

The skeptic asks me, Why do you believe the existence of the external object which you perceive? This belief, sir, is none of my manufacture; it came from the mint of nature; it bears her image and superscription; and, if it is not right, the fault is not mine: I even took it upon trust, and without suspicion. Reason, says the skeptic, is the only judge of truth, and you ought  
5 to throw off every opinion and every belief that is not grounded on reason. Why, sir, should I believe the faculty of reason more than that of perception; they came both out of the same shop, and were made by the same artist; and if he puts one piece of false ware into my hands, what should hinder him from putting another?

Perhaps the skeptic will agree to distrust reason, rather than give any credit to perception. For,  
10 says he, since, by your own concession, the object which you perceive, and that act of your mind by which you perceive it, are quite different things, the one may exist without the other; and as the object may exist without being perceived, so the perception may exist without an object. There is nothing so shameful in a philosopher as to be deceived and deluded; and therefore you ought to resolve firmly to withhold assent, and to throw off all his belief of  
15 external objects, which may be all delusion. For my part, I will never attempt to throw it off; and although the sober part of mankind will not be very anxious to know my reasons, yet if they can be of use to any skeptic, they are these.

First, Because it is not in my power: why then should I make a vain attempt? It would be agreeable to fly to the moon, and to make a visit to Jupiter and Saturn; but when I know that  
20 nature has bound me down by the law of gravitation to this planet which I inhabit, I rest contented, and quietly suffer myself to be carried along in its orbit. My belief is carried along by perception, as irresistibly as my body by the earth. And the greatest skeptic will find himself to be in the same condition. He may struggle hard to disbelieve the information of his senses, as a man does to swim against a torrent; but ah! it is in vain. It is vain that he strains every nerve,  
25 and wrestles with nature, and with every object that strikes upon his senses. For after all, when his strength is spent in the fruitless attempt, he will be carried down the torrent with the common herd of believers.

Secondly, I think it would not be prudent to throw off this belief, if it were in my power. If nature intended to deceive me, and impose upon me by false appearances, and I, by my great  
30 cunning and profound logic, have discovered the imposture; prudence would dictate to me in this case, even to put up with this indignity done me as quietly as I could, and not to call her an impostor to her face, lest she should be even with me another way. For what do I gain by resenting this injury? You ought at least not to believe what she says. This indeed seems reasonable if she intends to impose upon me. But what is the consequence? I resolve not to

35 believe my senses. I break my nose against a post that comes in my way; I step into a kennel;  
and, after twenty such wise and rational actions, I am taken up and clapped into a mad-house.  
Now, I confess I would rather make one of the credulous fools whom nature imposes upon,  
than of those wise and rational philosophers who resolve to withhold assent at all this expense.  
If a man pretends to be a skeptic with regard to the informations of sense, and yet prudently  
40 keeps out of harm's way as other men do, he must excuse my suspicion, that he either acts the  
hypocrite, or imposes upon himself. For if the scale of his belief were so evenly poised, as to  
lean no more to one side than to the contrary, it is impossible that his actions could be directed  
by any rules of common prudence.

Thirdly, Although the two reasons already mentioned are perhaps two more than enough, I  
45 shall offer a third. I gave implicit belief to the informations of nature by my senses, for a  
considerable part of my life, before I had learned so much logic as to be able to start a doubt  
concerning them. And now, when I reflect upon what is past, I do not find that I have been  
imposed upon by this belief. I find, that without it I must have perished by a thousand  
accidents. I find, that without it I should have been no wiser now than when I was born. I  
50 should not even have been able to acquire that logic which suggests these skeptical doubts with  
regard to my senses. Therefore I consider this instructive belief as one of the best gifts of  
nature. I thank the Author of my being who bestowed it upon me, before the eyes of my reason  
were opened, and still bestows it upon me to be my guide, where reason leaves me in the dark.  
And now I yield to the direction of my senses, not from instinct only, but from confidence and  
55 trust in a faithful and beneficent monitor, grounded upon the experience of his paternal care  
and goodness.

Thomas REID, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense* (1764), VI ("Of Seeing"),  
20 ("Of Perception in general")