If one considers the history of psychological theories prior to the rise of eighteenth-century associationism, it is clear that they were dominated by what I have termed nativism. Although the effects of experience were not, of course, wholly discounted, it was assumed that there were broad ranges of facts concerning human thought and human action which were directly attributable to native capacities common to all men. Furthermore, it was generally assumed that such capacities were constant, not having changed substantially over the course of recorded time. In spite, then, of a frequent recognition of the transiency of customs, the thesis of man's malleability had not deeply penetrated either the explanation of human behavior or views which were held regarding the history of mankind.

That an acceptance of nativism dominated psychological theories immediately prior to the time when associationism became dominant is a fact that needs only slight documentation. For example, those who belonged to the egoistic schools of political and moral philosophy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were predominantly nativists, for in their accounts of the more complex forms of human action as reflexes of self-interest and foresight, the specific nature of past experience rarely played a decisive role. For these same philosophers the processes of human thought reflected an inherent ratiocinative capacity, the results of which were, in most instances, taken to be independent of the nature of the specific experiences which the individual had previously undergone. In addition, we may note that those who opposed egoism sought to undercut egoistic accounts of human action by multiplying the number of distinct and independent motives attributable to man. In doing so, they greatly reinforced nativism, extending the range of those specific forms of sensibility and of action which were claimed to be independent of prior experience. These were not the only important nativistic tendencies then operative: in France, nativism was, at the time, dominant in the physiologically oriented accounts of human behavior. Nevertheless, it is not our present concern to analyze the various forms of nativism which dominated the philosophy of mind prior to the widespread acceptance of associationism, but to
show how a strain of geneticism separated itself off from the hedonistic and generally egoistic psychology of the period, becoming highly influential in establishing a doctrine of the malleability of man.

If one wishes to locate a single source from which modern geneticism derived its greatest power, that source must surely be found in Locke's theory of knowledge. His attack of innate ideas and innate principles was an attack or nativism in the theoretic sphere: all human knowledge depended upon factors given to the mind in the course of experience. However, as we shall see, his successors interpreted his doctrine in a narrower and more radical sense than was justified by the *Essay Concerning the Human Understanding*. The accounts of knowledge to be found in most who expressed their indebtedness to Locke do not assign to the mind's operations the same scope and freedom which one finds in Locke's own doctrine. Nor do most of his successors share his conviction that it is possible to establish a demonstrative system of morality.

Let us first recall what Locke's doctrine actually was. According to him, all knowledge was dependent upon experience, our minds being furnished with no innate ideas. Furthermore, however intricate any man's knowledge might become, all of its original or primitive elements were actually derived from experience: those elements were simple ideas given through the senses, or simple ideas given through introspection (which Locke called "reflection"), or a combination of both. Even though the ultimate and primitive elements of knowledge come through experience, it is important to note that not all of the actual content of our knowledge can be said to do so. According to Locke, the human mind is active as well as passive. Because we do not merely accept ideas, but compare them with one another, compound them, and abstract from them, much of our knowledge is not a direct reflection or reproduction of what was originally given: the elements of experience are generally rearranged, through the mind's autochthonous activities, and our actual knowledge is the product of such rearrangements. To be sure, when a number of simple ideas go constantly together, we tend to view them as a group, and to denominate them by one name; and in this way our complex idea of a particular material object, or of a specific type of material object, is built up. In such cases, our complex ideas may be regarded as primarily due to the effects of experience. In most other cases, complex ideas do not directly reflect the original presentations of experience, and the second book of Locke's *Essay* is in large measure devoted to the analysis of the latter cases. Among these complex ideas are modes such as number, the modes of place and of time, the conception of power, and mixed modes such as beauty or parricide. There are also conceptions of moral relations, and ideas of collective substances, such as armies. In these cases Locke offers an account of how it is that we can form a particular complex idea. He of course assumes that all such ideas are ultimately grounded in a set of simple ideas which serve as their primitive elements, but the complex idea itself is regarded by him as something different from those elements and not directly attributable to either sensation or introspection (i.e., "reflection").

Unfortunately, Locke himself was not clear on this difference between instances in which the content of knowledge is heavily dependent upon the mind's own
activity, and those in which it is more dependent upon the order of experience. Nor was he compelled to draw such a distinction for his chief purposes. However, almost all of his followers came to emphasize the role of experience in determining the actual content of knowledge, and this led to a far more radical geneticism than was present in Locke himself. To that point we shall shortly return. Before doing so, it will be useful to indicate that Locke’s account of our moral and religious beliefs raises precisely the same issue: on the one hand, he attributes many of our complex ideas to the activity of the mind operating on the elements given in experience, and, on the other, he emphasizes the role of experience itself in forming some of those ideas.

It is not surprising that there should be this parallel between Locke’s theory of morals and of religion and his more general theory of knowledge. The original impetus for the Essay came from his interest in reaching some conclusion concerning the possibility of gaining reliable knowledge in the moral and religious spheres, and throughout the Essay one can note passages in which moral and religious concerns are important elements in Locke’s treatment of some more general argument. In his attack on innate ideas, for example, Locke was at least as much concerned with disproving the innateness of practical principles and religious truths as he was to disprove an apriorist view of logical, mathematical, or metaphysical axioms. However, it is not to be assumed that his attack on the theory of innate ideas led him to deny the possibility of certainty in either morals or religion. On the contrary, his positive theory involved a distinction between the very limited degree of assurance to be attained in beliefs concerning the material world, and the certainty which can be claimed for the truths of morality and religion. On his view, the latter truths are demonstrable. While such demonstrative proofs must be grounded upon elements given in experience, the conclusions which we are capable of reaching are dependent upon man’s rationality, not upon the characteristics of that which was originally present in experience. That this was Locke’s view is obvious from his use of the cosmological proof for the existence of God; it is also present, as we shall now see, in his complex account of morality.

According to Locke, morality consists in obedience to the rules instituted by men in societies, these rules being a reflection of the basic needs of men and the commands of God. In dealing with such rules and their application to voluntary actions, we are of course dealing with the kinds of complex ideas which Locke terms mixed modes and relations, and these ideas—though ultimately dependent upon elements given in experience—are themselves products of the mind’s active powers. To judge whether an action is morally right, one need only consult these ideas: one need not appeal to dictates of conscience, or to a calculation of consequences, or to observation of how men actually behave. In this freedom from any appeal to experience, Locke held that moral reasoning is to be compared with mathematical reasoning; in both, one need only follow out the agreements and disagreements among ideas. (The deficiencies to be found in moral reasoning, as compared with mathematics, Locke attributed to the fact that moral rules have not been defined with equal accuracy.)
It is important to recognize that, while Locke believed that it is possible to attain demonstrative truth in morality and in religion, he was by no means satisfied with many of the moral and religious beliefs which men held. To understand his position, one must distinguish between moral and religious beliefs which are attributable to the use of reason and those which are to be attributed to custom: the former are warranted, but the latter are not. Frequently, Locke speaks of merely customary beliefs as superstitions, and denounces them in passages such as the following:

...doctrines that have been derived from no better original than the superstitions of a nurse, or the authority of an old woman, may at length of time and consent of neighbors, grow up to the dignity of principles in religion and morality. For such, who are careful (as they call it) to principle children well... instil into the unwary, and as yet unprejudiced, understanding, (for white paper receives any characters,) those doctrines they would have them retain and profess. These being taught them as soon as they have any apprehension; and still as they grow up confirmed to them, either by the open profession or tacit consent of all they have to do with... come, by these means, to have the reputation of unquestionable, self-evident, and innate truths (Essay, Bk. 1, Ch. 11, Sect. 22).

It is to be noted that the formation of such superstitious or ill-founded beliefs is not wholly dissimilar from the manner in which custom operates to make us think that we truly understand the nature of a particular material object, or type of material object. In the latter case, too, it is custom that habituates us to regard a particular set of qualities as belonging necessarily together, but there is no demonstrative proof that such qualities will always be found together. In spite of this similarity between the two types of case, Locke did not condemn an acceptance of custom in the case of beliefs concerning material objects as he condemned it in morals and in religion. The reason for this difference is twofold. In the first place, he did not regard the experienced grouping of the qualities of a material object as an arbitrary or accidental grouping: he assumed that it was regularly present because of the properties actually possessed by that which existed independently of our awareness. In the second place, such a custom-engendered view of the nature of material objects—while it is not an adequate view—is sufficient for most of the ordinary concerns of our lives. In the case of moral and religious superstitions, there was not the regularity which was present in our common-sense views of material objects; on the contrary, there was an indefinite variability among the beliefs characteristic of different societies. As he said in the Essay:

He that will carefully peruse the history of mankind, and look abroad into the several tribes of men, and with indifferency survey their actions, will be able to satisfy himself that there is scarce that principle of morality to be named, or rule of virtue to be thought on... which is not somewhere or other, slighted and condemned by the general fashion of whole societies of men (Bk. 1, Ch. 11, Sect. 10).

Now, Locke was unwilling to accept such variability as the ultimate truth in morality, for he believed in the theory of natural law, which was definitive of
certain moral duties, and in the ultimate origin of moral rules in God's commands. Therefore, these variant and alien rules were looked upon by him as constituting moral errors, not as providing justifiable bases for action in the communities which accepted them. They were due to the effects of custom, not of reason.

In this connection it is also relevant to note that Locke held that it was custom, and not their native endowments, which was accountable for the differences among men of different cultures. As he remarked in the Essay:

> Had you or I been born at the Bay of Soldania, possibly your thoughts and notions had not exceeded those brutish ones of the Hottentots that inhabit there. And had the Virginia king of Apochancana been educated in England, he had been perhaps as knowing a divine, and as good a mathematician as any in it . . . And if he had not any idea of a God, it was only because he pursued not those thoughts that would have led him to it (Bk. I, Ch. III, Sect. 12).

This contrast between superstition or ignorance on the one hand, and men's capacities to arrive at demonstrative truths in morality and religion when nothing inhibits the full use of their intellectual capacities, could scarcely help but lead Locke to the question of how human beings were to be reared so as to learn to use their faculties aright. Some Thoughts Concerning Education was the product of this interest and of the requests of persons seeking his advice concerning the education of their children.  

Considering his theory of knowledge, as well as his observations on the variability of moral and religious practices in different societies, it is small wonder that, in this book, Locke should explicitly say of the overwhelming majority of men that

> [they] are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education. It is that which makes the great difference in mankind. The little, or almost insensible, impressions on our tender infancies, have very important and lasting consequences: and there it is, as in the fountains of some rivers, where a gentle application of the hand turns the flexible waters into channels, that make them take quite contrary courses; and by this little direction, given them at first, in the source, they receive different tendencies, and arrive at last at very remote and distant places.

I imagine the minds of children as easily turned, this or that way, as water itself.

Throughout this work Locke emphasizes the malleability of the individual, both with respect to his body and his conduct, until—in conclusion—he referred to the fact that, in formulating his advice, he had considered the young child "only as white paper, or wax, to be moulded and fashioned as one pleases" (Sect. 216).

It is important to remember that expressions such as these do not have reference to man as a being capable of reasoning: Locke is here speaking of the effects of custom, which he regarded as antithetical to reason. This contrast, which we have now noted in other aspects of Locke's thought, receives what is perhaps its clearest expression in his discussion of the association of ideas. And it is important to understand his position with respect to associationism, if we are to appreciate one
of the chief points at which his successors modified his view of the human mind, paving the way for an acceptance of the theory of man’s indefinite malleability.7

As is well known, Locke added a chapter entitled “Of the Association of Ideas” to the end of Book II in the fourth edition of the Essay.8 In that discussion he consistently treated the association of ideas as something which was by its very nature antithetical to reason. For example, he said:

Some of our ideas have a natural correspondence and connexion with one another: it is the office and excellency of our reason to trace these, and hold them together in that union and correspondence which is founded in their peculiar beings. Besides this, there is another connexion of ideas wholly owing to chance and custom (Essay, Bk. II, Ch. xxxiii, Sect. 5).

The latter connection is, of course, the association of ideas.

If we examine the illustrations of the association of ideas which Locke gives in this chapter, we find that these associations all depend upon associations by contiguity, and not at all upon associations by resemblance. This fact is important, since Locke—like others—found the nature of reason to be the perception of agreement or disagreement among our ideas. Therefore, those cases in which two ideas are associated with one another because of the effects of their resemblances, or because of a contrast between them, could not be used as instances antithetical to reason: they would constitute cases in which there was “a natural correspondence and connexion... founded in their peculiar beings.” On the other hand, in cases where the presence of one idea evokes another simply because the two ideas have previously been experienced together, there is no “natural correspondence and connexion,” and it is not surprising that Locke should contrast such cases with examples of reasoning. Furthermore, in the same chapter, Locke conjectures that those associations which depend upon contiguity are ultimately dependent upon physiological causes, that is, upon “trains of motions in the animal spirits, which, once set a going, continue in the same steps they have been used to”;9 in this respect, too, they are not to be counted among the activities of the mind, but as examples in which it is passive. It is important to take note of such facts, if one is to understand how Locke came to adopt the very extreme position in which he characterized the effects of association as “this wrong connexion in our minds of ideas in themselves loose and independent of one another.”10 On Locke’s view, such linkages, being wholly due to contiguity, represent a totally different principle of connection than is to be found when the mind actively employs its discriminatory powers in compounding, abstracting, and relating the materials originally given to it. It is only in the latter instances that we build conceptions which in their degree of abstractness, their generality, and indeed their novelty, represent a level of awareness far different from that represented in the original flow of experience.

It has been of importance for us to stress Locke’s doctrine concerning the active, native powers of the mind, for it is primarily with respect to these powers that his theory of knowledge differed from that of his successors. He had prepared the way for their more radical rejections of nativism through his insistence that all of
the materials of human knowledge must be furnished by experience. However, he stopped short of the view that the mind's own operations were to be interpreted in terms of the effects of experience; thus he stopped short of a thorough rejection of traditional forms of nativism. On the other hand, his successors came to view that which Locke had attributed to the powers of judgment as being due to experience. It is to this radical shift that we must now turn our attention.

In tracing this development, we must first note that Berkeley and Hume, who followed Locke's way of ideas, explicitly rejected his doctrine of abstract, general ideas. This rejection, as one can see in the Principles of Human Knowledge, was the first point at which Berkeley felt it necessary to challenge Locke, and his challenge was cited by Hume as "one of the greatest and most valuable discoveries that has been made of late years in the republic of letters."

Locke had held that once experience had provided the human mind with simple ideas, the mind could, by its active powers, form genuinely new ideas from these elements. For example, once having touched or seen objects, we could frame the abstract general idea shape, which was not to be identified with any of the specific elements on the basis of which it had been formed. And this idea, as an abstract general idea, could itself function as one of the building blocks which the mind used in forming further ideas. Thus, most of our complex ideas (except for those of particular material objects) are ideas in which the original elements from which they were derived play a very small role. The effects of this "pyramiding" activity of the mind can be very clearly seen in Locke's doctrine of moral relations. These relations, it will be recalled, depend upon the conformity of a voluntary action to some moral rule. Now a moral rule relates to types of acts such as sacrilege or parricide, each of which is an abstract general idea of a mixed mode. While it is true that all of the materials necessary for our conceptions of mixed modes are ultimately derived from simple ideas of sensation or of reflection, these complex ideas are not necessarily tied to the particular simple ideas by means of which we first formed our conceptions of them. Thus, Locke grants the human mind a freedom in its use of experience which Berkeley and Hume came to deny. According to their view, whatever general concepts we use always remain tied to some of the individual simple ideas which originally served as the bases for these concepts. This doctrine brings Berkeley and Hume close to the position of the sensationalist school, in spite of the fundamental differences between their own epistemological positions and the views of most sensationalists.

In addition to this point, it is to be noted that Berkeley and Hume also approached the sensationalist position in the alterations which they made in Locke's theory of the sources of our simple ideas: they eliminated "reflection" as an independent source of ideas, co-equal with sensation. To be sure, the first paragraph of Part I of Berkeley's Principles of Human Knowledge apparently accepts Locke's view, admitting ideas "such as are perceived by attending to the passions and operations of the mind." Nevertheless, Berkeley did not actually make use of such ideas in his account of the scope of human knowledge. Whenever he departed from a discussion of ideas deriving from sensation, he introduced the concept of our notions of spirit. Such notions, however, are not to be construed as analogous
to simple ideas of sensation, for they are not the building blocks out of which further complex objects of knowledge are formed. In short, the specific ideas which Locke characterized as original simple ideas of reflection play no part in Berkeley's system. This unacknowledged alteration in Locke's views became explicit in Hume: many of the ideas to which Locke had referred, Hume denied that he could find within his own experience; and those which Hume did find, and called impressions of reflection, he held to be dependent upon prior impressions of sensation. In this he was of course at one with the sensationalists.

The connection between these alterations in Locke's doctrine and sensationalism can be noted in Condillac. While avowing his deep indebtedness to Locke, and praising his work, Condillac criticized him for having assumed that there are operations of the mind which are not reducible to sensation. The freedom to form new ideas, which Locke had believed that the human mind possessed, was denied by Condillac. As his Traité des Sensations suggested, the human being was no more active in the formation of complex ideas than would be a statue which had been endowed with no powers other than having the capacity for sensations: the nature and the sequence of these sensations would be sufficient in themselves to account for the whole of knowledge. This emphasis on the role of sensation as the foundation of knowledge is of course continued in later French thought by Helvétius and by d'Holbach; and in England it is paralleled in the associationism of Hartley and Priestley.

While Hobbes can rightfully be regarded as the first major figure in the history of associationism in England, it was not to him but to Locke that the British associationists themselves traced their lineage. For example, in the first chapter of his Observations on Man, Hartley pointed out that the basis of his own doctrine was a theory of vibrations which derived from Newton, and the theory of association which derived from Locke. To be sure, in the preface to his work, he had also remarked that he first came to consider "the power of association" on hearing how John Gay had suggested that it might account for intellectual pleasures. However, these remarks concerning his indebtedness to Locke and to Gay do not involve a contradiction. By his own testimony, Hartley was thirty-one years old when he heard about Gay's suggested account of intellectual pleasures, but he assuredly knew Locke's work before that time. Apart from the fame of the Essay, we have his son's testimony on this point, and Hartley himself said that from Locke "and other ingenious Persons since his Time" he had learned

the Influence of Association over our Opinions and Affections, and its Use in explaining those Things in an accurate and precise Way, which are commonly referred to the Power of Habit and Custom, in a general and indeterminate one.

His indebtedness to Gay was therefore not one of learning to appreciate the general power of the association of ideas, but something much more specific. Granting Hartley's familiarity with the way in which the association of ideas could explain "the Power of Habit and Custom," Gay's dissertation showed the applicability of the same principle to the formation of the moral sense in man. This
attempt on the part of Gay constituted a decidedly new step, and one which stood in sharp contrast to Locke's disparagement of the effects of association on moral and religious beliefs. Unlike Locke, Gay was not attempting to show that the principles of morality, like the principles of mathematics, form a demonstrative system. He was attempting to square the traditional account of the importance of other-regarding motives in a life of virtue with an acceptance of an egoistic psychology. The rewards and punishments of another life had, of course, often been invoked to do so. However, as Gay noted,

The generality of mankind do approve of Virtue, or rather virtuous actions, without being able to give any reason for their approbation; and also...some pursue it without knowing that it tends to their own private happiness; nay even when it appears to be inconsistent with and destructive of their happiness.

It was for the sake of explaining such approbations that Gay invoked the principle of association, appealing to the formative powers of experience to give men standards which others had held to be dependent upon innate moral cognition, or an innate moral sense. In offering this account, he was not, of course, denigrating these approbations: he regarded them as the basis of morality, founded in the nature of man and consonant with the Divine Will. Thus, Gay had transformed Locke's doctrine: the association of ideas was not to be regarded as a source of moral and religious error, but was, on the contrary, the means by which new and praiseworthy motives arose through the effects of experience, with self-interest becoming converted into virtue. Such, one must suspect, is what Hartley saw as "the power" which Gay had discovered in the association of ideas. In Hartley's own work, as his preface tells us, he was interested in tracing the consequences of this power with respect to morality and religion.

In spite of several comparisons which early associationists drew between the association of ideas and the Newtonian law of gravitation, associationism was not, in its origins, an attempt to formulate and validate a specific psychological law. It was not, as Hartley had suggested it should be, an example of "the method of analysis and synthesis recommended and followed by Sir Isaac Newton." Rather, it was the formulation of a principle which served to bridge the gap between the very general proposition that all knowledge derives from sense experience and specific observations concerning reasoning, the use of language, the operation of the imagination, the growth of complex emotions, and the basis of moral beliefs. For example, one may note that Hume was less interested in establishing that associations among ideas follow patterns of resemblance, contiguity, and cause-and-effect, than he was in showing how this view would lead one to treat problems of "Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics." Even Hartley, whose interest in the details of the theory of associationism was far greater than Hume's, and who was deeply interested in the physical basis of the association of ideas, was to a very considerable degree motivated by moral and theological concerns. One may also note that Joseph Priestley, Hartley's chief follower, expressed his interest in extending Hartley's system as it applied to questions concerning the conduct
of life and "the natural progress and perfection of intellectual beings." In this connection he said of the Hartleian system that "the most important application of Dr. Hartley's doctrine of the association of ideas is to the conduct of human life, and especially the business of education."\textsuperscript{28} Hartley himself had explicitly noted these applications, for he had said:

It is of the utmost consequence to Morality and Religion, that the Affections and Passions should be analyzed into their simple compounding Parts, by reversing the Steps of the Associations which concur to form them. For thus we may learn how to cherish and improve good ones, check and root out such as are mischievous and immoral, and how to suit our Manner of Life, in some tolerable Measure, to our intellectual and religious Wants. And as this holds in respect of Persons of all Ages, so it is particularly true, and worthy of Consideration, in respect of Children and Youth.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, in its origins, associationism was not what James Mill and especially Alexander Bain later sought to make it, a full-blown psychological system serving to classify and relate all aspects of mental life; it was, rather, a principle used to connect a general epistemological position with more specific issues of intellectual and practical concern.\textsuperscript{30} Among these issues, questions concerning the foundations of morality and the relations of morality to religion had an especially important place.

It is no part of my present purpose to trace the history of associationism, except as it bears on the contrast between nativistic and geneticist views of the nature of man. In this connection, one can safely assume from the outset that all associationists accept geneticism to some very appreciable degree. To be sure, associationism demands that we attribute to men certain innate capacities and propensities; among them, of course, are the capacity to receive elementary sensations and the propensity to connect the elements thus given in the specific way or ways summarized by the theory of associations. In addition, most associationists stressed the original, inherent tendency in men to pursue their own interests, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. However, these may be considered to be general principles which underlie specific forms of action; what associationists denied was not the existence of such principles but the assumption that there were any specific convictions or ways of acting which were natural and independent of experience. Furthermore, associationists attempted to keep even the most general principles to a bare minimum, regarding it as one of the most significant advantages of their theory that it was able to reduce diverse phenomena to a single and all-encompassing law.\textsuperscript{31} As Priestley remarked in his criticism of Reid and other members of the Scottish school: "My view in the following inquiry is to relieve dame nature of the unnecessary load which Dr. Reid has laid upon her."\textsuperscript{32} Thus, assuming that nature has endowed men with a limited number of simple capacities of a highly general sort, the associationists explained the specific content of human thought and patterns of action in terms of experience. With the exception of Hume, most of the major eighteenth-century associationists made the further assumption that all associations could themselves be accounted for solely through the effects of successive experience, that is, by means of the effects of temporal contiguity.\textsuperscript{33}
The doctrine of associationism, as thus conceived, obviously stressed the malleability of individuals, accounting for complex patterns of thought and behavior by an appeal to the ways in which experience had acted upon the individual. All traits which were specifically human were thus assumed to be acquired traits, rather than being "natural."34 Under these circumstances it would of course be easy to assume—and perhaps today it would be widely assumed—that associationism must have stressed the diversity of men, since the formative experiences of different persons would presumably be different. However, this was not in fact the position of the early associationists, other than Locke. As one can see in Hartley, and also in Hume and in Adam Smith, the principles of associationism were first invoked to explain the similarities among men, not their differences. In fact, after attempting to show, on the basis of his theory of vibrations, that our complex, acquired ideas may be no less vivid than simple ideas which are due to the direct action of objects upon us, Hartley drew a number of corollaries from that proposition, and among them we may note the following:

**Cor. 6.** If Beings of the same Nature, but whose Affections and Passions are, at present, in different Proportions to each other, be exposed for an indefinite Time to the same Impressions and Associations, all their particular Differences will, at last, be over-ruled, and they will become perfectly similar, in a finite Time, by a proper Adjustment of the Impressions and Associations.

**Cor. 7.** Our original bodily Make, and the Impressions and Associations which affect us in passing through Life, are so much alike, and yet not the same, that there must be both a great general Resemblance amongst Mankind, in respect of their intellectual Affections, and also many particular Differences.35

Hartley's stress on the element of a great general resemblance among men, rather than on the particular differences among them, can be seen in the fact that from the two preceding corollaries he draws the sweeping conclusion that "association tends to make us all similar."36

Should this conclusion be regarded as surprising, one need merely recall that Hartley, like other associationists, had assumed that ideas such as those which we have of individual material objects, and also our ideas of distance in the third dimension, were the effects of a repetition of simple ideas which came to be combined through association. Now, originally, the specific sense-experiences of any one individual might be supposed to differ considerably from the specific ideas received by others, since the original surroundings in which the individuals were placed would be different. However, it was assumed that as an individual's experience increased, the content of that experience would tend more and more to overlap with the experiences of others. As a consequence, it was entirely reasonable for Hartley to hold that the effects of continuing experience would function in an equalizing manner: our characterizations of objects would tend to converge, rather than being disparate, and our ideas of space, being built upon the correlation of our tactile and visual sensations, would also become increasingly congruent. These equalizing effects of experience with relation to the material world were also originally assumed by the associationists to be paralleled by the effects of men's experiences in their social environments.
That which was assumed to function in the social world in a manner analogous to the functioning of material objects in causing sensations was, for most associationists, the tendency of men to pursue their self-interest, seeking pleasure and avoiding pain under all circumstances. While this tendency to pursue only one’s own interest would originally lead to conflicts, the painful effects of such conflicts would gradually teach men to refrain from acts of naked and direct selfishness: thus it was claimed that self-interest became transmuted into the pursuit of virtue, that is, into a concern for the good of others. It is precisely this account of the origin of morality that we have noted in Gay, and a not wholly dissimilar one is present in Hartley. While Hume differed from Gay and Hartley in not regarding any one motive as a sufficient basis from which to derive a general account of moral notions, he did share their conviction that it was possible to explain the virtues which underlie social and political life through the effects of experience. As one can see in his account of justice and also in his account of promise-keeping, many of our moral ideas are rooted in social experience and become, as it were, a second nature in man. In such cases, the effects of experience can be seen to lead not to radical differences among men, but to basic similarities in belief and in conduct. Thus, according to Hume, experience instils in us virtues which are as “stedfast and immutable ... as human nature. And if they were founded on original instincts, could they have any greater stability?”

Associationism did not invariably lead to an acceptance of this view. We find, for example, that Joseph Priestley drew a sharp distinction between the effects of association on the basic patterns of action in men and its effects on ideas of moral right and wrong. Speaking of the first set, which he had illustrated by such actions as grasping, sucking, and blinking, Priestley said:

Who can help admiring the admirable simplicity of nature, and the wisdom of the great author of it, in this provision for the growth of all our passions, and propensities, just as they are wanted, and in the degree in which they are wanted through life?

Nevertheless, he differed from those associationists who had stressed the similarity and constancy of men’s moral beliefs. Instead, he used the doctrine of associationism to account for the variability in those beliefs.

This opinion of the gradual formation of the ideas of moral right and wrong, from a great variety of elements, easily accounts for that prodigious diversity in the sentiments of mankind respecting the objects of moral obligation; and I do not see that any other hypothesis can account for the facts.

As illustrations of such variability, Priestley cited differences in men’s views as to what constituted justice or murder, and the differences among men with respect to the moral stigma attaching to lying and swearing. All such differences he attributed to the effects of education, operating through the association of ideas. In drawing such a distinction between the constancy of certain forms of action and the variability in moral convictions due to education, Priestley had been anticipated by Helvétius, whose work represents a consistent attempt to trace the differences among men to the differences in their education.
The general psychological and philosophical views of Helvétius had their origins in that sensationalism and associationism which, as we have seen, arose out of the heritage of Locke; however, the uses to which Helvétius put these doctrines were essentially new. He took as his task that of being the theoretician of what might be called social education. Locke's concern with education had focussed upon the upbringing—chiefly moral and intellectual—of a single individual by his parents, and Rousseau's Émile, in spite of the range of its implications, was also concerned specifically with child-rearing practices and principles of instruction. On the other hand, Helvétius's theory of education was indissolubly linked to a system of social psychology and an interest in social reform. The background against which his views on these subjects were brought forward in his first major work, De l'esprit, was of course furnished by Montesquieu's work, De l'esprit des lois. Montesquieu had contended that it was necessary for laws and governments to be in conformity with the characteristics of the people to be governed, and he had attempted to account for differences in national characteristics on the basis of differences in climate. It was this set of relationships which Helvétius attacked in the Third Discourse of De l'esprit.

For Helvétius, the characteristics of peoples were not products of the climates in which they lived, but were formed by their education. The conception of education which Helvétius used in attempting to establish this claim was an extremely broad one, including every influence through which an individual acquired new knowledge, beliefs, or skills. It was on this basis that he put forward the claim that no two persons could ever be said to have the same education. And since the laws of a country, and all of its institutions, were among these influences, Helvétius insisted that it was mistaken to think that the laws of a country should conform to the characteristics of a people; their characteristics would always conform with their laws. In justification of this view, and in opposition to Montesquieu's use of climatic differences as a means of explaining national characteristics, Helvétius cited the dissimilarity of the people of modern Greece from those of ancient times. As he said in this connection:

Semblable à l'eau qui prend la forme de tous les vases dans lesquels on la verse, le caractère des nations est susceptible de toutes sortes de formes; c'est qu'en tous les pays, le génie du gouvernement fait le génie des nations.

To be sure, this doctrine is not to be interpreted as a denial of the uniformity of the fundamental psychological principles operative in men: like almost all of his contemporaries, Helvétius assumed that men are all informed by the same types of motives and by the same passions. It was his view that in different ages, and indeed in different sectors of a society, the influence of education resulted in the fact that these passions became attached to different objects. Thus, in spite of an original uniformity among men, the specific values of different cultures were diverse, and not infrequently antagonistic. With respect to intellectual qualifications, Helvétius adopted an analogous view, for it was part of his argument that all endowments which were relevant to intellectual capacity were initially equal.
in all men, the difference between mediocrity and the highest intellectual achievements being attributable to the effects of education:

L’homme de génie n’est donc que le produit des circonstances dans lesquelles cet homme s’est trouvé.\(^5\)

While this radical doctrine concerning the effects of education was sufficiently evident throughout Helvétius’ first major work, *De l’esprit*, it was not the explicit subject-matter of that work. However, it was the theme which dominated *De l’homme*, a work published posthumously because of the furor which had been created by *De l’esprit*. As Helvétius put the matter, the question which he was attempting to solve in the later work was whether the differences in men’s minds (la différence des esprits) is to be reckoned as the effect of differences in organization or in education.\(^6\) And to this question he answered:

Quintilien, Locke, et moi, disons: L'inégalité des esprits est l'effet d'une cause connue, et cette cause est la différence de l'éducation.\(^7\)

Helvétius’ assumption that men are all originally equal by nature, and that their differences are wholly attributable to education, was simply a radical form of a widely held doctrine. One finds Rousseau placing similar emphasis on a native equality in men;\(^8\) this doctrine was also of importance to Hume, whose account of the foundations of political life was predicated upon the fact that all men are nearly equal “in their bodily force, and even in their mental powers and faculties, till cultivated by education.”\(^9\) One finds a similar assumption in Adam Smith as well:

The difference of natural talents in different men is, in reality, much less than we are aware of; and the very different genius which appears to distinguish men of different professions, when grown to maturity, is not upon many occasions so much the cause as the effect of the division of labour. The difference between the most dissimilar characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature as from habit, custom and education.\(^10\)

As we have noted, both Hume and Smith had used this doctrine to account for the similarities in the basic values of different societies, no less than to explain individual and class differences. Helvétius, however, was not fundamentally interested in constructing a theory of the moral sentiments; his interest in psychological theory was bound up with his interest in social reform. At the time, it was Helvétius alone who drew the political and social consequences which were obviously implicit in the theory that the differences among men were primarily due to the conditions under which they lived. Shortly after Helvétius, and largely through his influence, these implications became familiar. One can see his influence on the thought of Godwin\(^11\) and, above all, on the origins and development of philosophic radicalism.\(^12\)

I shall not attempt to trace in any detail the effects of the doctrine of man’s malleability on doctrines of political and social reform during this period. None-
theless, it is important to note the element of what might be called "interventionism," with which these doctrines were connected. This element may be typified in Robert Owen's statement which he affixed as a motto to the title page of *A New View of Society; Essays on the Principle of the Formation of the Human character* (1813):

Any character, from the best to the worst, from the most ignorant to the most enlightened, may be given to any community, even to the world at large, by applying certain means; which are to a great extent at the command and under the control, or easily made so, of those who possess the government of nations.59

The same doctrine was present in Godwin, in the Utilitarians, and one might say in almost all who stood for liberal reform.

In order to hold an interventionist view of this sort, it was not enough to suppose that individual men were by nature malleable, taking on the characteristics which their educations impressed upon them. It was also necessary to assume that the power to direct these formative forces were either actually or potentially under the control of governments. Now, those who held this to be the case did not envision—nor would they have embraced—any form of totalitarian state.60

What regulated their thought was the assumption, which had been characteristic of almost all modern social theory, that the state constitutes the central institution in any society, being capable of controlling all other institutions, and is not itself controlled by them. This assumption can be seen in Godwin no less than in Helvétius. For example, in his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, we find that Godwin's first chapter attacks what he takes to be the usually received view that political institutions are primarily negative in nature, and do not exert a positive influence on all aspects of life. Against this view he sets up his own hypothesis that the political institutions of a society shape its people and all aspects of their life. As he says in this connection:

Perhaps government is, not merely in some cases the defender and in others the treacherous foe of the domestic virtues. Perhaps it insinuates itself into our personal dispositions, and insensibly communicates its own spirit to our private transactions. Were not the inhabitants of ancient Greece and Rome indebted in some degree to their political liberties for their excellence in art, and the illustrious theatre they occupy in the moral history of mankind? Are not the governments of modern Europe accountable for the slowness and inconstancy of its literary efforts, and the unworthy selfishness that characterizes its inhabitants? . . . If government thus insinuate itself in its effects into our most secret retirements, who shall define the extent of its operations? If it be the author of thus much, who shall specify the points from which its influence is excluded?61

The emphasis which Godwin thus placed on the influence of the state was not, unfortunately, balanced by an equal emphasis on the effects of other social institutions. And in the light of preceding social theory, it is not surprising that such was the case.

Nor is it surprising that those who stood in the direct line of descent from Hartley and Helvétius should have been sanguine about the possibility of radical
social reform on the basis of their theory of the state. The utilitarian view of the state, which receives what is perhaps its classic expression in James Mill’s article entitled Government, held that all governments are founded upon the interests of individuals, and they would not have arisen, nor would they be sustained, were they not instruments for the satisfaction of the interests of individuals. This heritage from the eighteenth century, when coupled with the view that the political institutions of a society constitute its dominant institution, gives the governed the right—and ultimately the power—to mold their own lives. Thus, in opposing the view that men are characterized by the possession of a fixed set of “natural” or inherited traits, geneticism led to the conclusion that through political reform man could be the agent of his own ever-increasing development.

Attractive as this doctrine was to those who shared the eighteenth-century ideals of enlightenment and reform, it met with formidable challenges. These challenges, however, were not directed against the notion of human malleability. Rather, they were directed against the sensationalist theory of knowledge and the utilitarian theory of morals and politics with which the doctrine of malleability had come to be connected. In other connections, and affiliated with other positions, the doctrine of malleability was affirmed in a no less radical way.