analyze certain expressions that are full of genius and fire, which, like a precious essence,

evaporate and no longer amount to anything when they are handled too much?—Ah! Hume, a little compassion, I beg of you, for this sublime and distinctive quality of a new theory that you haven't even glimpsed; *the soul a logical-plastic or plastic-logical nature!* Doesn't that say everything? And don't you swoon in saying it?

Hume: I for one don't swoon so easily, and if only to know if you have a swoon at this time, if I'm watching or sleeping while listening to you, I want to know what to loan you with respect to the soul in giving it this strange nature.

Berkeley: Well!—A cooking pot.

Hume: The soul, a cooking pot!

Berkeley: Yes, since we must talk bluntly, a cooking pot whose shape would be formed by time and space, and in the middle of which [121] there'd be four separations, in each one of which you'd put a paper which would take on its exact dimensions. The first would say "quantity" and underneath, "unity, plurality, universality." The second: "quality," and underneath, "reality, negation, limitation." The third, "relation," and underneath, "substance, cause, community." The fourth, "modality," and underneath, "possibility, existence, necessity." Above all that, in the interstices, and as much as the receptacle could contain of it, you'd throw in paper marked, "new, unintelligible, and not very necessary words; old words with an opposite meaning that must be guessed; pure and continuous *petitio principii*; a sharp and decisive tone," and whatever other slogan of great significance. That done, you'd set them on fire with alcohol and would stir it all with a magic baton, while invoking Pyrrho, Sextus Empiricus, above all, Aristotle, very surprised to find himself mixed up in this affair, and father Eson³¹ of youthful memory. And, oh, wonder of wonders! You'd see all your inscriptions, which had a real and ontological meaning when they went into the melting pot, come out light as a feather, having only formal, logical, and dialectical value, no longer proving or concluding anything at bottom; in return for which you'd be very comfortable, you'd have no more axioms whose value was troubling, and all the trouble you took to reconcile them with experience, which can't fill them, and with reason, which doesn't seem to you to be able to possess them prior to experience, would be labor lost.

Hume: I don't know what I'm hearing.—Berkeley, are you unwell? Are you apoplectic?

Berkeley: Well, at least my brain is fatigued. I think I've "exalted my soul," as the other one says and that consequently I have just made a prophecy. That isn't pleasant for someone who doesn't [122] like ghosts, and the certain man who appeared to me is of a singular build. In order to continue this conversation, I propose a game of chess.

Hume: A game of chess to continue and suitably complete a metaphysical conversation! I understand this less than the discoveries to come that you've just revealed to me in your prophetic rapture. Now then, no more joking.

Berkeley: Someone said of a man who is very narrow-minded and very serious that "in him seriousness was a mystery of the body to hide the stupidity of the mind."³² The same could be said about certain works; but I'm not one of those who takes heaviness and tedium for solidity. Good philosophy (if you will) and gaiety, that's what suits me. I repeat then: let's play chess in order to treat the matter we've taken up more profoundly, but in the following way: we'll lay out our pieces, and then leave them alone and not touch them; we'll merely argue about all the combinations that could be made with them and about all the coups that would result.

Hume: That's very good, but what relation is there between this virtual game and what I'm impatient to hear about the subject you want to exhaust? Finish then, you're killing me.

Berkeley: Dying doesn't help anything, and what I'm saying is as clear as day. Haven't I proved to you that you were wrong to be a transcendent Idealist? And haven't you proved that I was wrong to be my sort of Idealist?

Hume: That's true. [123]

Berkeley: Well! If you were right, I should become a physical Realist; if I were right, then you also must convert and become a transcendent Realist: in return for which, by a stroke of the pen, there we have all the possible reality in this universe, and all that will be left will be the poor Moralists, and those who seek happiness, who will complain that everything under the sun is appearance, vanity, and nothingness. But don't you see that by acting now like children who, after having moved the sand around where they were playing, level it out again in order to start over, we can take it that we've said nothing (which is very often the case in the world) and place the elements of our debate in all the different relations and points of contact in which they possibly could be, make of them as many different systems, and see to what extent these systems are compatible or incompatible.

Hume: Let's see if I grasp your idea:—physical Realist and transcendent Realist; physical Idealist and transcendent Idealist; physical Realist and transcendent Idealist; transcendent Realist and physical Idealist:—that is precisely

Marquise, your lovely eyes make me die of love

*Of love make me die your lovely eyes, lovely Marquise!*³³

And that's how to make those who like to try out all sorts of opinions happy.

Berkeley: It seems to me that one could give a more serious twist to the thing, and it isn't rare, for want of exhausting all these kinds of combinations in the matters that are amenable to it, to see the best debaters fall into

contradictions or *petitio principii* of which at times one perceives as little as the debaters. By the combination of physical Realism and transcendent Realism, metaphysics becomes a true science, worthy of that name, and solidly established. By the joining of physical [124] Idealism and transcendent Idealism, metaphysics is obliterated and lost; for it's essentially a science of things, and not a science of ideas or an instrument of logic. In this latter supposition, axioms are now merely combinations of abstract ideas (if that which represents nothing concrete or real can even be labeled "abstract"), applied to individual ideas which no longer represent anything. Since the soul itself is destroyed as substance, as "I," by transcendent Idealism or the void of the principle of causality, the ideas that the soul has as much isolated as united in universal propositions no longer connect to anything, exist one knows not where, are without principle, as they are without object or usefulness. As there's no longer anything to know that's different from the mere act of knowing, it isn't clear who's happy, or who gains from this knowledge. Associating physical Realism with transcendent Idealism seems to me first of all useless, then contradictory. I say useless, for if there's no reality in the principle of causality, and axioms in general, it matters very little whether there are bodies or not, a simple succession without sufficient reason not being able either to assure experience or form reason. I say contradictory, for how is it possible to be convinced or convince the Idealist that there are bodies, if one begins by shaking the foundations of all reason by maintaining that no principle is able to conclude in favor of that which is outside of ourselves, and no principle finds anything outside of ourselves with which it coexists? Am I obliged to grant you without proof that there are phenomena or bodies? And where will you find your proofs if universal propositions, the source of all your conclusions, are, in your view, merely formulas that are vain and empty of all meaning, to which nothing in the reality of things responds? You slander, you scorn, you break your weapons; then you want to engage in battle! Finally, transcendent Realism unites with physical Idealism or has no object, in my opinion, or has no bearing on the object that it should have, and which alone makes precious to us principles whose cosmological reality it maintains; the action of these principles no longer transports us, then, outside ourselves, but is enclosed entirely [125] within the explanation and necessary connection of the workings of the soul.

Hume: Certainly I see that these matters of which you've laughingly wrested the outline and the sketch from me are beautiful and vast and that there are things that are as true and useful as they are fine and strange to say about this bringing together of diverse possible opinions to which Realism and Idealism can give rise. Above all, what you've said concerning the combination of physical Realism and transcendent Idealism, and transcendent

Realism with physical Idealism seems to me ripe for further development and I await it impatiently.

Berkeley: Ah! For shame, Hume, who'd want to dwell too long on a game of jacks, for at first that's all you saw. Believe me, let's be lighthearted, lively, and pleasant until the end; Rightly, you said: *Marquise, your lovely eyes make me die of love.* Now that I know what is owed to two lovely eyes, I will never take the scalpel to them; that would be done soon enough by their sparkle, and you'd no longer have the pleasure of dying of love when you saw them.

Hume: You're punishing me excessively for a piece of folly.

Berkeley: That's merely a way of telling you that what you're asking would take us too much time, and that this conversation has lasted long enough. It'll be for tomorrow, if you want, and the following days, to speak in the ordinary style of dialogues.—At the break of day, at the first birdsong in a flowered path, near a brook that babbles and wanders through the fields, when I have the honor of meeting up with you by chance, pensive, tormented by the previous day's conversation, and suggesting I sit down with you under a tree in order to continue to hear [126] scruples that you'll be burning to sacrifice for me. Are they not the pretty things and ingenious transitions I needed to enrich my book? And am I not doing a good deed by taking away the malice that otherwise you'd have heaped on me? But besides, don't you see that until now we've only been playing a comedy?

Hume: In what way?

Berkeley: Don't play the innocent; you know as well as I.

Hume: Do you mean that there's been no semblance of truth (which is correct) in our dialogue, and that consequently it's bad in every way, since, contrary to the custom of philosophers since time immemorial, we've neither gotten angry nor insulted each other, nor even countered the succession of objections that we have both proposed immediately and without interrupting each other? When Hume spoke against Berkeley, Berkeley was silent; when Berkeley spoke against Hume, Hume was silent; and they even drew a clear and precise conclusion, which is never supposed to happen between metaphysicians who know their trade.

Berkeley: And why then have we done it?

Hume: Why? Who have you seen through this door, hidden in order to hear us and write down all we said?

Berkeley: And you?

Hume: A man who by the looks of him had the air of an academician tormented by the idea of a paper to read to his colleagues, [127] and looking for some source which could put an end to the dryness and sterility which had stricken him. We've given him one, by arguing as people hardly ever argue, and by replacing what we would have said to each other if he hadn't

been there, with what he needed to hear in order to be wrong on our account and amuse his colleagues without convincing them; for they know men like philosophers well.

Berkeley: He'll release us from the fine points of art and versimilitude in favor of solidity and a brevity which, while satisfying his memory, would have given pleasure to his listeners.

NOTES

Presented at the Academy on April 14, 1796. Published as "Dialogue entre Berkeley et Hume," *Mémoires de l'Académie Royale* [for 1796] (Berlin: Decker, 1799), 86–127. The French page numbers are shown in brackets in the text.

1 The French edition of the *Three Dialogues* (Amsterdam, 1750) had a vignette at the beginning of the first chapter that showed a philosopher in his study who was looking at a child who was watching himself in a mirror and trying to touch himself. The philosopher laughs. But a line from Horace reverses the subject of ridicule: "Quid rides? . . . fabula de te Narratur" ["Who are you laughing at? . . . the story is about you"]. This image is discussed by d'Alembert in "Corps," *Encyclopédie*, 1754, 4: 262. See also Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II xxiv.

2 George Berkeley, *Dialogues entre Hylas and Philonous*, trans. Jean-Paul Gua de Malves (Amsterdam, 1750) [hereafter, *Dialogues*].

3 David Hume, *Oeuvres philosophiques de M. D. Hume*, trans. Jean Bernard Mérian and others, 5 vols. (Amsterdam, 1758–60).

4 This analogy is used in the "lettre-préface" to Descartes, *Principes de la philosophie*.

5 Cf. David Hume, *Enquiries concerning Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 155n. The same sentiment was shared by Diderot, Saint-Hyacinthe, and d'Holbach.

6 *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous* (hereafter "*Dialogues*"), in *The Works of George Berkeley, Bishop of Cloyne*, ed. A. A. Luce and T. E. Jessop, 9 vols. (London: Nelson, 1948–57), 2: 117–8.

7 *Dialogues*, 197–8, 248–9 (Luce and Jessop, 2: 235, 251). See also *Principles of Human Knowledge* §38.

8 This definition of idealism is adapted from Christian Wolff, *Psychologia rationalis* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1734), sect. I, chap. I, 43, p. 29; see also *Vernünfftige Gedanken von Gott, der Welt und der Seele des Menschen* (Halle, 1720).

9 *Dialogues*, 254–6 (Luce and Jessop, 2: 252).

- 10 *Dialogues*, 12 (Luce and Jessop, 2: 175).
- 11 *Dialogues*, 78–80 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 196–7).
- 12 *Dialogues*, 11 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 174).
- 13 *Dialogues*, 204 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 237).
- 14 *Dialogues*, 285 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 261).
- 15 *Ibid.*
- 16 *Dialogues*, 211 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 240).
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 Molière, *Le Misanthrope*, act I, scene I.
- 19 This description of Berkeley's phenomenalism was shared by Maupertuis; see G. Tonelli, *La pensée philosophique de Maupertuis* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1987), 10ff.
- 20 *Dialogues*, 127 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 212).
- 21 *Dialogues*, 97 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 202).
- 22 *Dialogues*, 74, 129 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 195, 215).
- 23 *Dialogues*, 192–6 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 234–5).
- 24 *Dialogues*, 198 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 236).
- 25 *Dialogues*, 131–7 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 213–5).
- 26 *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 207–8, 236–9.
- 27 The Gua de Malves edition of the *Dialogues* has a Latin motto (175) that reads: “urget aquas vis sursum eadem, flectit que deorsum” (“It is the same force which made the water ascend and descend”) and shows two men conversing in front of a fountain.
- 28 On the difference between dreams and reality, see Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 196–7 (Luce and Jessop, *Works*, 2: 235); *Principles of Human Knowledge* §§28, 33–6.
- 29 David Hume, *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*, the original title of the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. See *Enquiries*, ed. Selby-Bigge and Nidditch, 60–79.
- 30 On this vocabulary, see Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe* (London, 1678).
- 31 Mythical king of Iolcos, father of Jason.
- 32 La Rochefoucauld, *Réflexions ou sentences et maximes morales*, maxim 257.
- 33 Molière, *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme*, act II, scene IV.