Book I.  OF THE UNDERSTANDING.  251

makes no addition to the arguments for religion, I have at Sect. VI.
least the satisfaction to think it takes nothing from them, but
that every thing remains precisely as before.

SECTION VI.

Of personal identity:

There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every
moment intimately conscious of what we call our Self;
that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence;
and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration,
both of its perfect identity and simplicity. The strongest
sensation, the most violent passion, say they, instead of
distracting us from this view, only fix it the more intensely,
and make us consider their influence on self either by their
pain or pleasure. To attempt a farther proof of this were to
weaken its evidence; since no proof can be deriv'd from any
fact, of which we are so intimately conscious; nor is there
any thing, of which we can be certain, if we doubt of this.

Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that
very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any
idea of self; after the manner it is here explain'd. For from
what impression cou'd this idea be deriv'd? This question
'tis impossible to answer without a manifest contradiction
and absurdity; and yet 'tis a question, which must neces-
sarily be answer'd, if we woud have the idea of self pass for
clear and intelligible. It must be some one impression, that
gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any
one impression, but that to which our several impressions
and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any im-
pression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression
must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of
our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner.
But there is no impression constant and invariable. Pain
and pleasure, grief and joy, passions and sensations succeed each other, and never all exist at the same time. It cannot, therefore, be from any of these impressions, or from any other, that the idea of self is deriv'd; and consequently there is no such idea.

But farther, what must become of all our particular perceptions upon this hypothesis? All these are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other, and may be separately consider'd, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence. After what manner, therefore, do they belong to self; and how are they connected with it? For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. When my perceptions are remov'd for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of myself, and may truly be said not to exist. And were all my perceptions remov'd by death, and cou'd I neither think, nor feel, nor see, nor love, nor hate after the dissolution of my body, I shou'd be entirely annihilated, nor do I conceive what is farther requisite to make me a perfect non-entity. If any one upon serious and unprejudic'd reflexion, thinks he has a different notion of himself, I must confess I can reason no longer with him. All I can allow him is, that he may be in the right as well as I, and that we are essentially different in this particular. He may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd, which he calls himself; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me.

But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought
is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.

What then gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possest of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives? In order to answer this question, we must distinguish betwixt personal identity, as it regards our thought or imagination, and as it regards our passions or the concern we take in ourselves. The first is our present subject; and to explain it perfectly we must take the matter pretty deep, and account for that identity, which we attribute to plants and animals; there being a great analogy betwixt it, and the identity of a self or person.

We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness. We have also a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession, and connected together by a close relation; and this to an accurate view affords as perfect a notion of diversity, as if there was no manner of relation among the objects. But tho' these two ideas of identity, and a succession of related objects be in themselves perfectly distinct, and even contrary, yet 'tis certain, that in our common way of thinking they are generally confounded with each other. That action