



An Essay on the Nature and Immutability: Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism (Classic Reprint)

James Beattie

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Excerpt from An Essay on the Nature and Immutability: Truth, in Opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism

To those who love learning and mankind, and who are more ambitious to distinguish themselves as men, than as disputants, it is matter of humiliation and regret, that names and things have so oft been mistaken for each other; that so much of the philosopher's time must be employed in ascertaining the signification of worth; and that so many doctrines, of high reputation, and of ancient date, when traced to their first principles, have been found to terminate in verbal ambiguity. If I have any knowledge of my own heart, or of the subject I pro-pose to examine, I may venture to assure the read-er, that it is-no part of the design of this book, to encourage verbal disputation. On the contrary, it is my sincere purpose to avoid, and to do every thing in my power to check it; convinced as I am, that it never can do any good, and that it has been the cause of much evil, both in philosophy and in common life. And I hope I have a fairer chance to escape it, than some who have gone before me in this part of science. I aim at no paradoxes; my prejudices (if certain instinctive suggestions of the understanding may be so called) are all in favour of truth and virtue; and I have no principles to sup-port, but those which seem to me, to have influenced the judgment of a great majority of mankind in all ages of the world.

Some readers may think, that there is but little merit in this declaration; it being as much for my own credit, as for the interest of mankind, that guard against a practice, which is acknowledged to be always unprofitable and generally pernicious.

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