

*A Letter from an anonymous Writer to the Author of the Minute Philosopher.*

Reverend Sir,

I have read over your treatise called *Alciphron*, in which the Free-thinkers of the present age, in their various shifted tenets, are pleasantly, elegantly, and solidly confuted; the style is easy, the language plain, and the arguments are nervous; but upon the treatise annexed thereto, and upon that part where you seem to intimate that Vision is the sole language of God, I beg leave to make these few observations, and offer them to yours and your ready consideration.

I. Whatever it is without that is the cause of any idea within, I call the object of sense; the sensations arising from such objects I call ideas; the objects therefore that cause such sensations are without us, and the ideas within.

II. Had we but one sense, we might be apt to conclude that there were no objects at all without us, but that the whole scene of ideas which passed through the mind arose from its internal operations; but since the same object is the cause of ideas by different senses, thence we infer its existence; but though the object be one and the same, the ideas that it produces in different senses have no manner of similitude with one another. Because,

III. Whatever connexion there is betwixt the idea of one sense and the idea of another, produced by the same object, arises only from experience. To explain this a little familiarly, let us suppose a man to have such an exquisite sense of feeling given him, that he could perceive plainly and distinctly the inequality of the surface of two objects, which, by its reflecting and refracting the rays of light, produces the ideas of colours. At first, in the dark, though he plainly perceived a difference by his touch, yet he could not possibly tell which was red and which was white, whereas a little experience would make him feel a colour in the dark, as well as see it in the light.

IV. The same word in languages stands very often for the object without, and the ideas it produces within, in the several senses. When it stands for any object without, it is the representative of no manner of idea; neither can we possibly have any idea of what is solely without us. Because,

V. Ideas within have no other connexion with the objects without, than from the frame and make of our bodies, which is by the arbitrary appointment of God; and though we cannot well help imagining that the objects without are something like our ideas within, yet a new set of senses, or the alteration of the old ones, would soon convince us of our mistake, and though our ideas would then be never so different, yet the objects might be the same.

VI. However, in the present situation of affairs, there is an infallible certain connexion betwixt the idea and the object; and therefore, when an object produces an idea in one sense, we know, but from experience only, what idea it will produce in another sense.

VII. The alteration of an object may produce a different idea in one sense from what it did before, which may not be distinguished by another sense. But where the alteration occasions different ideas in different senses, we may from our infallible experience argue from the idea of one sense to that of the other; so that if a different idea arises in two senses from the alteration of an object, either in situation or distance, or any other way, when we have the idea in one sense, we know from use what idea the object so situated will produce in the other.

VIII. Hence as the operations of Nature are always regular and uniform, where the same alteration of the object occasions a smaller difference in the ideas of one sense, and a greater in the other, a curious observer may argue as well from exact observations, as if the difference in the ideas was equal; since experience plainly teaches us, that a just proportion is observed in the alteration of the ideas of each sense, from the alteration of the object. Within this sphere is confined all the judicious observations and knowledge of mankind: now from these observations rightly understood and considered, your new Theory of Vision must in a great measure fall to the ground, and the laws of Optics will be found to stand upon the old unshaken bottom. But though our ideas of magnitude and distance in one sense are entirely different from our ideas of magnitude and distance in another, yet we may justly argue from one to the other, as they have one common cause without, of which, as without, we cannot possibly have the faintest idea. The ideas I have of distance and magnitude by feeling, are widely different from the ideas I have of them by seeing; but that something without, which is the cause of all the variety of all the ideas within in one sense, is the cause also of the variety in the other, and as they have a necessary connexion with it, we may justly demonstrate from our ideas of feeling of the same object what will be our ideas in seeing. And though to talk of seeing by tangible angles and tangible lines be, I agree with you, direct nonsense, yet to demonstrate from angles and lines in feeling, to the ideas in seeing that arise from the same common object, is very good sense, and so vice versa. From these observations, thus hastily laid together, and a thorough digestion thereof, a great many useful corollaries in all philosophical disputes might be collected.

I am,

Your humble servant, &c.

*attributed to Catherine Trotter Cockburn*