

Now, the only possible ways in which conceptions, new in any sense, can be formed or created, are either by perception, in which the mind originates a conception from outside the mind itself by perceiving the object, or by inception, in which the mind originates a conception of the object from within the mind itself without perceiving the object.

As perception always creates a conception entirely new as to its contents, without any reference to old conceptions, and has already been defined and explained, we shall now prepare the way and proceed with the discussion of Inception.

A conception to be created must be in some sense new, not a mere remembrance or repetition of one or more old ideas, but as conceiving of things in a form or combination different from that hitherto existing in the mind.

It is deserving of attention, however, that we cannot modify or combine old conceptions into a new shape without forming a new conception, because the conception thus originated has an existence different and distinct from any hitherto existing in the mind.

It is of importance to notice that a new conception can never be created as contained in only one old conception: because the one attempted to be thus framed would be but a mere repetition of the original. Neither can a conception be created as separately contained in two or more original conceptions: because that also would be merely a strict reproduction of the separate old ideas—not a combination or modified form of them.

The conception, to be really new or created, must be created as unitedly contained in the original conceptions. This gives it a new and distinct existence.

With these preparatory hints as to the method in which conceptions may be created by inception, we now proceed with its

Definition.—Inception, then, is the creation of a conception, either entirely new as to its contents, or as contained in combinations of old conceptions, by the internal powers of the mind, from within the mind itself, without perception.

It follows that Perception and Inception are the two only possible modes in which conceptions can be created—that is, the conception is created either from outside of the mind by perception, or from inside of the mind without perception. Inception thus stands in contradistinction to perception. Perception forms its conception by actual mental vision of the object itself. Inception forms its conception, in the absence of actual mental vision of the object, by its own inherent powers, either from old conceptions of the object existing in the mind, or vaguely, in utter disregard of them.

Now, all conceptions of things already existing in the mind must be either known conceptions or unknown; that is, they must either be correct conceptions, and which we are assured are correct, or they must be otherwise.

If a conception, therefore, is inceptively created as contained in a combination of known conceptions, we call it an act of reasoning; but if a conception is inceptively created as not contained in a combination of known conceptions, or vaguely in utter disregard of them, we call it an act of imagination.

It follows, then, that reasoning and imagination are the only two ways in which conceptions can be created or formed by inception.

The only means, then, in accordance with which the imagination may frame a conception are unknown conceptions, or its own self-originating power.*

Now, it is very evident that we cannot obtain knowledge by an act of imagination: because, in the first place, if a conception is formed as not contained in known conceptions, or independently of previous conceptions of any kind, we know that it is more likely to be incorrect than otherwise; and, secondly, as we know that it is most probably incorrect, we cannot be assured that it is correct: therefore it fails to give us the two elements of knowledge—viz., a correct conception, with assurance that it is correct.

Definition.—An act of Imagination, then, is the creation of a conception of things as not contained in known conceptions.

Its Powers.—We cannot obtain knowledge by it.

Definition.—An act of Reasoning, on the contrary, is the creation of a conception of things as unitedly contained in two or more known conceptions.

Its Powers.—We can obtain knowledge by it.

* It is, however, very doubtful how far the imagination really possesses the power of purely self-originating the materials of its conceptions, although it certainly possesses vast powers of modifying and combining the materials that have entered it from experience.

Known and unknown conceptions may alike suggest or furnish materials out of which it may create its conception; but if it should modify its conception in accordance with known conceptions, it would become Reasoning; if it moulds its conception in accordance with unknown conceptions, or otherwise, it remains Imagination. It is an act of imagination in whatever way the conception may be inceptively originated, provided it be not created as contained in known conceptions—in other words, if it be not created as in Reasoning.