

## **An Abstract of *A Treatise on Human Nature***

by

**David Hume**

By all that has been said, the reader will easily perceive that the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical, and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding. Almost all reasoning is there reduced to experience; and the belief, which attends experience, is explained to be nothing but a peculiar sentiment, or lively conception produced by habit. Nor is this all; when we believe anything of *external* existence, or suppose an object to exist a moment after it is no longer perceived, this belief is nothing but a sentiment of the same kind. Our author insists upon several other sceptical topics; and upon the whole concludes that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason, only because we cannot help it. Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it. I shall conclude the logics of this author with an account of two opinions, which seem to be peculiar to himself, as indeed are most of his opinions. He asserts that the soul, as far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions, those of heat and cold, love and anger, thoughts and sensations, all united together, but without any perfect simplicity or identity. Descartes maintained that thought was the essence of the mind; not this thought or that thought, but thought in general. This seems to be absolutely unintelligible, since everything that exists is particular; and, therefore, it must be our several particular perceptions that compose the mind. I say, *compose* the mind, not *belong* to it. The mind is not a substance, in which the perceptions inhere. That notion is as unintelligible as the Cartesian, that thought or perception in general is the essence of the mind. We have no idea of substance of any kind, since we have no idea but what is derived from some impression, and we have no impression of any substance either material or spiritual. We know nothing but particular qualities and perceptions. As our idea of any body, a peach, for instance, is only that of a particular taste, colour, figure, size, consistence, etc.; so, our idea of any mind is only that of particular perceptions, without the notion of anything we call substance, either simple or compound.

To assent = to approve, to agree with

To assert = to say, to declare

To inhere = to exist permanently in, to be inherent

Unintelligible = not capable of being understood