

## David Hume (1711-1776)

### *Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, Parts I - III*

#### **Thinks of himself as doing a sort of “physics of the mind”**

Tracing out the laws that govern the succession of idea and impressions in the mind.

#### **The value of this sort of inquiry**

“Safe and harmless pleasure” (311)

A way of combating superstition cloaking itself in obscure metaphysics (312ff)

“We must submit to this fatigue in order to live at ease ever after.” (312)

#### **The materials of experience and the origin of our ideas**

Impressions (of inner and outer sense) and ideas

Ideas have less “force and vivacity.” (316)

“The most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation.” (316)

Examples: feeling heat vs. remembering the heat you felt, being angry vs. thinking about being angry, being in love vs. thinking about being in love.

All ideas are either copies of antecedent impressions or are compounded out of ideas that are copied from antecedent impressions. (e.g., the idea of a “golden mountain”)

Confirming evidence: A person blind from birth can have no idea of colors.

The idea of God is no exception.

It “arises from reflecting on the operations of our own minds and augmenting, without limit, those qualities of goodness and wisdom.” (318)

But what about the *missing shade of blue*? (318-9)

A method for exposing metaphysical nonsense: “From what impression was this idea copied?” (319-20)

#### **On the dispute about innate ideas (320)**

What does “innate” mean here?

*Natural?* All perceptions and ideas are natural.

*Contemporary with our birth?* The dispute is frivolous, and the answer depends on when thinking begins.

*What is original & is copied from no precedent perception?* Then impressions are innate.

#### **The association of ideas**

Three principles of association:

1. resemblance (portrait)
2. contiguity in space and time (the apartment next door)
3. cause and effect (wound -> pain)