Chapter 2

Of Sense

Thomas Hobbes

Sense

Concerning the thoughts of man, I will consider them first singly, and afterwards in
train, or dependence upon one another. Singly, they are every one a representation or
appearance, of some quality, or other accident of a body outside us, which is commonly
called an object. Which object works on the eyes, ears, and other parts of a man’s body;
and by diversity of working, produceth diversity of appearances.

The original of them all, is that which we call sense, for there is no conception in a
man’s mind, which has not at first, totally, or by parts, been begotten [by] the organs of
sense. The rest are derived from that original.

To know the natural cause of sense, is not very necessary to the business now in
hand; and I have elsewhere written of the same at large. Nevertheless, to fill each part
of my present method, I will briefly deliver the same in this place.

The cause of sense, is the external body, or object, which presseth the organ proper
to each sense, either immediately, as in the taste and touch; or mediately, as in seeing,
hearing, and smelling; which pressure, by the mediation of the nerves, and other strings
and membranes of the body, continued inwards to the brain and heart, causeth there
a resistance, or counter-pressure, or endeavour of the heart to deliver itself, which
endeavour, because outward, seemeth to be some matter outside. And this seeming, or
fancy, is that which men call sense; and consisteth, as to the eye, in a light, or colour figured;
to the ear, in a sound; to the nostril, in an odour; to the tongue and palate, in a savour; and
to the rest of the body, in heat, cold, hardness, softness, and such other qualities as we
discern by feeling. All which qualities, called sensible, are, in the object that causeth them,
[nothing] but so many several motions of the matter, by which it presseth our organs
diversely. [Nor] in us that are pressed, are they any thing else, but divers motions; for
motion produceth nothing but motion. But their appearance to us is fancy, the same
waking, [as] dreaming. And as pressing, rubbing, or striking the eye, makes us fancy a
light; and pressing the ear, produceth a din; so do the bodies we see, or hear, produce
the same by their strong, though unobserved action. For if these colours and sounds
were in the bodies, or objects that cause them, they could not be severed from them, as
by glasses, and in echoes by reflection, we see they are; [so] we know the thing we see is
in one place, the appearance in another. And though at some certain distance, the real
and very object seems invested with the fancy it begets in us; yet the object is one
thing, the image or fancy is another. So that sense, in all cases, is nothing else but
original fancy, caused, as I have said, by the pressure, that is, by the motion of external
things upon our eyes, ears, and other organs thereunto ordained.