

about them, with an assurance that the words and signs used in our reasonings are full and true representatives of the things signified; and, consequently, that when we use language or signs in argument, we neither, by their use, introduce extraneous notions, nor exclude any part of the case before us from consideration. For example: the words space, square, circle, a hundred, &c., convey to the mind notions so complete in themselves, and so distinct from every thing else, that we are sure, when we use them, we know and have in view the whole of our own meaning. It is widely different with words expressing natural objects and mixed relations. Take, for instance, *iron*. Different persons attach very different ideas to this word. One who has never heard of magnetism has a widely different notion of *iron* from one in the contrary predicament. The vulgar, who regard this metal as incombustible, and the chemist, who sees it burn with the utmost fury, and who has other reasons for regarding it as one of the most combustible bodies in nature;—the poet, who uses it as an emblem of rigidity; and the smith and engineer, in whose hands it is plastic, and moulded, like wax, into every form;—the jailer, who prizes it as an obstruction, and the electrician, who sees in it only a channel of open communication by which that most impassable of obstacles, the air, may be traversed by his imprisoned fluid, have all different, and all imperfect, notions of the same word. The meaning of such a term is like a rainbow—every body sees a different one, and all maintain it to be the same. So it is with nearly all our terms of sense. Some are indefinite, as hard or soft, light or heavy (terms which were at one time the sources of innumerable mistakes and controversies); some excessively complex, as man, life, instinct. But, what is worst of all, some, nay, most, have two or three meanings, sufficiently distinct from each other to make a proposition true in one sense and false in another, or even false altogether, yet not distinct enough to keep us from confounding them in the process by which we arrived at it, or to enable us immediately to recognise